The Wild Adventures of Pinkish Tough Bunny Cooky and Super Curious Tata

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by cuttothequickk

Summary

“What the fuck is that?”

Taehyung’s daemon blinks up at Jeongguk and tilts its head, bumping Taehyung’s leg as its eyebrows tilt in distress. It leaps (shockingly high) to land in Taehyung’s arms and then hides its face in his sweater, and Taehyung holds it close, protective.

Taehyung stares at the trembling creature in his arms and then looks back at Jeongguk, eyes flashing with anger and hurt. “How dare you?”

“Oh my god, Guk, you can’t just ask people what their daemon is,” Seokjin scolds.

In which souls manifest as animal creatures outside the body, Taehyung and Jeongguk start off on the wrong foot, and despite everyone's best efforts, Cooky and Tata fall in love.
Notes

YO if you haven't read His Dark Materials, a) go do it right now because they're basically my entire life philosophy written in YA fantasy form, and b) that's actually fine, you don't need to know anything to understand this story.

Basically, the BT21 characters are the manifestations of the BTS members' souls, and they're really cute and fluffy and everything about this is silly and cute and fluffy.

also, shoutout to a really awesome twitter follower who helped me with this by giving me some writing advice which was to print out my first draft and completely retype the entire thing, rewriting as I went. I did this for this story, and actually it might have more typos than usual, but the actually rewriting/editing process was really interesting because of that and I do think it really improved the overall quality of the story. ^.^

ALSO, edit/update: I received a really important comment on this (feel free to look for it–I don't want to immediately put the person's username before getting their approval!) regarding Tata's gender and my use of "alien" in here. SO BASICALLY, in order to determine the genders of the daemons, I went on the BT21 website. Tata is referred to as "he" on the website (or at least that's how it is in English), so I went with "he" for Tata even though I was a bit conflicted on that from the start. Most of the others didn't really specify, so I just kinda decided.

UPDATE 29 MAY 2019: IT IS NOW CANON THAT THE BT21 CHARACTERS ARE ALL NB, SO I HAVE ADJUSTED ALL DAEMON PRONOUNS TO REFLECT THIS!!! Never before have I been so so so happy to have been wrong about something!!! <3 Shoutout to the user who had originally said that Tata should be NB. YOU WERE RIGHT, and I'm so happy you were! PS - I had to go through the entire fic changing pronouns manually, so if you spot any that I missed, please let me know!

Regarding my use of "alien" to describe Tata (and therefore, in extension, Taehyung a little bit)–I know that this is a bit contentious because calling Taehyung an alien was something that happened and he specifically said that he didn't like being called that. I really, really respect that <3 But since Tata is an actual alien in the BT21 canon, I originally called him an alien a couple of times in this. But because Tata and Taehyung are, like, technically the same entity in this story, I think it is totally reasonable to just remove that entirely, so I have. I really don't want there to be any implication of Taehyung being an alien, because he's not, and he's precious, and I respect and love him.

okay here you are, enjoy pls n ty
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

So to get one thing straight, everything is definitely, undoubtedly, 100-percent-no-arguments-whatsoever Hoseok’s fault.

“Seriously, you guys, I mean,” Hoseok is rambling, “He’s just—he’s the fucking cutest, and his daemon was this adorable little puppy wearing a yellow hoodie that was so soft looking, and Mang was—and Chimmy was like—just oh my god, Yoongi-hyung—oh, you’re not listening—Jeongguk! You can’t even believe—”

“I believe you,” Jeongguk sighs, leaning back against the couch. It’s been a long fucking day—Jeongguk had had to get up for his stupid required-for-graduation 8:30 a.m. writing class, and then he’d immediately had his three-hour biology lab (which he’s only taking for the science gen ed he hasn’t filled yet), and then he’d had just enough time to sprint over to the college café only to find the line way too long for him to get coffee before rushing back across campus for his history class. That professor had assigned a new essay, and then Jeongguk had gone to his Japanese class only to realize he’d forgotten to turn in a writing assignment for that professor and would have to submit it late via email; his professor had been understanding, but not understanding enough not to knock off a letter grade on principle. Jeongguk had left that class, frustrated with himself and ready to fucking get back to his room, only then it was raining, and he hadn’t had his umbrella, and by the time he’d gotten home, he’d been literally fucking soaked.

So. Yeah. Overall, a shitty day, the effects of which Jeongguk is still kind of feeling at 9:30 p.m. Cooky isn’t exactly happy either.

The saving grace had come in the form of a text from Hoseok, which, you know, is why everything is definitely, undoubtedly, 100-percent-no-arguments-whatsoever Hoseok’s fault.

Well, like, not the shitty day stuff. Probably. Unless Hoseok has taken up voodoo or witchcraft or whatever else might have given him that much arbitrary control over the mundanities of Jeongguk’s life.

Unlikely.
So *anyways*. Hoseok’s fault. The day wasn’t Hoseok’s fault, but the evening currently is, and all because Jeongguk is the apparently easily swayed maknae of his friend group who can’t escape getting roped into helping when one of his hyungs (Hoseok) meets a cute boy in the hall of the dance building and wants Jeongguk to help win the kid over.

The texts had gone something like this:

**hope hyung [6:47]**

jeongguk

**hope hyung [6:47 p.m.]**

jeonggukie u around 2nite?

**hope hyung [6:47 p.m.]**

it’s super important, babe

**hope hyung [6:47 p.m.]**

my babe, my bestie

**hope hyung [6:47 p.m.]**

I’m ur actual bestie not yoons or joonie or jinnie hyung

**hope hyung [6:48 p.m.]**

ur gon b so happy when you hear what I’m about to tell u

**hope hyung [6:48 p.m.]**

jeonggukkieeeee r u there
hope hyung [6:48 p.m.]
jeonggukkieeeeee

hope hyung [6:49 p.m.]
eeeeee

hope hyung [6:52 p.m.]
e

Me [6:59 p.m.]
uh hi yes what

Me [6:59 p.m.]
why does this seem like you’re making a non-urgent thing really urgent

hope hyung [6:59 p.m.]
GUDDIE THAT IS THE PERFECT WAY TO DESCRIBE THIS

hope hyung [6:59 p.m.]
URGET

hope hyung [6:59 p.m.]
URGET

hope hyung [7:00 p.m.]
BASICALLY
hope hyung [7:00 p.m.]
SOS ACTUALLY OH MY GODP

hope hyung [7:00 p.m.]
FOD

hope hyung [7:00 p.m.]
GOD OMG SRRY

hope hyung [7:01 p.m.]
obvi am 2 excite cannot type

hope hyung [7:01 p.m.]
so excite idk what 2 dooooo

Me [7:09 p.m.]
you could start by sending like. 1 text message. instead of 500.

hope hyung [7:09 p.m.]
ok ok srs srs

hope hyung [7:09 p.m.]
kinda not srs tho tbh

hope hyung [7:09 p.m.]
basically

hope hyung [7:09 p.m.]
BADICSLLY

hope hyung [7:10 p.m.]
BASICALLY

hope hyung [7:10 p.m.]
I met this guy

hope hyung [7:10 p.m.]
n he’s rlly rlly cute

hope hyung [7:10 p.m.]
n his daemon is the actual fuckng cutest I can t eveno mg

hope hyung [7:10 p.m.]
okay sry

hope hyung [7:11 p.m.]
but badically come 2 mine n joon’s 2night bc party bc drinking bc CUTE

Me [7:16 p.m.]
again with the 500 messages -_-
wait so the cute guy is for me or for you?

hope hyung [7:17 p.m.]
ME OMGOSH I JUST

hope hyung [7:17 p.m.]
sry this was unclear

hope hyung [7:17 p.m.]
don’t @ me like this

hope hyung [7:17 p.m.]
ur supposed to be my friend

Me [7:31 p.m.]
okay if im piecing this together right

Me [7:31 p.m.]
you want me to come over to your and joon hyung’s apartment

Me [7:32 p.m.]
to drink with some guy you think is cute

Me [7:32 p.m.]
and like wingman you
hope hyung [7:32 p.m.]
CORRECT

hope hyung [7:32 p.m.]
C O R R E C T

hope hyung [7:32 p.m.]
THANK YOU

hope hyung [7:33 p.m.]
took the words rtie outta my mouth

hope hyung [7:33 p.m.]
or like fingers?

hope hyung [7:33 p.m.]
bc typing?

Me [7:38 p.m.]
tbh im kind of not feeling it hyung

Me [7:40 p.m.]
super rough day, not like bad-bad but bad

Me [7:40 p.m.]
everything is annoying and everything hurts
hope hyung [7:40 p.m.]
okay well there will be beer

hope hyung [7:40 p.m.]
and soju

hope hyung [7:40 p.m.]
and cutie w cutie daemon is bringing a friend so like

hope hyung [7:41 p.m.]
maybe u could hook up w him?

hope hyung [7:41 p.m.]
I hear his daemon is like

hope hyung [7:41 p.m.]
really fucking cool

hope hyung [7:41 p.m.]
that’s wut jiminie said anyways

Me [7:50 p.m.]

jiminie?
hope hyung [7:51 p.m.]
yeah that’s his name isn’t it the actual fucking cutest isn’t he the CUTEST?? ^.^

Me [7:54 p.m.]
I mean I don’t know him

Me [7:54 p.m.]
but sure

hope hyung [7:54 p.m.]
sure meaning you’ll come?

Me [7:57 p.m.]
I meant sure like sure he’s the cutest

hope hyung [8:00 p.m.]
gukkieeeeee

Me [8:06 p.m.]
I mean. yeah whatever okay

Me [8:06 p.m.]
guess its Friday so I can wait and do my essay bullshit tomorrow

hope hyung [8:06 p.m.]
YEEEEAAAAHHHHHH UR SO GREAT UR SO FAB ILY

Me [8:10 p.m.]
want me to bring anything

hope hyung [8:11 p.m.]
no I mean

hope hyung [8:11 p.m.]
well actually

hope hyung [8:11 p.m.]
can u bring beer and soju and like a snack or something?

Me [8:19 p.m.]
…hyung isn’t this your party? are you literally asking me to furnish YOUR party with drinks and food

hope hyung [8:19 p.m.]
can u bring a card table and some pingpong balls 2
hope hyung [8:19 p.m.]

for beer pong

Me [8:22 p.m.]

I will bring some beers. that’s the extent of my generosity.

Me [8:24 p.m.]

I can’t believe you’re hosting a party and then asking me to like bring the actual supplies to have a party when it’s clearly YOUR PARTY

hope hyung [8:24 p.m.]

:(

hope hyung [8:25 p.m.]

yoongi hyung and jinnie hyung didn’t give me thsi much shit about this :(  

Me [8:31 p.m.]

I guarantee you that yoongi hyung did and you just didn’t hear about it because seokjin hyung confiscated his phone and deleted the abusive messages before yoongi hyung could send them

Me [8:31 p.m.]

but whatever

Me [8:32 p.m.]

get your own goddamn party supplies, oh my god
So that’s how Jeongguk ends up in Namjoon and Hoseok’s living room holding a plastic cup of somaek mixed with way too much beer and not enough soju, slumped in the couch cushions and too lazy to add more soju to the cup to make the drink taste the way it should. Which would almost definitely still rank as, like, a two on a scale from Fireball to A Drink Which Tastes Good, but which would definitely be Not As Shitty as it tastes right now.

Whatever. Everything is Hoseok’s fault. Definitely, undoubtedly, 100-percent-no-arguments-whatever.
“—and so then Mang started, like, nuzzling Chimmy’s hoodie and Chimmy giggled and I heard it and their voice is all high and cute and Mang was like stumbling from how smitten they were and—”

“We get it, hyung. Chimmy is a perfect match for your weirdo masked horse daemon,” Jeongguk says, buzzed enough from the too-weak somaek that he doesn’t think anything of throwing an insult at Mang even though that’s, like, really not something you’re supposed to do. Commenting on someone else’s daemon is, like, the most major bad form.

Whatever. Shitty day, Hoseok’s fault, all the things. Don’t at me like this, Jeongguk tells his own brain.

Hoseok sighs, smitten and sappy and probably too tipsy to really care about Jeongguk’s comment. “I can’t wait for him to get here. I can’t wait and Mang can’t wait for Chimmy and it’s just—ah,” Hoseok says, sighing again, all long and languid as he swoons back into the couch. “Isn’t it great, Yoongi-hyung?” Hoseok asks, nudging Yoongi with his socked foot.

Yoongi grunts and taps away at his phone, and Hoseok doesn’t try to engage him again. Yoongi is apparently not expected to participate in this conversation the way Jeongguk is, which, you know, is because Yoongi is smart and makes sure everyone knows right off the bat how intolerant of bullshit he is. Shooky too, except at least Shooky is a cute little critter whom everyone likes even if they are kind of unusual for a daemon. Most people have animals; Yoongi has a soft, squishy cinnamon cookie sort of entity, like, literally actually.

(In Shooky’s defense, they always smell really, really good.)

“Ugh, I need more alcohol,” Seokjin moans as he emerges from the kitchen. His miniature and very fluffy alpaca, RJ, is following him, and the daemon is hand in hand with Namjoon’s adorably sleepy koala, Koya. The daemons make a beeline for Shooky and force them into a snuggle on the beanbag in the corner, cooing over each other and humming as they whisper too soft for Jeongguk or Cooky to hear. Those three are the fucking cutest—the daemons and their humans—and Jeongguk sighs and tips his head back against the couch, trying to ignore their stupid adorable faces.

Cooky gives him a sweet little nudge from their spot near Jeongguk’s shoulder, some sort of solidarity against the aggressive cuteness of their friends, and Jeongguk smiles. Cooky’s pinkish fur is soft against his hand when he reaches up to stroke the bunny’s ears.

“Jeongguk-ah, you need a refill?” Namjoon asks as he comes in carrying three more bottles of
“Just pour some more of the soju in my cup—yeah, that’s enough,” Jeongguk says, sitting up to take a sip now that the beer-soju ratio should be better. Cooky hops onto Jeongguk’s shoulder from the back of the couch and clings, dragging Jeongguk’s balance off center and—oh, okay, yeah, Jeongguk is a little more than just tipsy now. Great. He swallows more from his cup and tastes pure soju floating above the beer.

Cooky keens as Jeongguk lists from side to side as he sets his cup on the coffee table, and Jeongguk rolls his eyes. “Cooky, how many times have I told you that you’re way too big to jump on my shoulder like that?”

“A lot,” Cooky whispers in Jeongguk’s ear. Jeongguk tilts his head to bump Cooky’s side, and Cooky hops down into his lap to curl up in a fluffy pink ball.

There’s a squeak from the corner as Shooky jumps onto Koya’s head and starts biting the koala’s ear. “Eep!” Koya yells, “Joonie!”

“Shook, you asshole, cut it out,” Yoongi drawls, still looking at his phone as Namjoon settles onto the couch next to him and drags Yoongi’s head over for a forehead kiss which goes unacknowledged beyond the light blush of pink spreading across Yoongi’s cheeks.

“Yoongi-yah, Shooky is a manifestation of you,” Seokjin says. “Your soul apparently wants to terrorize Namjoon’s and I have to say, I really don’t blame them after the disaster that was this afternoon.”

Namjoon and Koya groan in unison.

“What happened this afternoon?” Jeongguk asks, leaning forward to take another drink. God damn, Namjoon topped him off with a fuckton of soju.

“Don’t tell,” Namjoon says.

Jeongguk scoffs. “Well, now I’m really interested. What happened this afternoon?”
“Don’t tell, don’t tell,” Koya chants, their lilting voice a little bit disorienting in Jeongguk’s head. Daemons mostly only talk to each other and to their own humans, and rarely to a whole room. That only happens when everyone around is extremely comfortable together, and even still, hearing the voice of a daemon that isn’t your own is always weirdly taxing, like looking at those blue Christmas lights that are just a shade too far out of the spectrum humans can see for your brain to grasp the color right.

“I’m gonna tell, Koko-babe,” Seokjin teases. Koya whines and snuggles deeper into RJ, and Jeongguk wonders what it would be like to address another person’s daemon like that—Seokjin and Namjoon (and Yoongi, too) have been together long enough that it’s not unreasonable for one of them to speak directly to each other’s daemons, but Jeongguk has never reached that point with anyone.

“It was all Joonie-yah’s fault,” Yoongi grumbles.

“It was a little,” Seokjin chirps, drinking more soju. “Namjoon nearly set the kitchen on fire while we were trying to bake cookies. Shooky was personally offended by this.”

“It wasn’t like I did it on purpose as an attack on cookies or something,” Namjoon protests, looking at Yoongi with wide, pleading eyes. Yoongi keeps tapping his phone, paying no attention to Namjoon.

“You also picked Shooky up and tried to eat them, Kim Namjoon,” Yoongi snaps. Still looking at his phone.

In the corner, RJ is cuddling a trembling Koya while Shooky pouts, sullen, a few inches away.

“That was also not on purpose, and I apologized!” Namjoon says. “And I apologized to you. But I’ll say it again, because I really mean it. Yoongi-hyung, I’m sorry I touched your daemon without permission.”

Yoongi hums like he’s not convinced, and Jeongguk shivers as he imagines someone grabbing Cooky. Even in long-standing and comfortable relationships like the Namjoon-Seokjin-Yoongi Polyamorous Boyfriendship Est. 2k16, you don’t just grab someone else’s daemon. Contact like that is intimate as fuck.

“Youngi-hyung,” Namjoon says again, softer, a murmur in Yoongi’s ear. Yoongi finally drags his
gaze away from his phone to make eye contact with Namjoon, and they have a silent conversation for a second before Yoongi sighs and tilts to lean against Namjoon on the couch, suddenly relaxed. Namjoon kisses Yoongi’s forehead again. In the corner, Shooky snuggles into Koya and Koya coos at RJ. Mang dances over to lie down with them, and a comfortable silence settles over the room.

“So, Hobi, what time are they coming?” Seokjin finally asks, getting up from the couch to open a bag of chips and eat them on the floor at Yoongi’s feet.

Hoseok smiles. “Jimin said he and his friend would be here around 10:30. But he’s usually early, so he could get here at any minute!”

Jeongguk looks at the clock and strokes his fingers through Cooky’s fur. It’s 10:00 p.m. on the dot. “Hyung, seriously, a half hour is pretty fucking early for some millennial hipster ballerina boy to show up to a—”

There’s a knock on the door, and Hoseok turns to Jeongguk, smiling triumphantly. “Told you,” Hoseok says.

Jeongguk flips him off. “It’s weird to be early, hyung. You’re ten minutes late everywhere you go because you think it’s trendy to seem like you’re too busy for everyone.”

Hoseok doesn’t respond. He’s too busy answering the door.

“Hey!” A high-pitched voice chirps. “Glad we found the right place!”

“Jimin! Jimin’s friend! Come in!” Hoseok basically yells.

Jeongguk rolls his eyes and drinks more, and Cooky hums drunkenly in his lap. Jeongguk can feel it now, the intoxication catching up to his head, and he’s glad for it. Adding two new people and their daemons to the group dynamic seems like a fucking pain in the ass, especially after listening to Hoseok wax poetic about one of them all goddamn evening.

Also, Jeongguk totally forgot to submit the essay he had already forgotten about, which means he’ll have to do it tomorrow, which probably means losing another letter grade. Fuck. Can he submit the essay now, while he’s moderately drunk? Or is that just asking for trouble?
“Hyungie!” The same high-pitched voice chirps. There’s a wild giggle. “Sorry, we kinda pregamed. So we’re already drunk.”

Hoseok giggles back. High-Pitched Voice Guy must be Jimin, then, and Jeongguk’s suspicions are confirmed when a yellow blur darts across the room to join the pile of daemons cuddling in the corner, a puppy wearing a hoodie with a wagging tail and floppy ears sticking out of holes cut in its hood, and—okay, yeah, that’s pretty cute, Jeongguk will admit.

“You’re drunk, Jiminie. I’m only tipsy,” a new voice says, low and raspy and—fuck, who the fuck is that?

“Sorry,” Jimin’s higher voice says, “This is Taehyung. He’s my roommate.”

“And also best friend,” Taehyung says, his tone kind of smug. His voice is pretty, Jeongguk thinks, but it’s grating on Jeongguk’s nerves, the way this kid is trying to, like, establish dominance over Hoseok or whatever by reminding him of Taehyung and Jimin’s apparently-Best-Friends-status relationship.

“Come in,” Hoseok chirps, unbothered as ever. “Do introductions to the group!”

Jimin steps around the couch and waves awkwardly to everyone—or, well, it would be awkward if the kid weren’t so goddamn instantly endearing. Like, seriously, Jeongguk is shocked that this guy even exists, what with his adorable mochi cheeks and his ashy windswept hair and his crescent moon eyes and his silver earrings and his smoky eye makeup.

“Hi,” Jimin says, “I’m Jimin. My daemon is Chimmy, and they’re a puppy, and they’re really playful but friendly. I promise they won’t hurt your guys’ daemons.”

Jeongguk glances over at the daemon party in the corner. Chimmy and Mang are hugging and whispering and jumping in excitement while Koya and RJ and Shooky doze in a heap, their earlier animosity entirely forgotten.

“They’re really cute,” Seokjin says, watching Chimmy and Mang.
Jimin smiles. “Thanks.” He turns to the next person in the vague introductory line, which happens to be Namjoon.

Namjoon smiles. “Kim Namjoon, fourth year like Hoseok. The koala is mine. Their name is Koya.”

Jimin nods.

“I’m Seokjin. Graduated already, but I’m dating these two, so I’m stuck here,” Seokjin sighs, gesturing dramatically at Yoongi and Namjoon as he leans back into the couch as if he’s actually the slightest bit disappointed about any of that. “The alpaca is mine. RJ.”

“That’s cool,” Jimin says, nodding.

“I’m Yoongi,” Yoongi says. “The cookie is mine. Shooky, and don’t fuckin’ try to eat them like fucking Kim Namjoon over here—”

“Hey,” Namjoon yelps.

Yoongi smirks. “I’m gonna make you cry in bed tonight—”

“All right,” Seokjin gripes. “Stop, oh my god.”

Hoseok comes up behind Jimin. “You already know Mang,” he says. “And that’s Jeongguk, and his daemon, Cooky.”

Jeongguk nods. “Sorry, Cooky doesn’t handle their—my?—alcohol well,” Jeongguk says. “They’re a bunny. As you can tell.”

“Yeah, mine’s the only weird one,” Yoongi says. “Shooky is a cookie, but they’re also like—sort of an animal?”

Jimin shakes his head. “You don’t have to explain! It’s okay, Yoongi-ssi. I would never question the form of another person’s daemon.”
Yoongi throws a peace sign, takes a drink of his somaek, and goes back to his phone.

“Hey, sorry,” the low voice calls from near the door, “Sorry this is taking so long, it’s just my Docs take forever to untie and like—okay, got it.” A couple seconds later, a kid sidles up next to Jimin, puts his elbow on Jimin’s shoulder with an affectionate grin, and—

Fuck. The kid is gorgeous, like—like seriously fucking beautiful, and he’s tall and pink-haired and wearing lilac and his cream-colored trousers are cropped halfway up his calves and he has a fucking leather collar on and it’s the same color as the pants and he’s wearing gray-blue colored contacts and—

The somaek picks this exact moment to settle in, and Jeongguk suddenly feels a bit too drunk to handle the fucking beautiful human standing in front of him.

“I’m Kim Taehyung,” the kid says. “Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you,” everyone choruses. Everyone except Jeongguk.

Because Jeongguk is staring at Taehyung’s Hello Kitty–stockinged feet where the guy’s daemon stands, a little thing that barely reaches Taehyung’s knees. It’s wearing a blue pajama onesie with yellow polka dots. Its head is a heart with a yellow mouth in the shape of an oval, complete with black eyes and straight black cartoonish eyebrows.

Jeongguk has nothing but the alcohol to blame when he says, “What the fuck is that?”

Taehyung’s eyes startle over to Jeongguk, wide and shocked. “What—what’s what?”

“That,” Jeongguk says, nodding drunkenly at the heart-headed creature clinging to Taehyung’s leg.

“Jeongguk,” Namjoon warns, but Jeongguk stands up and shakes his head. The room spins.

Taehyung glares at him. “Are you talking about Tata?”
“Tata?” Jeongguk splutters, laughing as Cooky buries his face in Jeongguk’s calf.

Taehyung’s daemon—Tata, apparently—blinks up at Jeongguk and tilts its head, bumping Taehyung’s leg as its eyebrows tilt in distress. It leaps (shocking high) to land in Taehyung’s arms and then hides its face in Taehyung sweater, and Taehyung holds it close, protective. Then—and possibly weirdest of all, actually—Tata emits this humming, hiccupping sorrow sound, all beep-brump-beedooop-dut-deewwp, vibrating and pitchy, like a theremin.

Taehyung stares at the trembling creature in his arms and then looks back at Jeongguk, eyes flashing with anger and hurt. “How dare you?”

“Yeah, Guk, you can’t just ask people what their daemon is,” Seokjin scolds.

“You hurt their feelings,” Taehyung says, looking really fucking sad. Tata beeps a couple more times, and Taehyung nods and leans down to whisper something. Tata vibrates back, and Taehyung looks up.

Jeongguk blinks. “What—is it talking? Like, the beeping—you understand that?”

“Fuck you; I didn’t come in here and demand to know why your bunny daemon is pink,” Taehyung spits.

Jeongguk feels the hurt punch quick and sharp through his chest, just as any jab about one’s daemon always does. “Cooky is pink because they’re fucking pink, all right?” Jeongguk scowls.

Taehyung squeezes his arms around Tata, who makes more beeping-vibrating-humming-autotune sounds. “Yeah, and Tata is Tata. You’re making them sad. Don’t call them it, they’re not an it.”

Some part of Jeongguk’s head registers the fact that Taehyung must be sad too, if Taehyung’s little heart-headed soul creature is sad. Hell, the thing is still synthesizing its distress to the room, all beeps and glissandos and low-pitched buzzer sounds. A spike of guilt stabs through Jeongguk’s heart, but he shakes his head and pushes the feeling away, irritated and drunk and too proud to give in.

“Whatever,” Jeongguk says. “It—they—could be saying that the sky is purple and that mumble rap
is actually good music with that Daft Punk album of a voice box they’ve got. Not like we would ever know.”

Taehyung opens his mouth to retort, but Jimin puts a hand on Taehyung’s arm, careful not to bump Tata. “Leave it,” Jimin says, although he’s glaring at Jeongguk, too.

“Sorry,” Hoseok cuts in, “Jeongguk is just drunk and having a shitty day, right?” His tone brooks no room for argument.

Jeongguk rolls his eyes. “Yeah,” he says. Who gives a fuck about Taehyung or his daemon, really?

“You could apologize,” Jimin says helpfully, and he’s so adorable that it doesn’t even sound condescending. Just gentle and calm.

Jeongguk’s blood boils anyway. Cooky is hopping agitated circles around Jeongguk’s feet, and Jeongguk slams back the rest of his somaek and heads to the kitchen for more beer.

“Just ignore him,” Hoseok says as Jeongguk leaves the room. “He had a bad day, seriously. He’s in a Mood.”

Jeongguk doesn’t hear Taehyung’s response, but he does hear a soft, beeping coo as Tata says something, and Jeongguk ignores the pang of guilt in his chest when he realizes that even if he can’t understand the thing, he can at least recognize techno-toned disappointment when he hears it.

The night progresses like this:

1. Namjoon and Yoongi and Seokjin end up in a huddle on the couch, getting progressively drunker and letting all three of their daemons touch all three of them, which is a startlingly intimate thing to have going on in the middle of the living room with other people there.
2. Hoseok and Jimin flirt shamelessly, looking all sweet and sunshiny on the floor by the TV,
sipping their drinks and laughing as their daemons tumble around in the middle of the room, dancing and giggling in high-pitched excitement.

3. Taehyung drinks soju straight and taps angrily at his phone, ignoring everyone including Tata, because Tata has disappeared somewhere “to explore”, as Taehyung had explained earlier, even though no one was really listening except Jeongguk, and Jeongguk isn’t acknowledging Taehyung’s existence, so really Jeongguk also wasn’t listening.

4. Jeongguk downs way more somaek and spends his time trying not to look at Taehyung, because as much as Jeongguk currently hates Taehyung, the kid is also *fucking gorgeous and perfect to look at*, and this is A Problem.

“We should play Rage Cage,” Hoseok says, kind of out of nowhere.

“No,” Yoongi says.

“Please?” Namjoon and Seokjin intone.

Yoongi blinks. “Fine,” he says, caving—really easily, actually, for him.

“Yes!” Namjoon and Seokjin chirp, because Yoongi doesn’t agree to fucking *anything*.

“Tae, you wanna play?” Jimin asks, and Jeongguk sees the smile Jimin gives him, so sweet no one could possibly resist it, not even a stewing twentysomething who might be a little bit drunk.

Taehyung looks up at Jimin and then stares blankly around the room. “Fine,” he says, put-out and drunk and guarded.

Jimin flashes That Smile at Jeongguk. “You?”

“Fine,” Jeongguk says, really *really* not intending to mimic Taehyung at all. Taehyung frowns at him anyway like the imitation is a personal affront.

“I’ll set up!” Hoseok says. “The card table is in the back closet.”

“So you really didn’t need me to bring a card table,” Jeongguk grumbles.
Hoseok just laughs.

“Want help carrying it, hyung?” Jimin asks, standing to follow Hoseok down the hall.

“JK, Taehyung-ah, will you guys go get the rest of the beer from the fridge?” Seokjin asks, pulling himself to his feet and giggling as he sways. Yoongi puts a hand on his hip to steady him.

Jeongguk shoots a look at Taehyung, but Taehyung is scooping a recently reappeared Tata into his arms and making a cute face at the daemon—not that Taehyung can possibly make an uncute face, because Jeongguk has been observing him all night and not one of Taehyung’s expressions has been less than fucking beautiful, dammit. Jeongguk hates him.

“Guk,” Yoongi snaps.

Jeongguk snaps his gaze away from Taehyung and Tata. “Fine. Cooky, where are you?”

Cooky comes running out from behind the couch and flicks their ears at Jeongguk as they give this wide, dizzy-drunk stumble. Jeongguk kneels down to catch them, and he can feel the way Cooky is radiating a sort of shaky, restless energy that sets Jeongguk’s teeth on edge.

“What’s wrong?” Jeongguk asks, just a whisper in Cooky’s ear.

Cooky shakes their head. “Nothing. It’s fine.”

Jeongguk furrows his brow. “Cooky? What the hell, you never hide shit from me.”

Cooky shakes their head again. “Don’t worry, Gukkie. Not hiding stuff.”

Jeongguk bites his lip and strokes in between Cooky’s ears. “You sure? You’re really okay?”

Cooky nods and refuses to say anything else.
“Come on,” Taehyung says, Tata clinging to his head as they perch on Taehyung’s shoulder and emit random beeps.

“Yeah,” Jeongguk says, following Taehyung into the kitchen. Cooky hops along behind him.

“Is the beer in the fridge?” Taehyung asks once they’re alone.

“Where else would it be?” Jeongguk snaps, and honestly he’s not even sure why he’s being so rude anymore, just that Cooky is acting weird and Jeongguk is pretty sure it’s somehow Taehyung or Tata’s fault. Both, because technically Taehyung and Tata are the same thing.

“How many should we bring?” Taehyung asks as he opens the fridge and peers inside.

“Haven’t you ever played Rage Cage before?” Jeongguk asks.

Taehyung shakes his head. “No. I don’t usually play drinking games. I don’t even know what Rage Cage is.”

“Like beer pong but no teams and faster,” Jeongguk says.

“I hate beer pong. I only play drinking games that make people reveal personal secrets,” Taehyung says, and it seems like the kind of thing that could be flirty if he didn’t just sound tired and drunk and resigned.

Jeongguk snorts. “Well, you’re not gonna get me to play any of those.”

Taehyung nods like he’d expected this response. Tata beeps and makes these little trance-techno-y vibrations, and Taehyung giggles at his daemon, a boxy grin stretching his mouth with obvious joy. Jeongguk watches and feels his neck go hot at the sound of Taehyung’s obvious delight.

“Grab like five,” Jeongguk instructs, turning away from Taehyung to search out more cups. “If there’s a six-pack in there, just grab that and we’ll just all be fucking trashed. I’ve got the cups.”
Jeongguk catches Taehyung’s frown from the corner of his eye as he rifles through the cupboard.

“How drunk is this game going to get me?” Taehyung asks.

Jeongguk grabs the cups and turns to look at Taehyung and Tata. “I don’t know,” he says, “Depends on how bad you are at bouncing a ball into a cup.”

Taehyung winces. “Probably pretty bad. Now stop being civil to me; I’m angry at you and Tata is still sad.”

Tata lets out an animated series of clicks and melodic tones that sounds pretty happy and unruffled to Jeongguk, but whatever. Obviously Taehyung is the only one who can understand his weird heart-headed daemon.

When Jeongguk and Taehyung get back to the living room, the table is set up and Hoseok and Jimin are bouncing ping pong balls between them, laughing and striking flirty poses and being super fucking annoying and super fucking cute.

“Cups?” Yoongi says. Jeongguk tosses them over and Shooky appears out of nowhere to snatch them up before Yoongi can. Yoongi scoffs and shoves at Shooky, and Shooky cackles and starts setting up the cups.

“Hey, look! Mang is teaching Chimmy a new choreography!” Hoseok shouts, and Jimin darts around the table to watch, leaning up against Hoseok as he does it. Hoseok puts an arm around Jimin’s waist to steady him, and Jimin giggles and gets closer.

“Pour the beer into the cups,” Jeongguk says to Taehyung. just to give both of them something to do that’s not watching Hoseok and Jimin being all obnoxious like this.

“Well since you said please,” Taehyung says. “Oh, wait.”

Jeongguk holds eye contact. “Please,” he grits out, practically a growl.
Taehyung rolls his eyes and starts to pour.

“You’re spilling,” Jeongguk says.

“It’s a drinking game and we’re already drunk,” Taehyung bites back, teeth clenched around the syllables. “We’re gonna spill everywhere anyways.”

“Lightweight,” Jeongguk scoffs.

“Fratty muscle bro,” Taehyung mutters. “Just because some of us aren’t out partying every weekend and making poor, unsafe decisions we won’t even remember the next day—”

“You don’t even know me—”

“I took one look at you and knew you were gonna be an asshole—”

“Fuck you,” Jeongguk says, blood flaring hot as he points a finger in the air, jabs it at Taehyung. He probably looks ridiculous, but he’s drunk and mad, so he doesn’t care, and Taehyung is also drunk and mad, so he doesn’t either.

“Oh, sorry,” Taehyung hisses, “I don’t go for the bulky, meathead types.”

“Aaaaand I think that’s enough,” Seokjin says, stepping in with Koya in his arms and RJ clinging to his feet. “Be civil or I’m kicking you out.”

“I’d be civil if he weren’t such a dick,” Taehyung mutters.

Jeongguk crosses his arms. “You started it.”

“I did not—”
“Can we play?” Yoongi roars. Shooky is standing on his shoulder looking pretty threatening for a sentient cinnamon cookie.

“Yeah, fine. I’m not standing by him though,” Jeongguk mutters, taking a spot across the table from Taehyung and glaring hard.

Taehyung rolls his eyes and stands between Jimin and Seokjin, and Hoseok comes up by Jimin (obviously). Namjoon and Yoongi go to the other side.

“Jeongguk, start,” Yoongi says. “You too, Taehyung. Since you’re across from each other.”

“I don’t know how to play,” Taehyung spits.

Hoseok explains. “Drink, bounce the ball in the cup, pass. If the other ball overtakes you, you have to stack the cups and drink a new cup and then keep playing. Got it?”

“Got it,” Taehyung says.

“Fuck, just start,” Yoongi gripes.

“Fine,” Jeongguk says.

“Fine,” Taehyung echoes.

“On your marks, get set, go!” Seokjin chants.

Jeongguk smirks, chugs the beer in his cup, and bounces the ball.
Rage Cage turns out to be a terrible idea for everyone except Jeongguk (because he has a lot of practice and is fiercely competitive) and Taehyung (who is obviously experiencing some kind of crazy beginner’s luck). They only make it through two rounds before Hoseok is on the floor, Jimin crouched next to him cooing drunkenly in his ear, while Yoongi and Namjoon and Seokjin attempt to start an orgy on the couch.


“Too drunk, babe,” Hoseok slurs back, “Too—too gonna—need to be sober. ‘Fore I take you to bed. ‘Fore you let me—lemme take you to my bed but I want to, ugh. Sober though.”

Jimin and Hoseok stand up. Jimin is trashed, and he falls over, and Hoseok falls too. Mang and Chimmy stumble around by Jimin’s head, and then they just flop over onto the floor by the armchair and pass the fuck out.

“You’re the best, Hoseokie-hyung,” Jimin chants, “You’re the best, you’re the sweetest.”

“Sleep in my bed,” Hoseok says. “I’ll—couch, I’ll sleep here, you can—take my room, you’ll sleep better.”

“Yeah, ‘kay Seokseok-hyung. Hoseokie. Seok-hyung, hyung, see you—” Jimin hiccups, “—see you soon. Come in as soon as you’re sober and okay.”

They stand up and Hoseok shows Jimin to his room, and then Hoseok comes back and falls onto one of the couches. On the other, Yoongi and Seokjin and Namjoon have stopped making out in favor of moaning about how drunk and sick they feel.

“Fuck, I give up, I hate everything and I hope you barf with me, Namjoon,” Yoongi says, and he stumbles off towards Namjoon’s master bedroom. Seokjin and Namjoon are hot on his heels, and their daemons follow in this adorable little parade of hand-holding, and then Namjoon’s door slams and Jeongguk can faintly hear the sound of retching. He winces in sympathy.

“I’m leaving,” Taehyung announces.
Jeongguk blinks. He’s not that drunk anymore, really; it’s been about a half hour since he last had a drink, and they had been snacking on weird Japanese candies during the game of Rage Cage, so there’s at least something in his stomach. Jeongguk looks at his watch. “It’s 11:30,” he says, staring at Taehyung. “You’ll miss the last train even if you leave right now.” He says it harshly, like it’s not the sort of concern-blanketed advice it most definitely is.

Taehyung shrugs, turning to look for Tata. “I’ll walk. It’s not that far.”

“Where do you live?”

“SNU. In the dorms.”

“That’s where I live. It’s far,” Jeongguk says.

Taehyung shrugs. “It’s fine. I’m leaving. Where is Tata?”

Jeongguk glances around the room. No sign of a red heart-shaped head, no sign of blue and yellow pajamas.

Also, no sign of Cooky.

“Yeah, wait,” Jeongguk says, “Where’s my daemon? Cooky? You around?” No answer. It’s kind of distressing, all of a sudden, even if Namjoon and Hoseok’s apartment isn’t unsafe for daemons or anything. It’s weird that Cooky is off and alone, and that Jeongguk is alone, too.

Taehyung darts around the room, checking behind the couches and under the table in obvious drunk distress. “Tata?” He calls, quietly, like he’s trying not to wake Hoseok on the couch.

“Cooky, where are you?” Jeongguk calls into the kitchen. He goes in to check around the corner of the fridge, in a couple of cabinets (although Cooky isn’t the type to go hide away in a dark corner, unlike some daemons Jeongguk knows ( Shooky )). Taehyung appears over his shoulder, and Jeongguk starts at the sudden intrusion. “Fuck, back up a step,” he snaps, meaner than he really intends to be.
Taehyung moves back and shivers, but not like he’s physically cold. Just like he’s worried, and uncomfortable, and maybe just a little bit Not Okay. “Did you find them?”

“No,” Jeongguk says, “Why would they even be together? Tata is probably in the bathroom mixing shampoo and body wash to see if it makes better bubbles than either liquid on its own, and Cooky is probably asleep under Hoseok’s bed or something. Relax. It’s not like they can get out or anything.”

Taehyung wraps his arms around himself like he’s about to melt into the floor and has to hold himself into the correct shape if he wants to stay a person. “Tata could,” he whispers, biting his lip and looking at the floor. “Tata has arms. They’re super curious. They—they could. Like, open a window and try to jump.”

Something about the way Taehyung says it makes Jeongguk wonder if that’s happened before.

Jeongguk scoffs. “Don’t worry. Tata doesn’t have thumbs.”

Taehyung’s eyes flick up to Jeongguk’s and they’re wide, upset, bright blue in the kitchen light. “Not usually,” he says. “They don’t usually have thumbs. But they can.”

What the fuck? Jeongguk thinks.

“What the fuck?” Jeongguk says.

Taehyung’s expression flashes to resigned hurt, like he had expected the verbal slap and still hadn’t been quite prepared to receive it. “Come on,” he says, “Let’s just check the bathroom.”

Tata and Cooky are not in the bathroom. Tata and Cooky are not in the laundry room, or under the kitchen table, or in any of the cubbies in the shoe rack.

“Fuck, where the—okay, they’ve gotta be in either Namjoon or Hoseok’s room,” Jeongguk says, annoyed because he really doesn’t want to go disturbing the people in either room.
Taehyung shakes his head, his pink hair shifting silky and shiny around his ears. “Wait. We didn’t check the back closet where they kept the card table. It probably has a bunch of blankets or towels, yeah?”

Jeongguk nods. “Yeah, but why does that matter?”

“Tata likes soft things,” Taehyung murmurs, voice so low and sad it makes Jeongguk’s chest ache.

On second thought, that’s probably just because of Cooky’s extended absence.

“They can’t get into the closet,” Jeongguk says even as he follows Taehyung down the hall towards the door. “The door is closed. Even if Tata can have thumbs, they’re not tall enough to open it, and neither is Cooky.”

Taehyung’s arms are still wrapped around his sides, his palms and long fingers pressed around his waist, flat and golden and maybe trembling, or maybe not. “Tata can be tall enough,” he says.

*What the fuck?* Jeongguk thinks.

*What the fuck?* Jeongguk mouths at the back of Taehyung’s head. He doesn’t say it out loud because they’re too close to Namjoon’s room now, and he doesn’t want to disturb Namjoon and Seokjin and Yoongi.

Not because he doesn’t want to upset Taehyung more. Jeongguk does not care about Taehyung’s upsetness level.

Taehyung steps to the side to give Jeongguk room to stand with him in front of the closet door. It’s dark in the hallway with only the light over their heads to give them any illumination, and Taehyung reaches out with a tentative hand to twist the handle, pulling the closet door out towards them in a slow motion like he’s afraid the door will creak.

A strip of light from the hall falls onto the floor of the closet, and Jeongguk’s breath leaves him all in a rush as he sees it:
Tata and Cooky are burrowed in a nest of blankets, nuzzling close and protective and soft. Cooky is holding Tata against their chest, and Tata is sort of electrically purring. Together they look like the most adorable bundle of contentment and peace that Jeongguk has ever seen, maybe.

So. Yeah. All night while Taehyung and Jeongguk have been at each other’s throats and despising each other, their daemons have apparently been in a closet blanket nest snuggling together while they sleep.

Fuck.

Fuck.

An interlude on daemons:

When children are born, their daemons are amorphous little blobs of light that can talk and float around and don’t look like much of anything. When a child turns five, the child is allowed to give the daemon a name. This is why most daemons end up with names like Snowflake, or Princess Aurora, or Captain T. Rex, or you know. Cooky. Or Tata.

Sometime between the ages of 13 and 18, daemons choose shapes. They are not assigned a binary gender; some languages have daemon-specific pronouns while others use a pronoun already in existence, such as “they” in English (although some daemons prefer other options such as zhe or fey/feir).

When a daemon chooses its shape, it settles into something familiar, real, something the child likes but something that reflects the child, too. This is why most daemons are animals, and why some end up like Shooky: almost cartoonish, not quite an animal but still identifiable, because people’s souls are made up of things they know. Things they are. Seokjin is a fluffy alpaca sweetheart. Yoongi is mysterious and mischievous and a total fucking softy on the inside, like a cinnamon cookie. Hoseok is wild and fast and concerned enough with impression management to pull a mask on over the beautiful face he has, which he thinks might look sort of like a horse’s face. Namjoon is contemplative, sleepy, koala-sappy and nurturing. Jimin is hard-working and determined and kind and loyal like a dog. Jeongguk himself is a scared, sprinting bunny, fluffy pink but also muscular and lean and loping.
Taehyung is—

Tata is—

(??)

As soon as Taehyung realizes what’s going on in the closet, he lets out a strangled cry and falls to his knees in front of the blanket bundle, reaching out to rip Tata from Cooky’s hold, clearly horrified. But—

“Tata!” Taehyung barks, “get away from him!”

—Taehyung can’t touch Tata without his hands hitting Cooky. Which. *Fuck no,* Jeongguk prays, and apparently Taehyung is at least sane enough not to commit that sort of violation, to touch Cooky without permission. Taehyung’s hands hover above the tangle of limbs in the nest, unable to do anything to help the situation, and Jeongguk’s heart is pounding in his throat but the relief of Taehyung not touching Cooky is sweet, sticky syrup in his veins.

Jeongguk joins Taehyung on his knees and stares at the daemons, equally unable to reach into the nest and get their daemons apart.

“Wake up,” Taehyung moans, swaying kind of tipsy and upset as he pokes one finger at an exposed bit of Tata’s head, somewhere that doesn’t risk Taehyung’s skin hitting Cooky. Tata coos sleepy little beeps and boops and *vvzzz*-s and *viwaaaaa*-s, and finally they sit up enough that Taehyung can snatch them away from a yawning Cooky. He does it fast and then cuddles Tata to his chest, petting them over like he’s brushing the remnants of Cooky’s touch off of Tata’s body. Like Cooky’s touch might have burned the little creature.

Jeongguk reaches into the blankets and scoops up Cooky, who blinks and looks very confused and somewhat ashamed.
Taehyung and Jeongguk stand up. Taehyung holds Tata and Jeongguk holds Cooky and they glare at each other, arms shielding their daemons.

“Jeongguk,” Taehyung snaps, angry and terrified, “Please inform your daemon that if he comes within ten feet of my Tata again, I will grab him by the neck and throw him, social protocol be damned.”

Jeongguk balks. “What—who the fuck, Taehyung, that’s fucking rude, and it wasn’t Cooky’s fault. Tata is the crazy one, all super curious like you said. Probably wanted to go explore the closet and ended up tricking Cooky into cuddling because Cooky just happens to love blanket nests,” Jeongguk shouts, aware that—yeah, okay, shouting vitriol about his pink bunny daemon loving blanket nests isn’t all that threatening, or that effective.

Taehyung scowls. “Fuck you; it wasn’t Tata’s fault. Tata was probably just exploring and got tired and went to sleep in the blankets because they do that. It was your bunny who was holding Tata all close; let’s not pretend otherwise—Cooky probably came in and joined Tata’s nest without getting consent—”

“What the fuck, do you actually think Cooky—or I, for that matter—would ever just forcibly touch someone without permission when—”

“I think it’s just very suspicious that Tata was being held—”

“I’m not a goddamn—I’m absolutely not someone who would ever assume consent or push myself on someone and Cooky would never— ”

“How am I supposed to know that when—”

A cough from behind Namjoon’s door. Taehyung and Jeongguk freeze, and then they resume the fight in whispers:

“Fuck you and your stupid heart-head demon—”

“I should fucking pick YOU up and throw YOU—”
“—and it’s not, hey, hold on, you could NOT, you’re a goddamn fucking TWIG—”

“—and if your soul weren’t so obviously—no I could totally throw you—”

“—twiggy low-voiced—”

“TATA!” Taehyung shouts, alarmed.

Jeongguk halts.

Tata has squirmed out of Taehyung’s arms and is on the floor with Cooky, beeping-booping- vzzz ing- nuwaaa ing all sweet and flirtatious (?????) and thrilled.

Cooky is rolling their eyes and humming all cute and smiling (well, as much as a bunny can smile) and nuzzling their nose at Tata’s shoulder.

Tata hugs Cooky, and Cooky whispers something at the side of Tata’s neck, too soft even for Jeongguk to hear.

“What the fuck,” Taehyung says.

Jeongguk is floored. “Yeah. I don’t. What the fuck.”

“They’re like—”

“Yeah.”

A lingering silence.
Taehyung inhales. “Wanna get super trashed with me right immediately now as soon as we can?”

Jeongguk nods, already heading to the kitchen for shot glasses. “I know where Hobi-hyung keeps the hard stuff.”

It’s 2:00 a.m. and Jeongguk is fucking smashed. Like, Falling Down Slurring Speech Giggling Helpless Actually Drunk, like beyond Falling Down Slurring Speech Giggling Helpless Actually Drunk but not to the point of feeling sick, not yet. No, Jeongguk is just really really fucking trashed, and Taehyung is next to him on the floor leaning up against the couch, equally drunk and laughing hysterically at nothing, the living room deserted after Hoseok had woken up at 12:15 because Jeongguk and Taehyung were shouting the words to—

“Is that ‘Call Me Maybe’? It’s literally 1:00 a.m. and you guys hate each other, what the hell even—is that my vodka? You know what, whatever, I’m going to sleep in the bathtub. Mang, where—yeah, come on, bathtub. Carry this blanket for me, Mang-ie. Thanks.”

—So now it’s 2:00 a.m. and Jeongguk is drunk and leaning up against Taehyung, both of them giggling and touchy the way alcohol gets Jeongguk every time, all sleepy presses of hands on legs, hands on hips, hands on hands. Sleepy and giggly and touchy and needy and clingy.

Taehyung is apparently all these things when he’s drunk, too.

“Holy shit,” Jeongguk slurs after the giggling just gets confusing, because—actually why, why the fuck were they giggling? “Holy shit, Tae, I’m so so drunk.”

Taehyung giggles and his eyelashes flutter and he looks prettier somehow than he has all night. “Same, saaaame. Where’s…where’s Tata?” He slurs, hiccupping at the end.

Jeongguk snickers. “Where’s Cooky?” He enunciates, looking around and oh, his head spins.
“Tata,” Taehyung calls, leaning to the side until he falls to the floor, legs still stretched out next to Jeongguk’s but his head and shoulders all tumbled out across the carpet. “Tata! C’mere! Wanna—wanna go to the convenience store.”

“Oh, fuck yeah,” Jeongguk breathes, tipping over to rest his head on Taehyung’s hip. “Wanna get fried chicken. Wanna get more soju. You have the best ideas, Tae,” he says, letting one hand trace the exposed skin where Taehyung’s shirt has pulled itself out of where it had been tucked into his waistband.

“Want those—those, those, those hangover drinks,” Taehyung says. “Gonna be—we’re gonna be fucked. We’re already so fucked.”

Jeongguk hiccups and the motion jolts his head into Taehyung’s stomach sort of. “So, so fucked, Taetae. Tata. Tae-ta. Tatatatata why’d you name your daemon your actual name?”

“’s not my name, name’s not Tata, it’s Tae. Kim Taehyung, I’m Taehyung, Tae. Why’s yours Cooky?”

“I was five,” Jeongguk says. “I picked Cooky.”

“Come on, convenience store,” Taehyung groans back in the same petulant tone.

“’Kay,” Jeongguk mumbles. “’Kay, Tae, c’mon, let’s go. Gotta—stand up.”

They do, somehow. Tata and Cooky come out from behind the couch with a drunken beeping and a sleepy grumble respectively, and all four of them parade out the door, down the hall, into the elevator, out of the building. The night air is cool enough to nip some clarity into Jeongguk’s head, just a little, just enough so he doesn’t feel disoriented-bordering-sick as they make the walk to 7-Eleven. Tata is rambunctious the whole way, darting up into raised flowerbeds and chirping computer noises into the night. Cooky clutches Jeongguk’s leg and lets themselves be dragged along, pliant and silent and clearly tired. It’s been a long day.

7-Eleven is deserted when they push their way inside, and Taehyung darts straight for the hangover cure section while Tata just—disappears. Jeongguk is getting used to that, slowly, the fact that yes, Tata is, in fact, Super Curious, and yes, Tata will, in fact, disappear at any given opportunity.
“Which one?” Jeongguk asks as he approaches Taehyung at the hangover cure shelf. “Too late for the turmeric. You have to take those before you drink.”

Taehyung nods. “Vitamin C boost then. The lemon ones that taste really good, in the green glass bottle with the yellow top.”

They scan the mini cooling-shelf for the right one, and both of them see it at the same time, two rows of green glass bottles with yellow tops.

“This one looks normal,” Jeongguk says, reading the labels on the bottles. “Why does this other one say ‘Moisture’ and just…that’s it. It’s the exact same but the bottom of the label here says ‘Moisture’.”

Taehyung stares at the bottles. “What the FUCK is the difference,” he yells, kind of loud for a deserted convenience store.

“Wow,” Jeongguk says, blinking at Taehyung with wide, impressed eyes.

Taehyung blinks back. “That was aggressive,” he says, like he’s not talking about his own outburst.

“Yes, it was,” Jeongguk agrees.

Taehyung keeps staring into Jeongguk’s eyes, drunk and serious. “But actually though. What—does it mean it’s more hydrating? In which case, why even make the original then? Why not only make the superiorly hydrating one?”

“Maybe Moisture is just, like, wetter in your mouth.”

Taehyung splutters, dramatic and distressed. “They’re both liquids! There is no such thing as one liquid being wetter in your mouth than another!”

“I mean, like, it fights cottonmouth.”
“It’s not a product for smoking weed—”

“Look, you get regular and I’ll get Moisture and we’ll taste them and see,” Jeongguk offers.

Taehyung looks skeptical. “What if Moisture tastes bad. What if it really is wetter in your mouth and it tastes bad?”

Jeongguk rolls his eyes. “I’ll drink the Moisture. You just buy regular and if you like Moisture better, I’ll swap you.”

Taehyung blinks, over-serious and wild. “Okay,” he nods, “That’s very generous and-or considerate of you. Two things. Two like two and then parenthesis and the numeral version of two and then a closing parenthesis. Does anyone know why they do that ever? Like I can’t read the word version of ‘two’ but I apparently can read all the other words around it and also I can read the numeral version? Why do they do that? Two, two-in-parenthesis. Generous and-or considerate.”

Jeongguk is just sober enough to realize Taehyung is gone. He can’t help the grin that tugs up the edges of his lips, unbidden. Taehyung sways, looking at Jeongguk Very Serious, and Jeongguk lifts his hands to rest on Taehyung’s shoulders and steer him around to the back of the store. “Come on,” Jeongguk says, “Let’s get some water too.

In the end, the Moisture hangover drink turns out to taste the same as the original but more fake-sugar-y and *kind of blech* (Taehyung’s description, followed by Tata’s affirmative beep even though Tata hadn’t even tasted it). They stand in front of the 7-Eleven and Jeongguk drinks the Moisture while Taehyung chugs the regular, rambling off the whole time about some article he recently read about why some people just don’t really like music and how *absolutely tragic and sad that is, that some people hear sounds and don’t, like, want to cry with how beautiful they are sometimes, right Gukkie? That’s really really sad, like sadder than people who genetically don’t like cilantro because they have the gene that makes it taste like soap, like that’s sad but not liking music is so much worse, don’t you think, Gukkie? Don’t you think?*

“Yeah,” Jeongguk says back, running a hand through Taehyung’s bangs to calm his distress. “Yeah, but it’s okay, I’m not one of those people.”

“I’m not either,” Taehyung breathes, closing his eyes and relaxing into Jeongguk’s touch.

Some rowdy guys come up and stand too close, laughing and shoving each other and smoking.
Taehyung goes almost immediately green. “Ugh, I hate smoking,” Taehyung mumbles, chugging the water. Too much, probably, but Jeongguk is busy swallowing Moisture to chide him.

“You’re standing closer to them,” Jeongguk says. “I’ll switch you sides.”

Taehyung shakes his head. “That’s just literally not how air works. Ugh, I hate—it gives me a headache, makes me—fuck—”

Taehyung’s eyes go wide and he stumbles around the side of the building to puke. Jeongguk and Cooky and Tata follow, and Jeongguk rubs Taehyung’s back because he’s not a total dickhead and Taehyung is gorgeous and also, completely against his own will, Jeongguk has kind of maybe a little bit started to like him.

Shut up.

“Fuck,” Taehyung gasps when he’s done throwing up soju and beer and vodka and water and hangover drink and whatever he’d been snacking on throughout the night. He wipes his mouth on the back of his hand and clutches his head, and Jeongguk helps tilt him upright, lets Taehyung curl into his chest and rest for a minute, just breathing. Taehyung’s forehead is all sweaty from the puking, and he’s shaking a little, and Jeongguk strokes the back of his neck in the best gesture of comfort he can offer when he himself is also really fucking drunk.


Jeongguk giggles even though he’s a little green himself after watching Taehyung throw up. “Feel better now? Want me to go get you something greasy to soak up the rest of the alcohol? Might help.”

Taehyung looks up at Jeongguk with wide, watery eyes. “Would you?” At their feet, Tata makes pleading eyes up at Jeongguk and does a synth-y glissando-y sound like they’re begging for something.

“Sure,” Jeongguk says, heart rising like a balloon into his throat. “Yeah, what do you want?”
“Fried chicken,” Taehyung requests, slumping against the wall. “Not the spicy kind. Just, like, the regular. And another hangover drink. Not Moisture. I puked the other one up,” he adds needlessly.

Jeongguk bites back a smile. “I’ll get more water, too,” he promises, heading back into the store. It’s only as he leaves with all the requested items plus a couple plain rice kimbap that he realizes Cooky isn’t with him. When he comes back around the corner to Taehyung and Tata, Cooky is with them, curled at Tata’s feet, careful not to touch Taehyung.

Jeongguk is unbothered. Kind of glad Cooky stayed to keep an eye on Tata and Taehyung, honestly. So. That’s something.

Taehyung accepts Jeongguk’s offerings with a thank you that consists of ducking forward and bumping his forehead into Jeongguk’s shoulder, smiling as he whispers, “Thanks.”

Jeongguk’s stomach flips over in a good way, not a too-drunk way.

Taehyung eats the chicken, offering pieces to Jeongguk in between every one of his own careful bites, and Jeongguk gladly accepts a few and then lets Taehyung have the rest once it’s clear Taehyung is enjoying it a lot more than Jeongguk’s acid stomach is. They split the water and Taehyung sips the hangover drink slowly this time, and by the end of all that, Taehyung looks better. Better even than Jeongguk feels, honestly.

“Come on,” Taehyung says when they’ve thrown all their trash away in the receptacle inside the store. “Let’s go back to Namjoon’s.” Taehyung offers his arm when Jeongguk sways, everything spinning. “Come on, you’re okay. Should’ve puked like me.”

“Yeah,” Jeongguk pants, “Shoulda.”

They make it back to Namjoon’s and Taehyung fishes the keys out of Jeongguk’s pocket, opens the door. He slips out of his Doc Martens while Jeongguk fights his way out of the tangled laces that restrict his Nikes, and then Taehyung pulls out the folding mattress from the couch and leads Jeongguk over to get under the blankets.

“Here,” Taehyung says, “Go to sleep. You’ll feel better in the morning. Maybe the late afternoon.”

“Maybe not until tomorrow evening,” Jeongguk groans. Not like it will be the first time he’s been
that hungover. He can deal. “Where’re you gonna sleep?”

Taehyung runs a hand through Jeongguk’s hair, perching on the edge of the foldout mattress. “I’ll find somewhere,” he murmurs, glancing over at the other, smaller couch.


“I’ll get a trash can,” Taehyung says, disappearing to the kitchen for a minute before he returns with a glass of water and a bottle of painkillers, and also the promised trash can.

“Stay here,” Jeongguk mumbles again, gratified when Taehyung lies down next to him.

The last thing Jeongguk remembers is a strange, cool touch across the back of his neck, a comforting electrical hum in his ear, and Taehyung’s gasp all breathy and shocked as he says, “Tata, what—”

Jeongguk falls asleep.

When Jeongguk wakes up, he makes a beeline for the sink because it’s closer than the toilet, and then he pukes. A lot.

“I had a trash can for you,” Taehyung says from behind him, but he rubs Jeongguk’s back all the same. There’s a comforting weight at Jeongguk’s right foot, the ever-present Cooky—well, ever-present except last night during the closet incident, traitor, although they seem less of a traitor now because Taehyung is rubbing Jeongguk’s back like a very kind, very gorgeous new friend (and possible boyfriend, Jeongguk’s actually-a-traitor heart is whispering).

Jeongguk finishes puking and wipes his mouth. There’s some weird weight on his leg, and he looks down, and—holy shit, Tata is clinging to Jeongguk’s left thigh. Like, their arms and legs are wrapped around Jeongguk’s leg right above his knee, and Tata’s limbs have somehow formed into continuous bands like rings, which is—just, like, not physically possible and definitely a trick.
“Sorry,” Taehyung says, as he follows Jeongguk’s gaze to his own soul manifested as a heart-headed, R2D2-voiced little creature. “They kinda got like that last night and now they won’t let go. I could probably—could maybe get them off if I really yanked at them and yelled, but I didn’t wanna wake you up.”

Jeongguk blinks. “It’s okay. I don’t mind.”

Jeongguk throws up again. Taehyung rubs his back, and Tata hums around his leg. After that, Jeongguk chugs water and collapses back to sleep on the couch with Cooky at his feet. Taehyung and Tata curl around him all sweet and soft and cool, and Jeongguk revels in the feel of them against his hangover-fevered skin.

Sometime around 9:30 in the morning, Jeongguk wakes up again feeling marginally less bad.

“Fuck,” he groans, rolling over to find Taehyung in a little ball beside him, wide awake. Tata is squished in between them, and they vibrate and then brrrr-up their way to consciousness against Jeongguk’s chest. Still, even once Tata is fully awake and blinking super curious eyes up at Jeongguk, the daemon doesn’t try to pull away from Jeongguk’s skin. There’s this whisper-silk, cool feeling tremble-fluttering over Jeongguk’s heart, the touch of another hitting directly against his soul, and Jeongguk looks down and realizes that Taehyung’s bare calf is pressed up against Cooky.

Taehyung follows Jeongguk’s eyes and yanks his leg away, blushing. “Oh. Sorry.”

The fluttery silk feeling snaps away instantaneously, and Jeongguk feels weirdly abandoned. “It’s okay,” he says, too hungover to really think about any of it. “You look exhausted. Did you sleep?”

Taehyung yawns. His eyelids are red and swollen, and there are lilac circles to match his sweater spreading on the skin beneath his lower lash line. “Can never sleep when I’m drunk,” Taehyung says. “It was—even though I puked and ate the chicken, I just—I got a couple hours, maybe. Took a shower.”

Jeongguk wrinkles his nose. “Did you just put the same clothes back on?”
Taehyung chuckles, just once, and it looks like even that takes way too much effort. “Yeah. Had to.”

Jeongguk pushes himself up and it’s not great, but it’s bearable. “Hey, Tae, you wanna get some breakfast with me? There’s a place pretty close that has good egg sandwiches.”

Taehyung blinks, all slow and molasses-heavy. “Okay,” he says, pushing himself up to sit next to Jeongguk. He opens his arms and Tata climbs into the embrace, burying their head in Taehyung’s sweater, humming a noise that sounds sort of like a computer shutting down. “They’re really sleepy,” Taehyung murmurs.

Jeongguk nods, heart thumping at the sight of Taehyung snuggling his daemon. “Come on,” Jeongguk says. “I’ll grab Namjoon’s keys.”

They walk down to the coffee shop, and Jeongguk orders two bacon sandwiches with eggs and cheese and two iced coffees, one with cream per Taehyung’s request. Taehyung curls into one of the squishy couches at the edge of the room looking worn out and pretty, and Jeongguk’s heart aches for how little he looks, how deflated Tata seems as they curl into Cooky’s side, because, oh, of course, Cooky is sitting on the couch with them. Not with Jeongguk, because why would Jeongguk’s actual own soul be with him when it could be with Tae and Tata.

Why indeed, Jeongguk thinks, because honestly, he would rather be with Tae and Tata too.

“Here,” Jeongguk says as he approaches the couch, handing Taehyung his coffee and one of the plates with a steaming fresh sandwich.

Taehyung practically devours the thing with his eyes. “Fuck, thank you,” he says, diving in to take a bite of the sandwich. He chews and makes a face and breathes “hot hot hot” and chews more, smiling.

“Burn your tongue?” Jeongguk asks, smirking through his hungover fog.

Taehyung swallows. “Don’t even care,” he says, like it’s a reference to something. If it is, Jeongguk doesn’t know what, but he doesn’t mind not knowing. Taehyung looks pretty goddamn beautiful bare of last night’s makeup, hair still barely wet, devouring a bacon sandwich in a cozy café on a Saturday morning, hungover and happy. Jeongguk’s heart flutters like the silk-satin of earlier, when Cooky had touched Taehyung.
When Taehyung had touched Cooky; it wasn’t Cooky who did that, Jeongguk reminds himself. Tells himself. (Kind of wonders, actually.)

Taehyung is blinking slow and drinking Jeongguk’s coffee (“Why’s it so bitter—oops, sorry, that was yours, ha ha, I’m so tired” plus the cutest frowny face ) and devouring his sandwich, and Jeongguk’s anger from the previous night is gone like it never existed at all. Instead, his heart is pounding on affection, and Taehyung’s whole being is like this glorious fountain of light in front of him, and Jeongguk bites into his sandwich and wonders how he’d ever thought he could hate Taehyung or the super curious creature twisting their limbs around in time with the music playing quiet from the speakers in the ceiling, dancing all adorably as Cooky watches and taps their foot against Tata’s side.

“Fuck, I have ‘ZUTTER’ so stuck in my head right now,” Taehyung gripes as they’re finishing off the last bites of their meals. He halfheartedly raps the first bits of the hook, gets a little louder when G-Dragon’s part starts, laughs, makes blown-out-cheek fish faces at Tata. Jeongguk is more than smitten, more than a little bit crushing, kind of just—

Instantly in love.

“Hey, can I have the rest of your ketchup?” Taehyung asks. He still has a bite of his sandwich. Jeongguk’s is gone.

“Sure,” Jeongguk says, offering the plate.

Taehyung dips his last bite in the ketchup and shoves it in his mouth, laughing as he somehow gets ketchup splattered on the tabletop. “Wow, spill all over the table, great job, Tae. Spill all over the table, spill all over the table, yeah” he sing-raps in what is very, very tenuously the rhythm of “ZUTTER”. Then he giggles, waggles his eyebrows at Jeongguk. “Eh, do you wanna?”

“Oh my god,” Jeongguk says, shaking his head even as he laughs, migrainey from the hangover but kind of way too smitten to tamp it down. “Oh my god, no, I don’t wanna. You are actually the most extra human being I have ever encountered, and I’m best friends with Jung Hoseok.”

Taehyung smiles. “I’m so tired,” he says, like this explains it. He leans over into Jeongguk’s side,
snuggles them up against the corner of the couch as Tata and Cooky climb into their laps, completely regardless of whose daemon belongs to whom. As soon as Cooky presses their head to Taehyung’s hand, nudging him to ask for pets, Jeongguk gets that fluttery-satiny sensation from earlier, the shock of it heightening to gingersnap-spice as Taehyung acquiesces to Cooky’s request and scratches lightly between the rabbit’s ears.

“Fuck,” Jeongguk moans, hangover clearing a little—like, not really going away, but the ear scratches feel nice and they’re not even happening to Jeongguk’s actual body. He can feel the affection and devotion in them anyway, can feel Taehyung’s selfless desire to comfort Jeongguk and Jeongguk’s aching soul.

Taehyung notices the relief he’s causing. His eyes widen and he pauses in his motions, but Jeongguk whines and shakes his head and buries his face into Taehyung’s shoulder in clear entreaty for more, and Taehyung scratches more confidently at Cooky’s fur. It’s nice. Everything is nice, and Jeongguk relaxes into Taehyung’s side and lets himself comforted. “Fuck,” Jeongguk says. “Fuck, fuck.”

“Oh,” Taehyung says, lifting his hand away and eliciting a whine from Jeongguk. When Taehyung doesn’t immediately resume the scratching, Jeongguk lifts his head, and there’s an old lady smiling at them.

“You kids are wonderful,” she says, nodding at their unusual and obvious disregard for personal daemon space. “You must love each other very much to touch each other’s daemons like that. It’s a nice reminder of love, to see it like that.”

The lady’s own daemon, a pine marten, curls around her ankles, looking playful and intelligent.

“Your daemon is very pretty, ma’am,” Taehyung says in lieu of answering to the comment she’d made.

“Indeed,” the woman says, a glint in her eyes as she smiles. “Come along,” she says to her daemon, and together they head out of the café.

“Sorry if that was weird,” Taehyung says once the lady is gone.

Jeongguk shakes his head, forcing himself to sit up finally. He’s all cloudy again now that Taehyung isn’t touching Cooky so intentionally. “It’s okay,” Jeongguk manages to say, “I don’t mind. Wasn’t weird.”
Taehyung nods. “God, I’m so sleepy.” He yawns. “Shoulda—shoulda had more ketchup. Wow, I just said ‘ketchup’ and I meant ‘coffee’. I’m a disaster.”

Jeongguk blinks. “Oh god, you did. You just said ‘ketchup’.”

“And I meant ‘coffee’,” Taehyung sighs. “Shoulda had more ket—coffee. Coffee. Yeah, obviously I really, really need more coffee.”

“I’ll get you a refill if you want.”

Taehyung chews his lip and doesn’t look at Jeongguk. “Nah. It’ll—I’ll get a stomachache if I drink more. Sadly.”

Taehyung gets shy then, and Tata gets weirdly robotic (well, more weirdly robotic than usual) and marches off under the couch, beeping and booping and vrooming the whole way. Taehyung sighs. “Hey, um. I um. I wanted to apologize. For being, like, aggressively rude to you last night.”

Cooky hops off Jeongguk’s lap to crawl under the couch with Tata, and Jeongguk furrows his brow. “What? No, Taehyung—Taehyung-ssi—it was my fault. I was the one who was rude first, and it was just because I was drunk and wasn’t thinking and was having a bad day but all of that is not an excuse. It was rude of me to say anything about Tata.”

Taehyung smiles, soft and sweet.

“Also,” Jeongguk continues, hoping the next part won’t be taken badly, like Jeongguk is patronizing when he really doesn’t mean to. “Tata is honestly really awesome.”

Taehyung’s smile goes wild and breathtaking then.

(Oh, Jeongguk thinks, honestly kind of dizzy. Oh, that’s what that looks like. Oh. Oh.)

“Really?” Taehyung asks, eager and bright. “You think so? I mean, I know so, they’re my daemon
“Yeah,” Jeongguk says, “I mean, I still don’t totally get how you understand what they’re saying or how they do the ring thing with, like, combining their arms and legs into continuous loops like that, but—that’s why they’re awesome. I’ve never seen a daemon like them.”

“I know,” Taehyung breathes, leaning forward like he’s confessing some terribly wonderful secret. “I know, they’re just—unlike anything. I felt so lucky when I finally got them, when they finally stopped being a blob and settled in with their heart-shaped head and their cute yellow mouth and their eyebrows, oh my god, I love their eyebrows. And I love how they talk, like—I don’t know how I understand it either, but I just do, and it’s amazing.”

Taehyung bites his lip and looks down, hunching his shoulders. “Nearly 20,” he whispers, knees pressed together, ankles apart. He looks so small, so scared.

Jeongguk has never heard of anyone’s daemon settling past the age of 18. Has heard stories—rumors, really, which probably aren’t true but maybe, maybe—of daemons that never settle, of people going crazy because their daemons won’t stop being glowy blobs. “Oh,” Jeongguk says, reaching out a hand to rest against Taehyung’s bare wrist. It feels kind of like a dulled version of when Taehyung touches Cooky.

Taehyung swallows. “My parents took me to the doctor a bunch of times. To figure out what was wrong, why Tata wouldn’t—be something. Because they wouldn’t.”

Jeongguk can’t imagine the pain of that. Cooky had formed when Jeongguk was 15. Perfectly normal. “I’m sorry.”

Taehyung nods. “Yeah. It’s—I guess it’s not impossible for people’s daemons to wait until after they’re 18 to settle, but—18 is generally regarded as the upper limit for a reason,” Taehyung says. “Everyone is settled by then, but I just…wasn’t. It was—I’ve always loved them, even when they were a shimmery light blob, but it was—hard. For a couple years, there, when everyone—my family and parents and stuff—they were waiting and Tata was just…not settled. And then they did settle and they’re this.”
Taehyung says it and it’s so harsh, an imitation of hurt-disgust-disappointment that undoubtedly came from people who were supposed to love Taehyung and Tata, people in Taehyung and Tata’s family.

“Oh, Taehyung,” Jeongguk breathes, “Oh, fucking—fuck, I’m a douchebag. I’m a huge fucking douchebag and I’m sorry and I didn’t mean to—oh my god, you should hate me. I wouldn’t ever want to make you feel bad about Tata, no, Tata is great.”

Tata’s long arms (too long, seriously, okay can they just make their arms literally any size they want regardless of how conservation of mass works?) snake out from under the table and poke Jeongguk’s kneecaps twice, and then the arms slither back from whence they’d come. Cooky hops out from under the couch to blink up at Jeongguk, and then they hop back under to join their new best friend.

“It’s okay,” Taehyung says when the spectacle of Tata and Cooky is over, “You didn’t know.”

“Do people—are they—weird about them a lot?” Jeongguk asks.

Taehyung shrugs. “My parents still are a little. I mean, they’ve gotten used to them, but they still totally avoid talking about them or to them even though they’re not like that with my siblings’ daemons. My siblings and I were close when we were young, but their daemons settled early and they’re normal, it was—it was just mine. That’s part of why I moved away from Daegu for college, because it sucked to be around and have my daemon treated like a pesky fly that no one could get rid of. Plus, Tata is super curious, like I said. They were always getting into stuff, and that annoys people. Honestly, Jimin is the first person who’s been really nice and kind to Tata. Always feeds Tata brown sugar and apple slices, because those are Tata’s favorite.”

Jeongguk frowns. “Wait, Tata can eat? Cooky can’t eat. I’ve never met a daemon that could eat. That’s fucking awesome.”

Taehyung smiles. “Yep. Tata eats. Who the hell even knows what they do with the food once it’s inside of them though, honestly. I certainly don’t.”

“Maybe it’s how the extendable arms magic happens,” Jeongguk says.

Taehyung nods. “Maybe.” His grin is boxy and magical and stunning, and Jeongguk’s breath is gone.
“Hey, wanna go back to Namjoon’s and see if anyone is up?” Jeongguk asks then. “We could bring them sandwiches. I’m sure everyone needs it.”

Taehyung nods. “Sure. Let me get it though; you got mine earlier.”

Jeongguk scoffs as he stands. “Don’t be silly, Tae. I bought one sandwich and one coffee for you. You’ll have to buy five of each to get enough for them, which is way more expensive. We can split it.”

Taehyung purses his lips, indecisive. “Well, okay,” he says. “But let me buy three and you buy two, and then we’ll be even.”

Jeongguk rolls his eyes. “Yeah, all right, fine.” He holds out a hand and pulls Taehyung to his feet, gets a steadying hand on Taehyung’s hip when it looks like Taehyung’s going to drop back to the couch in exhaustion. “Hey,” Jeongguk says then, standing closer to Taehyung than is publicly appropriate and gripping tight at Taehyung’s skin. “Hey, is this—is this okay?” He asks, flexing his fingers around the crest of Taehyung’s hipbone.

Taehyung nods. “Yes,” he says.

“Okay,” Jeongguk nods. “Then I wanted to just say, um—I’m really, really sorry. Like, really-really.”


They stare at each other for a minute, both blushing now, and then Jeongguk clears his throat. “Come on. Let’s go.”

They get the sandwiches and coffees, drag Tata and Cooky out from under the couch.

“Oh my god, would you guys let go of each other?” Taehyung gripes as Jeongguk attempts to extricate Cooky from the actual literal tangled rope-mess of Tata’s clingy extendable limbs.
Tata beeps and beeps and vibrates like crazy.

“Cooky,” Jeongguk says, exasperated. “Can’t you at least let go so we can get back to Joonhyung’s?”

“Don’t wanna,” Cooky mumbles in their velvet-soft little voice.

Taehyung melts into Jeongguk’s side. “Fuck. That was the cutest thing,” he says, staring at Cooky. Tata hums, clearly agreeing with his human.

Jeongguk kisses Taehyung’s forehead then, not really thinking about it. Tata shudders hard and clings to Cooky harder, and Cooky whimpers, sweet and happy.

“Come on,” Jeongguk says, “I’ll carry the food and coffee. You carry those two.”

Taehyung scoops both daemons into his arms, and as soon as he’s touching Cooky, Jeongguk’s velvet-satin-fluttery-spiced-chai feeling comes back, so new and yet so immediately familiar, like having someone else touch Jeongguk’s daemon is something that he’s been living without forever and yet knows as intimately as he knows his daemon itself, and that’s—

Well. Whatever.

What matters is that Jeongguk is kind of reveling in the touch of Taehyung’s hands on his bunny-manifested soul, and now that Jeongguk knows the feeling, he wonders how he’ll ever live without it.

“Well, that was a lot,” Taehyung says as he and Jeongguk get ready to go back to campus together,
heading for their separate dorms, obviously. Obviously. Jimin is staying with Hoseok because they’re, like, already kind of official and also now they’re sober which means they can share the bed. Yoongi and Namjoon and Seokjin had disappeared directly back to Namjoon’s room after accepting the offered coffee and egg sandwiches.

“Yeah,” Jeongguk says, shaking his head as Tata jump-ropes their own arms and Cooky laughs at them. Jeongguk grins. “I haven’t been that drunk in ages.”

Taehyung smiles and laces up his boots. They really do take kind of forever to deal with, but they look good, so Jeongguk understands Taehyung’s dedication. “Me neither,” Taehyung says. “You need to stop anywhere before we go? You wanna take the train, or split a cab?”

Jeongguk shrugs. “Either is fine. If you don’t wanna...if you wanna go home, like, separately, that’s okay too.”

Taehyung bites his lip. “Um, actually, it’s...I mean, it’s fine. Whatever you wanna do.”

Jeongguk groans. “No, Tae, don’t do that. Then we’ll never decide.”

“Fine,” Taehyung says, decisive. “Let’s just take the train. It’s not that far, really.”

It’s not. They take the train together in not-quite-awkward silence; the subway isn’t busy on a late Saturday morning, and everyone on the train is quiet, so Taehyung and Jeongguk stay quiet too. They get off at their stop and walk a ways together, exchanging idle comments about the weather and arguing a bit over Taehyung’s (beginner’s luck) skill at Rage Cage, and then they reach a fork in the path through campus and Taehyung stops.

“Um. We’re going this way,” Taehyung says, holding a squirming Tata and looking over his shoulder towards the dorm building directly across the quad from Jeongguk’s.

Jeongguk blinks. He doesn’t want Taehyung to go. “Oh. Yeah. Okay,” he says, instead of saying that. *I don’t want you to go. I don’t want Tata to go. Cooky doesn’t either.*

Taehyung nods. “So. Anyways. It was nice to meet you, Jeongguk-ssi.”
“Nice to meet you, Taehyung-hyungnim.”

Taehyung snorts. “You don’t have to call me that.”

Jeongguk smiles. “You don’t have to call me ‘ssi’.” At his feet, Cooky hops around and then darts to Taehyung and gives his legs a hug, and Taehyung smiles.

“Hey,” Jeongguk says in a burst of courage, “You want my number? So we can, like, get them together for a playdate?”

Taehyung giggles. “Yeah. They obviously like each other.”

Jeongguk nods. “God knows why. Cooky is way not as cool as Tata. Cooky, did you hear that? You’re lucky Tata is giving some silly fluffy bunny like you the time of day, you get that?”

Taehyung blinks at Jeongguk, eyes wide and knowing. “Jeongguk-ah,” he says, taking a step closer, careful not to jostle the still-clinging Cooky. “Jeongguk-ah, Cooky’s not lucky to have Tata hanging out with them. Tata is lucky to have someone like Cooky to, um. To like them.”

“Like them,” Jeongguk says, whispering now that they’re standing so close. There’s no one around; it’s not like campus is exactly bustling at 11:30 a.m. on a Saturday morning. “Yeah,” Jeongguk agrees, blinking into Taehyung’s contact-gray eyes. “Cooky likes Tata very much. Like. Really likes them.”

“Really-really,” Taehyung agrees, leaning so close their foreheads are almost touching. It’s early autumn, and the leaves are yellow-red-orange against the bright blue sky, and the sunlight is falling through the air like gold dust swirling heaven around them, and the breeze is just light enough to tease Taehyung’s grapefruit hair into his eyes. Jeongguk is breathless.

“Taehyung,” Jeongguk whispers.

“Jeongguk,” Taehyung murmurs back, eyes dropping to Jeongguk’s lips for just a tiny split second, just long enough to give away what he wants. “Jeongguk.”
“Yes,” Jeongguk breathes, because they’re both thinking it, but there’s still something so hopelessly romantic about really saying it. About exhaling consent that’s enthusiastic and happy, enthralling in its plainness. How anyone could think real consent isn’t sexy and necessary and the most beautiful thing you can offer another person is beyond Jeongguk.

“Yes,” breathes Taehyung, like he gets it too, the shattering vulnerability of that syllable. Its weighty clarity hangs like a glistening spider web between their lips in the cool, sunny fall morning, perfect and lovely and the most freely offered surrender.

Jeongguk takes the last step forward and connects their lips, the question asked and answered, silken ginger-spice pulsing over them as Jeongguk slips his tongue into Taehyung’s mouth. Taehyung lets Tata slip to the ground, and he clutches Jeongguk’s shoulders and kisses back, hard. Jeongguk’s arms snake around Taehyung’s waist, and he presses their bodies flush together, and then he lifts Taehyung up and spins him around, and the motion isn’t doing anything for his hungover head, but it’s doing something great for Jeongguk’s fluttering, shuddering heart.

“Jeongguk,” Taehyung gasps as they break apart, still hanging onto Jeongguk’s shoulders like he’ll fall if he lets go, and—oh, whoops, Jeongguk is leaning him back like some Disney princess or something, so actually, yeah, Taehyung will in fact fall if Jeongguk drops him.

“Sorry,” Jeongguk responds, straightening up so Taehyung can stand up on his own, except apparently he kind of can’t, because Taehyung’s knees are weak and he falls into Jeongguk’s frame with his head buried in Jeongguk’s throat, trembling and breathless.

“It’s—fine,” Taehyung gasps. “Sorry, I can’t—fuck, I must be super hungover or something.”

Jeongguk snorts. “Yeah, that’s gotta be it. Super hungover. Can’t even stand up.”

“Can’t, that’s true,” Taehyung says. “You’ll have to carry me back to my room, I’m too hungover.” He says the last word so sarcastically, so facetiously, that Jeongguk’s cheeks heat up a little.

“Fuck, you’re really fucking cute, Tae,” Jeongguk spills, burying his burning cheeks in Taehyung’s shoulder. Taehyung giggles and ducks himself further into Jeongguk’s embrace, and Jeongguk can feel the heat of Taehyung’s own cheeks against his collarbone, so at least they’re in the same boat.

“Wanna come back to my room and watch movies until Jiminie gets back?” Taehyung whispers, smiling and clutching Jeongguk.
Jeongguk bites his lip. “I have a single, if you’d rather go there.”

Taehyung stills.

“We don’t have to,” Jeongguk says, ready to offer an easy out. “We don’t have to—”

“Ugh, Jeongguk, no,” Taehyung teases, pulling away to meet Jeongguk’s eyes. “No, come on, let’s go to your room.”

“For movies,” Jeongguk whispers, blinking wide eyes at Taehyung.

“For movies,” Taehyung echoes, except his expression is just the slightest bit teasing and his eyes glint with mischief.

“Movies,” is apparently the only thing Jeongguk can say.

Tata springs (surprisingly high) to land on Jeongguk’s shoulder, wrapping their arms around Jeongguk’s head, and Cooky clutches at Taehyung’s calf just the way they normally cling to Jeongguk’s. Jeongguk’s heart trips over the fluttery silk of Cooky touching Taehyung, and he sort of wonders how Yoongi and Namjoon and Seokjin have never mentioned anything about that.

“Well?” Taehyung says after a few seconds of Jeongguk’s indecision. “Lead the way, Mr. What-the-fuck-is-that-why-does-it-talk-like-that-oh-wait-your-daemon-is-awesome.”

Jeongguk tips his head back and groans. “Ugh, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it, I was drunk and angry, I was— fuck! I still need to send in that essay!”

Taehyung giggles and leaps forward, tugging at Jeongguk’s hand as they finally start towards Jeongguk’s dorm. “Don’t worry, I’ll remind you when we get there.”

“And then movies.”
“And then movies,” Taehyung affirms.

They go back to Jeongguk’s room and he submits the essay, and then Taehyung asks for more comfortable clothes to wear during the movie, and then they put on Netflix, and they don’t really pay any attention to the movie at all.

Because they’re talking.

_Talking._

(And also sometimes maybe sort of kissing, but if that happens, no one can prove it. The only witnesses would be Tata and Cooky, but those two are exploring under the bed like usual anyways, so they wouldn’t even know either.)

How the story ends:

“Cooky, where are you— _fuck,_ I hate living in the dorms,” Jeongguk mutters, cursing as he trips over a pile of laundry that he’d been meaning to get to yesterday and hadn’t because of homework.

(Okay, it was because he was at Taehyung’s, but that’s not really—whatever. Shut up.)

After another few seconds of struggle, Jeongguk gets the door open. Tata immediately zips through the door with a beep and a buzzy noise, and Taehyung blushes faintly, still kind of embarrassed about how Super Curious Tata is even after a month of Jeongguk knowing this.

“Hey,” Jeongguk says, opening the door wider and gesturing Taehyung in.
“Hey,” Taehyung says. “I brought fried chicken,” he says, holding up the box. Jeongguk takes it from him and sets it on his desk.

“I have soju if you want some,” Jeongguk says as Taehyung slips out of his Pumas.

Taehyung shakes his head, groaning. “Jiminie and I got kind of wine-drunk last night and I only just got over it. That’s why I was so bad at responding today. Was trying to sleep it off before I came over.”

Jeongguk smiles. “You’re cute when you’re hungover. It’s okay.”

Taehyung settles himself on the bed, finally looking comfortable in the room when Jeongguk joins him and threads their fingers together. Jeongguk raises Taehyung’s hand to his lips and presses a kiss there, all gentle and sweet. “Hey,” Jeongguk says.

“Hey,” Taehyung returns, smiling.

“You wanna eat the chicken first? Your stomach okay?” Jeongguk asks, pressing a hand to Taehyung’s forehead. Taehyung’s hair is brown now, and it sits dark and pretty against Jeongguk’s skin.

“I’m fine,” Taehyung says, looking up at the ceiling. “But actually—um, maybe we could wait on the chicken?”

“Why?” Jeongguk asks, “What did you want to do instead?”

Taehyung bites his lip, shifting against the mattress and finally lying down on his back, spread out beneath Jeongguk. “I don’t know,” he says, looking at Jeongguk’s lips. “We could just—hang out.”

“Hang out,” Jeongguk murmurs, leaning closer and biting his lip, hoping they’re all rosy and red for Taehyung’s appreciation.

“Yeah,” Taehyung says, and then he threads his fingers through Jeongguk’s hair and pulls Jeongguk closer, and Jeongguk shifts just a little. Taehyung closes his eyes. “Yes.”
“Yes,” Jeongguk echoes, just like every time they’ve done this thus far, and Taehyung is smiling as Jeongguk fits their lips together, careful and sweet and kind of painfully vanilla, because that’s what they like—making out like teenagers who don’t really know what to do with themselves, pausing to check in every step of the way, running hands along skin and occasionally discarding shirts, never pushing beyond that.

Tonight—

Tonight feels different.

“Taehyung,” Jeongguk breathes as he ghosts breath over Taehyung’s bobbing throat, as his hands run up Taehyung’s sides, press in at his ribs. “Taehyung, can I touch you?”

“Yes,” Taehyung says, “Please. Please, you can—can touch me.”

“Okay,” Jeongguk answers, tugging Taehyung out of his shirt, leaning down to run his mouth along Taehyung’s collarbone.

“Oh,” Taehyung gasps, “Can I touch you?”

“Yes,” Jeongguk breathes, letting Taehyung pull his shirt over his head.

They stare at each other, breathing in tandem and smiling, eyes holding each other’s gaze for a few seconds before one of them drops their eyes to the other’s lips like they just can’t help it, and Jeongguk is powerless, and yeah—he’s really can’t. Help it, that is. Can’t help it, acting like this when he’s staring at a breathless Taehyung.

“Come on,” Taehyung says, eyes going a little desperate as Jeongguk blinks down at him. “Come on, touch me, Jeongguk. Wanna—wanna feel you.”

“How?” Jeongguk asks, pressing his hips down, cataloguing the way Taehyung’s hips jump up to meet them, head thrown back against Jeongguk’s pillows, breathing ragged and torn.
“This,” Taehyung says, coming back to himself enough to lace his fingers with Jeongguk’s. “However you want, just—wanna feel good.”

“Wanna make you feel good, Tae,” Jeongguk says, committing himself to this intention as he presses Taehyung to the sheets.

“Sure?” Taehyung asks, breathless.

“Yes,” Jeongguk breathes, sucking a hickey into Taehyung’s neck. “Yes, yes, yes.”

“Yes,” Taehyung says, “Me too. Yes.”

“Okay,” Jeongguk promises. “Just enjoy it. Don’t worry about anything, don’t worry about—maybe this is weird, but don’t worry about if you come. Just—there’s no pressure for anything. Just let me make you feel good, yeah?”

“Huh?” Taehyung gasps, already grinding into Jeongguk’s thigh. “No one’s ever—that’s, that’s really nice, Guk-ah—ah, ah.”

“Well, it’s only fun if everyone is enjoying it,” Jeongguk says, “But you don’t have to come to be enjoying it. So just tell me if I can do something better, and I’ll check in, and whenever you want to stop, we stop. Even if you don’t come. Even if I don’t come. Just—it’s about being comfortable, and feeling good, and I want you to—to just feel good, hyung, fuck.”

Taehyung clutches Jeongguk closer, smiling all rectangular into their kiss. “Fuck,” Taehyung says as they pull apart. “Fuck, you’re amazing. You’re amazing, no wonder Tata fucking loves you. And Cooky.”

Jeongguk smiles as he gets his mouth on Taehyung’s earlobe, as he swirls his tongue and elicits a stuttering moan. Jeongguk grabs Taehyung’s hips and guides their rhythm, and Taehyung whimpers under him and fists one hand in the sheets, gasping.

Someone under the bed, Tata starts to vibrate, and Cooky mews very small.
Jeongguk smiles into Taehyung’s mouth and pulls him close and makes him feel so good. Really, really good.

Really-really.

Chapter End Notes

References:
1) When Seokjin tells Jeongguk that he can't ask what someone’s daemon is, I was of course thinking of the part in Mean Girls where Gretchen says "Oh my god, Karen, you can't just ask people why they're white!"
2) The line Taehyung says about not caring when he burns his tongue is from Parks and Rec. In S02E24, Ron takes a sip of coffee and then says "Burned my tongue. Don't even care."

tumblr

twitter
AM BACK WITH CHAPTER TWO!!!! because I couldn't let these guys go, and everything was just too cute to end it where I left off <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

New Group Message: all the babes

rj & jin hyung [2:57 p.m.]
Everyone remember!! Catan and pizza tonight at Joon’s!

hobi/mangieee [3:01 p.m.]
jiminie n chimmy n mang n I are in!

jooniehyung and sweetie koya [3:03 p.m.]
Yoongi-hyung and Shooky say okay

jooniehyung and sweetie koya [3:03 p.m.]
And obviously Koya and I will be there

JK+Cook ❤❤ [3:07 p.m.]
we remember, don’t worry hyung.
JK+Cook ❤❤ [3:08 p.m.]

btw “we” means tata/tae too

yoongi hyung/actual soft cinnamon cookie [3:09 p.m.]

as if we didn’t already know that

jimmychimmy!! [3:09 p.m.]

^^

jooniehyung and sweetie koya [3:13 p.m.]

I was driving when Jimin sent that and my car Bluetooth read it out loud to me as “carrot carrot” and I got really confused.

yoongi hyung/actual soft cinnamon cookie [3:15 p.m.]

we get it you have a nice car

Taehyung blinks down at his phone with eyes blurry on lack of sleep and too much coffee in the morning, on the migraine pressing itself insistently against the insides of his skull. It’s like his brain is too swollen for the cavity in which it sits, throbbing so hard it might just burst right out of bone and splatter all over the walls.

Which. Gross. Probably would be the same color as the strawberry ice cream, though, which—
Gross.

Taehyung sighs and puts his phone back in his pocket, eyes too bleary and fingers too weirdly stiff for him to make the effort to text back. Not when Jeongguk has already confirmed their presence at the event—which, honestly, this is for sure the weirdest Friday night get together they’ve ever had. Not a silly movie. Not going to the mall to act out Avril Lavigne’s “Complicated” music video. Not even drunk Mario Party or sober Octodad. No.

Settlers of fucking Catan.

Now here’s the thing: normally, when it comes to absurd entertainment, Taehyung and Tata consider themselves inarguably pro. Not pro like professional (although wouldn’t that be nice)—just, they are pro all of the more ridiculous things in the universe, like Frisbee golf and that sport that’s like horseshoes but on ice (curling?) and the Goat Simulator videogame where you throw around a bleating goat in a junkyard with a physics engine. Taehyung is a chaotic good with a penchant for mischief and super curiosity just like Tata, and a board game about strategically building a rural island empire which also gives its players the repeated opportunity to ask everyone else “do you have wood?” is normally right up Taehyung and Tata’s alley. Normally.

Not today, when it’s 3:15 p.m. and Taehyung is at work with this stupid migraine, his stomach a churning mess, his balance shot like he’s going to pass out and collapse to the floor of the ice cream shop. At his feet, Tata gives a pathetic little bleat.

<< hurts, taetae, >> the buzzy plea means. << hurts hurts HURTS!! >>

Tata’s buzzing elevates and then stops with a crackly pop like wires shorting out. Taehyung slumps against the ice cream cooler and wishes he could leave, silent because he can’t open his mouth or risk puking all over his shoes.

When Taehyung doesn’t respond, Tata switches tactics and shivers hard while they beep in a long scale down. << hurts. taetae. hurts. >>

“I know, Tata,” Taehyung sighs, aggressively rubbing his temple. “Trust me, I know.”

Taehyung’s phone goes off again, and he takes a sick, exhausted glance around the shop as he checks it again. It’s not the group chat this time, so Taehyung figures he should make the effort to actually respond.
hey babe, hope work is ok. tbh kinda wanna pregame this catan thing

haha, you probably should lol

cooky misses tata

like they won’t tell me bu theyre all sad andI’m sure that’s why

??
Me [3:19 p.m.]
nothing, I’m fine!

Me [3:19 p.m.]
Tata misses cooky too ❤️

JK+Cook ❤️❤️ [3:21 p.m.]
u sure?

Me [3:24 p.m.]
sure ❤️

JK+Cook ❤️❤️ [3:25 p.m.]
babe.

Me [3:26 p.m.]
babe.

JK+Cook ❤️❤️ [3:27 p.m.]
taaeee (nd tata)

JK+Cook ❤️❤️ [3:27 p.m.]
m gonna send cooky 2 the ice cream shop to make sure ur okay
you are not.

and stop typing like Jiminie n hobi

lol sorry

If you’re sure you’re okay.

M sure!

See you soon, TnT
Me [3:33 p.m.]
byebye, JK

Me [3:33 p.m.]
byebye, cook

Me [3:34 p.m.]
❤

Me [3:34 p.m.]
(ps I love TnT like it's so cute BYE)

JK+Cook ♥️ [3:34 p.m.]
❤

JK+Cook ♥️ [3:35 p.m.]
(that's from cooky. for tata)

JK+Cook ♥️ [3:35 p.m.]
I love it too

JK+Cook ♥️ [3:35 p.m.]
TnT I mean

JK+Cook ♥️ [3:35 p.m.]
Tae n Tata
Me [3:36 p.m.]
Yeah i GET IT

Me [3:36 p.m.]
lol

Me [3:36 p.m.]
❤

Me [3:37 p.m.]
Tata just said something in binary but idk how to write it. but it’s probs something sweet about cooky.

Me [3:37 p.m.]
or it’s just like data about ice cream idk tbh

JK+Cook ❤❤ [3:38 p.m.]
mkay cute

JK+Cook ❤❤ [3:38 p.m.]
like

JK+Cook ❤❤ [3:39 p.m.]
fuck them both for being so cute.

Me [3:40 p.m.]
fuck you for distracting me at work!

Me [3:40 p.m.]

bye!

JK+Cook ❤❤ [3:42 p.m.]

bye babes.

JK+Cook ❤❤ [3:43 p.m.]

❤

Taehyung doesn’t reply. Seriously, it’ll never end if he leaves it up to Jeongguk to finish the conversation.

Fuck. Fuck migraines. Fuck the weird stomach twinges, the zinging spasms down his neck when he turns his head. Wait, could he have meningitis? Stiff neck is a symptom of meningitis, right? And college kids get it, especially ones who live in dorms.

Except wait. They got the vaccine for that. Taehyung remembers because Tata remembers, because Tata has a weird fascination with watching Taehyung get stabbed by sharp medical instruments.

Taehyung’s daemon is kind of a dick.

<< mean mean~ >> Tata beep-brrrrrrups.

Taehyung bites his lip and offers his arm for Tata to leap up to, and Tata swings their way into Taehyung’s arms. “Sorry, cutie pie,” Taehyung grins, weak against the force of the migraine and the charm of his daemon. Tata scurries up to Taehyung’s shoulder and then just flops themselves all atop Taehyung’s head. They’re still clearly wonky with migraine pain because their body is going really hot then really cold then hot again. With their arm pressed to Taehyung’s forehead, it actually feels
kind of good.

<< water, taeereeee >> Tata hums, tone dulled out to keep Taehyung’s head from hurting more with the sound.

“I honestly don’t even think it’ll help,” Taehyung moans.

<< sugar, >> Tata vibrates. << eat sugar. also cooky! want cooky! want JK, taetaetae. >>

And oh. Taehyung knows. Taehyung wants the comforting embrace of Jeongguk and his pretty, fluffy pink daemon something fierce right now too.

But Taehyung and Tata have never been the type to say anything about their injuries or illnesses. It’s always felt to Taehyung like there’s a gag over his mouth when he has to own up to being sick, even to his parents when he was young, and to his teachers or managers at jobs. In all his years of school, Taehyung never went to the clinic once, not even that time in elementary school when he had the stomach flu and puked in the bathroom and still went back to gym class, silent about the roiling in his gut. Taehyung has always messed up his words enough without it involving injuries and illnesses, and he assumes it’s an extension of that. Some tongue-twisted anxiety thing that’s the same reason Tata has never been able to actually talk, and presumably never will.

So, despite the fact that they might be dying of meningitis, Taehyung and Tata slog through the rest of the shift without complaint. The headache dies a little when Taehyung stops at Starbucks for more coffee on the way back to his dorm, enough that Taehyung thinks he can manage a night in with the hyungs. His stomach is still twinging uncomfortably and Tata is vibrating in a too-hot-too-cold body, but they’re okay. Really.

“Hey, what time are you heading to Hobi-hyung’s?” Jimin asks as soon as Taehyung and Tata walk into their double room. Jimin is lying on his bed, Chimmy curled up next to him as they do homework.

Taehyung manages a shrug. “Not sure yet. Jeongguk wants to pregame before, so I might head over to his room first.”

Jimin giggles, and Chimmy hops down from the bed and does a little dance in the middle of the cheap turquoise rug covering the linoleum floor. Tata climbs up on Taehyung’s bed and curls into the pillows, letting out a buzzy booting-off noise. Chimmy jumps into the pillows too, and
immediately snuggles into Tata.

Jimin grins at the daemons and then turns to Taehyung. “Hey, you look kind of…dim. Not, like, tipsy-dim, but like. Your face is less-expressive than usual.”

“Tipsy-dim?” Taehyung grins, sitting on his bed, careful not to touch Chimmy.

Jimin giggles, all smitten-looking. “Hobi-hyung started it,” he says. “If ‘lit’ means drunk, then tipsy should be ‘dim’.”

Taehyung shakes his head and tips himself back against the wall beside the bed. “Cute.”

Jimin shuts the textbook in front of him. “See? Dim. That was a less-enthusiastic reaction than anticipated. You love new slang.”

Taehyung huffs and rubs his upset-ish stomach. He knows it’s just the migraine, knows sugar would probably actually help. “I need a snack,” he says. Not that saying it aloud makes him actually want to eat one.

“Yeah?” Jimin asks. “What do you want?”

Taehyung ponders it. “A chocolate malt,” he settles on, reaching over to pet Tata. Chimmy hums in their pretty, song-like lullaby voice and pets Tata too.

Jimin stands up to stretch. “You just came from the ice cream shop. Why didn’t you make yourself one there?”

“I didn’t want one until just now,” Taehyung pouts.

Chimmy hops off the bed and starts running circles around the rug on the floor. Tata jumps up, stumbles so hard they nearly fall, and hides under the bed. They’ve got this ridiculous blanket nest under there, bigger than Tata really needs, surely.
There’s one under Jeongguk’s bed too. Which probably says something about the nature of Jeongguk and Taehyung’s relationship, but if it does, Taehyung isn’t convinced of what it is. It’s not like Jeongguk and Taehyung are boyfriend-together or anything, not like Jimin and Hoseok, who have been Facebook Official since a week after they met. Jeongguk and Cooky might be sweet and affectionate, they might invite Taehyung and Tata over practically every night, but Taehyung doesn’t want to presume. He knows he’s weird and kind of too much all the time. Knows that Tata can be really demanding and annoying, hard to deal with because only Taehyung can really understand them. Jeongguk and Cooky might be willing to put up with it for now, but Taehyung is waiting for the other shoe to drop.

There’s a buzz as Jimin’s phone goes off. “Hey, Hobi-hyung just texted,” he announces.

“Mang! Seokseok-hyung!” Chimmy cheers.

Jimin laughs. “Okay, well, we’re out. See you in a bit? Don’t drink with Jeongguk too late; we’re getting pizza, remember. Chill, non-drunk Friday night.”

“Dim,” Taehyung offers.

“No getting lit!” Jimin giggles. “All right, well. See ya!” He grabs his backpack off the floor—must be planning to stay over at Hoseok and Namjoon’s place, then—and heads out the door, Chimmy hot on his heels.

Taehyung sighs and pulls out his phone.

Me [6:20 p.m.]
Yo I’m home now

Me [6:20 p.m.]
Chim n jiminnie just left
you want me to come over there then?

JK+Cook ❤❤ [6:25 p.m.]

will bring alcohol!

Me [6:26 p.m.]

Actually yeah, that would be nice.

Me [6:26 p.m.]
❤

JK+Cook ❤❤ [6:27 p.m.]

kk! be over soon!!

Me [6:28 p.m.]
❤

Jeongguk and Cooky knock on the door ten minutes later. Jeongguk takes one look at Taehyung and the migraine-dizzy Tata and drags Taehyung into his arms.

“Ugh, you always do this,” Jeongguk moans, squeezing Taehyung’s waist with his arms all locked around Taehyung’s ribcage. Cooky has already disappeared under the bed with Tata.

“What,” Taehyung groans, letting Jeongguk take his weight.
“Pretend you’re fine when you actually don’t feel good,” Jeongguk whispers. “What’s the matter this time, Tae?”

Taehyung scoffs weakly. “‘This time’? As if I’m sick all the time or something.”

“You work yourself really crazy hard, babe,” Jeongguk says, voice muffled in Taehyung’s shoulder. “You get headaches and backaches and colds and anxiety and insomnia and nightmares. And you never fail to try to hide all of it from everyone. Including me.”

Taehyung sighs. “Maybe it’s because I’m always feeling shitty that I just ignore it. I’ve accepted that this is my perpetual state of being. I’m—it’s—then there was not a—fuck.”

“Words going weird again, honey?” Jeongguk asks, drawing back to look Taehyung in the eye.

Taehyung takes a deep breath and nods. Reevaluates what he was trying to say. “I’m fine. There’s probably not a solution. Unless I could quit work and school and design club and just sleep in every day with you. Be a stay-at-home mom for Cooky and Tata or something.”

Jeongguk hums. “I’d support you. That’d be hella cute.”

Taehyung giggles. “‘Hella’.”

Jeongguk drags Taehyung to the bed and cuddles them all up. “Yeah. God, your bed is hella pillows, hyung.”

“That is not how that word works, Gukkie,” Taehyung teases. “‘Hella’ doesn’t mean ‘a lot of’; it means ‘very’. And even if it did mean ‘a lot of’, you’d still have to say that the bed has hella pillows. Not that it is hella pillows.”

Jeongguk snorts. “We can agree to disagree.”

Taehyung groans. “I’m too migrainey to argue this with you right now.”
Jeongguk huffs. “Ah, so that’s what’s wrong.”

Taehyung sighs. “I’m fine. I had some caffeine earlier, and that helped.”

“You still wanna go tonight?” Jeongguk asks, pressed his hand to Taehyung’s forehead. He furrows his brow. “You’re not running a fever.”

Taehyung rolls his eyes. They feel kind of puffy and they’re burning, bleary. “I have a migraine. Migraines don’t give you a fever.”

“You want an ice pack to put on your eyes or something?”

Taehyung shrugs. Tata and Cooky choose that moment to crawl out of their hiding place under the bed, and they hop onto the mattress, Cooky first so they can help the still-malfunctioning Tata up onto the covers.

“Oh, Tata,” Jeongguk says as Tata crawls up the blankets into Jeongguk’s arms. Jeongguk skims his fingers over Tata’s head, and Taehyung sighs at the strange not-sensation of it, the tickle in the back of his consciousness at the feeling of another person touching Taehyung’s soul.

“Relax,” Jeongguk whispers, his other hand coming up to massage Taehyung’s temple. “We can rest instead of pregaming. If you feel sick, you definitely shouldn’t be drinking.”

Taehyung goes boneless under the dual ministrations of Jeongguk’s hands, one on Tata and one in Taehyung’s hair. “Yeah, no. No alcohol. Hey, um—is it okay if I pet Cooky?”

Jeongguk smiles. “Yeah, of course. You know you really can ask him. It’s okay. I talk to Tata, don’t I?”

Taehyung ducks his head. God, he loves that. How Jeongguk speaks to Tata directly even though he can’t fully understand what Tata says back. The more Jeongguk listens to Tata talk, the better he gets at picking up bits and pieces, anyways. His Tata Comprehension Rate is somewhere between 30 and 50 percent now, probably. He’s better than Jimin, even, better than anyone else Taehyung has ever known.
(Which probably means something.)

(Still. Taehyung isn’t going to get his hopes up.)

Taehyung looks down at Cooky, who’s nuzzling Tata’s cheek. “Cooky, can I scratch your ears?”

Cooky glances up at Taehyung and their eyes look just like Jeongguk’s. Wide, and dark, and pleading. “Yes, please, Taehyungie-hyung,” Cooky whispers. They hop over and Taehyung digs his nails into the thick fur behind Cooky’s floppy pink ears. It’s lovely. Cooky and Jeongguk are lovely.

“You know, I read something somewhere that said you’re not supposed to, like, lie down and wallow when you have a migraine,” Taehyung says. “I think you’re supposed to just go about your normal day. Unless you’re actively puking, I guess.”

Jeongguk sighs against Taehyung’s hair. “Yeah? That mean you still wanna go eat pizza with the hyungs and play that board game even though I know you feel like shit?”

Taehyung nods. “Yeah. Anyways, that pizza will do me good. I never want to eat during a migraine, but then I feel better when I do, at least a little.”

“Mmkay, babe,” Jeongguk says, sliding his hand down Tata’s head until he’s stroking the daemon’s back.

Tata vrooms and hums. << JK, >> they say. << JK is love. the most very hearts. >>

“What’s he saying?” Jeongguk asks. The vibrate-y noises give him more trouble than the beeping.

Taehyung bites back a smile. “That he likes you,” he whispers. He hasn’t said it yet, the real thing, the I love you thing.

Not that Jeongguk and Cooky don’t have some idea of it, probably. That Tata and Taehyung love them. It’s pretty obvious, Taehyung thinks; but then, Jeongguk and Cooky haven’t mentioned anything about love, so they probably don’t feel the same way. They’re probably trying to spare Taehyung and Tata’s feelings.
“I like you too, Tata,” Jeongguk says, leaning down to kiss the side of Tata’s head. “And I like your human. He’s pretty cool, huh?”

Tata beeps and makes this whiny little synth sound. << cool, JK thinks taetae is cool ‘cuz taetae is COO!! love JK love love, most very VERY! >> Then their head flashes orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, before finally returning to its usual red.

Taehyung blinks. “I have never seen them do that before. Ever.”

Jeongguk giggles, cheeks all scrunched up with his smile so they look chubby and childish and perfect. Sometimes Jeongguk and Cooky seem so young, so small and innocent even as they comfort. Even as they protect.

“Maybe they’re installing new software,” Jeongguk jokes. “Or updating their carrier settings. Did you enter your passcode and plug them in between 1:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m. like you’re supposed to?”

Taehyung giggles, pushing out his insecurities, his doubt. Jeongguk is the only one who’s allowed to joke that way and Taehyung knows he knows it. “Yeah, that’s it,” Taehyung says around his smile. “Hey, Ta, why’d you do that?”

Tata looks up at Taehyung with wide eyes, like it should be obvious. They beep-bop-bloop all melodically, kind of petulant. << love. love color love MAINTAIN STANDARD VISUALS protocol failure OVERRIDE love color taeeeeee!! >> Tata blinks a couple times and settles back against Jeongguk’s ribcage, tugging at Jeongguk’s sleeve until Jeongguk wraps a diligent arm around Tata’s midsection. Tata hums. << color balance restored. the operation has been terminated by the user. tatatatata snuggles JK now. >>

“Oh,” Taehyung says, tucking himself closer to Jeongguk so Tata is squished between them. “It’s because they just—like you. A lot.”

Jeongguk giggles again. “Wait, if you’ve never seen Tata do that, does that mean you’ve never liked anyone as much as me before?”

Taehyung freezes.
Jeongguk blushing and seems to realize what he said, because he goes back to petting and cooing at Tata, nonchalant as he can be after asking such a direct question. Cooky remains squished between Taehyung’s and Jeongguk’s legs, chin hooked over Taehyung’s ankle.

They lie together for another 30 minutes or so before finally Taehyung sighs and sits up. “All right, come on. I’m fine. We should get over there.”

“Sure,” Jeongguk agrees easily, lifting himself off the bed with Tata and Cooky in tow. Tata clings around Jeongguk’s neck like a koala. It’s overwhelmingly cute.

They make it to the train station without incident, which is unusual considering Tata is with them. Taehyung leans into Jeongguk during the walk from the stop to Namjoon and Hoseok’s place, and when they knock on the door, Tata is still clinging to Jeongguk, adamantly refusing to let go.

Jimin answers the door. Sees Tata in Jeongguk’s arms and gives Taehyung this look, because oh yeah, Jimin knows all about the are-we-actually-dating-or-not of Taehyung and Jeongguk. Jimin’s look seems to suggest that they are, and Taehyung swallows and doesn’t get his hopes up and looks away. After a second, Jimin chirps, “Hey! Finally; we were starting to think you guys ended up getting too lit and weren’t coming!”

Taehyung shakes his head. “And miss watching Min Yoongi complain about how much he hates board games all night while he secretly gets extremely emotionally invested? No way.”

Jimin cackles, apparently forgetting all about Taehyung’s relationship angst. Jeongguk and Taehyung slip inside and take off their shoes, and Cooky hops over to the corner so they can sniff at Chimmy, RJ, Koya, Shooky, and Mang.

Tata reluctantly beeps a little whimpery sound at Jeongguk, << tatatata will get down now >>, and Taehyung watches with his heart in his throat as Jeongguk cradles Tata and leans down, carefully allowing Tata to drop to the floor like a small, precious child. Tata looks up at Jeongguk once their feet are on the ground, says << thank you love you JK >>, and then walks over to the corner towards the other daemons. They move slower than usual, like they’re weighed down by the lingering pain still battering their and Taehyung’s heads. When they get close, Chimmy and Mang spring up to drag them into their arms, like they can tell something is wrong. Taehyung settles on the floor in front of the low coffee table with Jeongguk, content to feel slightly shitty but mostly just warm and cared-for as contented pain (yeah, it’s kinda weird) flows into Taehyung’s subconscious via Tata.
“You good?” Jeongguk asks, brushing hair back from Taehyung’s eyes.

Taehyung hums, comfy in Jeongguk’s oversized sweater, stolen during the first week they’d been dating/hanging out/whatever and never returned. Not like Jeongguk had asked or anything. “Hmm, yeah,” Taehyung nods. “As good as I’d be at home, anyway.”

Through the bond connecting him to Tata, Taehyung feels another pulse of << ow, ow, good good good.>>

An interlude on the connection between humans and daemons:

The human-daemon relationship has been studied in depth for many years, yet little is known about the specifics of the bond or the reason it exists at all. In many ways, the relationship is in fact fairly weak: daemons and their humans are not telepathic nor do they seem to occupy the exact same mind.

Nevertheless, the telepathic link between humans and daemons is relatively weak. Humans and daemons can sense each other’s feelings (the strength of the exchange varies from person to person), but they must communicate through actual speech. They can (and do) keep secrets from each other, can exist in physically different locations (the record distance is about ten miles, at which point the mental distress of the human and daemon became too great to continue), and can even lie to each other.

New Age philosophers are big on being totally honest with your daemon—it’s really just being honest with yourself, after all—and some psychologists specialize in facilitating healthy relationships between humans and daemons. Daemons are just another piece of you, after all. This is why it hurts like hell when someone else is mean to your daemon, but it’s also why it aches something warm and sweet and wonderful when someone you love treats your daemon the way they treat their own.

In other, unrelated news:

Tata has taken to climbing all over Jeongguk all the fucking time. They’re like an overactive, clingy little monkey using Jeongguk’s arms as a jungle gym, his shoulders as a lookout perch, his legs as firefighter poles to slide down to the ground. Jeongguk lets it happen, catches Tata on the rare occasion that the daemon slips, and presses kisses to Tata’s head whenever he can.
Tata has also taken to chirping and beeping and buzzing and blipping at Jeongguk endlessly, with wide, earnest eyes like they think Jeongguk can fully understand them. Jeongguk looks back with rapt attention, committing every bit of his concentration to trying to understand a language he doesn’t know, can only parse in little fits and starts, mostly based on the tone of Taehyung’s voice, if you can even call it that.

Taehyung always gets a burst of butterflies in his stomach when he feels the intensity with which Jeongguk focuses on Tata. Tata loves the attention, loves when Jeongguk pretends to be a ninja with them and play-fights them on the dorm room floor, loves when Jeongguk feeds them candies and bubblegum and bits of whatever Taehyung and Jeongguk are eating for dinner.

Taehyung feels the depth of Tata’s affection in his chest nestled there with his own, all happy happy happy.

In return, Taehyung tries to do the same thing with Cooky, and if Jeongguk’s blush when he sees Taehyung scratching Cooky’s ears and reading aloud to the fluffy pink bunny is anything to go by, Jeongguk likes feeling that secondhand daemon-buzz of affection for someone else, too.

“Okay, so we’re gonna have to play in teams,” Seokjin says, straightening the hexagonal board so he can snap the ocean pieces around the edges. “We need four players, but there’s seven of us.”

“Team!” Jimin and Hoseok shout together, and then they burst into giggles and shout a bunch of stuff like “jinx!” and “you owe me coke!” and all that childlike innocent flirty shit.

“Us too,” Jeongguk offers, gesturing to himself and Taehyung. Taehyung nods and glances at the corner of the room, where all the daemons are joking around and cuddling Tata. RJ and Koya are fussing about with the extra-soft pillows and blankets from the daemon supply shop, trying to get Tata as comfortable as possible. Shooky is whispering at Tata and looking conspiratorial, Tata’s eyes rapt as they listen to the cinnamon cookie, and Mang and Chimmy have started mothering Cooky into curling up in Tata’s little nest even though the rabbit seems determined to take care of Tata themselves.

“Look,” Taehyung whispers to Jeongguk, nudging him and nodding at the daemons. Jeongguk follows Taehyung’s gaze and smiles.
“They love them,” Jeongguk whispers.

Taehyung blushes.

“Okay, Namjoonie and I will play against each other,” Seokjin announces then, interrupting Taehyung’s concentration on the daemons. “And Yoongi-yah won’t play.”

“This is stupid, so you are correct,” Yoongi intones, swiping around on his phone as he surreptitiously snuggles into Seokjin’s side.

“Great,” Seokjin smiles, wrapping his arm around Yoongi’s shoulders without a second thought. “So it’s Namjoon, me, Tae and Guk, and Hobi and Jimin.”

“Yep,” Hoseok confirms.

In the corner, Mang squeaks a shocked little sound as Tata and Shooky snag them in for forcible snuggles. That must be what Shooky’s secretive whispering was about.

Taehyung drags his eyes back to the table and wills himself to pay attention. Seokjin builds the first road, gloating to Namjoon as he does it, and Namjoon pouts but gets a determined glint in his eyes, which means suddenly Jeongguk is intent on winning too, competitive streak flaring up before Taehyung’s eyes.

Taehyung groans.

“I am not good at this game,” Taehyung whispers a few minutes later after the sixth or seventh turn, after Seokjin has just swindled Taehyung for all their brick cards. Taehyung had traded away their ore to get them, and then Seokjin had stolen all those bricks right back with a well-played Monopoly. Bastard.

Jeongguk grits his teeth, but in his defense, he sounds genuinely caring when he whispers back, “Hey, it’s okay. Just let me handle it, yeah? And that way you can sort of rest.”
Taehyung nods and settles his head on Jeongguk’s shoulder, looking over at the daemons. Tata is lying on a cushion with all the others crowded around them. They’re giving them strawberries and squirts of whipped cream straight from the can and sips of Sprite. Jesus, where the hell did they even get all that stuff?

“Okay,” Taehyung murmurs, handing their cards over to Jeongguk. “You play. I’ll just watch.”

For as bad as Taehyung is at Catan, Jimin and Hoseok are catastrophically worse. They’ve never played before and they don’t know the rules, but then they also make almost zero effort to actually learn them, which is unsurprising and yet still incredibly frustrating to those who are taking the game seriously.

“Can I pay all this ore for a road please?” Jimin asks, smiling at Namjoon, their banker.

Namjoon shakes his head, and Seokjin lets out a long-suffering sigh. “No, because you use wood and brick to build a road. Not ore,” Seokjin explains.

Jimin looks at Hoseok, who shrugs, clearly perplexed. “But the ore looks like pavement, hyung.” Jimin protests. “Like—what’s the wood for in a road? And bricks seem kinda shitty for, like, building something people are going to drive on.”

Hoseok nods along.

Yoongi glares. “It’s not like they have cars, Jimin-ah,” he says, clearly trying to pretend he’s not totally rooting for Jeongguk and Taehyung. Yoongi always roots against his boyfriends, and he hates incompetence, so he’s currently really annoyed with Jimin and Hoseok. “They’re fuckin’ settling a rural island.”

Jimin frowns and looks at Hoseok, who shrugs.

“Okay,” Jimin says, looking at the board helplessly. He’s holding about ten cards, probably all of them ore. “Um, I guess just…turn over? I don’t know what else to do.”

“Oh my god, it’s, like, unreasonably sad,” Yoongi says, shaking his head.
“I thought you thought this game was stupid anyway, hyung,” Taehyung teases, although it lacks his usual pep. Still kinda headachy and all.

Yoongi flips Taehyung off. In the corner, Shooky yanks the can of Sprite away from Tata, sending fizzy liquid spilling everywhere.

“Noooo!” RJ coos.

“Taehyung’s fault,” Yoongi drawls, back to glaring at his phone.

“Was not,” Jeongguk says, flat and unimpressed.

Still, none of the daemons are making any move to actually clean up. “I’ll get a rag,” Taehyung offers, dragging his head off Jeongguk’s shoulder and climbing to his feet, trusting gravity to keep him upright even as the world swims and he almost blacks out. In the kitchen, Taehyung grabs a few paper towels for the spill and then drinks some water right out of the tap. He’s just turning to head back out when he feels a warm weight settle across the tops of his feet. When he looks down, Cooky is huddled in a little ball on the floor, peering up at Taehyung with concerned, pretty eyes.


Taehyung crouches down and offers his arms to Cooky, who runs forward into them, clinging to Taehyung’s chest.

“Oh, Cooky,” Taehyung whispers, burying his nose in Cooky’s fur.

“Taehyung-ssi! Taehyung-ssi!” Chimmy shouts, appearing in the doorway with Mang in tow. Chimmy is always kind of formal with Taehyung, even though Jimin and Taehyung are roommates and close friends.

“Yeah, Chimmy?” Taehyung asks, still snuggling Cooky.

“Taehyung-ssi, Tata threw up,” Chimmy murmurs, their voice all weird and too-ringy in Taehyung’s ears, as other people’s daemons voices always are.
Taehyung groans. His head is pounding harder now, the caffeine wearing off. Fuck, when is the pizza getting here so Taehyung can get some carbs? “Thanks, Chimmy. I’ll bring more cleaning stuff.”

When Taehyung, Chimmy, Mang, and Cooky emerge into the living room carrying disinfectant and more paper towels, everyone is huddled around Tata, who’s blinking all befuddled, propped up between Koya and RJ.

“Tae, fuck,” Jeongguk says, whirling and looking really dramatically alarmed. “Fuck, Tae, he—he puked, do we need to go to the hospital or something?”

Taehyung kneels down in front of Tata and strokes a hand along Tata’s head. Tata beeps forlornly, all atonal and weird. “Sorry sorry taetae sorry, didn’t mean to, didn’t mean to.”

“They’re fine,” Taehyung reassures everyone as he reaches out to press a hand to Tata’s forehead. “This happens sometimes.”

Tata vibrates really hard all of a sudden and pukes again, and—fuck, Taehyung’s head is really pounding, and he collapses to his hands and knees in front of Tata and the other daemons, the room spinning. Oh, he must’ve gotten Tata dizzy when he stood up earlier to get supplies to clean up the Sprite.

“Shit, god, we should go home,” Jeongguk says, frantic as he reaches out and strokes Tata’s side. Tata is still kind of shaking, and he looks a little delirious.

“You can’t if Tata is puking,” Namjoon points out. “How are you gonna take the train?”

“We’ll take care of them,” Koya whispers, looking up at them with their sleepy koala eyes, kind and genuine. “Stay here, stay here.”

“Yeah,” Mang agrees, leaping up and clapping their front hooves together, as bright as Hoseok ever is. “Sta-ay-ay.” It’s a cute little neigh, a voice Taehyung realizes he’s never heard before.

“Jeongguk,” Taehyung whispers, eyelids fluttering as Tata whines, a high-pitched tone that makes
the others in the room cover their ears.

All Taehyung can hear is the saddest little "help, help, help."

“Taehyung,” Jeongguk manages, pulling Taehyung into his lap and stroking down his back with gentle strokes of his fingers. Taehyung shudders and closes his eyes, the vertigo between his temples ramping up and up until—

nothing.

When Taehyung wakes up, he’s on the couch with his head in Jeongguk’s lap and his feet in Jimin’s. Cooky is curled up at the juncture of Taehyung’s legs and lower abdomen, and Tata is huddled by Taehyung’s chest, wrapped in a blanket that swamps them.

“Oh, fuck,” Taehyung whispers. His mouth is tacky and tastes kind of weird and metallic, like blood. “Fuck, did I pass out?”

“Yeah,” Jeongguk says, carding his fingers through Taehyung’s hair. Jimin is stroking Taehyung’s bare ankles, his fingers pressing up under the cuffs of Taehyung’s tapered sweats.

“Oh thank god,” Seokjin says, coming in from the kitchen with RJ in his arms. “I was about to call an ambulance.”

Taehyung blinks and it’s like his eyes have been rubbed with sandpaper. “No, it’s—it’s fine. I’ve had fainting spells before. Especially with migraines. Jimin knows.”

Jimin nods, lifting one of Taehyung’s legs to press a kiss to the skin of Taehyung’s ankle.

“Well, we’re glad you’re okay,” Hoseok says. He’s standing behind the couch massaging Jimin’s shoulders. Mang and Chimmy are cuddling in the corner, and Yoongi and Namjoon are sitting off to the side of the room with their knees up to their chests, each holding the other’s daemon.
“Do you want something?” Seokjin asks. “Water, maybe?”

Taehyung tries to swallow and it’s hard to force his throat to contract right. “Yeah, ugh. That would be good.”

Seokjin nods and hurries back into the kitchen, still clutching RJ.

Taehyung thinks about trying to sit up and decides not to even attempt it. Fuck, his head still hurts. “So, um. What happened, exactly?”

Jeongguk swallows. “You and Tata passed out at the same time. Which was worrying but, like—at least Tata stopped puking, I guess. I carried you over here and the other daemons wrapped Tata all up like that.”

“It was really cute,” Jimin cuts in. Hoseok nods along.

“Yeah,” Jeongguk agrees. “It was.”

“How long was I out?” Taehyung asks.

Jeongguk and Jimin exchange a look. “Maybe ten minutes?” Jeongguk says, looking at his watch. “Namjoon-hyung and Yoongi-hyung cleaned up the puke.”

Taehyung lifts a hand at Namjoon and Yoongi in thanks. They each nod, and Yoongi leans a little harder into Namjoon, his head dropping to Namjoon’s shoulder as Koya snuggles into his lap.

“You sure you’re okay?” Jimin asks. His hand stills on Taehyung’s ankle and just rests there, careful, and it feels almost as sweet as the contact with Jeongguk and Cooky and Tata.

Taehyung sighs. “I’m okay.”
“You wanna go home?” Jeongguk asks, leaning in over Taehyung and brushing his thumb along Taehyung’s cheek.

“I don’t—no, no, I don’t, I’m—I’ll just start freaking out about how bad I feel if we go home,” Taehyung confesses, the truth spilling out because—because fuck, he just feels really bad, and it is kind of scary.

“Here,” Seokjin whispers, appearing before Taehyung with a glass of ice water. “Drink this. It might help.”

Taehyung’s eyes fill as he stares. “I can’t—please don’t make me sit up right now.”

“I’ll get a straw,” Hoseok says, darting out from behind the couch and into the kitchen. Taehyung kind of floats in a daze until he gets back, and then there’s a straw in the water and Taehyung is fitting his lips around it and it’s like heaven, the liquid cool and soothing on his tongue.

“Careful,” Jeongguk says, stroking back Taehyung’s hair out of his eyes. “Don’t drink too fast, hon.”

Taehyung hums because he can’t bear the thought of nodding, of moving at all really. His arms are limp across Tata and Cooky, his legs like jello even though Taehyung is lying down.

Settlers of Catan ends up getting forgotten, the board pieces all messed up in the excitement. They end up just sitting around in the living room together, everyone whispering so as not to worsen Taehyung’s migraine or wake Tata. The pizza gets there and they all eat, although Taehyung only manages one slice. It’s a comforting evening, and finally Taehyung starts feeling better as he drifts in and out of sleep, curled up at the center of it all even if he’s not really participating. Hoseok falls asleep at Jimin’s feet around 11:00, and Yoongi on Namjoon’s shoulder around 11:15. Finally, at 11:30, Taehyung pushes himself up.

“Hey, Jeongguk,” Taehyung yawns, “Let’s head home.”

Jeongguk looks at the still-sleeping Tata, at Cooky who is blinking so slowly it looks like they’re mostly asleep too. He nods. “You wanna just take a cab?”

Sorry we didn’t finish Catan.”

Seokjin and Jimin smile. Namjoon is totally nodding off with his head against Yoongi’s.

“Goodnight, guys. You’ll be good getting home, right?” Jimin asks.

“Yeah,” Taehyung smiles. “Don’t worry about us. See you tomorrow sometime?”

Jemin shakes his head. “Nah, I’m here all weekend.”

Taehyung raises his eyebrows. “Saucy.”

Jemin snorts. “‘Saucy’? Oh my god. As if you won’t be at Jeongguk’s all weekend anyways.”

Taehyung shuts his eyes. “Fuck, I didn’t pack a bag though. I’ll have to run back to ours. Whatever.” Taehyung sighs and stands, scoops up Cooky as Jeongguk curls Tata to his chest like a baby about to be burped. Taehyung almost wants to cry at how cute it is when Tata’s head comes to rest comfortably in the crook of Jeongguk’s neck, their body still swaddled in the blue throw. “Oh, Jin-hyung, the blanket.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Seokjin says. “Bring it back whenever. Or don’t; we have a zillion.”

Taehyung smiles and steps into his shoes, careful not to jostle Cooky too much, and then he takes Tata with his free arm as Jeongguk gets his Timberlands on.

“Goodnight, guys,” Taehyung waves, handing Tata back to Jeongguk as soon as Jeongguk is ready.

“Yeah, see ya,” Jeongguk says. They head out the door to a chorus of goodnights, and then they start down the hallway and to the curb to seek out a taxi. They curl up in the backseat with Tata and Cooky on the seat between them, and they lean together and whisper down at the daemons like they’re tucking in their children, even though Tata is still asleep and Cooky is almost there too. By the time they’re struggling through Jeongguk’s door, Taehyung is ready to crash.
“Hey, wait, I gotta go get—pajamas,” Taehyung says, yawning around the syllables.

Jeongguk shakes his head. “Just wear mine, babe. You know I don’t mind.”

Taehyung sets Cooky on Jeongguk’s bed and sways where he stands, and Jeongguk steadies him carefully, Tata still cuddled in his arms. Taehyung struggles to keep his eyes open as he says, “What about clothes for tomorrow. Toothbrush. That stuff.”

Jeongguk looks at Taehyung curiously, like he’s confused and sort of amused. “Taehyung, you’ve got a bunch of clothes here. And I—um, I bought you a spare toothbrush last week, just because…I mean, I know you only live right across the quad, but…”

Taehyung blinks, migraine making him forget his uncertainty for a second. “Oh. Oh. We’re, like—that’s very like we’re boyfriends.”

Jeongguk snorts. “Yeah, hon. We are boyfriends. Didn’t you notice? We do homework together every day. And get dinner. You stay here all the time.”

Taehyung sighs, tentative warmth spreading through him as he lists into Jeongguk’s side. “Shut up. I’m sleepy and I’m like—bad at human interaction and also words and also I want to crash, so just—help me take my clothes off?”

Jeongguk nods and presses a kiss to Taehyung’s forehead. “Sure, babe. Lemme grab that one really soft shirt for you, yeah?”

“Okay,” Taehyung says, sighing as he sinks onto the mattress. He takes Tata from Jeongguk and then just kind of lives in this weird sleep-awake daze as Jeongguk undresses him and slips the super soft white shirt over Taehyung’s head, and the next thing Taehyung knows, he’s under Jeongguk’s blankets being held delicately in Jeongguk’s arms, their daemons sound asleep beside them.

“Hey, I didn’t brush my teeth,” Taehyung slurs, coming awake just enough for that.

Jeongguk presses a kiss to the back of Taehyung’s neck. “It’s okay. You’ll live. Brush them double in the morning.”

Jeongguk chuckles. “Did you really not know? Yeah, obviously. If you want to be.”

“Yeah,” Taehyung hums, slipping into sleep.

Beside him, Tata buries their head in Cooky’s neck, and Cooky snuggles back with a little comforting coo.

Sometime later, Taehyung is dragged out of sleep by the incessant sound of Tata beep-beeping, the way they sometimes do when they’re restless or bored or scared in the middle of the night.

“So what, Taehyung spits, or tries to, because he’s annoyed but he’s also still mostly asleep. He fumbles for his phone under the pillow and finds it—2:39 a.m., earlier than he would have expected and so deep into the dead of the night that it kind of makes Taehyung want to cry for how loud Tata is being, for how much his eyes burn to even be open. “Tata, quiet, *please*. Jeongguk is gonna wake up and I don’t want him to—um—” be mad.

It says something, Taehyung thinks, that he refuses to even acknowledge that to his own soul. Tata was there; Tata remembers. Tata knows why Taehyung doesn’t want them making stupid noises in the night when there’s someone other than the two of them in bed—hell, in the *room*. Taehyung freaks out a little when Tata beeps or hums or buzzes or whirs in the night even when it’s Jimin and Chimmy on the other side of the room. Even when Jimin and Chimmy have said time and time again that they don’t mind.

Tata beeps and hums and buzzes a bit more. Taehyung flips over carefully and grabs Tata away from Jeongguk, his head no longer aching. The few hours of sleep they’ve had have evidently chased away the migraine.

“Tata,” Taehyung whispers, praying that Jeongguk and Cooky won’t wake up. “Tata, stop. You can have more fucking attention in the morning, I promise, I’ll—I’ll—”

Taehyung cuts off when he feels Jeongguk shifting on the other side of the bed. There’s a little
grumble from Jeongguk’s open mouth, something drowsy and not-quite-awake.

Tata beeps a couple more times, blessedly not at their typical volume level but a little bit softer at least, all bleating and sad. << can’t sleep, all blurry. sick, taetae, still kinda sick, need snuggles. >>

“Okay,” Taehyung whispers. “Okay, fine, I’ll snuggle you, I’ll—I’ll sit up and rock you to sleep, sing you a lullaby, okay? But you have to be quiet, honey, please.”

<< okay can be quiet, initiate quiet protocol, UNSUCCESSFUL taetae just wanna, dizzy DIZZY wanna— >>

Tata dissolves into a flurry of beeps that are unintelligible even to Taehyung. Taehyung drags himself upright to cradle Tata like an infant and drops his head back hard, eyes going all tight like they do right before he starts to cry. Tata shakes in Taehyung’s arms, buzzing like an overheated laptop.

“Tata, I’m sorry,” Taehyung says. “I’m sorry, just—just please quiet down—”

<< JK won’t care, JK likes tata-honey very much really so much LOVES tatatatata so much taetae, won’t care he won’t care. >>

“He might,” Taehyung whispers. “We’ve been enough of a burden already tonight. We can’t bother him, just please. Go back to sleep.”

<< can’t sleep, taetae can’t sleep, tatata can’t sleep. >>

“Ta, honey, please. Just try, ” Taehyung whisper-cries.

Jeongguk and Cooky both shift as Tata whimpers and buzzes and finally falls silent, clearly distressed but trying hard to hide it. They even bring their little arms up and press them over their mouth, looking up at Taehyung in utter desolation, but Taehyung remains firm. He’s not going to force Jeongguk and Cooky up to take care of them, not ever but especially not right now when they’ve been sick and annoying as hell all night.
Tata stays quiet long enough that Taehyung feels it safe to lie down. He feels bad, telling Tata to be quiet this way, but being difficult with himself is better than being difficult for Jeongguk, so Taehyung forces himself to close his eyes and go back to sleep. Hopes beyond hope that Tata will do the same.

Five minutes pass in silence. Ten. Taehyung is almost asleep again when Tata lets out this jingly marimba alarm sort of sound, which starts quiet but ramps up as the daemon shakes like they just can’t control it, and Taehyung’s arms squeeze around Tata’s middle but then Tata is slipping out of Taehyung’s arms and away, and Taehyung is just about to sit up and grab Tata and hightail it out of the room and back to his and Jimin’s dorm when he hears Jeongguk move and stretch like he’s waking up.

Taehyung freezes.

“Huh—Tata?” Jeongguk asks, sitting up and rubbing his eyes as Tata jumps up and down on Jeongguk’s thighs above the blanket.

Tata beeps all frantic and sad and loopy, something like << dark feel crazy can’t sleep scary scary anxious JK JK JK JK taetae JK. >>

“Whoa, slow down, love,” Jeongguk whispers, reaching out to stroke his hands down the sloped sides of Tata’s heart-shaped head, so lovingly it makes Taehyung go limp against the pillows. “We don’t wanna wake Taehyung-hyung.”

And he should sit up, Taehyung knows, should put a stop to this, should apologize and leave so Jeongguk can get a decent night of rest, but—but Jeongguk is comforting Tata and talking to them in that low, melodic voice of his, and Tata is calming down. Tata is quieting, and then they’re collapsing overdramatically in Jeongguk’s lap, and then Jeongguk is lying down facing Taehyung as he curls into a ball around Tata, Cooky squirming at their feet before they go still again.

“This okay, Tata?” Jeongguk asks, holding Tata close.

<< tataTA, >> Tata says, because Tata has always liked saying a random number of stuttered tappy syllables as their name instead of sticking to the double “ta” Taehyung officially dubbed them with when they turned five. << tatatatatata, tata-love, tata-yah, tata-chan, >> Tata demands.

Jeongguk huffs a laugh. “Okay, okay, sorry. Tata-chan is really cute.”
Tata whines. In Japanese. Which is weird because they’re actually really just fucking beeping, but they still somehow manage to codeswitch. Tata is like that sometimes, confused about what language anyone speaks, even Taehyung, whose Japanese is limited to a few basic phrases about money and buying stuff.

Which. How Tata knows Japanese when Taehyung doesn’t, Taehyung will never know.

“Sorry, Tata-chan,” Jeongguk says, sweet and giggly even though it’s fucking 3:00 in the morning and they should all be asleep. “I don’t speak Japanese. And I don’t really speak Tata-chan Language; you know that.”

Tata beeps and buzzes, sounding happy and sweet and kind of like a toddler who’s won attention from their favorite person. << sorry sorry meant korean, didn’t mean to, JK JK JK! >>

Jeongguk presses a kiss to Tata’s forehead. “It’s okay, Tata-chan. You want me to tell you a story or something?”

Tata buzzes, all excited and << yes yes YES! >>

“Okay,” Jeongguk agrees, and then—

Then his eyes flick up to meet Taehyung’s, and he doesn’t look surprised that Taehyung is awake. Taehyung opens his mouth, ready to apologize and head out or do whatever he can to make sure he’s not burdening Jeongguk with this, but Jeongguk just smiles, soft and sleepy but warm, and earnest, as he launches into a story about dinosaurs and unicorns that Tata will obviously love.

Taehyung lies there and listens along, and he slips back to sleep before he means to, relaxed and not so worried about Jeongguk being mad about Tata’s midnight distress. In the morning, Taehyung and Tata wake up after Jeongguk and Cooky are already up, and they share the coffee that Jeongguk has made them and leave a bit later so Jeongguk can go to his dance practice and Taehyung and Tata back to bed to sleep off the remaining dregs of migraine twinging vaguely through them both.

“You gotta be respectful at night, Ta,” Taehyung says as he and Tata snuggle under their own covers (too cold too rough) an hour later, all the blinds closed against the bright morning sun.
JK likes us doesn’t care told good stories love love LOVE! taetae LOVE, >> Tata says, giddy even as they’re clearly falling asleep while they say it.

Taehyung nods, warmth pooling in his stomach even though he doesn’t think it should. “He was really nice, huh,” Taehyung says, smiling a little as Tata keeps beeping about how much they liked talking to Jeongguk all night before they fall asleep in the middle of a sentence the way they always used to when Taehyung was little. It makes Taehyung smile to see it, nostalgic and warm.

So. Yeah. Maybe Tata is annoying sometimes at night, but Jeongguk doesn’t seem to care about it. And then next time it happens, a week later after they go on a date to a fall harvest fair in town and spend all evening making out on the Ferris wheel and Tata is too keyed up to sleep, Taehyung thinks —

Okay, this is fine.

Tata beeps and beeps about how much they like Jeongguk and Cooky the whole way home.

And Taehyung dares to let himself hope.

x

Sometimes Cooky feels really small and needs to snuggle with Tata-honey to feel better. It’s really cold in the fall and in the winter and Tata-honey can make themselves extra warm if they want which is really nice. Tata-honey lets Cooky sit with them and be all warm in the Nest under the bed all the time when Cooky is cold. Tata-honey is really nice even though they’re so super curious and want to explore stuff. They still let Cooky curl up with them like how Taehyungie and Jeonggukkie curl up too. Except Taehyungie and Jeonggukkie have an electric mattress pad and Cooky and Tata-honey do not.

Maybe Jeonggukkie would buy Cooky and Tata-honey an electric mattress pad if Cooky asked. Or it
would be better if jeonggukkie bought them an electric blanket actually, because then tata-honey would add it to the Nest and that would be really warm and nice and sleepy. cooky is really sleepy sometimes and tata-honey curls up with them in the Nest and warms their long arms and legs so they’re really toasty and then they wrap cooky all up in them and it’s nice and sleepy and comfy.

right now, cooky and tata-honey are on the bed, though, and the electric mattress pad is on even though it’s only the afternoon and not really bedtime. taehyungie and jeonggukkie are doing Fall Crafts!, but cooky’s paws are all fumbly so they can’t help and tata-honey is busy investigating the electrical outlet. they keep sticking their arm up there so the current will make them all shocky.

cooky is really cold but tata-honey is busy and cooky doesn’t want to disturb them. they can’t touch the electrical outlet for fun like tata-honey, and tata-honey is tittering and humming and dancing around having so much fun! so cooky hops off the bed and goes over to the card table taehyungie borrowed from hoseokie hyung and namjoonie hyung.

“jeonggukkie,” cooky whispers, hopping into jeonggukkie’s lap and then up onto the table.

ejonggukkie smiles. “hey, cook. what’s up?”

cooky blinks up at jeonggukkie and jeonggukkie’s eyes look just like cooky’s eyes. tata-honey said so one time when jeonggukkie and taehyungie and tata-honey and cooky were all in the dorm bathroom getting ready in the morning. then tata-honey ran off to investigate the broken showerhead, the last one in the row, and they got all wet and taehyungie had to make tata-honey go home and change their jammies. but cooky and jeonggukkie had to go right to class or else they would’ve been late.

“cooky?” jeongguk asks.

cooky bites their teeth into his lower lip all sharp sharp sharp. “i’m really cold,” cooky whispers. “even with the electric mattress pad.”

jeonggukkie’s smile widens. taehyungie is looking over too, and he’s smiling really pretty like how cooky really likes. cooky and jeonggukkie really really like it when taehyungie smiles like that, like a shoebox, like the shoebox cooky used to sleep in when he and jeonggukkie were really little and cooky wasn’t a bunny-rabbit yet.

“wanna sit in my lap?” jeonggukkie asks.
cooky shakes their head. “taehyungie’s lap. please.” cooky whispers.

taehyung nods and he looks super enthusiastic. just like tata-honey when cooky asks for snuggles and tata-honey is in the exact perfect mood for snuggles and they get in the Nest and tata-honey is really really Happy!

cooky hops over and taehyungie shakes his head, setting down the half-cut-out construction paper maple leaf in his hand. cooky frowns, but taehyungie just leans over across the really small dorm room floor and snags the throw blanket off the bed and sits up cross-legged on the folding chair and puts the blanket all like a nest (but not as good as the Nest) in the nice little burrow between his crossed ankles and his thighs. cooky hops down and curls all up there and they’re surrounded by the nice mixy scent of taehyungie and jeonggukkie and tata-honey and cooky. all four together. really nice and pretty and like flowers and like pine.

taehyungie and jeonggukkie go back to joking around and cutting out paper leaves or whatever they’re doing, and cooky dozes for a while, but then taehyungie wakes him up, which cooky is not mad about because cooky is just sort of dozy-napping anyways.

taehyungie wakes cooky up because this:

“tata,” taehyungie calls, “oh my god, tata could you not do that with the outlet because i have asked you like sixteen times to not, oh my god, you’re not even your own entity, you’re a part of me why am i like this—”

<< ’zzz all fzzzzzzzy YAY! >> tata-honey says.

“yeah, well, you’re not just making yourself feel weird. you’re making me all tingly and not in a good way ,” taehyungie scolds back.

<< taetae ’zz mean. zzz. kk kk kk kk ,>> tata-honey giggles, sticking their arm at the socket again.

“ tata, ” taehyung barks, collapsing over the table so his chest is all an arc over cooky. cooky likes it. it feels like they’re in a nice little burrowy cave.
“come sit with me, tata-baby,” jeonggukkie says. cooky kind of wants to peek up and watch what’s going on, but sitting sorta under the table in taehyungie’s lap is really nice and cooky doesn’t want to move.

<< no no not sleepy! JK! not sleepy! ‘lectricity zz zz zz! >>

“you want a snack?” taehyungie asks. “you can have some of the sour patch kids i brought.”

tata-honey buzzes all hummy and sweet and super excited! and Happy! and jumps off the bed and cooky can see them bouncing up and down on the dorm room floor, all their attention focused up at taehyungie.

“i’ll get them so you don’t have to stand up,” jeonggukkie says, crossing the room to dig through taehyungie’s pretty leather backpack. cooky likes to take all the books out sometimes and curl up in it and taehyungie sometimes carries them around like that and it’s really nice. and sometimes tata-honey even sits in there with them and looks out the top of the bag at everything because tata-honey is super curious.

“these?” jeongguk asks, holding up a yellow bag.

<< please please pleasepleasepleasepleasepleasePLEASE!!! >> tata-honey beep-buzzes. they’re still all hyped from the electricity probably.

jeonggukkie kneels down. cooky likes it when jeonggukkie makes himself all small like that. because cooky is really small and they hate it sometimes, how small and frightened they are of stuff, and jeonggukkie is so big and strong but sometimes jeonggukkie gets all small too and that used to be really scary but it’s okay now because taehyungie is here and he always talks to jeonggukkie and makes jeonggukkie feel better and not scared and not small.

tata-honey hops up and down some more and beep-beeps and makes their arms all long and squiggly and waves them around, and jeonggukkie laughs and tears open the plasticky package and feeds tata-honey a blue sour patch kid. tata-honey goes all nom-nom-nom and spins in a circle, arms still long and helicoptery.

“oh my god, why are you this hyper,” taehyungie grumbles. the vibration of his deep-deep voice goes all tingly along cooky’s fur and to his heart, and cooky sees the half-smile on jeonggukkie’s face that says he feels it too kinda. like how humans can feel daemony things sometimes. like right
now, because taehyungie is in love and that’s a really strong feeling so of course jeonggukkie can feel that.

also, jeonggukkie really loves taehyungie and he loves tata-honey really a lot too, he’s so in love that cooky sometimes almost falls over with it. like a really big wave or something and they’re standing in the ocean like in busan, when they were little and the big waves came, cooky feels bowled over and small but in a really nice way, not a bad way. like being in the Nest only the Nest is made of feelings because jeonggukkie and cooky are really in love with taehyungie and tata-honey.

“taehyungie,” cooky mewls, sitting up and snuggling at taehyungie’s tummy.

taehyungie puts his hands on cooky’s back and starts massaging their fur, sorta. like pressing down but gentle-like. “yeah, cooky? you okay? still cold?”

cooky shakes his head. it’s kinda fuzzy because talking to humans who aren’t jeonggukkie is always fuzzy, but it’s less with taehyungie now. ’cause taehyungie and tata-honey are always around and sometimes live here, except when tata-honey has to take vacations to taehyungie and jiminie and chimmy-chimmy’s dorm room. really, though, tata-honey and cooky know that tata-honey lives here, not there. and taehyungie secretly lives here too.

“what’s the matter, honey,” taehyungie asks, petting cooky’s cheek with just one finger. taehyungie says he likes to do that because it’s really really soft there.

cooky shivers. “tata really likes sour patch kids. tata really likes sour things. and electricity.”

taehyungie laughs. “yeah, cooky. they really do, huh?”

cooky nods. “tata really likes jeonggukkie. and you.”

“yeah?” taehyung asks.

“yeah,” cooky confirms.

taehyungie looks really happy. “i really like jeonggukkie too. and you.”
cooky curls up in a ball in taehyungie’s lap. “jeonggukkie too. he likes you and tata. and me.”

“yeah, jeongguk likes you a lot, cooky,” taehyung smiles.

cooky didn’t mean it like that. they meant that they like tata-honey and taehyungie.

but taehyungie is back to cutting up leaves, and the blanket and taehyungie’s legs are really really soft and warm, so cooky doesn’t want to interrupt. they curl up and go to sleep instead.

x

When Jeongguk wakes up, he’s not in his dorm room, which is always a little disorienting.

“Tae?” He yawns, listening to the bustle of someone moving around the room. Oh, it’s Taehyung’s room. Right. They’d stayed there last night because Taehyung had already been entrenched in essay work when Jeongguk had wanted to hang out, and Jimin had been at Hoseok’s anyways, so it had made more sense for a (miraculously) homework-free Jeongguk and Cooky to invade Taehyung and Tata’s room to comfort them during their last-minute editing.

“Sorry,” Jimin’s voice says, startling Jeongguk so he’s fully awake. “I didn’t mean to wake you guys. I’m just grabbing stuff and going to class.”

Jeongguk sits up in bed, rubbing his eyes. Taehyung is still sound asleep beside him. “No worries,” Jeongguk says, yawning again. “Sorry we’re…um…”
Jimin turns to Jeongguk with raised eyebrows. “Naked and really obviously fucked out?”

Jeongguk looks down. Oh, fuck. Yeah, he’s not wearing anything, and there are hickeys all over his chest. “At least the blanket is in my lap,” he says, looking up at Jimin with wide, embarrassed eyes.

Jimin laughs, scrunching his nose all up. Hoseok is obsessed with that look; Jeongguk has heard him wax poetic about it like eight trillion times by now.

“Don’t worry about it,” Jimin says, waving him off. “You should see me in the morning before I put my clothes back on.”

Jeongguk groans. “I have heard vivid and overly sentimental descriptions from Hobi-hyung way more times than I ever needed to, thank you very much.”

Jimin cackles and waves as he dumps a couple books into his backpack, slings it over his shoulder, and heads back out of the room. “Don’t worry. I’ll be out until 2:30. You guys have plenty of time for salacious morning sex, if you so choose.”

Jeongguk falls back into the sheets with a groan and a half-hearted wave, and then the door opens and shuts and it’s blessedly quiet.

Taehyung yawns himself awake. “Gukkie,” he slurs, all pretty and nice.

“Morning, Tae,” Jeongguk whispers.

Then Taehyung kind of jumps up to his knees and crouches over Jeongguk, startlingly awake. His grin is mischievous and wild. “Wanna have some super salacious morning sex, Jeongguk?”

Jeongguk laughs. “You were awake, weren’t you?”

Taehyung’s grin widens impossibly. “Yep.”

Jeongguk snorts up at Taehyung and brings his hands up to squeeze around Taehyung’s hips,
startling a giggle out of Taehyung’s pretty mouth. “Hey,” Taehyung whines, leaning down to nip at Jeongguk’s neck. “Rude.”

Jeongguk grips tighter, less playful and more commanding, and Taehyung’s breath leaves him in a rush. Jeongguk wrinkles his nose. “Gross, morning breath.”

“You too,” Taehyung pouts, but he leans in and kisses Jeongguk hard, so Jeongguk supposes he’s excused from judgment.

They kiss long and hard, hands roving and stomachs clenching and legs tensing and relaxing with the comfortable pleasure of it. They’ve only been together for a short couple months; everything is still a little bit new and breathtaking, but it’s reaching the point where new becomes familiar and breathtaking becomes less because of surprise at getting to have this, more because they have a deeper understanding of the workings of each other’s bodies. Jeongguk nips at Taehyung’s earlobe and receives a whine in return; Taehyung squeezes his knees around Jeongguk’s waist and Jeongguk offers him a shuddering gasp.

Taehyung smiles boxy and victorious into their kiss. It’s strange, but until now, Jeongguk has never realized how much he likes tracing the right angles of that smile with his tongue, filling up the corners of it with love. Taehyung always smiles so bright, but the very dimensions that make his smile so wide also threaten to look so empty Jeongguk can’t help but want to move in and make a home in the space. Let Taehyung be smiling and whole instead of smiling an empty box ready to contain whatever he will be given.

Oh, Jeongguk will give. He always does, and Cooky too; Cooky snuggles Taehyung and Tata with the kind of fierce devotion that screams love in every shape.

“Jeongguk,” Taehyung pants. Above him, Taehyung is sucking more bruises into Jeongguk’s chest.

“Turn around,” Jeongguk whispers.

“Huh?”

“Turn around so I can…” They haven’t done this before. Have always stuck in the realms of missionary, the occasional round of quick (or not so quick) blowjobs. Taehyung likes riding Jeongguk with Jeongguk sitting up against the wall, so they’re pressed together everywhere and Taehyung can kind of collapse into Jeongguk’s chest with the dizzy pleasure of it. Jeongguk likes
getting Taehyung all close like that too.

Now, Jeongguk thinks, they can do more. In the morning, in the safe warmth of a small dorm room. More, more.

Taehyung draws back and looks at Jeongguk, really looks at him.

“Tae, honey,” Jeongguk whispers, brushing unwashed bangs out of Taehyung’s blown-black eyes. “Tae, let me eat you out,” he says. “If you want.”

Taehyung’s eyelashes flutter, his breath coming quick and soft. Like he could tremble into a burst of fairy dust right here before Jeongguk’s eyes. “You want to?” He asks, reverent and low. Half-disbelieving.

“Yes,” Jeongguk promises. “Please. If you want me to.”

“You want to,” Taehyung breathes, and then he’s kind of collapsing on Jeongguk’s chest in this desperate hug, his face buried in Jeongguk’s throat, all small and fragile in Jeongguk’s arms.

“Hey, I don’t have to,” Jeongguk whispers, an edge of alarm creeping into his voice.

Taehyung shakes his head. “No, it’s just—a lot. This is always kind of a lot.”

Jeongguk nods. “Yeah, it is. It’s okay. Just breathe. Relax, take your time.”

Taehyung pulls his head up after another minute of silence, the usual mischievous glint returned to his eyes. “Okay,” he says. “I’m good.” He leans in and kisses Jeongguk hard. Bites his bottom lip, chews it raw and swollen. Jeongguk groans and smacks Taehyung’s bare ass, just lightly, a call for Taehyung’s attention more than anything.

Taehyung draws back on an exhilarated laugh. “What.”

“Turn around,” Jeongguk pouts, and Taehyung throws his head back so the line of his body is all
long and beautiful: unintentional, probably, but stunning nonetheless. He climbs around as instructed, sitting so he’s facing Jeongguk’s feet, and Jeongguk grabs his hips from behind and pulls Taehyung back hard enough that Taehyung almost loses his balance. Has to relinquish all his stability to the clutch of Jeongguk’s hands, to the teasing press of Jeongguk’s tongue.

Taehyung comes like that, sitting upright over Jeongguk and shaking as he gasps all startled like always, and then he leans down and starts up a rhythm with his own tongue as Jeongguk keeps going, hoping to wring one more orgasm from Taehyung’s quaking, trembling frame.

Jeongguk succeeds, and then he comes with his own gasp, and somehow Taehyung rights himself along Jeongguk’s body and they lie pressed together, quiet in the aftermath, grins playing at both of their mouths as they play with each other’s hair in mutual delight.

Eventually, Taehyung yawns and looks down, crinkling up his nose. He must have gotten that mannerism from Jimin. “Ew,” Taehyung says. “We need a shower.”

Jeongguk looks at the time on his phone. “Sweet, it’s almost 10:00. Everyone will be in class by now, so we can share.”

Taehyung snorts. “As if the presence of others in the bathroom ever stops anyone from sharing showers. I swear I was in there the other day and there were two—not one, but two—couples having sex in there at the same time. I mean, in different stalls, but still.”

Jeongguk smiles, wicked and happy. “Oh, you were planning for us to have more sex? Shower sex at 10:00 in the morning? That seems pretty boyfriend-y.”

Taehyung rolls his eyes. “We are boyfriends, don’t you remember? Established when I had that migraine.”

Jeongguk nods. “So, shower sex in place of breakfast. I like it. Domestic bliss.” His voice is sarcastic and light, but he sounds really kind of smitten underneath the put-on drawl.

Taehyung yawns and sits up. “Ugh. No. We had sex last night, too. And this morning. My dick will literally fall off if we try again.”

Jeongguk sits up too, just so he can drop a kiss to Taehyung’s bare shoulder. “Hey, we’ve always
been open about the fact that we don’t have to actually have an orgasm to enjoy sex.”

“I know,” Taehyung says, very seriously. “My dick will still literally fall off. Even if I don’t come, which I definitely won’t.”

Jeongguk huffs a laugh and kisses up underneath Taehyung’s ear, down the back of his neck. “Don’t worry,” he says, “We can just share the shower and then go to our afternoon classes, yeah?”

“Okay,” Taehyung says. “Jesus, I can’t believe you managed to make me come twice.”

Jeongguk grins and wraps his arms around Taehyung’s waist. “That was all you, babe. I mean, yeah, I’m gonna try to make you feel good, but whether or not you come is kinda your thing, you know?”

Taehyung blushes. For all his shameless antics in normal life, he can be timid when it comes to Relationship Stuff. Guarded. Jeongguk is sure there’s a story there, but if there is, Taehyung hasn’t told it.

(Yet.)

(Not that he’s expected to. He’s not.)

“I guess,” Taehyung says. “Yeah, that’s a nice way of looking at it. Like you do your thing to help the other person feel nice, but them coming isn’t a reflection of your skill or whatever. I hate when it’s an ego trip. To make the other person come.”

“It’s not about my ego ever,” Jeongguk says. “You’re the one who has to, like, do it. I know it can be difficult to come. People always say that for girls, but that’s so limiting. Like, everyone’s bodies are different, and it’s chemical reactions in you that make you come. I just get to help, if I can.”

Taehyung groans. “Ugh, this is getting really sentimental and also sort of weirdly scientific, Gukkie. I’m shocked Tata isn’t out here making ridiculous beeping noises and dancing like a robot with too-long arms right now just to be annoying and break up all the feelings.”

Jeongguk and Taehyung both pause, suddenly aware of the quiet in the room. No noise from under
the bed, which is where Tata and Cooky often sleep and almost always hide when Taehyung and Jeongguk are doing anything remotely sexual. No noise from under Jimin’s bed, either, or from the closet.

Everything is still.

“Fuck, what— Tata, where are you?” Taehyung says, louder than usual and touched with frantic energy. He climbs out of bed and snags boxers off the floor as he peers under the bed, and then he’s struggling into the underwear (definitely Jeongguk’s) and looking around, agitated. There’s no response.

“Cooky?” Jeongguk asks, getting out of bed a little bit slower than Taehyung had—after all, the daemons are probably just exploring the bottom of the laundry basket again or something; there’s no way they would’ve gotten out. Even if Tata can and does use doors. Daemons don’t exactly just leave.

“Tata?” Taehyung cries, darting around the room in a blur as he checks under the desk, inside the mini-fridge in the corner—Tata has been known to investigate that space before because they apparently don’t need to breathe and are therefore in no danger of getting sealed inside and running out of oxygen.

“Cooky, what the hell,” Jeongguk mutters, more annoyed than anything. “I know you’re here somewhere.”

Across the room, Taehyung lets out a frustrated groan. He’s looking out the window, which is standing open just wide enough that two 18-inch-tall daemons could fit through it and drop to the hill about ten feet below.

“Did you leave that open last night?” Jeongguk asks, hoping hoping hoping that Taehyung will say yes.

Taehyung shakes his head. “No. It’s cold outside, it’s fucking November, I definitely didn’t—Tata must have—they must have opened it and left, oh my god, and—and Cooky is gone too; Tata must’ve convinced Cooky to leave which is—just really not okay, god, I’m sorry, I’m sorry— ”

“Tae, honey, calm down,” Jeongguk soothes, dragging on boxers (definitely Taehyung’s) and a pair of loose jeans. “Come on, we’ll go find them; don’t worry. I’m not mad or anything. Cooky went,
“Don’t worry?” Taehyung cries, hands coming up to grasp in his hair. “Tata is—fuck, they’ve done this before and they almost got really hurt and now Cooky is in danger too, and—fuck.”

“It’s okay,” Jeongguk says, yanking on a shirt. “Get dressed, come on, we’ll go. It’ll be fine.”

Taehyung looks up at Jeongguk then, wild-eyed and terrified. “Oh my god. Oh my god, Jeongguk, we were too busy sixty-nining each other to notice our actual souls escaping out the fucking window.”

Jeongguk can’t help it: a laugh startles out of him. At the absurdity of the words, at the seriousness with which Taehyung utters them. Across the room, Taehyung lets out a distressed cry, and Jeongguk hears the real fear in it, the honesty of it knocking the humor out of Jeongguk’s head.

“Hey,” Jeongguk says, crossing to Taehyung so he can wrap the older boy in his arms, careful and quiet. “Hey, I’m sorry I laughed. It just sounded really funny, and I’m—I mean, yeah, I’m worried, but I don’t know what to do except for us to go look for them.”

“You don’t understand,” Taehyung says, kind of pleading and short. Half angry, half scared. “Tata is—they left before. Just a couple years ago, like a month after they settled finally.”

“Tata left?” Jeongguk asks, careful because it feels like something is about to come to light that maybe Taehyung doesn’t really want to have to remember.

“Jimin and I weren’t roommates then—it was my second year, and I had this group of friends who were kind of assholes, and I had been messing around with one of them on and off when Tata finally settled, and the NSA guy was—he was such a dick about everything. About sex, and whether I was flirting with other people in our group of friends, and—and honestly he wasn’t, like, mean? He just used to make me feel guilty. He would get moody and passive-aggressive and stuff. But we weren’t dating, and I genuinely wasn’t into him, and—anyways, Tata settled and I was so excited and thrilled but also scared, because I knew my parents wouldn’t like them, and I knew my friends would tease me—tease us. And they did.

“And anyways, one night I accidentally fell asleep at my FWB’s place and in the morning he woke me up and was kind of pouty and—and he always played the ‘nice guy’ thing, like he liked me but wouldn’t say because he didn’t want to pressure me, except he did pressure me, and—anyways, that
morning he was just kind of lecturing me about Tata and how I couldn’t sleep over because Tata was buzzing and beeping all night and it kept him awake, and if I wanted to actually date then that would be a different story, but if I just wanted to fuck around then I needed to let him get his rest and stop bugging him beyond whatever I wanted to use him for.”

“That sounds…really not healthy,” Jeongguk says.

“It was—I mean, I knew he liked me and I wasn’t into him like that; I shouldn’t have been sleeping with him in the first place,” Taehyung says, the words spilling out in a quiet cry. “But—anyways, he was so mean about Tata, and when I got up to leave, Tata was just gone. I ran out of the room even though the guy was calling after me, and—well, I found Tata eventually, but they were literally, like, burrowed under a fort of books in the basement of the library. It took all day to find them, and then my FWB decided we should stop sleeping together which was for the best—he texted me right after I found Tata, and I didn’t even care because I was just so relieved to have Tata back…”

Jeongguk strokes Taehyung’s back and waits for him to finish.

“Anyways,” Taehyung says. “I know this situation isn’t anything like that. This is—like, they probably just went somewhere because Tata is fucking crazy and really manipulative, they probably just convinced Cooky to go, and…I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry,” Jeongguk says, the words a litany against Taehyung’s hair. “It’s okay. We will find them. You don’t have to say that Tata is crazy. We both like them, hyung. I like Tata a lot exactly how they are. And you’re right; this situation isn’t anything like what you went through a couple years ago. I’m never going to guilt you into stuff, or—if you didn’t like me anymore or something, or if you don’t like me now, I mean…just, it’s never okay to make someone feel bad for not liking someone else, or to act like you owe someone something just because they have a thing for you. So if he knew that and he still said he’d be okay to be friends with benefits and then he wasn’t, that’s not your fault.”

Taehyung nods. “I know. I know, just…it still feels like I did something wrong.”

“You can’t make someone else’s choices for them,” Jeongguk says. “Even if it’s to protect them. If you were both consenting, I really think you didn’t do anything wrong.”

“I led him on and then friendzoned him. Our friends—well, his friends after all that—called me a tease and stopped talking to me,” Taehyung says.
Jeongguk shakes his head. “Don’t listen to that. That’s bullshit. Especially the whole ‘friendzone’ thing.”

Taehyung nods. “Okay. Yeah, I know. Um. Do you think we can go look for Tata and Cooky now?”

Jeongguk nods. “Yeah, come on, let’s go. Hold my hand?”

Taehyung does, and together they head out of the room and lock the door, hand in hand as they head out towards the lawn where Tata and Cooky would have dropped from the window.

“I can’t believe they didn’t just use the door,” Jeongguk grumbles as they emerge onto the quad. There’s no sign of either daemon anywhere; for all their tendency to disappear in a flurry of curiosity, Tata is fairly easy to spot considering their big red heart-shaped head and their blue and yellow pajamas.

“I can,” Taehyung grumbles. “Tata has always loved high places and climbing and stuff. Maybe it’s because of how much I loved climbing trees as a kid.”

Jeongguk looks over at Taehyung, surprised and delighted. “You liked climbing trees?”

Taehyung nods, hiding a grin. “Yeah, I was always a monkey. My parents always said my daemon *would* end up being a monkey, actually.”

Jeongguk shakes his head. “Tata is way cooler than a monkey. Way cooler than any animal, honestly.”

Taehyung adjusts his grip on Jeongguk’s hand so their fingers are intertwined. “Don’t let Cooky hear you saying that.”

“Cooky said it before *I* did,” Jeongguk admits, smiling over at Taehyung. “Cooky always talks about how much they like Tata. It’s pretty cute.” And—oh. Right. That’s kind of a lot to confess, in the middle of campus as they wander towards the library, eyes open for flashes of red or blue or yellow or pink.
Taehyung doesn’t act weird, though; he just hums and falls silent, clearly still anxious about the whole losing-Tata-and-Cooky thing. Jeongguk is honestly not even really sure why he’s not freaking out over it, but—okay, it’s not like the daemons can really get that far. They can’t drive and they can’t take the train; they’re small so they have to take like ten steps for every one of Taehyung and Jeongguk’s. And they’re together. Tata and Cooky are undoubtedly hanging out together, and, well, maybe it would be good for them to have some solo bonding, Jeongguk thinks.

It is kind of weird though, not having Cooky at his feet or in Taehyung’s arms. Not having Tata sitting on top of Jeongguk’s head, or sitting backwards on Jeongguk’s shoulder while they rotate their head in circles like an owl but without a spine or tendons or anything like a normal body at all, because, like, living things really shouldn’t be able to rotate their heads 360 degrees and then just… keep rotating.

(Tata can, and it was creepy at first but now it’s just adorable. Like they’re a little lookout tower, seeking out whatever interesting things they can find to investigate.)

Tata and Cooky are not on the quad. They’re not at the café, and they’re not in the library stacks. They’re not in the computer lab, or by the printers (Tata likes to climb inside the giant paper tray of the biggest copier and hide there when Taehyung and Jeongguk do homework in the library sometimes). They’re not up in the fourth floor atrium, and they’re not in any of the study rooms. They’re not even in the literature lounge, which is unanimously agreed to be the nicest room on campus with its squishy egg-shaped chairs and its floor-to-ceiling windows.

“Fuck,” Taehyung says, burying his head in his hands. “Fuck, we need to find them but—we’re gonna be late for class, it’s already 11:45 and we haven’t seen any trace of them and—and—”

“Taehyung,” Jeongguk says, grabbing Taehyung’s fingers so Taehyung will stop yanking at his pretty chocolate hair, overlong and kind of a mullet. The cutest mullet Jeongguk has ever seen. “Come on, let’s go back to the room and regroup there. We can send out a grouptext too, and maybe Jimin-hyung will be back and we can ask him if he saw them when he came in this morning.”

Taehyung looks miserable. “I guess,” he says, slumping visibly as he allows Jeongguk to steer him out of the room and down the hall, out onto the quad to head back towards Taehyung’s dorm building. Jeongguk scans his ID to get them inside, keeps his hand on Taehyung’s lower back as they climb the stairs to the second floor and walk down the hall to Taehyung and Jimin’s room.

When they get there, the door is cracked open.

“Jimin?” Taehyung asks, pushing his way inside. “You here? Why’d you leave the—ohmygod,
fucking—thank god,” Taehyung gushes, ripping away from Jeongguk to collapse to his knees between his bed and Jimin’s.

There, in the middle of the rug, are Tata and Cooky. Tata is holding something, a little cardboard box folded up like something you’d get from a restaurant. In front of Cooky sits a tray with two paper cups on it—to-go cups from a coffee shop.

“What,” is all Jeongguk can think to say. “I—what the fuck.”

Cooky blinks up at Jeongguk with something shy and worried in their eyes. “Went out to get you breakfast, Jeonggukkie. Taehyungie-hyung.”

Taehyung is busy petting over Tata and checking them for damage—there’s a little scrape on Tata’s left arm, but that’s not too out of the ordinary. Tata falls down from high places with enough frequency that Taehyung and Jeongguk are both accustomed to occasional mild injuries.

“Tata, oh my god, I can’t believe you fucking did that,” Taehyung scolds, talking over the humming and buzzing and beeping Tata is emitting, which sounds kind of proud and braggy to Jeongguk.

“How did you even get this?” Jeongguk asks, coming to kneel next to Taehyung so he doesn’t intimidate Cooky too much. It’s funny, really, that Jeongguk’s own soul can kind of get scared of itself.

“Went to the café,” Cooky mewls. “Tata pointed at the menu and beeped a lot ‘til they gave us stuff.”

Tata wrenches out of Taehyung’s hold to leap into Jeongguk’s lap, blinking up at him really earnestly and rattling off a series of sounds that Jeongguk can only half parse. Beep-brip-vrrrrrrill! Vrivervriverbrrrrrr-rr-rrAAABBBBBYYYYYY-beep-boop-doo000-zh-zhhiibvoo. Beep-beep-baadabadabadabadabadadadaaang-vrrt-vrrrt-vrrrrrrrt.

The meaning Jeongguk gets: coffee—taetae JK kissing WEIRD—love—buy coffee for LOVE—barista MEAN NICE—cooky! came with for safety—did a really good job—so fun fun FUN!

Taehyung frowns and rolls his eyes (he can actually understand all of what Tata said, so he can probably have a better reaction than Jeongguk can)—oh, Taehyung is holding Cooky now, that’s
why Jeongguk suddenly feels all tingly and happy—and then Taehyung starts lecturing Tata.

“Tata, you have to at least leave me a note, like I fucking know you can spell and I fucking taught you to use a pen—” Taehyung starts.

*Beep-brip-boo0000000000oo00oo! (Something about sharpies, maybe?)*

“—No, that is unacceptable, you can use a goddamn normal pen or pencil that you find on my desk because I’m not spending 25,000 won on that stupid rainbow pack of Sharpies you want just so you can—” (So it *was* something about sharpies!)

*Dooo-drip-drop-vrr-vroooom-zrrap! (Something about being really smart and clever and curious, definitely.)*

“—I don’t care *how* fucking smart you are, you are literally less than two feet tall and anyone could fucking pick you up and take you away—”

*Wowawowa-taooooowat! Wao-waoooo! (Jeongguk has no idea on this one.)*

Whatever it is, it makes Taehyung stop. Jeongguk suspects it’s because of how fucking sad Tata suddenly sounds, something Jeongguk can recognize even if he can’t decipher the actual meaning behind the distressed tones. Taehyung and Tata stare at each other for a few seconds, and then Taehyung just bursts out crying, and Tata starts crying too, and they collapse to the floor together, holding each other and sobbing.

(Well, Taehyung is sobbing. Tata is doing that really sad thing where tears come pouring out of his eyes and he makes violent, shuddery vibration-y sounds that, Jeongguk has come to learn in the time he’s spent with the little daemon, are his version of sobs.)

“Are you okay,” Jeongguk whispers as Cooky comes to snuggle in his lap.

“We’re okay,” Cooky says, presumably meaning themselves and Tata, and Jeongguk thinks it’s kind of cute, Cooky referring to them as a collective like that.
“Did you guys actually go out and get us coffee? Like—like that’s actually what happened. Jimin didn’t bring it over or something?”

“We got it,” Cooky admits, like they think Jeongguk is going to be mad about it.

Jeongguk can’t help but grin, wild and unrestrained. “That’s—I mean, okay, not the wisest choice you and Tata have ever made, but definitely also one of the cutest. I can’t believe Tata talked you into it.”

Cooky goes still. “It…wasn’t Tata-honey’s idea.”

Jeongguk furrows his brow and looks down at his daemon, reaching out at the same time to scratch his fingers all lightly down Taehyung’s back. Taehyung is still crying, and Tata doesn’t seem to be much better off. “What do you mean?”

Cooky does that thing where their ears come down and they kind of hide behind them. “Um. We just—I thought it would be nice. Since you and Taehyungie were busy,” they whisper.

Jeongguk blinks. “Oh,” he says. “And you said…”

“Told Tata-honey. Wished we could make you breakfast. And they said we couldn’t make it, but we could go buy it. So we went,” Cooky says, looking down as their little shoulders slump.

Jeongguk strokes through Cooky’s hair as his other hand continues stroking Taehyung’s back. “Aw, Cooky,” he says. “You’re sweet, hon. You’re okay. Don’t worry, I’m not mad.”

“Taehyungie-hyung is mad,” Cooky whispers.

Jeongguk sighs, and his smile widens. “Nah,” he says. “He was just worried. Now he’s relieved.”

Cooky nods, but they kind of look like they don’t believe what Jeongguk is saying.

Jeongguk chooses to be gentle. “Taehyung, are you angry?”
Taehyung finally sits up, Tata clutched in his arms as he looks at the coffee, at the box which presumably contains bagels, if Jeongguk hadn’t misinterpreted Tata’s little speech earlier.

“No,” Taehyung says, “I—I’m really emotional right now and I want some fucking coffee.”

Jeongguk snorts and nuzzles his nose down against Cooky’s. “See?” Jeongguk whispers, face still pressed into his daemon’s. “Taehyungie-hyung’s okay.”

Tata beeps and hums and sounds less broken-laptop and more overactive iPhone, and Jeongguk opens the box—yep, bagels, and they’re even the right flavors (plain with maple-walnut cream cheese for Jeongguk, cinnamon crunch with just butter for Taehyung)—as Taehyung gets the coffees out of the drink carrier and takes a sip out of one.

“Ew, this one is yours,” Taehyung says, handing over the paper cup. Jeongguk takes a swig and it’s his usual caramel white chocolate mocha. Taehyung’s is undoubtedly his customary soy latte. Not because he’s allergic to dairy or anything. Taehyung is just the kind of person who actually likes soy milk.

“You guys did good,” Jeongguk says, smiling down at Cooky, who curls tighter into a quivering ball of nerves in Jeongguk’s lap.

Tata beeps a lot when they hear that, and Taehyung rolls his eyes and sighs like a mildly irritated parent. “No, Tata, that does not mean you can just leave whenever you want. Stop it.”

Taehyung is grinning by the end, and Tata looks cocky and smug and endearing like a wild but adorable kindergartener, one of those kids who can get away with anything just by virtue of being the cutest thing you’ve ever laid eyes on, and who definitely knows it.

“Wait, how did you guys even get money?” Jeongguk asks then, biting into his bagel with a satisfying crunch. Just the right amount toasted, even. Tata must be great at charades to have somehow ordered this. Honestly, a daemon ordering or buying anything is just fucking unheard of. Those poor baristas. They must have been so confused.

Tata beeps frantically and points their whole arm at Taehyung’s wallet.
“You stole my wallet, too? I didn’t even notice,” Taehyung cries, tugging his hand through his hair the way he always does when he’s upset with himself. “Fucking hell, you two are menaces. Demons, and not the nice kind. Like, actual raised-from-hell sort of demons who come to earth to cause awful mishaps and steal innocent souls.”

Tata beeps proudly, and Jeongguk can hear the thank you of it loud and clear.

They sit and gobble down the bagels and sip at the coffee for a while in companionable silence, Tata still beeping and humming about what exactly had happened on their adventure—something about how nice the weather was, and how the barista was nice but weird and didn’t like them, and how human money is stupid and why are there so many zeros on all the won notes and why are there so many types of salmon available for purchase in bagel shops.

(Okay, Jeongguk isn’t totally sure he actually hears this one right, but there’s something about lox and the different flavors of cream cheese which had included salmon too, so his extrapolation probably isn’t too far off.)

Finally, after Tata has worn themselves out and is making sleepy alterations to the blanket fort which Cooky adorably calls their “nest”, Cooky noses Jeongguk and looks at the clock. Jeongguk groans. “Fuck. We still have class. In fucking 15 minutes.”

Taehyung groans. “Ugh. Wanna skip?”

Jeongguk shakes his head. “Ugh, no, I mean—well, yeah, obviously, but I can’t. It’s fucking trig. I’ll have no idea what’s going on if I miss again.”

Taehyung grins. “Haha, sucks to suck. I just have my sociology class, the super easy one about deviance and social control.”

“Lucky you,” Jeongguk grumbles. “We should just skip and, like, fucking sixty-nine again or something. That was dope, dude.”

Taehyung’s laugh is a rainbow shimmering in the warm light of the room. “Wow, please continue to talk about our sex life like one of the university’s douchey sports bros.”

Jeongguk laughs a little bit evilly and sets his near-empty cup down to grab Taehyung in a teasing
but forceful kiss. Taehyung shrieks into Jeongguk’s mouth but kisses back, hands coming up to clutch Jeongguk’s shirt as Jeongguk gets his hands tight in the hair on either side of Taehyung’s cheeks.

They break apart with a gasp a few minutes later, panting and eyes half-lidded.

“Fuck,” Taehyung says. “I really wish you didn’t have trig.”

“I really wish I didn’t, too,” Jeongguk pants.

Taehyung laughs, breathless. “You could skip.”

Jeongguk lets loose a growl. “Why should I?”

Taehyung’s eyes go dark, and Jeongguk can hear the way his breath catches in his throat. “’M really — need it, Guk.” It’s half an act, surely, but it’s also half not. “Need you to fuck me.”

Jeongguk grins. “So what? My boyfriend’s horny and I should just not go to my very important and expensive trig class so I can stay home and take care of him? Get you off again, even though you came twice last night and twice this morning.”

“Fuck,” Taehyung blurts, a gaspy-moany-pretty thing, and Jeongguk crushes Taehyung’s mouth with his own just one more time before he draws away, stands up, scoops Cooky and his backpack off the floor, and heads for the door.

“See you later, babe,” Jeongguk says with a cheeky wink.

Taehyung’s eyes are wide and shocked and horrified. “Jeon Jeongguk, you fucking—”

Jeongguk shuts the door with a fond laugh as Taehyung’s yelling gets muffled and distorted by the wall between them, and he heads down the hall a few feet before he changes his mind and turns around and goes back, peeking his head through the door.
“Tae? Tata? See you guys later, yeah?”

Taehyung cuts off his rant and looks up at Jeongguk. “Huh?”

Jeongguk smiles. “Just—I didn’t mean to be a dick like that. Come over to mine after your class is out and we’ll go get dinner? Take out, so we can eat it while we watch stuff or whatever.”

Taehyung blinks. Tata comes out from under the bed just to blink. They look really similar like that. “Huh. Okay.”

Jeongguk can tell his teeth look like Cooky’s as his smile gets impossibly wider. “Mmkay. See you later, hyung. Tata. Love you guys.” He closes the door and heads off to class.

It’s only when he gets a text from Taehyung when he’s halfway through trig that he realizes what he’d said.

**tnt ❤❤ [1:24 p.m.]**

see you later

**tnt ❤❤ [1:24 p.m.]**

gotta tell you something

**tnt ❤❤ [1:24 p.m.]**

not over text

**tnt ❤❤ [1:24 p.m.]**

tata says I should be brave
The force of all of it hits Jeongguk like a tidal wave, and he looks at Cooky, but the rabbit is fast asleep in his lap, squished between the desk and Jeongguk’s stomach the way they always are in class.

Jeongguk takes a shaky breath and types back.

Me [1:26 p.m.]

Oh. Yeah. You should.

Me [1:27 p.m.]

Be brave, I mean.

That night, Taehyung is.

And Jeongguk—well, he’s got Taehyung and Tata and Cooky all curled up with him on his little too-springy dorm bed with lamb skewers to eat and Netflix playing in the background. It’s pretty easy to be brave with that sort of thing going on, with the enamored echo of Taehyung’s confession ringing like crystalline holiday bells in his head, *I love you, I’m—Guk-ah, Cooky, I’m in love with you, we’re so in love with you it aches right here, sort of*. Taehyung had pressed at his sternum, shy and hardly making eye contact, and Jeongguk’s heart had melted to sweet, fudgy chocolate warmed by the light of Kim Taehyung and Tata.

“Yeah,” Jeongguk whispers, in the dark, the taste of it sugary and stronger than the lamb skewers, even, because it means something fierce right now, it means everything. “Taehyung. Tata. I love you. I’ve been in love with you since the night we met, I think.”

Taehyung’s smile brightens the whole room, and they curl up all pressed together and warm with Cooky and Tata in the bed with them instead of under it, and all things considered, Jeongguk thinks, he’s pretty goddamn lucky.

Taehyung falls asleep first, mewling a little as Jeongguk pulls him closer. Tata hums and settles across Jeongguk’s neck, and Jeongguk closes his eyes and falls into the happiest, most contented
sleep he’s had in his life, possibly ever.

x

brrr taetae napping /// cooky! (COOKY!!! ❤❤❤) snack snack yum ///

tata >>> initiate eating protocol >>> initiation successful

cooky! snack APPLES! ❤ tata apples love cooky! LOVE!! taetae napping

\ taetae >>> initiate sleep protocol >>> initiation successful

\ JK >>> initiate study protocol >>> initiation successful

. . .

\ JK >>> initiate Pet taetae’s Hair protocol >>> initiation successful

taetae sleeeeeeccccccceeeep /// 眠い /// 眠い /// taetaeがめっちゃ眠い /// 超ヤベイ!!

JK!! taetaeに快適にする ❤❤❤❤❤❤❤❤❤ すごいですねー ///
cooky! make snack

\[\text{cooky! >>> initiate apple chop protocol >>> initiation successful}\]

... ... ...

/// brrrrr cold tata SO COLD! /// wanna be warm so cold!!

[EMERGENCY] tata >>> INITIATE BLANKET SEARCH PROTOCOL >>> loading… loading…>>> INITIATION SUCCESSFUL [end emergency mode]

what’s /// what’s /// cooky! >> WHAT’S THAT??

tata >>> initiate INVESTIGATE protocol >>> initiation successful

/// リンゴと砂糖がある~~~ ^.^

warm blanket warm brrrr byebye sleepy blanket on the desk
tata >>> initiate WRAP IN BLANKET ON DESK™ protocol >>> initiation unsuccessful
tata >>> initiate WRAP IN BLANKET ON DESK™ with cooky!’s help protocol >>> initiation successful
tata >>> initiate happy© protocol >>> initiation successful
JK love love LOVE!! taetae so sleepy napping with JK, JK loves taetae taetae loves JK /// 一番大好き！！！ 一番大好き！！！ // yummy apple sugar milk honey 甘い 甘い！

/// sleepy taetae >> tata cuddle

tata >>> initiate Companionship ♥ protocol >>> initiation successful

COME ON COOKY(!!! ♥ !!!)) /// snuggle JK and taetae with tatatatatatatatatata たくさん TA がある

/// love, love, love ♥

tata cooky taetae JK love ♥

!!!

///

♥.

Chapter End Notes

Tumblr
twt
The first time Jimin and Chimmy wake up in Hoseok’s bed, it’s kind of an accident. Also, they’re, like, really hungover.

“Mmph—ng, ugh,” Jimin moans. He opens his eyes and blinks at an off-white ceiling, a messy-but-not-too messy bedroom. He’s been half-awake for a while, that sort of hungover-alert where your stomach is twisting and your head is aching and you’re way too hot and you know it but you’re still
really not awake yet. Jimin closes his eyes again. “Chimmy, you okay?”

Somewhere down the bed, there’s a rustle and a little whimper. “’M okay, Jiminnie,” Chimmy yips. Jimin thinks about rolling over to make sure, but he’s pretty sure that if he does that, he’ll throw up in Hoseok’s bed. Which would be pretty disastrously embarrassing, considering he’s known Hoseok for, like, three days.

“Ugh,” Jimin says, fighting down his nausea. “What time is it?”

“9:30,” Chimmy says, padding over to Jimin’s head. They lick Jimin’s ear and then turn in three little circles before plopping down against the back of Jimin’s neck.

“Think Hoseok-hyung and Mang are awake yet?”

“Probably no,” Chimmy says, shaking with the tiniest giggle. “Wow, we were really drunk, Jiminnie.”

Jimin can’t help the smile that flits across his lips. He lifts a hand and reaches up to scratch Chimmy’s ears, fingers digging in beneath the little holes in the hoodie Chimmy never wants to take off. “Yeah. At least we didn’t black out, though. Or at least I don’t think we did?”

Chimmy starts licking Jimin’s fingers, and Jimin rolls onto his back. He doesn’t puke.

Jimin and Chimmy drift back into a sleep-hazy hungover doze. Finally, maybe minutes later or maybe hours, Jimin thinks he can sit up. He does, raking fingers through his hair and scooping Chimmy into his lap.

“Think I’m okay to venture out there, Chim?”

Chimmy looks up and nods. “You look very cute, Jiminnie.”

Jimin rolls his eyes. “Thanks, babe.”

Chimmy makes their cute little ruff-y bark noise and bumps their nose into Jimin’s chin. “You’re
When Jimin sneaks out into the hallway, the apartment is still dark. Namjoon’s door is closed and there’s no sign of life within, and the living room is deserted. Jimin reaches for his phone to text Taehyung, but—fuck. Where is his phone?

Finally, Jimin’s bladder gets the best of him. He heads for the hallway bathroom, sets Chimmy on the counter, and relieves himself with a sigh, splashing water on his face when he’s done. He’s adjusting the waistband of his sweats, which are way too long and definitely not actually his, when there’s a groan from the curtained-off bathtub.

“Ngh— Jeongguk? Is that you?” Hoseok’s bleary voice asks.

A masked pony head peeks around the edge of the curtain, whinnying in distress when it sees Jimin.

“Oh—Hoseok-ssi,” Jimin says as the curtain slides back.

Hoseok freezes. “Fuck. You’re here.”

Jimin ignores the stab of hurt that runs through him. Of course Hoseok wouldn’t want Jimin here in his apartment, in the morning, wearing clothes that are almost definitely Hoseok’s. They’ve only known each other for three days, and Jimin has a reputation for—well.

“Um,” Jimin says, shifting from foot to foot.

Hoseok puts his head in his hands, and Mang blinks up at Chimmy with delirious round eyes. “Fuck, this is really embarrassing,” Hoseok groans.

Jimin furrows his brow, disappointed despite himself. “You don’t have to be mean about it,” he says. “Don’t worry, you didn’t even sleep with me. I’ll just go, promise I won’t tell anyone about this—”

“What?” Hoseok interrupts, blinking in obvious confusion. “No, I didn’t—I mean, it’s embarrassing because I definitely look really stupid and hungover and shitty and I was sleeping in a bathtub, and here you are looking all—like that.” Hoseok moans. “It’s unfair. You should look less pretty in the
morning.”

Jimin takes an actual step backwards, surprised and very slightly confused. “Oh,” he says.

“I’m sorry,” Hoseok says, scrambling up so fast he goes a little green. “I didn’t mean to make it sound like I was embarrassed that you were here. I’m not.”

Jimin glances at Chimmy, who hops down from the counter to go up to Mang. “Sorry I assumed that’s what you meant,” he says.

Mang leans over and whinnies against Chimmy’s nose, and Chimmy giggles and perks up their ears. When Jimin looks over, Hoseok is blushing violent red. “Um,” Hoseok says. “Anyways. You, um—you don’t have to stay. Don’t…don’t feel obligated.”

Jimin swallows, a pit in his stomach at the daunting thought of sitting through a twenty-minute train ride and then a ten-minute walk back to his dorm right now. “Um.”

“Or you can stay,” Hoseok says, smiling and kind of wincing with it, obviously just as hungover as Jimin. “I mean—I want you to stay. That is my professional opinion on the matter—that you should stay. But if you don’t want to, I won’t pressure you. You can leave and I’ll never bug you again.”

Jimin blinks. “I want to stay,” he blurs, looking down. Mang and Chimmy are slumped together against the edge of the bathtub, eyes closed.

Hoseok’s smile is exhaustedly bright. “Great. So I’m thinking we can sleep all day and then hang out later tonight, once we’re not dying of alcohol poisoning.”

Jimin rolls his eyes. “We are not dying,” he says, slumping against the counter. “Although it does kind of feel like it.”

“Come on. Let’s get breakfast, and then we’ll at least feel okay enough to sleep some more,” Hoseok suggests. “If you’re okay with that? Me sleeping in the bed with you?”

Jimin nods. “I’m not exactly shy, Hoseok-ssi.” As Hoseok certainly already knows.
(The whole fucking school knows.)

Hoseok just gives Jimin a wry smile. “That’s great,” he says, which is kind of weird because usually guys don’t act like they like Jimin for being easy—they want to fuck him because of it, which, you know, makes more sense. But Hoseok grabs Jimin’s hand and leads him out of the bathroom as if he’s not even thinking about any of that. “Come on, don’t forget that I really, really like you.”

Jimin lets out a startled huff. “You’re kind of moving fast,” he says, letting Hoseok pull him to the kitchen. “And that says a lot, coming from me. You should know.”

“Oh?” Hoseok asks, searching through the cupboard until he finds a couple of plastic cups to fill with water. “What should I know?”

Jimin stands against the counter, frozen in place. At his feet, Chimmy darted away from Mang to press against Jimin’s leg. “Um.”

Hoseok hands Jimin one of the cups. “Tell me!”

Jimin sighs and looks off to the side. “I mean, it’s not like it’s a secret. When you asked me out, I figured you wanted…but then we didn’t…”

On the kitchen floor, Chimmy whines in obvious distress, and Mang whinnies and tugs Chimmy away from Jimin’s legs into a gentle snuggly hug. Jimin and Hoseok watch, and Hoseok steps forward to brush hair out of Jimin’s eyes. “What, Min?”

Jimin swallows. “I thought you would know—I mean…people say stuff. Like. That I’m slutty, because I’ve hooked up with a lot of guys. But it’s not—it’s just, when I first got to college, I tried dating a lot and it just turned into, like, me being naïve enough to believe people when they said they liked me but they all kept using me for sex and then disappearing, which then turned into that no one wants to date me because they think I’m easy and desperate. One guy posted a thing on Facebook evaluating me as a mediocre date but a great lay and then people kept—I mean, when you asked me out so quick after meeting me, you were ridiculously sweet and you got my hopes up that you didn’t want to just use me but I just figured, well, you were cute and even if you did just want to sleep with me, like, I guess I should just take whatever I can get. Maybe I am just—like, desperate, I don’t—”

Jimin’s foggy head kind of catches up to the fact that he’s just spilled all that shit to a likely uninterested audience, and he cuts himself off. “Oh god. I’m sorry, I’m very hungover, I should. Just probably go.”
Jimin sighs, looking down at Chimmy, preparing to pick them up and run out the front door. But Chimmy is curled into Mang’s body, and the little horse is petting their ears, and Chimmy’s tail is tapping a soft, furry rhythm against the floor.

Hoseok sets his cup of water on the counter with a bang. “Well that’s all bullshit,” he says. “Can I touch you?”

“Huh?”

“I mean, like, a hug,” Hoseok says.


Hoseok presses himself all up along Jimin, arms long and lanky and dancer-strong. Jimin is caged against the counter, and his head kind of spins with it, the closeness of the contact. Jimin has always been sensitive to touch.

(He’s weirdly touchy and begged for praise like fuckin bitch, but he chokes on dick like a champion, the online review had said. Conversation 2/5 stars would not recommend, deep-throating 5/5 stars would buy again.)

“Okay,” Hoseok says, “So all of that is bullshit, and I want to fight everyone who said anything about it.”

Jimin huffs. “Why.”

“Because first of all, your sexual choices are exactly that—your sexual choices,” Hoseok says, voice fierce. “Slut-shaming is super not okay, and honestly fuck that so much. Park Jimin, I do not give a flying fuck how many people you’ve slept with, and you do not have to justify yourself to me in any conceivable way.”

“Oh,” Jimin whispers.
“Second of all, separate from the first part. What you said about guys using you for sex, and one of
them posting about it online? That’s—god, I’m so fucking sorry that happened to you, and I kind of
wanna figure out if we can, like, press charges against him because that’s definitely cyber bullying
and fuck him so much. I’m not going to do any of that, god. I’m sorry that I made you think I
would.”

Jimin’s heart hurts, his head spinning with all of what Hoseok just said. “Oh,” Jimin whispers. “You
didn’t…I mean, it wasn’t anything you did that made me think that. Just…you weren’t being sweet
and flirty because you wanted to sleep with me?”

Hoseok tugs Jimin in impossibly tighter. “I was being sweet and flirty because I forcibly ran into you
in the dance hall and dumped my water bottle all over your stuff including your phone, and then you
asked me if I was okay even though it was my fault. And then you talked to me and Mang and
Chimmy were fucking break dancing and you were the coolest, most interesting person I had met in,
like, all of college. Possibly ever.”

“Oh,” Jimin says, half hopeful and half perplexed as he finally brings his arms up to return Hoseok’s
embrace. “You were—um, you were really cool too. That’s why I said yes. To your invitation to
your party last night.”

Hoseok laughs, his breath tickling Jimin’s neck. “I wanna hang out with you more,” Hoseok says.
“And I want you to stop looking and feeling like you look and feel right now because honey, you are
very clearly hungover and you should be in bed sleeping it off and not standing in my kitchen
shaking and almost crying over shitty people who don’t respect you and your agency and how
fucking awesome you are.”

Jimin sags in Hoseok’s arms. In the corner of the kitchen, Chimmy does the same thing with Mang.
“You’re very sweet, Hoseok-ssi.”

“Stop that,” Hoseok says. “You’re being very formal.”

“You’re being very for ward!” Jimin says, laughing.

“We got really drunk together last night and spent hours flirting and doing all the handsy-touchy stuff
and I like you and I want to date you,” Hoseok says. “Fuck, I would go Facebook Official with you
right now and not even be worried about it. I like you, Jiminie.”
Jimin shudders. “That’s really serious.”

Hoseok nods. “Yes, it is. Now—”

The front door bursts open, and Jimin and Hoseok and Chimmy and Mang all turn to look.

“Hey, careful, don’t— ow, Tata, that was my foot!” Taehyung’s deep voice pouts. He and Tata and Jeongguk and Cooky are all standing in the doorway holding coffee and something that smells like really good food.

“Oh shit,” Hoseok says. “Is that for us?”

“Nope, all for Tata,” Jeongguk says, looking mildly hungover. Cooky is quiet at his feet, and Tata makes a strange whirring noise and titters, all happy and prissy and adorable like always. Taehyung nudges at the side of Tata’s head with his stockinged toe.

“Here,” Jeongguk says, offering one of the bags and a drink tray. “The latte is for you, Hobi-hyung, and Jimin-hyung, Tae said you would want a caramel mocha.”

“Oh my god,” Hoseok says, still squeezing Jimin’s hands like he doesn’t really realize he’s doing it. “Jeongguk-ah, Taehyung-ssi, I am really fucking glad that I know you and that you evidently love us.”

Jeongguk rolls his eyes, and Taehyung flashes a peace sign as Tata leaps up into Jeongguk’s arms with a weird lololololol sort of noise.

“Fuck,” Jeongguk says, staggering to try to keep the coffees upright with Tata now dangling from his forearms. “Really, Tata?” Tata makes their vibrate-y laughing noise, and Jeongguk shakes his head.

“Here,” Jimin says, tugging away from Hoseok to take the food. Breakfast is a quiet affair wherein Tata and Taehyung instigate some sort of silent tag game with Jeongguk and Cooky; Jeongguk doesn’t seem to have any qualms about touching Tata, which is interesting. Jimin has only ever seen Namjoon and Seokjin and Yoongi do that, and that was just last night.
Jimin and Hoseok gobble down their sandwiches, sip their coffee. At some point, Seokjin emerges from Namjoon’s bedroom, takes one look at the food, and carries the leftovers back to his boyfriends, slamming the door shut behind him.

“You’re welcome!” Taehyung whisper-shouts, grinning.

“Asshole,” Jeongguk says, rolling his eyes. He looks at Taehyung with this wildly adoring look, and —wow. Jimin must have missed whatever went down with those two last night.

“You wanna go back to bed now?” Hoseok finally asks even though Taehyung and Jeongguk are sitting right there. In the corner of the room, Mang and Chimmy doze in a little cuddle heap with Tata and Cooky, who are apparently tired after their impromptu game of silent tag.

“Yeah,” Jimin says. He looks at Taehyung. “Um, I’m gonna…”

Taehyung nods. His eyes are just barely worried, because of course Taehyung knows all about the party hookups and the guys who ghosted Jimin after one date and a quick fuck and the online review shit. “Be safe, Jimin,” Taehyung says. “Have fun.”

Hoseok is the one who responds. “He will. To both.”

Taehyung appraises Hoseok for a few seconds, and then he finally nods. Hoseok pulls Jimin to his feet and they head off down the hall, Chimmy and Mang padding along behind them, yawning and drowsy.

They climb between the sheets and snuggle into the pillows, and Hoseok makes sure Mang and Chimmy have some room at the foot of the bed. The daemons settle on top of the covers so they can be close without accidentally touching the wrong person, and Jimin relaxes with the warm weight of Chimmy atop his shins.

“You okay like this?” Hoseok asks once they’re all cozy.

Hoseok smiles. “Can I touch you? Like, while we sleep, can I—my hand on your hip or something? It doesn’t have to be anything much. It doesn’t have to be anything.”

Jimin’s heart is pounding. At the foot of the bed, Chimmy whines in the back of their throat, and Mang neighs a comforting sound in response. “Yes,” Jimin says. “Um. Please.”

“You sure?”

Jimin nods. “I like being touched,” he whispers. “Not just during sex. It’s just—hard to find people who just want to touch you without…getting off.”

Hoseok shakes his head. “I like it too,” he says, an easy grin on his face. “I mean, I love sex, sex is great, it can be really fun! But I love cuddling so much, especially like—getting to feel someone else’s skin? That’s the best.”

“Um…do you want me to take my shirt off?”

Hoseok shrugs. “I don’t want your shoulders to be cold, so I could just lift it up? If that’s okay?” A wild grin paints Hoseok’s mouth into the shape of a heart. “Also, that’s definitely my shirt.”

Jimin can’t tamp down the giggle that bubbles up in his throat, escaping into the warm air of the bedroom. “Sorry, hyung. It’s really soft and I’m keeping it.”

Hoseok makes a cute little yelp-y squeak noise and darts in to hug Jimin tight, and Jimin lets it happen. Puts his arms around Hoseok too, and buries his hungover head in Hoseok’s chest, and revels in it when Hoseok rakes up Jimin’s (Hoseok’s) shirt to rest his broad palms flat on Jimin’s back.

“This okay?” Hoseok asks.

“Yes,” Jimin says, luxuriating in the comfortable, casual intimacy of it.

“Wanna sleep now?”
“Okay,” Jimin sighs. He can feel the tiny footsteps of Mang and Chimmy playing at the foot of the bed, and then there’s more pressure as the daemons settle down in between Jimin’s and Hoseok’s legs, still on top of the covers. It’s shivery and strange, being so close to someone else’s daemon even if they’re not touching. Most of Jimin’s potential-boyfriends-turned-asshole-hookups have been pretty adamant that the daemons stay on the floor to avoid unwanted contact.

“If you get too cold, don’t be afraid to steal my blankets,” Hoseok whispers. “Or wake me up and I’ll get more. Or if you get too hot, that’s fine too. Just kick everything onto the floor.”

“I think Chimmy would be pretty upset if I did that,” Jimin says. “Mang too.”

“I’m just saying,” Hoseok smiles, rubbing his nose into Jimin’s temple. “You seem like the kind of person who sleeps over at someone’s house and spends the whole night freezing because you don’t want to inconvenience them by asking for an extra blanket.”

Jimin burrows further into Hoseok’s arms, touch-starved and needy now that he’s finally got someone holding him. “I don’t usually get to sleep over,” Jimin murmurs. “Hookups go home after.” Jimin is used to hurriedly dressing, escaping to his own bed, climbing into Taehyung’s arms on the nights when Jimin gets kicked out unexpectedly and it hurts. The nights when Jimin walks back to the dorms with Chimmy straggling behind him, ears and head and tail drooping, their feet scuffling against the pavement as they try and fail to hide tears.

“Great,” Hoseok says, “So I can teach you right now that your physical comfort in my home and bed is of the utmost importance to me, and you’re not a hookup.”

“Apparently not,” Jimin giggles. “We haven’t even kissed, silly.”

“I know,” Hoseok says, giggling back. It’s such a lovely giggle, lighthearted and sunshiny and heart-shaped like Hoseok’s big smile. “I’m trying to surprise you. Like, consensually, though.”

Jimin shakes through another laugh in Hoseok’s arms and gets hit with the mental image of himself shaking through an orgasm here, right here in this bed, tucked into the sunflower bright embrace of Jung Hoseok. Jimin gulps and shoves the thought away. “What does that even mean? ‘Surprise me consensually’?”

Hoseok squeezes once around Jimin’s middle, his hands so warm on Jimin’s skin. “Like, we’ll just
be hanging out, chilling and not doing much, enjoying each other’s company. And you won’t be thinking about us kissing—I mean, you will, but you won’t admit that—and then the moment will be just right, and I’ll cage you in against the counter or wall or whatever, and I’ll say, ‘Jiminie’, all teasing and nice and soft. I’ll have to duck a little, because you’re so cute and small—and I’ll bring my lips right up close to yours, and I’ll ask—‘Jimin, honey, baby —can I please, can I kiss you?’ And you’ll say ‘yes’ with your big brown eyes kind of dazed, and you’ll tip your chin, and for a second we’ll just breathe and wait for it. And then I’ll kiss you.”

“Oh,” Jimin says, his mouth going dry.

“You don’t have to say yes,” Hoseok tacks on, sounding warm and unworried about potential rejection, but not like he doesn’t care. More like he cares too much, enough to be brave. Something about it makes Jimin feel powerful. Not weak, not small and pressured by the nice-guy smiles, the ones that say oh, you don’t have to and mean I’ll be passive-aggressive all night if you don’t.

“You think I wouldn’t?” Jimin flirts, biting his bottom lip cutely between teeth he knows are just barely crooked.

Hoseok’s eyes are recklessly happy. “I think you’d say yes,” he says.

“Oh yeah?” Jimin’s stomach tingles in anticipation.

Hoseok glances down at Jimin’s lips and then his gaze flicks back to Jimin’s eyes, making sure Jimin has caught him in all his wild desire for this kiss which is bound to happen. It’s inevitable, Jimin can tell.

“Yeah,” Hoseok whispers, “You’d say yes.” His breath ghosts Jimin’s lips in a tracery of what that kiss might feel like, and Jimin waits. Juts his bottom lip out, blinks slow and sultry. Hoseok takes it all in, rough and cocky now. It makes Jimin shiver, the purity of the desire in the look.

At the foot of the bed, Chimmy growls playfully and pounces on Mang, tugging Mang’s ear into their mouth. Mang huffs and rolls them over, and they tumble to the floor with a yelp.

Hoseok bursts into laughter, sitting up out of Jimin’s arms to look down at the two daemons, who crawl back onto the mattress looking embarrassed. Chimmy’s tail is hanging low between their legs, and Mang’s usual springy gallop-step is a slow, self-conscious gait.
“Sorry-y-y,” Mang neighs.

Jimin’s heart flips over at the sound of it, and he sits up and sways into Hoseok, who holds him upright without a second thought. “That’s really cute, Hoseok-hyung,” Jimin says. “How Mang talks.”

Mang perks up and does a happy twirl at Jimin, and then they flop forward over Hoseok’s blanket-covered legs. Chimmy jumps onto Mang’s back and lies there with their tail wagging, their mouth open and their tongue out. Jimin giggles and reaches down to scratch Chimmy’s ears, careful not to touch Mang.

“Have you ever done it before?” Hoseok asks, sounding bright and curious.

“Done what?” Jimin asks.

“Touched someone else’s daemon.”

Jimin thinks back. “Not that I can remember. I mean, I probably did as a kid, like with my siblings at least. But it would have been forever ago.”

Hoseok nods. “I’ve touched Koya a couple times, but it was on accident.”

Jimin hums and slumps back against Hoseok’s pillows. Chimmy hops up and curls onto his chest. “It’s kind of surprising that I’ve never touched Tata, now that I’m thinking about it.” Jimin muses, staring at the ceiling. “Or, like, it’s surprising that they haven’t touched me.”

Hoseok snorts. “I can’t believe those two are, like, together or whatever. Taehyung and Jeongguk.”

Jimin shakes his head. “I knew they would be a thing as soon as I saw the way Taehyung looked at Jeongguk when they met. I just thought it would take longer.”

Hoseok’s laugh fireworks out of him. “You mean when Jeongguk drunkenly insulted Tata and Taehyung just about punched him?”
Jimin sighs and nods. “Yep. That whole interaction was exactly the sort of thing Taehyung likes, which is why he always ends up with assholes. Jeongguk better not break his perfect heart.”

Hoseok grabs Jimin’s hand, the one that’s not buried in Chimmy’s fur, and he turns on his side to look straight at Jimin. “He won’t. I’ve never seen Jeongguk look as smitten as he did in the kitchen this morning. Jeonggukkie is shy, and he’s a tough nut to crack. So if Taehyung was able to draw that sort of affection out of him, well. Jeongguk won’t let go of that. Jeongguk won’t let go of Taehyung, or Tata.”

Jimin turns onto his own side, plays with Hoseok’s fingers. “I’m glad,” Jimin murmurs, tucking himself back into Hoseok’s side. “But I’m also still kind of hungover, so do you think we could go back to sleep now?”

Hoseok sighs. “Yeah, god, that sounds nice. Okay. Remember, wake me up if you need anything. Anything.”

“I will,” Jimin promises, warm and practically dozing already. “Promise.”

They sleep away the afternoon, and in the evening they microwave leftover pizza and eat it in their pajamas (Hoseok’s pajamas) while they watch silly YouTube videos. When it’s time for Jimin to go home, he doesn’t really want to.

“Get home safe,” Hoseok whispers at the door. Mang and Chimmy are doing one last dance in the living room, and Namjoon and Seokjin and Yoongi are still sequestered away in the master bedroom.

“I will,” Jimin says, slipping into his shoes. “Chimmy, come on!”

“One more time!” Chimmy yips, “One more!”


Jimin looks over and the daemons are clinging to each other, hugging and gazing up at Hoseok and Jimin with wide, earnest eyes. Mang’s tail is flicking around and Chimmy’s tongue is sticking out, and they look cute and unselfconscious.

Jimin giggles. “You mean like someone else I know?”

“Who, me?” Hoseok grins, eyes bright and teasing. “Nah, not at all.”

“Hyungie,” Jimin pouts.

Hoseok puts his hands on Jimin’s hips and presses him against the door. “What,” he says, mischievous as he puts a foot in between Jimin’s. The threat of a thigh to grind against, if Jimin wanted it, if they were up against the door and moaning and desperate for skin on skin—

“Seok-hyung,” Jimin mumbles. His eyes are on Hoseok’s lips, he can hardly drag them away. Can hardly drag them up to meet Hoseok’s wild brown gaze, now focused and intent.

“Minnie,” Hoseok says, moving his hips forward so the front of his sweats just barely brushes the denim of Jimin’s jeans.


Hoseok brings his hands up to cup Jimin’s cheeks and moves forward so his hips press Jimin into the door. “Jiminie, honey, baby,” he pleads, “Can I please? Can I kiss you?”

Jimin’s can hear a smothered moan vibrate its way through his lungs, his throat. “Oh,” he says.

“Can I?”

Jimin closes his eyes. “Yes,” he says. “Hyungie, please.”

Hoseok’s mouth is hot. Hot, and insistent, and bruising with its intensity. Jimin likes it like this, and he whimpers and drags his nails down Hoseok’s back, grinding forward and forcing Hoseok to cage
him more solidly against the door.

“Fuck,” Hoseok gasps, pulling away to grab Jimin’s wrists. He interlaces their fingers, presses the backs of Jimin’s hands to the door as he leans in again and kisses Jimin harder, his leg finally between Jimin’s thighs. Jimin lets his weight fall into the command of Hoseok’s hips, drops his head back as Hoseok starts trailing lips and teeth and tongue down the column of Jimin’s throat. Jimin feels debauched already, his hips juddering up against Hoseok’s muscled thigh, his hands clenching helplessly around Hoseok’s fingers, his moans aimed at the ceiling as he lets Hoseok have his wicked way with him.

“Hyung,” Jimin chants, “Hyung, hyung.”

Hoseok pulls away.

Jimin whimpers, bereft. “Why did you stop?”

Hoseok looks dazed but concerned. “Thought you had to get home. I don’t want to keep you too late.”

Jimin whines. Fuck, he’s all hot and tight with the endorphins running through him, with the ecstasy of making out against someone’s door just for the hell of it.

Hoseok smirks. “Or,” he says, nonchalant, “You could just stay.”

“I’m already dressed,” Jimin protests, even though it’s so token he might as well not even bother saying it. “I got my shoes on and everything.”


“Gonna mark me up, hyung?” Jimin asks.

“Can I?”
“Yes,” Jimin gasps.

Hoseok growls and presses his hips more insistently against Jimin’s. “Fuck, you like that? Me getting you all messy and begging for it and claimed so you can ride home on the train and everyone will know you belong to someone?”

“Yes,” Jimin gasps, head falling back against the door with a resounding thud. “Seok-hyung—”

“Jesus fucking Christ,” Yoongi’s voice calls from down the hall.

Hoseok and Jimin freeze. In the middle of the living room floor, Mang and Chimmy stop the dancing-wrestling-playfighting thing they’ve got going.

Hoseok lifts his head. “Sorry, Yoongi-hyung.”

Yoongi scoffs. “If you’re going to be lewd, at least go in your room and close the door while you do it. Exhibitionism is strictly forbidden in this apartment.”

“This isn’t even your apartment!” Hoseok calls. When he ducks in to kiss softly at the skin behind Jimin’s ear, though, he whispers, “Too bad. Was planning to get you off with all of them in the same room if you’d let me.”

“I would,” Jimin gasps.

“Under a blanket, while we’re all watching a movie.”

“Okay,” Jimin whispers, lost in it.

“You two better be decent when I walk into the kitchen,” Yoongi calls, and then there are footsteps coming towards them. Hoseok and Jimin reluctantly part. “Good,” Yoongi scolds as he passes them.
“So,” Hoseok says. “Anyways. Sure you’ll be safe getting home?”

“Jiminie,” Chimmy whines, loping forward with Mang on their heels, and then the daemons trip over the rug and go tumbling and Chimmy is yelping and Mang is whinnying and Jimin crouches down to slow their somersaulting and then—

“Oh,” Hoseok gasps, blinking all startled. Jimin’s hands are buried in fur, but it’s not Jimin’s.

It’s Mang’s.

“Shit,” Jimin yelps, yanking his hands away. He tumbles back, and his head hits the door hard. “Sorry, god, I’m so sorry, Hoseok-ssi. I didn’t mean to—shit.” Jimin breathes tight and sharp.

Hoseok is gazing at Jimin with wide eyes. “Minnie,” he says, “That was—oh wow. Holy shit.”

“I’m sorry,” Jimin moans, preparing to flee the apartment as fast as he can. “I didn’t mean to.”

“I know,” Hoseok says. He doesn’t sound angry, really. It’s confusing, but he sounds almost—amazed? “Fuck, I’ve never—I mean, Joonie has done that too before but it didn’t feel—fuck.”

“I’m sorry,” Jimin repeats, a chant at this point, a litany.


Jimin blinks. “Oh,” he says, for lack of anything better. “Um.”

Hoseok checks Mang to make sure they’re okay. Chimmy looks dizzy, but they’re calm where they stand by Jimin’s leg.

“Jiminie,” Chimmy says, tugging at Jimin’s jeans. “Jiminie, can Hoseokie-hyung hold me?”
Jimin startles. “What?”


“Sorry,” Hoseok murmurs, still looking a little dazed. “I don’t want to impose.”

“But if it’s okay with you,” Chimmy begs, perking up their floppy ears. “Please, Jiminnie.”

Jimin stares at Hoseok. “Um. If you want to,” he says, because—okay, yeah, he is curious. And there’s this electric sort of tension in the room, an echo of the unresolved sexual energy from earlier, now mixed with something deeper and wilder and more instinctual than even that.

“Yes,” Hoseok says, like he can’t help the way the syllable slides out of his mouth. “Yes, I want to.”

Hoseok kneels down. Chimmy steps forward, ears perked in nervous anticipation. Hoseok holds out his right hand and Chimmy leans forward to sniff it, just like a non-daemon puppy, and then they yip and leap forward, right into Hoseok’s lap.

“Oh, fuck,” Jimin gasps as the sensation washes over him. This isn’t something that’s ever happened before; Jimin would have remembered it. The soft flutter of it, and the comfort, the safety in the vulnerability, because—well. He’s trusting his soul to be kept safe in someone else’s hands. How could it not be terrifyingly vulnerable?

“Mi-i-i-i-nie,” Mang whinnies softly, pressing their heart-shaped nose into Jimin’s denim-covered leg. Through the fabric, there’s only the slight pressure of contact, and Hoseok doesn’t seem to really be able to feel it, but the question in Mang’s touch is apparent.

“Hoseok-hyung?” Jimin whispers.

“Yeah,” Hoseok nods, scratching at Chimmy’s ears and pulling a soft-shuddering moan from Jimin’s mouth. Jimin takes Mang into his arms, and Mang nuzzles at the lobe of Jimin’s ear.

“Fuck, this is better than sex,” Hoseok says, and Jimin nods, amazed.
Yoongi chooses that moment to emerge from the kitchen. He raises his eyebrows. “You know it’s only like that if you’re, like, soulmates, or whatever,” he says, so fucking nonchalant.

“What?” Hoseok asks, head jerking up to look at Yoongi. Shooky sits on his shoulder, surprisingly quiet.

Yoongi shrugs. “Just a rumor. Goodnight. See you guys in the morning,” he says, as if Jimin will still be there the next day.

Which.

Hoseok laughs, sounding nervous for the first time since Jimin has met him. “Um. Well.”

Jimin slowly releases Mang even though he doesn’t want to. Even though Hoseok looks bereft once the contact has ended. “Yeah.”

Hoseok blinks. “Jeongguk was touching Tata earlier. Do you think…”

Jimin shrugs. “Yoongi-hyung was just teasing,” he says, although—fuck, he’s not quite sure. How could he be? “Um. I should head home now.”

“You could stay,” Hoseok blurs. Then he softens. “You don’t have to, though.”

Jimin gulps. “I, um…”

“It’s okay,” Hoseok says, his eyes all kind and warm and understanding as he sets Chimmy on the floor and stands. As soon as Hoseok’s hands are gone from Chimmy’s fur, the world seems to spin slower.

Hoseok nods. “Sure. Or when you get home. To let me know that you made it.”

Jimin nods, his stomach warm even though he’s a little freaked out. “Okay. I will.”

Hoseok smiles faintly. “Get home safe,” he says, an echo of his words when Jimin had tried to leave for the first time.

“I will,” Jimin says. He and Chimmy head out the door.

When Jimin steps into the dorm, Taehyung and Tata aren’t there. Jimin pulls out his phone.

Me [10:08 p.m.]
Tae where are you?

Me [10:08 p.m.]
It’s late, are you okay?

Jimin doesn’t receive a reply for a few minutes, but then:

bestie taetae! [10:16 p.m.]

um

bestie taetae! [10:16 p.m.]
don’t be mad
Jimin looks at Chimmy, who doesn’t bother looking back. Chimmy has been pouting ever since they left Hoseok’s.

Me [10:18 p.m.]
I’m not mad, babe ❤️

Me [10:18 p.m.]
use protection ;)

bestie taetae! [10:20 p.m.]
oh ha ha, tysm

bestie taetae! [10:21 p.m.]
same to you, honey

bestie taetae! [10:21 p.m.]
and be careful, okay? I mean, hobi-hyung seems like a great guy, but I don’t like to see you hurt ;(:

Me [10:25 p.m.]
:( tae
Me [10:25 p.m.]
I'm okay though. Chimmy and I actually went home.

bestie taetae! [10:30 p.m.]
is everything okay?? do you need me to come home??

Me [10:31 p.m.]
everything is fine, we just left, like

Me [10:33 p.m.]
um, can I ask you something?

bestie taetae! [10:34 p.m.]
yeah of course baby

bestie taetae! [10:34 p.m.]
sure you don’t need me to come home??

Me [10:35 p.m.]
I’m sure

Me [10:35 p.m.]
just um
Me [10:36 p.m.]
what does it feel like when someone else touches tata?

Me [10:36 p.m.]
sorry, just, I know jeongguk touched tata and you were touching cooky and like

Me [10:37 p.m.]
yeah idk, I just wondered

Taehyung takes a long time to respond. So long that Jimin is already snuggled in bed with Chimmy, ready to fall asleep.

bestie taetae! [11:21 p.m.]
like.

bestie taetae! [11:21 p.m.]
really good um

bestie taetae! [11:22 p.m.]
kind of overwhelming at first, but in a good way

bestie taetae! [11:23 p.m.]
just. it feels really good, fuck

Me [11:25 p.m.]
oh, ok
Me [11:25 p.m.]
sorry, didn’t mean to be weird

bestie taetae! [11:26 p.m.]
it’s fine, love

bestie taetae! [11:26 p.m.]
but also jk and I are going to sleep now so

bestie taetae! [11:27 p.m.]
ily you’re the best see you tomorrow

Me [11:28 p.m.]
see you tomorrow, tae. ily gnight ❤️

Jimin bites his lip. Maybe Yoongi was just making stuff up. Yeah, that makes the most sense. After all, why would it be so taboo to touch another person’s daemon if the really-good reaction only happened with someone who was your soulmate? Wouldn’t it make more sense for everyone to be touching other people’s daemons all the time, trying to find the person they were meant to be with?

“It’s probably nothing,” Jimin says to Chimmy.

Chimmy burrows under one of the pillows and huffs a half-bark in response, still pouting. Jimin rolls his eyes.

Right before he goes to sleep, there is this:
hoseok hyung guy from dance building w horse daemon?? [11:31 p.m.]
hey, sorry to bother you but did you make it home okay??

hoseok hyung guy from dance building w horse daemon?? [11:31 p.m.]
you don’t have to respond if you don’t want! no pressure :) just wanted to make sure.

Jimin’s heart pounds, and he swallows down the warmth that fills him.

Me [11:32 p.m.]
no it’s fine, sorry I forgot to message you >.<

Me [11:32 p.m.]
but I’m fine. made it home and everything, so yeah. talk tomorrow?

hoseok hyung guy from dance building w horse daemon?? [11:33 p.m.]
mmhmm

hoseok hyung guy from dance building w horse daemon?? [11:33 p.m.]
sleep well, min. chimmy too.

Me [11:34 p.m.]
you and mang sleep well too <3
Me [11:34 p.m.]

1. you wanna hang out tomorrow?

If Jimin is asking that question, planning to see this guy again, he might as well give him a better name in his phone.

hoseok hyung and mang [11:35 p.m.]

omg yes!! if you still want to in the morning, of course.

Me [11:36 p.m.]

:) I’ll let you know.

hoseok hyung and mang [11:37 p.m.]

:) 

hoseok hyung and mang [11:37 p.m.]

night night sleep tight don’t let the bedbugs bite!

Jimin falls asleep with a smile pressed into his pillow, too excited about the prospect of seeing Hoseok again to think about anything like soulmates or the feeling of Jung Hoseok with his hands all over Chimmy, Jimin’s passionate puppy, his literal soul.
An interlude on the interaction of daemons with humans which are not their own:

Very little research has been done regarding the relationships (or lack thereof) between daemons and humans who are not theirs. In the Middle Ages, it was common for humans and daemons to interact and touch regardless of whose daemon was whose, as evidenced by written accounts from the time period. Additionally, artwork from the time often depicts two people holding the same daemon or, in more erotic cases, shows humans coupling while their daemons participate, insofar as lying on the bed with the humans counts as “participating”. In modern times, this is an exceptionally rare occurrence.

It is not uncommon for children to attempt to touch each other’s daemons. When such contact occurs, there are no ill-effects aside from a sharp scolding from a parent or teacher, and while children learn that it is inappropriate and disrespectful to touch another person’s daemon, this happens through socialization and not through some natural experience which would lead them to believe the act is “bad”.

Married couples are freer in their touches with each other’s daemons than unwed people, although the practice has only become common in recent decades; as late as the 1950s, married couples did not touch each other’s daemons at all. The sexual revolution of the 1960s and ‘70s increased the likelihood of couples (and sexually active single people) reporting in surveys that they had touched another person’s daemon.

Due to the taboo nature of the topic, no research has been done on the exact effects of touching another person’s daemon.

When Jimin starts googling stuff like “touch someone else’s daemon feeling” and “daemon touch romantic”, the only results he gets are shitty Yahoo Answers posts with a zillion misspellings, a Reddit page in English which he can’t read, and. Well.

A lot of porn.
On Sunday afternoon, Taehyung and Tata still aren’t back, and Jimin has finally finished with his homework, so he figures he might as well text Hoseok about hanging out. After all, the whole daemon-touch thing was probably just a fluke, and Yoongi had obviously been joking around—there’s no soulmate sort of pressure here.

No pressure at all.

Me [2:54 p.m.]
hey sorry it’s so late in the day

Me [2:54 p.m.]
I was just finishing up homework :( 

Me [2:55 p.m.]
but um. you still wanna hang out?

In all honesty, Jimin isn’t entirely expecting a response. Sure, Hoseok had talked a big game about actually liking Jimin and not just wanting to fuck him, but still. Jimin is used to getting left on read.

One minute passes and Jimin’s phone vibrates.

hoseok hyung and mang [2:56 p.m.]
hey! yes! I’m glad you got your homework done!! :)
So Jimin goes, and Chimmy yips and runs circles around Jimin’s legs the whole way there, even on the train, for the love of god. Hoseok opens the door with his signature smile, heart-shaped like Mang’s pink nose.

“Hey!” Hoseok says, gesturing Jimin in. He looks good, hair all silky above his eyes, muscles on display in the bro-y basketball getup he’s wearing. Jimin swallows, hoping he looks even half as pretty. “Joonie and Yoongi-hyung and Jin-hyung went out, so we have the place to ourselves.”


Hoseok takes one look at the expression on Jimin’s face and laughs, and it’s like flower petals fluttering through the air on a gust of wind. “We can just chill,” Hoseok says, hand on his heart. “I promise not to defile you just because the apartment is empty.”

Jimin purses his lips and shrugs. “Well, you know. If they’re not here to watch, I’m not really interested anyways.”

Hoseok cackles and lets Mang drop to the floor so he can lean in close, arms corded and strong as he puts his hands on the door on either side of Jimin’s head. “I could call them,” he says. “I’ll call Joonie right when you’re about to come. Make sure he hears me talking, totally normal, just fine, while you whine and whimper and moan my name loud enough for him to know what I’m doing to you. Would you like that, babe?”

“Yes,” Jimin gasps.

That’s pretty much it.

They go to the bedroom, mouths fastened together, and Jimin has told himself not to jump into bed with people before, has done this enough times that he should know better, but—

“Fuck,” Hoseok groans, getting Jimin on his back on the mattress. The bed hasn’t been made, and Jimin is lying in blankets that smell like laundry detergent and human musk and just a hint of sweat. It’s easy to fall into the haze of sex, to let Hoseok drag Jimin’s clothes off and then his own, to gasp and pant and beg for it when Hoseok goes slow. To beg for it more when he speeds up.
“You want me to really do it?” Hoseok taunts. “You want me to call Joonie?”

“Seok-hyung,” Jimin cries, the thought of it fluttering his eyelids shut, making his lips go slack. “Hyung.”

“Maybe next time,” Hoseok says. “Right now you’re all mine. Too pretty to share.”

Jimin’s back arches hard, his toes curling as he shakes and shakes. Hoseok cradles him close, keeps them all wrapped up together as Jimin tips over the edge.

“Want me to stop?” Hoseok asks.

“No, no, go,” Jimin moans.

“Fuck,” Hoseok gasps. It only takes a minute and then he’s coming too, and it’s hot and sticky and everything is delirium. Jimin breathes hard up towards the ceiling, trying to get his head back together and failing miserably. When Hoseok disappears to the bathroom, Jimin thinks about letting himself out. The walk of shame doesn’t seem particularly inviting, and—well. Maybe Jimin thinks Hoseok kind of wants him to stay.

He’s brave enough to find out.

Hoseok comes back with a wet cloth and cleans the spunk off Jimin’s chest. Mang and Chimmy hop up from under the bed and curl into a ball on the pillows, and when Jimin makes it a point not to let any part of himself touch the little horse daemon, Hoseok shakes his head.

“It’s okay with me if it’s okay with you,” Hoseok says, nodding at Mang.

Jimin blinks up at him with shy, tired eyes. “It’s okay,” he says.

Hoseok kisses his forehead. “Go to sleep, Min.”

Jimin doesn’t even have time to say goodnight before he’s fast asleep, Mang and Chimmy pressed
between Jimin’s body and Hoseok’s, the flutter-soft contact of it spinning Jimin high and happy.

On Monday, Hoseok and Jimin spend the evening dancing in the deserted studio, yellow can lights illuminating the place instead of fluorescents, the wood floor glowing gold and the windows black. Two hours, three, four and it’s midnight, and the security guard kicks them out. They go back to Jimin’s and Taehyung isn’t there. Hoseok and Mang stay.

On Tuesday, Hoseok insists that he knows the best barbecue place in Sinchon, and he and Jimin eat tender lamb and thin-sliced beef and fatty pork and grilled kimchi. Mang and Chimmy sit at the edge of the table whispering and giggling. Hoseok feeds Jimin perfectly-constructed lettuce rolls, and Jimin agrees to go back to Hoseok’s afterwards. They have to make an embarrassing 2:00 a.m. condom run to the local 7-Eleven, but it’s worth it when they get home and Hoseok fucks Jimin’s brains out for the third time that night.

On Wednesday, Hoseok takes Jimin for bowling and beer and arcade games. On Thursday, they go ice skating and do surprisingly well considering they’re used to dancing on solid ground. On Friday, Jimin shares with Hoseok the secret of his favorite dessert bar, an American-style place that has brownie sundaes and warm apple pie and alcoholic milkshakes that get them warm and tipsy and affectionate.

On Saturday, Hoseok invites Jimin over to try some edibles Yoongi had magically procured.

“I dare you to go Facebook Official with me,” Hoseok says, lying on his back, limbs all spread out across his bed. He giggles. “We are obviously, like, super-dating. And you love it. So we should be Facebook Official.”

“Isn’t it weird how there’s no abbreviation for that?” Jimin asks. “Being Facebook Official? Like, you have to say the whole thing. ‘Facebook Official’.” Jimin bites his lip and sucks at it, lounging against the pillows as he waits for the THC to hit him. He’s not used to edibles; he and Taehyung have smoked up a few times, but Taehyung hasn’t ever been super into it because weed makes Tata clumsy and prone to hurting themselves, and Jimin knows better than to get crossfaded at parties considering those nights have always led to his worst decisions and his biggest regrets. “Ugh, we ate the things like an hour ago. When am I gonna be high?”

“You’re for sure high already,” Hoseok says. “I can tell.”
“I’m not high,” Jimin insists. “I can’t feel anything. Also, I forgot to tell you earlier—the ceiling in the bathroom is two different colors.”

Hoseok laughs and laughs and laughs.

“You’re the one who’s high,” Jimin says, and then he’s giggling, and then he’s giggling more, and then there’s a bang on the wall from Namjoon’s room and Jimin claps a hand over his mouth to stifle his guffaws.

“I’m not that high,” Hoseok says, whispering as he tugs Jimin down so he’s lying on the bed instead of sitting up at the headboard. He stifles more giggles. “Being quiet is hard.”

Jimin lets the humor of that particular phrasing dance through him, lighting him up like he’s swallowed a handful of lightning bugs. He giggles again. “Wanna make it even harder?” He teases, giggling giggling giggling.

“What did you have in mind?” Hoseok asks. His smile is wicked and dominant and so so hot.

Jimin sits up and his head swims. Oh. Oh, yeah, okay. He pushes on Hoseok’s shoulder, gets Hoseok so he’s lying all long and lean on the bed, and then Jimin moves with a dancer’s grace to straddle him, settling his ass right on Hoseok’s stomach.

“Oof,” Hoseok says, overplaying the impact just a little. Jimin giggles as softly as he can and leans down to get their mouths together in a messy kiss. Hoseok groans and brings his hands up to cradle Jimin’s hips, and Jimin shudders, head spinning as he lets himself melt into those big, long-fingered hands. It’s easy to let it happen, even with Mang and Chimmy lying spread-eagle on the mattress with them. Easy to let Hoseok turn them over, to let him undress them both and then slide home with Jimin’s legs up over his shoulders. They haven’t done it quite like this yet, quite this giggly and warm and comfortable. Jimin’s orgasm takes him by surprise, more a deep ocean swell than a crashing wave, and everything is languid and sweet and sunshiny and nice.

When Jimin comes back to himself, still swimming in the drugs and nowhere near coming down, Hoseok is tracing patterns on Jimin’s stomach, which is totally sticky.

“Gross, hyung,” Jimin giggles, shoving Hoseok’s hand away.

Jimin blinks. “Hyung, you’re really high.”

“Yeah,” Hoseok says, dreamy and slow.

Jimin relaxes even deeper into the covers. “I’ve never had good sex while I was high before.”

Hoseok hums. “You know, studies have shown that sex is better with a partner you’ve had for a long time. Like, not just hookups. You have better sex when you have a boyfriend.”

Jimin giggles. “Is that your roundabout way of suggesting that I should get a boyfriend?”

Hoseok shrugs. “I’m just saying. One more reason to go Facebook Official.”

Jimin looks up at the ceiling. He’s high enough that it doesn’t even seem unreasonable even though they’ve known each other for, like, a week. “Okay, hyung.”

Hoseok looks over, eyes wide. “Oh. Really?”

Jimin shrugs. “Sure.”

“You’re not just saying it because you’re really high right now?”

“Maybe,” Jimin admits. “Whatever. Not like I can’t just break up with you when it wears off,” he teases. “In the meantime, you wanna spend the night having better-than-hookup, super soft boyfriend sex?”

“Fuck, yes,” Hoseok growls, and then he rolls over and covers Jimin’s body with his own again, fitting their mouths together as Jimin moans, weak and reedy. They do it slow and careful, no hurry as their hands and tongues wander, tracing all the stretches of each other’s skin. At some point, Jimin
feels a nuzzle from Mang’s heart-shaped nose, but he doesn’t think anything of it. Not even when butterflies erupt in him with the way Chimmy’s tail flicks against Hoseok’s calf.

Afterwards, they actually do go on Facebook and make the change: **Park Jimin is in a relationship with Jung Hoseok**.

In the morning, when Hoseok asks, teasing, if he wants to break up, Jimin says no.

The ease of it all lasts for about a month. By that point, Taehyung and Jeongguk are solidly In A Relationship (although Taehyung is convinced that they’re not and that Jeongguk doesn’t want that, and Jeongguk is consistently worried about how to show the goddamn *love of his life* that Taehyung is it for him). Jimin and Hoseok sail through the honeymoon phase of their own relationship, dancing in the kitchen late at night and cooking dinner together and bringing each other breakfast in bed.

The first time Jimin fights with Hoseok, it’s kind of an accident. Also, they’re, like, *really* hungover.

It’s after a night of clubbing. It wasn’t supposed to be, though, and that’s the thing—Jimin has a test the next morning (if 1:00 p.m. counts as morning, which for a college student, it does), and it was supposed to be just a couple of drinks with Namjoon and Seokjin and Yoongi.

Instead, it turns into this:

“Come on, Jiminie, just one more!” Hoseok begs, even though it’s 11:25 p.m. and last train is a few minutes after midnight.

Jimin sighs, looking down at Chimmy, who is snuggling under the table with Mang, looking forlorn. “Hyung, we really have to go.”

“Please, Jiminie,” Hoseok says, taking both of Jimin’s hands in his own and pleading with his stupid, bright, pretty brown eyes.
Jimin sighs. “One more. But we have to make last train or I’m going without you.”

It’s a testament to how drunk Jimin is that he’s allowing this to happen. That he’s staying, when he really should just go. He downs the rest of the drink he’s got and orders another one, thinking that everything will be fine.

“Shit,” Jimin says at 12:14, “We missed the train.”

“Let’s go dancing!” Hoseok chirps. Yoongi and Namjoon and Seokjin are gone, and the bar is hopping even though it’s a Sunday, but that’s Hongdae for you.

“Can’t—hyung, my test,” Jimin says.

“Please,” Hoseok asks, grinning, and kissing Jimin until Jimin’s head is lust-foggy and delirious. He’s so tired, and he’s so drunk, and—

“Okay,” Jimin allows, and so they do. They go dancing, and it’s all a blur of strobe lights and house music and lewd grinding and lewder kissing. Mang and Chimmy hang around their feet, keeping out of the way like all daemons do in public spaces. Jimin loses track of everything but the feel of Hoseok against him, wicked hips pulsing a beat through them both, and Jimin thinks—fuck, I could come like this, maybe—

And then it’s 3:00 a.m. and they’re getting herded out of the closing club.

“Fuck,” Jimin says, head spinning, “Gotta get a cab.”

“Oh, fuck,” Hoseok says. “I can’t—I must’ve lost my wallet.”

Jimin stares at him, everything catching up to him. How late it is, and how hungover he’s definitely going to be, and his fucking important test which Hoseok knew about and still—

“I’m so sorry,” Hoseok says, visibly drunk. “Can you pay the cab fare and I’ll pay you back
tomorrow?”

Jimin scowls, emotions diving to irritation in a second. At his feet, Chimmy sways drunkenly. Mang trips off the curb, lands practically under the wheel of the taxi.

“Fine,” Jimin says, reaching down to snatch Mang out from under the car. Hoseok practically trips into the backseat when he feels Jimin’s hands on his daemon, and then they’re off. Jimin directs the driver to Hoseok’s, and they spend the ride in stony silence, Jimin forcibly staring out the window and holding Chimmy in his lap even though the puppy whines and paws at Jimin’s arm the whole time. When they arrive at Hoseok’s apartment, Jimin pays the fare with the little cash he has and stumbles out of the car.

“You’re coming in?” Hoseok asks, looking surprised.

“Do you not want me to?” Jimin spits back. “I don’t have enough money to get home.”

Hoseok shakes his head. “It’s fine. Come on, don’t you have a test in the morning?”

Jimin almost starts to cry, he’s so frustrated and drunk and tired. “Let’s just go to bed.”

The next morning, Jimin wakes up at 11:56 a.m.

“Jiminie, ugh I’m so hungover, will you get us some water?” Hoseok pleads, rolling over in bed and looking altogether a mess. Jimin’s heart pangs in irritation and sympathy and irritation that he’s feeling sympathy.

“I’m going to shower,” Jimin snaps.

“I’m hungover!” Hoseok moans.

“I’m hungover too,” Jimin says, yanking off last night’s clothes with little precision. “I’m hungover and fucking tired and I have a test.”
Hoseok sits up in bed, one hand clutching at his head. “Why are you acting like that’s my fault?”

Jimin throws his shirt to the ground with a fabric-soft thump, which has less effect than he would’ve liked. “Because it is.”

“How?”

“We went out for a couple of drinks. Which is fine when you have an important test at 1:00 p.m. the next day,” Jimin spits. “But then you have to go and beg me to stay, and make me feel all guilty, and suddenly we’re having, like, ten drinks and we’re going dancing and it’s 3:00 a.m. and you fucking lost your wallet and I had to pay the fare home, which is fine it’s just—I’m just—” Jimin cuts off, hot tears filling his eyes and threatening to spill down his cheeks.

“Jiminnie,” Hoseok murmurs, sounding bad. Sounding like he feels bad, which is what Jimin wants, right? And Mang has their head down and they’re whimpering soft and pathetic in the corner of the mattress, and Chimmy is clutching at Jimin’s leg with their eyes closed—“Oh, shit, my wallet,” Hoseok says, looking over at the dresser.

His wallet is right there, perfectly safe and not lost at all.

Jimin kind of loses it. He gives a strangled yell and stomps into the bathroom, climbs in the shower, spends the whole five minutes of it crying. He drags himself out and wraps a towel around himself because he’s forgotten to bring in clothes. Ventures out into the hall, less angry now that he’s cried himself out. But still. He’s hurt, and hungover, and disappointed in himself, and he still has to go take his test.

Jimin goes in Hoseok’s room and there’s no sign of Hoseok. It hurts, looking around and realizing how much of Jimin’s stuff is littered around the bedroom, how intermingled their lives have become. “Whatever, Chimmy,” Jimin whispers. “Maybe it was too good to be true.”


Jimin shakes his head, dresses in the random pieces of his own clothing that have found their way into Hoseok’s closet, and turns to go.
“Minnie,” Hoseok says when Jimin enters the kitchen.

“Oh,” Jimin says, stopping in his tracks. Spread out on the table is the most delicious-looking breakfast Jimin has seen in probably a decade, since he was little and used to bring his mother breakfast in bed on her birthday. “Hyung…” There are strawberries cut up in a bowl, dollops of whipped cream sitting pretty and white on top. Pancakes and waffles, and scrambled eggs, and bacon cooling on a paper towel that’s soaked through with grease.

Also, the kitchen is a goddamn mess.

“I threw up in the sink,” Hoseok admits, shoulders slumping.

“What—you threw up in the sink?” Jimin asks, confused.

Hoseok nods. “I was really hungover. But um. You deserve this. You deserve more than this.”

Jimin has to swallow the lump in his throat, force back the tears that threaten to fall again. “Oh.”

“I was out of line,” Hoseok says. “I was drunk and excited and it made me act stupid, and I know that’s not an excuse, and I apologize. I promise not to do it again.”

Jimin blinks. “That’s—thank you,” he whispers, taking a seat the table. “You can…” He gestures to the other chair. Hoseok sits down.

They nibble in silence for a while, Hoseok still looking guilty and hungover although better than he had looked earlier. Jimin is drained, and he’s trying to muster up the strength to go take his test which starts—

“Shit,” Jimin says at 12:30. “I have to leave.”

“Let me drive you,” Hoseok says.

“It’s fine,” Jimin says. “You already made me breakfast, you don’t have to—”
“I want to,” Hoseok swears, grabbing Jimin’s hand and looking him straight in the eye. “I want to. I like you. You’re my boyfriend, and it’s fucking awesome, and I want to do this for you.”

Jimin swallows. In the corner of the kitchen on the squishy bed thing from the daemon supply shop, Mang and Chimmy are snuggled together.

“I hate being mad at you,” Jimin says, a broken whisper as he starts to cry again. “I hate it and I don’t want to be mad at you and so I’m not mad. I forgive you, hyung. Sorry I didn’t say it earlier.”

Hoseok rushes around the table to scoop Jimin off his chair and into a hug. “No, I’m so sorry,” he says, even though Jimin has just forgiven him. “I promise. I won’t do that again.”

“Okay,” Jimin whispers. “I’m sorry too. And I promise not to give in if you do. But you have to listen to me if I say I need to go home.”


“Drive me to my test?” Jimin asks.

Hoseok gets him there with ten minutes to spare, and Jimin—

Surprisingly, Jimin does just fine.

Two days after the fight, Jimin and Hoseok are in Jimin’s dorm room cuddling each other and their daemons and generally having a lovely stay-at-home date when Taehyung and Tata come bursting in.

“Sorry,” Taehyung says, chasing after Tata as the daemon goes berserk around the room, vrooming
and humming and knocking at least four books off each shelf and the top of Taehyung’s desk. “God dammit, Ta.”

“Hey, Taehyung,” Hoseok smiles, still stroking his hands through Jimin’s hair.

“Sorry,” Taehyung repeats, “I won’t be here long. Just getting clothes to take over to Jeongguk’s.” He dumps all the papers and textbooks out of his backpack onto his bed, replacing them with a couple of mismatched clothing items, his glasses, and his toothbrush.

“It’s fine,” Jimin says, not moving to extricate himself from Hoseok’s embrace.

Right as Taehyung is heading out the door, back turned to the rest of the room, it happens: Tata jumps up on the bed and onto Jimin’s actual head, the daemon’s extendable arms reaching out to tap Hoseok twice on the nose, and then Tata jumps down and scurries out after Taehyung, making a bunch of really proud beepy noises.

Taehyung slips into his shoes and grabs Tata and walks them right out the door like nothing happened.

“Holy shit,” Hoseok says, blinking. “Tata just—”

“Yeah,” Jimin affirms. “Yeah, they did. They just touched us.”

“Taehyung didn’t notice,” Hoseok observes. “He didn’t feel it, or at least not enough for it to matter.”

Jimin’s heart is in his throat. This feels better than sex, Hoseok’s voice echoes in his head. The words he’d spoken the first time he touched Chimmy. Hoseok is still hesitant about just reaching out and attaching himself to the cute little daemon dog, but Jimin and Chimmy both like when he does touch. Hoseok likes when Jimin touches Mang. It’s all fluttery and sweet, like butterflies flitting around brushing their wings along your skin, like flower petal fireworks in your chest, your abdomen.

“Do you think he was just in such a rush that he didn’t notice?” Hoseok suggests. “I feel bad. Maybe we should apologize?”
Jimin swallows and reaches out to stroke Mang’s back, and Hoseok shudders like always. *You know it’s only like that if you’re, like, soulmates, or whatever,* Yoongi says in Jimin’s head. “No,” Jimin says, “It’s fine. I’ll let him know what happened next time I see him.”

Hoseok shrugs, nonchalant. Maybe he doesn’t remember that, the first day when Yoongi had tipped Jimin’s world upside-down with just one simple sentence. “You wanna watch a movie?”

“Oh,” Jimin agrees, trying to let it go.

Jimin can’t let it go. He thinks about it when Hoseok kisses him awake, thinks about it when he’s stuck at work, thinks about it when everyone is hanging out and Jimin gets to watch Taehyung and Jeongguk hang all over each other and each other’s daemons, when he sees Yoongi and Namjoon and Seokjin doing the same. He thinks about it in the library, and in class, and in the dance studio.

He’s thinking about it one night when Taehyung is agonizing (again) over whether Jeongguk wants to actually be his boyfriend, which—yes. Everyone knows. *Yes.*

“Tae,” Jimin interrupts Taehyung’s monologue. 

“Huh?” Taehyung asks, startling up to look at Jimin. He has his glasses on, and his hair is falling low across his brow, and *of course* Jeongguk is in love with him.

Jimin swallows. “Um. A couple weeks ago, Tata touched me,” Jimin says. “I mean—they just jumped onto the bed and I was there, I didn’t mean for it to happen, it wasn’t—I’m sorry.”

Taehyung blinks. “Oh,” he says. “It’s fine. I can’t believe I didn’t notice, though. I mean, you can tell when Hoseok touches Chimmy, right?”

Jimin nods. “Yeah.”

There’s a beat of silence.

“Um, Tae?” Jimin asks, steeling himself. “I mean—if it isn’t too weird—well, okay, it is weird but—just, um, do you…do you wanna try touching Chimmy? Maybe it’s something with us, like, we’re
such good friends that we just don’t notice?”

Taehyung blinks and then nods. “I mean, if you want me to? I don’t know why it matters that much, but sure, if you want.”

Jimin hesitates, then nods. “Chimmy?”

Chimmy is, of course, as curious about this as Jimin is. They go up to Taehyung and fit their head under Taehyung’s outstretched arm, let Taehyung’s palm drop onto their head.

A flicker, sure, but it’s practically nothing. Not compared to when Hoseok touches Chimmy. Honestly, it kind of just feels like if someone had touched Jimin’s arm.

“How do you feel that?” Taehyung asks.

Jimin shrugs. “Yeah, but it’s not intense.”

Taehyung shrugs. “Huh. Must be a friendship thing.”

“Yeah,” Jimin mumbles, “Must be.”

“Well, I’m gonna go to the library,” Taehyung gripes. “See you!”

“See you,” Jimin calls. Taehyung and Tata leave, and Jimin buries his head into his pillow.

*What the fuck.*

Jimin sits on his newfound revelation for about six hours before he calls Hoseok.
“Hobi-hyung, I need to talk to you. It’s really important and I need you to get in your car and come over here because it’s really important and—”

“Whoa, whoa, slow down,” Hoseok says, voice low and calming. “Jiminie, are you okay?”

“I am really wound tight about something and I need you to come here and talk to me about it and then we’re probably gonna break up,” Jimin says.

Hoseok is silent. “Um.”

“Oh,” Jimin says, his own words catching up to him. “No, I didn’t mean the thing about breaking up. Just, you might be disappointed and then you’re gonna be the one who breaks up with me.”

Hoseok sighs. “Look, Jimin, whatever you’re worried about, it’s probably not a big deal…I mean, whatever it is, we can talk about it—”

“Ugh, hyung,” Jimin says. “Just come here right now please.”

On the floor, Chimmy is chasing their tail at top speed. Jimin’s foot is tapping, fuck, why is he so agitated? Oh, right, because he and Hoseok are literal soulmates.

Or whatever.

“Okay,” Hoseok finally says, sounding kind of resigned. “Um. I’ll be over in a bit.”

When Hoseok gets there, the scene plays out rather ungracefully.

“I’m pretty sure we’re soulmates and that’s why we go all tingly when our daemons touch and also I’m in love with you,” Jimin blurts as soon as he opens the door.

Hoseok and Mang stand there looking shocked. They blink together, and Hoseok’s mouth is half
open, and Jimin loves them loves them loves them.

“Is this about what Yoongi-hyung said that one time?” Hoseok asks, stepping into Jimin’s dorm room and slipping out of his shoes when he sees that Taehyung and Tata aren’t there.

Jimin nods. “Yes.”

Hoseok swallows. “Why did you think this was going to make us break up? I mean, you don’t have any proof that what you’re saying is real, and even if it is and we are soulmates, I would think that it would be a positive thing for our relationship?”

Jimin shakes his head. “We touched Tata and Tae didn’t notice. And I let Taehyung touch Chimmy. It felt like nothing. Nothing really mind-blowing, anyways. Not like when you touch them.”

Hoseok runs a hand through his hair. “Oh.”

“Yeah,” Jimin says.

Hoseok looks up, all down-to-business. “Let’s call Yoongi-hyung.”

Jimin pulls out his phone.

“We have you on speaker,” Seokjin says, answering Yoongi’s phone.

“That’s a scoff on the other end of the line. "Jesus," Yoongi’s voice comes. "Is this because of what I said when I walked in on you daemon-fondling that one day?”

“Yes,” Hoseok and Jimin say at the same time. "Also, don’t call it that," Jimin adds.
Yoongi sighs. There’s some whispering that Jimin can’t quite decipher, and Mang and Chimmy come up and start nosing around Jimin’s feet. Chimmy bumps into Hoseok a few times, and shocks go through Jimin’s chest.

“Hi, it’s me,” Namjoon says after a minute. “Look, um. What Yoongi-hyung said, it’s not…it’s not exactly untrue. ”

Jimin and Hoseok look at each other with deer-in-the-headlights stares.

“But it’s nothing substantiated, and there’s nothing to say that there won’t be other people who give you the same reaction,” Namjoon continues.

Jimin blinks. “I guess that makes sense. Since there’s three of you in your relationship.”

“Actually, I don’t feel it much,” Seokjin says, soft. “I’ve never noticed it with RJ. But Yoongi and Namjoon—with Shooky and Koya…”

“We feel it,” Yoongi says. “We can feel it, but…not with Jin-hyung. Not with RJ, like Jin said.”

Jimin looks down at Chimmy and Mang. “Oh,” he says.

“It doesn’t matter,” Yoongi hurries to correct. “We love Seokjin-hyung and RJ. The daemon thing…it’s not what makes a relationship good, or what makes it work. It’s just—with some people, that happens. Not with others. I’ve heard rumors that it’s a compatibility thing, a soulmate thing, but I was a dick to spring that shit on you like that. I’m sorry.”

Hoseok whistles. “That might be the first time I’ve ever heard you apologize in my life.”

“Shut up,” Yoongi grumbles.

“Anyways,” Namjoon says, “What Yoongi-hyung said is right. If you’ve got that in a relationship, great. But it’s not the thing that determines who the love of your life is. Jin-hyung is in this with us,
and we absolutely love him, and we love RJ just as much.”

Jimin swallows. “That’s really nice, hyung.”

“Still, though,” Seokjin says then, sounding soft and tender and maybe just the slightest bit melancholy. “It means something. True compatibility, I think.”

“Jin-hyung,” Namjoon intones, so soft Jimin barely hears it.

“I don’t mind,” Seokjin chirps. “I know they love me. But I see the way Namjoon and Yoongi communicate sometimes, the way they know each other…they were together before me, you know,” he says. “Sometimes, they look at each other and they just know. And I don’t.”

“Um,” Hoseok says. “Maybe we should hang up now.”

“It’s fine,” Seokjin says, suddenly much more matter of fact. Less dreamy. “We all three love each other, soulmates or not. The person you end up with doesn’t have to be your soulmate. Hell, it’s okay to not be the fabled ‘love of each other’s life’. That’s not what relationships are about. They’re about trust, and communication, and friendship, and compassion, and generosity, and—yes, love. But not end-all-be-all, written in the stars love. That stuff is nice, but I would never trade what I have now for that. I like the security of this. It’s beautiful. It’s not easy, but it’s worth it.”

“Wow,” Hoseok breathes.

Chimmy nuzzles Jimin’s thigh, and Jimin swallows. “Wow, hyung. That was really nice.”

“Can we go now?” Yoongi asks. “I kind of want Seokjin to fuck me on the counter.”

“Hey, I prepare food there!” Hoseok shouts, but the call has already ended.

There’s silence for a few heavy seconds.

“Hyung,” Jimin murmurs, biting his lip and looking down. It’s easier, somehow, to look at Mang
“I love you,” Hoseok says. “Independently of this.”

Jimin blinks. “Oh.”

“I love you,” Hoseok repeats, a grin stretching his mouth into a heart. “I love you, and I love Chimmy, and whether we’re soulmates or not, I want to be with you. I want to work for this every day, because it’s the best thing, and you’re the best, and—and I know you’ve maybe been questioning it, like from the beginning, but just—Jimin, I never have. From the moment I tripped into you in the dance building, I knew.”

Jimin’s face heats up. On the floor, Mang and Chimmy are tumbling around and playing and yipping/neighing at each other, clearly overwhelmed and happy. “Oh,” Jimin says. “Um. That’s—a lot.”

Hoseok raises an eyebrow. “You’re the one who called me over here freaking out because you thought we were soulmates and that this, for some reason, would make me want us to break up.”

“I just thought,” Jimin starts, ready to blurt it out except—no, fuck, don’t do that. Don’t do the insecurity thing.

“What?” Hoseok asks, taking Jimin’s hands in his own.

“I just didn’t think someone like you would want someone like me for a soulmate,” Jimin admits. “I know, it sounds childish. And kind of whiny, and like a late 2000s Coldplay song.”

Hoseok laughs. “You’re absurd. But you’re also right—I don’t want someone like you for a soulmate.”

Jimin’s heart drops.

“I want you,” Hoseok says, pressing their foreheads together. “Someone like you could never be enough. Just you, Park Jimin.”
Jimin blinks, stunned, and—“Hyung!” He shouts, smacking Hoseok lightly in the chest. “Oh my god, you are such an asshole!”

Hoseok laughs and laughs and laughs, and Jimin joins in, helpless against the rising tide of happiness within him.

“I hate you,” Jimin says, grinning.

“You love me,” Hoseok says, smug.

Jimin just looks at Hoseok for a moment then, silent. Taking in the sight of big brown eyes, and brilliant straight teeth, and nice cheekbones, and a heart-shaped, dimpled smile. “Yeah,” Jimin whispers. “Yeah, I love you.”

“Me too. I love you,” Hoseok says.

Mang curls up in Jimin’s lap, and Chimmy in Hoseok’s.

“I won’t ever get over that,” Hoseok says in awe, reaching down to pet Chimmy. Jimin lights up with the warm, fairy-wings-in-your-ribcage feel of it.

“Love you, Hobi-hyung,” Chimmy yips, biting at Hoseok’s fingers and chewing them lightly, just like real puppies do.

“Love you, Jimin-ah-ah-ah,” Mang neighs, voice all soft and affectionate and sweet.


“In your professional opinion, should I say yes?” Jimin asks, teasing.

“Yes,” Hoseok says.
Jimin flutters his eyelashes. “Hmm. If you think it’s in my best interest. Yes.”

Just as they’re leaning in, Hoseok presses a hand over Jimin’s mouth, eliciting an offended squeak.

“Wait,” Hoseok says, eyes wide and urgent. “Should we tell Taehyung and Jeongguk about the soulmate thing?”

Jimin thinks about Taehyung and Jeongguk, the way they’ve been dancing around each other. Maybe this would be a good reassurance, sure, but Jimin knows his best friend, and Taehyung won’t believe it unless he figures out for himself how fucking crazy Jeongguk is for him. How over the moon, how over the fucking stars. Somewhere out in the Andromeda galaxy.

“Nah,” Jimin says. “Let the universe take care of it.”

“Sure,” Hoseok says. And then, finally, he kisses Jimin soft and sweet.

Chapter End Notes

My only reference here is that the last bit about letting the universe take care of it came from this memory I have of a Subaru car commercial where the person talked about not washing their car and just letting the universe take care of it and then it showed the car parked in an outdoor parking lot and it was raining and the dirt was coming off. Why did this commercial stick with me so vividly? Literally no clue.

tumblr

twitter
The Angsty, Meaningful Meetings of Kind Alpaca RJ, Yummy-head Shooky, and Thinker Koala Koya (Among Other Things)

Chapter Notes

okeeeeee well here it is!! the final installment! hope you enjoy!

NOTE: a couple people have pointed out that this chapter contains A LOT of sex, although it's not very explicit and most of it is just referenced. But I want to make sure people know that, especially because the first chapter in this was pretty PG and this chapter definitely does get more mature. The most explicit part is actually more a discussion of past sexual experiences which contains some graphic language. SO if you want to skip through those bits, definitely feel free to skip over them and please keep yourselves safe etc. <3

OKAY ACTUAL WARNINGS (contains spoilers kinda): basically this chapter deals a little bit with regret over past sexual choices that were consensual at the time but a character regrets having given that consent, which makes things a little bit complicated. There's also DEFINITELY some internalized stuff about virginity and someone's worth once they have had penetrative sex, and while there is acknowledgement that intellectually characters disagree with this, a character still kind of feels guilty/dirty for past sexual choices due to the sheer volume of stuff in the world socializing people to believe all this really terrible stuff!

SO bottom line is that I do not believe AT ALL that sexual choices determine a person's value, but I've definitely struggled with the way society tends to characterize things like that, and so I guess I just wanted to write something that could maybe kind of capture the angst of knowing intellectually that it's all social control and shit, but also feeling like "hey I grew up for years being told this and it's hard to let go of, especially when I'm using that criteria to evaluate myself" sorta thing. yes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

kim seokjinnie in all the babes

kim seokjinnie [1:31 p.m.]

Okay so for Christmas break I think we should all go to the beach

kim seokjinnie [1:31 p.m.]
I know this seems illogical but hear me out.

**kim seokjinnie [1:31 p.m.]**

It’s off-season so it’ll be super cheap

**kim seokjinnie [1:32 p.m.]**

And we can all get some ~alone~ time, like in our own relationships obviously

**kim seokjinnie [1:32 p.m.]**

But also together.

**kim seokjinnie [1:33 p.m.]**

(also I already booked a place)

**imjhope [1:37 p.m.]**

i mean

**imjhope [1:37 p.m.]**

in that case r we even allowed 2 say no

**imjhope [1:37 p.m.]**

(asking 4 a frnd)

**suga-gloss [1:38 p.m.]**

you have friends?
mini jiminie [1:39 p.m.]

WOW shots fired

rm [1:39 p.m.]

yeah ouch, that one must’ve hurt, hoseok

mini jiminie [1:40 p.m.]

dw dw he’s not crying

mini jiminie [1:40 p.m.]

like almost though

tnt ❤️ [1:41 p.m.]

wait can we go back to this beach house thing pls n ty

tnt ❤️ [1:41 p.m.]

bc I’m honestly a lil flabbergasted that we’re not more fixated on that honestly

tnt ❤️ [1:41 p.m.]

just sayin

kim seokjinnie [1:42 p.m.]

Thanks, Tae ❤️
kim seokjinnie [1:43 p.m.]

We leave on the 27th and come back the 30th

kim seokjinnie [1:45 p.m.]

Also you guys all owe me 100000 won. And you have to buy your own train tickets.

suga-gloss [1:46 p.m.]

wtf hyung

imjhope [1:47 p.m.]

do we get separate bedrooms

imjhope [1:47 p.m.]

like, with the ppl we’re dating

suga-gloss [1:48 p.m.]

no hoseok, you have to share with joonie n kook

mini jiminie [1:49 p.m.]

wouldn’t it be worse on hobi hyung to make him have a room by himself?

imjhope [1:49 p.m.]
kim seokjinnie [1:50 p.m.]
I…yes, obviously I booked a place with three rooms, one for each relationship.

kim seokjinnie [1:50 p.m.]
With queen-sized beds. And our own bathrooms.

mini jiminie [1:51 p.m.]
we’re in!

imjhope [1:51 p.m.]
will give u the WWW asap

rm [1:52 p.m.]
yoongi is grumbling about it but he wants to go

rm [1:52 p.m.]
I can tell

suga-gloss [1:53 p.m.]
you’re annoying and I’m breaking up with you
suga-gloss [1:53 p.m.]

…after the beach trip though because this will give me ample opportunity to use my tongue in new and mysterious ways

---

tnt ❤️ [1:54 p.m.]

ooh, the scandal

---

mini jiminie [1:55 p.m.]

yeah that’s actually vaguely terrifying

---

imjhope [1:55 p.m.]

hey where’s jeonggukah in all of this??

---

tnt ❤️ [1:57 p.m.]

don’t worry he’s here w me n ta

---

tnt ❤️ [1:57 p.m.]

;) ;);)

---

tnt ❤️ [1:58 p.m.]

he’s not available at the moment but u can leave a message n he’ll get back to u when he’s not doing

---

tnt ❤️ [1:58 p.m.]

the thing he’s doing
mini jiminie [1:59 p.m.]

wut

tnt ❤️ [2:01 p.m.]

what

mini jiminie [2:02 p.m.]

W U T

imjhope [2:03 p.m.]

W

imjhope [2:03 p.m.]

U

imjhope [2:03 p.m.]

T

tnt ❤️ [2:04 p.m.]

;)
rm [2:07 p.m.]
wow didn’t realize this chat was gonna get borderline NSFW today

suga-gloss [2:08 p.m.]
shut up namjoon, nothing here is remotely nsfw

rm [2:09 p.m.]
you said the tongue thing

imjhope [2:10 p.m.]
yoongi hyung?

imjhope [2:12 p.m.]
min yoongi hyungnim?

imjhope [2:13 p.m.]
@MIN YOONGI HYUNG

mini jiminie [2:14 p.m.]
hoseokie hyung, bb, I think u killed him

kim seokjinnie [2:15 p.m.]
You didn’t kill him, Yoongi just got distracted by Namjoon sticking his tongue down his throat
imjhope [2:16 p.m.]
the nsfw makes a comeback

imjhope [2:16 p.m.]
so shocking n inappropriate, guys, come on

mini jiminie [2:17 p.m.]
*me

mini jiminie [2:17 p.m.]
he meant “come on me”

rm [2:18 p.m.]
…I’m actually trying to do production work right now, guys, come on

imjhope [2:18 p.m.]
ME

mini jiminie [2:18 p.m.]
ME
kim seokjinnie [2:18 p.m.]
ME

rm [2:20 p.m.]
really? even you, jin hyung?

kim seokjinnie [2:21 p.m.]
Sorry, Joon-ah. I just wanted to feel included.

mini jiminie [2:21 p.m.]
AW, U R SO INCLUDED JIN HYUNG!

mini jiminie [2:21 p.m.]
ILY!!!

kim seokjinnie [2:22 p.m.]
Oh, thanks, Jiminnie!

mini jiminie [2:22 p.m.]
YW ❤❤❤

mini jiminie [2:23 p.m.]
wait, tae disappeared tho
mini jiminie [2:23 p.m.]
taetae?

mini jiminie [2:24 p.m.]
tae ily

imjhope [2:25 p.m.]
@KIM TAEHYUNG AH

tnt ❤️ [2:29 p.m.]
ok we’re done

jeong-cooky [2:30 p.m.]
wait done with what?

jeong-cooky [2:30 p.m.]
tae whatre you talking about

mini jiminie [2:31 p.m.]
jeonggukkie, honey, scroll up babe

mini jiminie [2:32 p.m.]
wait for it
imjhope [2:33 p.m.]
wait 4 it

mini jiminie [2:34 p.m.]
waaaaaiiiiiitttttt…

jeong-cooky [2:34 p.m.]
KIM TAEHYUNG WHAT THE FUCK I WAS LITERALLY MAKING YOU A NUTELLA BANANA SANDWICH

mini jiminie [2:34 p.m.]
there it is

tnt ❤️ [2:34 p.m.]
yeah I know

tnt ❤️ [2:34 p.m.]
not really sure why anyone would think anything else, I mean I thought it was abundantly clear…?

jeong-cooky [2:35 p.m.]
I hate you let’s break up
tnt ❤ [2:36 p.m.]
you’re breaking up with me over text even tho we’re sitting right next to each other on this bed rn?

tnt ❤ [2:36 p.m.]
wow heartless

suga-gloss [2:36 p.m.]
JFC STOP SPAMMING THIS CHAT WITH THIS SHIT

jeong-cooky [2:37 p.m.]
that’s not how you spell never, stupid

tnt ❤ [2:38 p.m.]
don’t call me

stupid

that aint the way my name pronounce

imjhope [2:39 p.m.]
brockhampton, sweet

tnt ❤️ [2:39 p.m.]
yes see hobi hyung gets me

tnt ❤️ [2:39 p.m.]
lets elope hobi hyung ily

suga-gloss has left the chat

nti ❤️ has added suga-gloss to all the babes

suga-gloss has left the chat

tnt ❤️ [2:41 p.m.]
sad face :(((((( bye forever yoongi hyung I hate u n I miss u

jeong-cooky [2:42 p.m.]
what you hate him but you miss him how does this make sense

tnt ❤️ [2:43 p.m.]
it makes a lot of sense, like what part do you not understand
jeong-cooky [2:43 p.m.]

well obviously the core concept, taehyung

kim seokjinnie [2:43 p.m.]

ANYWAYS, Jeongguk, in case you missed it, you owe me 100,000 won for the beach house vacation we’re all taking in a couple weeks.

jeong-cooky [2:43 p.m.]

what

jeong-cooky [2:43 p.m.]

what even are you talking about

mini jiminie [2:44 p.m.]

I’m sure taetae can tell you through bites of his nutella banana sandwich

tnt ❤️ [2:44 p.m.]

wow my mouth is really full right now actually it’s hard to talk

tnt ❤️ [2:45 p.m.]

gukkie why would you do this to me it’s obviously ur fault
kim seokjinnie [2:46 p.m.]

All right everyone, anyways. See you guys soon, don’t forget to buy train tickets and give me the 100,000!

jeong-cooky [2:48 p.m.]

I still don’t know what the fuck’s going on?

tnt ❤ [2:48 p.m.]

you’re gonna pay 100,000 won to fuck me in an actual bed is what the fuck’s going on

mini jiminie [2:49 p.m.]

W U T

imjhope [2:49 p.m.]

W

imjhope [2:49 p.m.]

U

imjhope [2:49 p.m.]

T

kim seokjinnie has added suga-gloss to all the babes
suga-gloss [3:05 p.m.]

jesus you all don’t give up

suga-gloss [3:06 p.m.]

upon scrolling through the latest messages I’m blocking you all

suga-gloss has left the chat


tnt ❤ [3:07 p.m.]

awwwwwwwwwwww

kim seokjinnie [3:09 p.m.]

Don’t forget the money! See you soon!

jeong-cooky [3:11 p.m.]

jesus fucking christ.

jeong-cooky [3:12 p.m.]

fine.

And that’s how Jeon Jeongguk ends up paying Kim Seokjin 100,000 won to fuck Kim Taehyung in an actual bed.
(Actually, Jeongguk pays Taehyung’s share of the rental fee too, and he buys Taehyung and Tata their train tickets. It’s their birthday, for Christ’s sake. It’s not like Jeongguk is going to *not* buy his boyfriend a nice mini-holiday just because Taehyung sent intentionally misleading texts in a groupchat.

He *does* maybe pin Taehyung up against the wall and fuck him until he comes all over Jeongguk’s abs, but like—that’s a different story unrelated to the groupchat event.

And they both really like it, so. You know. Yeah.)

Tata is a veritable *mess* to travel with.

Which, okay, that’s really probably the least surprising thing about all of this. Definitely less surprising than the fact that all seven of them had managed to last-minute clear their schedules between Christmas and New Year’s, or that they’d all found relatively cheap arrangements to get from Seoul to their hometowns and then to Mokpo for a few days before all returning to Seoul together on the 30th. Less surprising than Seokjin just up and deciding the trip was going to happen at all.

But yeah. Tata is a mess. Taehyung and Jeongguk get up absurdly early the Sunday before Christmas to get to the station on time, and Tata spends their prep time unpacking Taehyung’s bag repeatedly and repacking it to include different clothing articles and random objects that no one needs while traveling, like a Sumiko Gurashi dinosaur charm, a sparkly bouncy ball, and an entire clothes-drying rack (“They like to use it like a jungle gym,” Taehyung sighs). Tata also snakes around Jeongguk like a boa constrictor, inhibiting Jeongguk’s own packing abilities, and they knock over the coffee maker while it’s brewing. Three times.

At least they can ride all the way to Daegu together. The bullet train from Seoul to Busan passes through Taehyung’s hometown, and originally Jeongguk had wanted to suggest that they spend one night there, so that maybe he could meet Taehyung’s family—

But no. That would be too forward, Jeongguk thinks. Especially when he’d made a joke about Taehyung potentially meeting Jeongguk’s mom on the 27th, when Taehyung and Tata are taking the
train down from Daegu to Busan to meet Jeongguk and Cooky for the train trip to Mokpo. Taehyung had laughed awkwardly, brushed it off, made it clear he didn’t want that.

Jeongguk had dropped it, although part of him had been vaguely and tenderly disappointed.

They’re mostly quiet on the train, Taehyung staring out the window and Jeongguk in the aisle seat holding Tata. Taehyung has his earphones in as he strokes Cooky, who keeps refusing to leave Taehyung’s arms; Tata jabbers on in Jeongguk’s ear about why “Hello” is the best SHINee song for the entire ride. It’s honestly amazing how many opinions Tata has about each note and line and dance move in that music video.

Finally, the announcement comes that they’re nearing Dongdaegu Station. Jeongguk pulls Taehyung’s bag down off the rack for him, sets it on the floor at their feet.

“See you Thursday?” Taehyung asks as he pulls out his earbuds, still holding Cooky up so the little rabbit can rest their head on Taehyung’s left shoulder.

Jeongguk nods, trying ineffectually to pry Tata off his arm. They’re doing the thing where they make their arms and legs into continuous loops again. “Yeah, text me when you get home.”

“I will,” Taehyung promises, peering up at Jeongguk from beneath his blond bangs.

“You have your ticket, right? For the 27th?” Jeongguk asks.

“Yeah,” Taehyung says. “See you in Busan.” He’s being so quiet and it’s strange, seeing him like this. Even if he’s obviously tired, which he is. But Taehyung just seems unusually sad.

Jeongguk is sad too.

Cooky coos in Taehyung’s arms, and Taehyung scratches at their ears, sending chills down Jeongguk’s spine. Tata climbs up from Jeongguk’s leg and extends their arms so they can double-wrap them around Jeongguk’s head.

“Tata,” Taehyung scolds.
Tata makes the cutest little distressed beeping sound. <<JK don’t wanna go don’t wanna MISS YOU heart heart heart heart heart.>>

Jeongguk swallows. “It’s okay, Tata-love. It’s only four days.”

Tata sighs out a melodic synth-noise just as the train jolts and starts slowing down in preparation to stop. They’ve got a couple minutes, but people are already getting up into the aisle and lining up to disembark. Jeongguk stands so Taehyung will have an easier time getting out of their row, and Tata swings down so they’re dangling from Jeongguk’s neck like an oversized necklace. Tata hugs Jeongguk tight and finally extends their arms, lowering themselves to the ground. They let go and their arms go back to their normal size, and they hug Jeongguk’s ankle really quick before jumping up into Taehyung’s arms with Cooky.

“Come on, Cooky,” Jeongguk murmurs, stepping closer to Taehyung and wishing they could kiss just one more time before they go. But alas, a public train car isn’t the place for that sort of PDA. Not between two guys, even if they probably are already being pretty obvious. Taehyung is looking at Jeongguk with reckless, desperate moon eyes. Jeongguk is sure his own expression isn’t more subtle.

“See you soon,” Taehyung whispers, handing Cooky over and clinging to Tata with the sort of distressed embrace he usually saves for late at night when he’s panicking or breaking down, the sort of embrace he turns on Jeongguk and Jeongguk can’t help but ache for it, that impossible cling of Taehyung’s that so closely mirrors Tata’s. Maybe that’s why Tata has such versatile arms—not because they’re meant for exploring and being Super Curious, but because they’re meant for holding on.

“I love you,” Jeongguk whispers, cradling Cooky close. “Merry Christmas, Taehyung. Merry Christmas, Tata.”

Tata starts playing a recording of Hugh Martin’s “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas”. Interestingly enough, Tata is pretty fucking good at being basically a Bluetooth speaker.

…Holy shit, is Tata equipped with Bluetooth?

“Jeonggukkie,” Cooky whispers, tugging at Jeongguk’s sleeve. “Jeonggukkie, come on, please, wanna hug Taehyungie-hyung one more time.” Jeongguk looks down and Cooky looks pretty fucking distressed—as bad as Tata, who is now marching around Taehyung’s feet lighting their head up in patterns of red and white and green, their expression Extremely Distraught.
“Jeongguk,” Taehyung whispers, like he’s about to cry. He reaches out and Of course Jeongguk hands Cooky over again, reveling in the warm-sugar-butterfly feeling of Taehyung’s hands stroking carefully through Cooky’s fur. He tips himself in too, and Taehyung rests his head on Jeongguk’s shoulder. Tata jumps up to cling around Jeongguk’s ribs, and the four of them breathe together as people push past them down the aisle, the train nearing the platform.

Finally, Taehyung sighs. “Cooky, I’ll see you soon, babe. Don’t be sad, okay? You’ll make Jeonggukkie sad too.” Taehyung looks up at Jeongguk then. Holds eye contact as he presses their foreheads together, hands still moving over Cooky’s ears. “I love you,” Taehyung whispers, always so shy and careful and delicate as he says it.

“Love you too,” Jeongguk manages, a raspy whisper as Tata drops down and clings to Jeongguk’s ankles. “See you in a few days.”

An announcement echoes through the car: *We will soon make a brief stop at Dongdaegu. Dongdaegu.*

Taehyung glances towards the door. “Fuck.”

“Go,” Jeongguk says, smiling weakly as he takes Cooky back into his arms. “Love you. See you.”

“Text me when you get there,” Taehyung says, already grabbing his bag and stepping away with Tata posing like a ship captain in the crow’s nest except their ship is the yellow suitcase in Taehyung’s grasp. “Text me on the train!”

“I will,” Jeongguk promises. “See you soon.”

Taehyung and Tata hurry down the aisle, the last ones off as they disappear out of the car. Jeongguk looks down at Cooky with a sigh as he sits back into their seat.

“Well,” Jeongguk murmurs to the fluffy rabbit slumped in his arms like a ragdoll. “Busan, here we come, I guess.”

“Jeonggukkie,” Cooky whispers. “Can I ride in your backpack?”
“Sure,” Jeongguk says, standing up to grab his bag off the rack above their heads. He sits down, gets settled, smiles as Cooky climbs into the backpack and tugs the zipper up as high as they can reach from inside the bag. “Want some help?”

“Yeah,” Cooky says miserably.

Jeongguk zips them all the way inside and cradles the bag in his lap. Cooky likes small, dark rabbit-burrowy spaces.

tnt ❤ to jeong-cooky

tnt ❤ [8:37 a.m.]

made it home

tnt ❤ [8:37 a.m.]

had to ride a couple stops on the local train and tata wouldn’t stop running up and down the racks up by the ceiling

tnt ❤ [8:38 a.m.]

everyone was looking at them because they were stepping on their bags

Me [8:39 a.m.]

fuck I miss you so fucking much tae

Me [8:40 a.m.]

I literally miss people staring rudely at tata and then at us because tata is being extra, wtf is this
idk maybe it’s because

Me [8:45 a.m.]

it’s fine. I’m pretty sure I already know anyways.

will you be lonely if I stop texting you and sleep? I’m in my room right now and the bed is just super inviting. like. the only inviting thing about being here.

I can give tata my phone but they might just send you stuff in Japanese and/or strings of emojis

Me [8:50 a.m.]

go to sleep, tae baby

text me when you wake up

!!!!!!!! JK大好き ❤❤❤❤❤❤ cooky！も！！！
Me [8:52 a.m.]

hey, ta❤

Me [8:52 a.m.]

do you like being home?

tnt❤ [8:53 a.m.]

好き！好き！めっちゃ好き！but not home in general, just BED taetae has soft bed, 好き！好き！

Jeongguk racks his brain for whatever he can remember from the few Japanese lessons he’s had. He’s pretty sure those symbols mean essentially “I like it”.

tnt❤ [8:54 a.m.]

sleepy sleepy gonna sleep taetae has many many BLANKETS!!! tatatata loves blankets loves JK and cooky!

Jeongguk’s smile is absurdly wide. He unzips his backpack to show Cooky, and Cooky blinks blearily at the messages and does a little shiver-shake with how happy they get reading them.

Me [8:52 a.m.]

goodnight, tata-chan.

Jeongguk kisses Cooky between the ears.

Me [8:52 a.m.]

cooky says goodnight, too. and we love you back, the most ❤

The days between Jeongguk’s arrival at home and his reunion with Taehyung and Tata pass way too slowly. He and Cooky shoot the breeze with Jeonghyun-hyung and his coyote daemon; they help their mom and her arctic fox daemon in the kitchen. They talk about degree plans with their dad—well, Jeongguk talks and Cooky huddles in an intimidated ball while Mr. Jeon’s hawk daemon eyes the rabbit with that piercing fatherly gaze. Jeongguk spends every minute he can spare texting Taehyung and Tata. On Christmas Day, his whole family goes to visit other relatives, and they eat the same foods they eat every year at Christmas. Jeongguk gives his family the few small presents he was able to pack from Seoul, and his parents still don’t really understand why he wanted to go so far for college, but Jeongguk doesn’t mind them not understanding. Not now that he has Taehyung and Tata, who do understand.

(Taehyung and Tata kind of understand everything. They FaceTime on Christmas and spend most of the time curled on their sides in their too-far-away beds, daemons lying tucked into their chests, talking about how much their families just don’t get it, any of it. Jeongguk and Cooky fall asleep still on the call, and when they wake up in the morning, Taehyung and Tata still haven’t disconnected, although they’re both asleep and the camera is focused mostly on one of Tata’s pajama-clad limbs.)

Finally, it’s December 27th. Jeongguk gets up early with no trouble (for once), gets packed and ready to go with time to spare. His mom is dropping him off at the station, and she’s honestly more put-together in her dress and scarf than Jeongguk is in his sweats and hoodie. Her fox daemon curls around her ankles and nuzzles at Cooky when Cooky shivers from the cold.
“You know,” she says in the car, “I haven’t said anything because—well, just, Jeongguk, you seem really happy. I don’t know if it’s because of these new friends you keep talking about or what, but… I don’t know. Is there something you’d like to tell me, honey? Have you met someone?”

Jeongguk’s mom is open-minded and kind and lovely. Always has been. But that doesn’t mean Jeongguk is exactly ready to come out, especially not when they’re almost at the station and his mom deserves better than a one-minute ‘oh, yeah, actually I’m into guys and I’m dating one and he’s meeting me here at the station and I’m contemplating dragging him into the public bathroom and fucking him right there in one of the stalls—’

Okay, Jeongguk obviously wouldn’t say that last part. But he is kind of thinking it.

“Jeongguk-ah?” His mom asks.

Jeongguk sighs and clutches Cooky to his chest. In all of his family, including his extended family even, he’s the only one whose daemon is prey. “I’m just—feeling settled, Eomma, I don’t know,” Jeongguk says. “It’s no big deal. Just getting comfortable in Seoul for real, it feels like. Even though I’ve been there a couple years.”

Jeongguk’s mom sighs. “You’re going to stay, aren’t you? After you finish school.”

Jeongguk closes his eyes. His mom pulls to a stop in front of Busan Station. “Maybe,” Jeongguk says. “I don’t know, Eomma. But I love you. I’ll text you when I get to Mokpo.”

Jeongguk’s mom smiles. “Okay, sweetie. But you know you can tell me anything, right?”

“I know,” Jeongguk says, leaning over the center console to kiss her cheek. “See you in a couple months.”

Jeongguk and Cooky climb out of the car and practically run into the station. They have to search out the right platform and wait ten minutes, but then there’s an announcement for an arriving train from Daegu, and finally, finally —

“Jeongguk!” Taehyung shouts as he scans out of the bullet train gates, rushing forward with Tata perched on his suitcase again. His hair is bright red and shiny like brand new dye jobs always are, and Jeongguk’s heart pounds.
“Tae,” Jeongguk practically gasps, stumbling forward to drag Taehyung into a hug, Cooky squished between them. Tata extends their arms to wrap around both of them and Cooky too, and the four of them stand there right in the middle of the station holding onto each other for at least a minute before Tata gets distracted and runs off to investigate a vending machine.

“Your hair,” Jeongguk whispers into Taehyung’s ear. “You look so Christmassy like this, babe.” He rubs his nose back and forth against Taehyung’s.

Taehyung giggles. “I match Tata. They were the one who wanted me to do it. Last night, they got all adamant about it.”

Jeongguk bites his lip. “I bet you and Tata are really cute when you hang out just the two of you.”

Taehyung smiles, cheeks rosy red but not quite as vivid as his hair. “Maybe.”

They draw apart and Don’t Kiss Because This Is a Public Space™, and then they grab pastries and coffee from a station bakery and climb onto their train to Mokpo.

“I missed you so much,” Taehyung says, curling up in the window seat so his feet are half-under him and his head is on Jeongguk’s shoulder. Cooky climbs immediately into the little nest Taehyung is making with the soft travel blanket in his lap, and Jeongguk can feel Taehyung both physically and mentally, in the hidden soul-depths of his mind, gentle and considerate and warm.

“Here, hold on,” Jeongguk says, pushing Taehyung away to lift up the armrest between their seats so Taehyung can fit more completely against his side. “That’s better.”

“Ta,” Taehyung calls, grinning as Tata pokes their head out from behind a suitcase on the overhead rack across the aisle. “C’mere.”

Tata swings down like a heart-headed Tarzan and curls up in Jeongguk’s arms. Together, the four of them sleep, all touching, the soft soul-contact of it floating through Jeongguk’s dreams until it feels like his and Cooky’s consciousness is tied irrevocably to Taehyung’s, and to Tata’s.

And, well. Maybe it is.
“I call sharing a room with Hobi-hyung and Mangie!” Jimin shouts as soon as they burst into the house Seokjin had rented for them.

Yoongi scoffs. “Of course you’re sharing with Hobi and Mang. That’s the whole point of this.”

“100,000 won to fuck Taehyung on a real bed, yeah,” Jimin giggles, smirking as he shoves at Jeongguk’s shoulder and then turns to Hoseok for a truly NSFW kiss right in the middle of the entryway.

“Get a room,” Yoongi grumbles.

“That’s what we’re working on,” Taehyung whines, leaning into Jeongguk, his red hair shining in the winter-slanted sunlight pouring through the windows.

“God, I just can’t get over you,” Jeongguk says. “Your hair. It’s so fucking—ugh.”

Taehyung smiles and leans in for a lingering kiss. “Thanks, babe. Tata is glad you like it too.”

“Get a room,” Yoongi gripes, slipping out of his shoes.

“Where is Tata, anyways?” Jimin asks.

Taehyung shrugs, which is his usual response to that question and everyone (especially Jimin, as Taehyung’s Actual Best Friend) knows it. The answer comes thirty seconds later, when Tata appears down the hallway flailing overlong arms and making the polka dots on their pajamas light up in patterns (which makes no sense because they are, in fact, made of fabric). They’re also beeping loudly to tell Taehyung and Jeongguk and Cooky which room they should have because it has a balcony and is therefore the best.
No one except Taehyung and Jeongguk and Cooky understands any of what Tata has said, but they still let Tata claim the room when Taehyung explains. Jeongguk and Taehyung walk in, close the door, throw their stuff on the settee, and fall onto the covers of an actual queen-sized bed instead of a dorm room twin. It feels so domestic, being away from it all, even if they’re at the beach and it’s December.

“Whatcha thinkin’,” Taehyung whispers after a few seconds of warm silence.

Jeongguk hums. “Nothing,” he murmurs, turning his head to look at Taehyung’s profile, the long line of his neck, the golden radiance of his skin. “Just thinking how pretty you are.”

Only it’s not just that. Seeing Taehyung like this is making Jeongguk think ridiculous things, future things, like falling into a Real Bed in a Real Bedroom in a Real House with Taehyung every night, like, forever. Jeongguk imagines Cooky all sleepy and frightened and snuggly like they get sometimes; Tata beeping and telling cute stories that Jeongguk can understand because in this mirage of a future life, he and Taehyung and Tata and Cooky have been a unit for so long that Tata’s language is no longer a mystery at all.

(Actually, Jeongguk is pretty good at Tata-Tongue now. He also coined the term Tata-Tongue, and Tata liked it so much their limbs practically exploded from them in big waves of excited flailing.)

“Worth the 100,000 won?” Taehyung asks, grinning and closing his eyes, red hair fanning in a halo on the pillow.

Jeongguk nods, a lump in his throat. “Yeah,” he croaks, reaching up to pet Taehyung’s hair.

Taehyung giggles, shy. “You haven’t even fucked me yet.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Jeongguk says. “It was worth it, hon. I promise.”

Tata opens the sliding door and goes to do gymnastics on the railing of the balcony, beeping their approval. Taehyung opens his eyes and grins. “I guess Tata thinks it was worth it, too.”

Jeongguk hums. “They have good judgment.”
Taehyung scoffs. “They have terrible judgment.”

“Worth it, Tae. Seriously.”

Taehyung swallows, and Jeongguk thinks—hopes, prays—that Taehyung believes him.

The first day passes in a haze of napping and then grocery shopping and then snack-eating and then dinner preparations. They start drinking early, wine for everyone except Jimin and Hoseok, who insist on coffee and Bailey’s.

“Wanna watch a movie?” Namjoon suggests once they’re all curled up in the living room, cozy and tipsy and full from Seokjin’s always-incredible cooking.

“We’ll just end up talking over the whole thing,” Hoseok points out. Jimin and Taehyung nod seriously.

Yoongi shakes his head. “At least you know that about yourselves.”

“We could tell scary stories!” Taehyung suggests, earning him skeptical looks from everyone, including all of their daemons. “What!”

“Truth or dare?” Jimin suggests.

“Look for board games in the closet?” Seokjin offers.

“Spin the bottle,” Jeongguk says, dry as anything, which makes Yoongi snicker.

“Wait,” Taehyung says, “I know what we should do. We should hear the story of how Yoongi-hyung and Namjoon-hyung and Seokjin-hyung met.”

Yoongi snorts, and Namjoon looks kind of deer-in-the-headlights. In the corner of the room, Koya’s head perks up, and Shooky starts cackling that rough little laugh of theirs.
“I’ll tell it,” Seokjin offers.

“No,” Namjoon whines, slumping against the side of the couch. “Don’t do this.”

Yoongi’s smile is merciless. “No, come on, let’s.”

“Please!” Taehyung begs, clapping his hands a couple times. Tata, who is perched on top of the lamp in the corner, fireman-slides down the post and comes to sit in Taehyung’s lap, all attentive and focused like they hardly ever are.

“Please no,” says Namjoon.

Taehyung pouts. “Come on, hyung. As a birthday present. To me. Us. Can’t you see how interested Tata is?”

Seokjin looks at Namjoon and shrugs. “He has a point. It is their birthday.”

Namjoon closes his eyes and runs his fingers through Yoongi’s hair in a nervous gesture. It’s so very Namjoon, really, to comfort his boyfriend instead of himself in a time of distress. Especially when his boyfriend is, in fact, not actually distressed.

“All right,” Yoongi says. “First of all, let’s get one thing straight. My version of this story is the correct one, and anyone who tells it differently is patently wrong. So don’t interrupt. Namjoon.”

“I haven’t even done anything!” Namjoon shouts. Koya and Shooky and RJ all come over and climb onto the couch with their humans, and Cooky snuggles smaller in Jeongguk’s arms.

“No,” Yoongi sighs, “But I’m sure you’re going to.”

“Just tell the story,” Taehyung begs.
“Yeah, okay. It went like this.”

The first time Yoongi and Shooky meet Namjoon and Koya, it’s late at night and they’re in a bar near campus and Yoongi is unfortunately very not-drunk.

Namjoon is fucking smashed.

(“Hey,” Namjoon says, “You didn’t know my name yet! And I was not smashed.”)

“See, what the fuck did I just say? Shut up, Namjoon,” Yoongi says.)

“Hiiiiiiii- oh, ” Namjoon slurs, tripping his way into Yoongi’s arms, which is terrible because Namjoon is considerably taller and bulkier than Yoongi, and also way more drunk, and generally just more a mess of a human being.

A really annoyingly gorgeous mess, but, you know. A mess.

“What did you even trip over,” Yoongi drawls, Shooky cackling in his ear as the gangly giraffe person and his sleepy-looking koala daemon work on righting themselves against a chair (or, you know, the leg of a chair in the daemon’s case, because the koala is really pretty small).

“I don’t know,” Namjoon whines.

(“You still don’t know his name,” Seokjin says, stroking RJ and Shooky, who are hanging out in his lap.)
Yoongi glares. “Shut up. What am I supposed to call him? We all know his name now.”

“You could call him—” Jeongguk starts.

“Shh, Gukkie! I’m trying to hear the story!” Tae interrupts, eyes wide and locked on Yoongi. Tata is in his lap, and the little heart-headed force of nature is just as fixated as their human.

“You all should all take a page from Taehyung and Tata’s book,” Yoongi scolds, crossing his arms.

“Just get on with it!” Jimin yelps.)

Namjoon looks stupid and cute, and Yoongi tries to ignore it, because he is on a mission to go home.

“I was—jus’ walking,” Namjoon says. “‘S like the world wanted me to fall.”

Yoongi chuckles even though he really means not to, and Shooky leaps off his shoulder onto the bar and then the chair and finally to the floor, so they can regard the koala creature from less of a distance. The koala blinks at Shooky with drowsy black eyes and then sits down, evidently too tired to stand any longer.

(“Wait, so you’re using my name like you know it but you’re acting like you don’t know Koya’s?” Namjoon protests.

“Hyung,” Taehyung says, turning his head and raising a finger to his lips in perfect time with Tata, who does the same. “Shh.”)

“Where are you even trying to go that the universe is intentionally working to make you fall?” Yoongi asks, crossing his arms as he watches this pretty blond guy whose name he doesn’t know
lean sloppily all over the bar.

“‘Nother drink,” the guy says.

Yoongi puffs out his lips and shakes his head. “Nope. You’re, like, an eleven on a scale from one to ten of drunkness. You should drink some water and go home. Do not pass go; do not collect 200 dollars.”

Blond Dude frowns, and his pout is honestly kind of striking Yoongi through the heart with how annoyingly convincing it is. “But—but wanted more beer ‘n ’sonly eleneven—neven—elevnen, hyung.”

Yoongi looks down at his watch, looks up at the dude with the most judgmental gaze he can muster, and shakes his head. “First of all, it is 1:49 a.m., which is why I am trying to leave, because I’ve been here for four whole hours and I am somehow still disdainfully sober. Second of all, ‘hyung’? What the fuck is that? How would you know?”

Blond Dude grins and his teeth are very white and straight and annoying. “Hyung! I know who you are; you’re Min Yoongi. You’re like—like, Professor Kang’s favorite student in the—the history of ever. Well, maybe second-favorite. But still. Ever.” The words are punctuated by drunken hiccups and general disorientation.

Yoongi blinks. On the ground, Shooky starts vibrating in that weird nonsensical way of theirs and jumps up on the koala’s head and hops up and down a few times before settling between the daemon’s light blue ears. That’s—a little forward, yeah, but not unreasonably so, especially because the koala and its owner don’t seem to really notice or mind. “Um,” Yoongi says, “Well. Second-favorite sounds—that’s—maybe not ever.”

“Yes,” Blond Dude says. “You are. He even played your final project for some production seminar for us and it was amazing, hyung. Yoongi-hyung. Hyung, you’re really pretty, and your music’s really good, and I bet your tongue is really—”

(“I did not say any of that!” Namjoon shouts, straightening up in his seat next to Yoongi as Koya lifts their sleepy head off his thigh, looks around, and goes back to sleep.)
Yoongi throws his hands into the air. “Do you wanna fuckin’ tell it?”

Namjoon sighs overdramatically. “Well if I have to for the sake of veracity, then sure!”

“Just tell us! It was getting cute!” Taehyung chirps. In his lap, Tata beeps and vibrates and extends their arms until they’re really long just so that they can fling them around like sine waves.

Namjoon rolls his eyes. “It wasn’t getting cute. Yoongi is just telling it wrong.”


“Whatever, hyung,” Namjoon says. “I will continue from where you started getting shit wrong.”

Min Yoongi is really fucking pretty in person. He’s also reasonably drunk, maybe as drunk as Namjoon. Okay, maybe not quite as drunk as Namjoon. Still. Reasonably.

Namjoon grins. Yoongi is kind of a frightened baby deer, soft and lovely and uncertain in the face of Namjoon’s praise.

“I know who you are; you’re Min Yoongi. You’re Professor Kang’s favorite student,” Namjoon says. “Well, maybe second-favorite. But still. ” The words are very smooth and contain no indication of Namjoon’s reasonable level of drunkenness, which is great.

(“Whatever,” Yoongi scoffs.)

Yoongi blinks. His daemon jumps on Koya’s head and sits between their light blue ears. “Um,” Yoongi says, “Well. Second-favorite sounds—that’s—maybe not ever. I’m not—you don’t have to act like I’m really impressive or something. I’m not.”
“Yes, you are. Kang played your final project from last semester’s production seminar for one of my classes and it was amazing, hyung,” Namjoon says. On the floor, Koya looks very content to have Yoongi’s adorable cookie of a daemon nesting on their head, and they hum and look very warm.


Namjoon nods. “It was very good. Your song.”

“Um—I should…” Yoongi says, gesturing at the door. “Shooky, c’mon.”

“Shooky,” Namjoon whispers to himself, because he’s drunk and that’s just about the cutest name ever, especially for a little chocolate chip cookie daemon.

(“Shooky is a fuckin’ cinnamon cookie, Kim Namjoon,” Yoongi says. In Seokjin’s lap, Shooky leaps up and sticks their tongue out at Namjoon in protest.

Namjoon raises his hands in surrender. “I didn’t know that when we met! I’m telling it that way to convey my original thought process upon first encountering you in close proximity! It’s authentic.”

“My way was better,” Yoongi grumbles, crossing his arms.

In the loveseat, Tata leaps into Jeongguk’s lap, and Cooky hops over to rest on Taehyung’s thighs because Tata is aggressively taking up their original seat.

“Honestly, I’m pretty enraptured by both methods,” Taehyung says, carding his fingers through Cooky’s pink fur without really thinking about it.

Next to him, Jeongguk shudders.)

“Wait,” Namjoon says, even though Yoongi isn’t actually making any move to leave. “Can I at least
—look, you produce shit that’s like— really fuckin’ good. Better than me, maybe. But I have lyrics—I don’t know if you write any but I love writing and I would love to collab with you—"

“Yoongi!” A voice calls from the back of the bar.

(“That was Donghyuk, and you know his name. ”)

“I didn’t know it at the time!”)

“Shit,” Yoongi says, shaking his head. “That’s my friend—they’re all way more drunk than me and I told them I was leaving and now I’m not and they’re gonna see that I’m not and make me stay—”

“We can split a cab,” Namjoon suggests, grabbing Yoongi’s wrist without thinking and dragging him towards the door.

“Thought you were getting another drink,” Yoongi says, stumbling along behind Namjoon.

“It’s fine,” Namjoon says, “I wanna talk to you. ”

Yoongi scoffs. “Look, kid, I’m not that good—”

“You are,” Namjoon says as they practically tumble out onto the street and over to a deserted corner. At their feet, Shooky is still sitting on Koya, and somehow (somehow) both of them have made it out of the bar with their humans. “I wanna write lyrics for you. If you’d let me.”

Yoongi crosses his arms. “Why.”

“I just said, hyung, you’re good—”
“No,” Yoongi shakes his head. “You wouldn’t have heard them in an instrumental piece I made for a class, but I already rap. I write my own shit. Why should I want to work with you.”

Namjoon raises an eyebrow, smirk growing as the cold outside air dims the drunkenness he’s feeling. “Because,” he says, words aimed like a pistol locked and loaded, “I’m Kim Namjoon. Professor Kang’s first-favorite student.”

Yoongi actually takes a step back, eyes wide. “Oh. Shit. He played your song from— shit. That was— good.”

Namjoon crowds Yoongi up against the wall, licking his lips all powerful and thrilled and committed to this. “So?” He asks. “What do you say?”

(“That’s pushing it,” Yoongi says. “You did not look that cool practically trapping me up against a wall in fuckin’ Sinchon, you asshole.”)

Namjoon shrugs. “I was pretty fuckin’ cool.”

“You were pretty fucking drunk,” Yoongi says, eyes locked with Namjoon’s.

“You were too.”

They glare at each other for a couple of moments and then Tata extends their arms out and it looks like maybe they’re going to try to knock Namjoon and Yoongi’s heads together. Taehyung steps in, which is to say he snatches Tata out of Jeongguk’s lap and kind of tosses them onto the floor. Tata gets distracted trying to wiggle their ridiculous limbs underneath the couch.

“Couldn’t you have just grabbed their arms?” Hoseok asks.

Taehyung blinks, very solemn. “They would’ve just kept extending them from a spot beyond my grip. Trust me, I have played all of these games with them before. They’re clever as fuck and uncannily creative, but they’re also my literal soul.”
“Anyways,” Seokjin says, “Who’s going to finish the story?”

Namjoon and Yoongi are still looking at each other, both clearly a bit dazed on the memory of what they’re telling.

“Um,” Namjoon says, biting his lip and glancing over at Yoongi’s mouth.

Yoongi doesn’t even bother to respond. He’s eyeing Namjoon’s bitten lip with a familiar hunger.

Seokjin sighs. “Fine. I wasn’t even there, but I’ve heard this story enough times to do it justice.”

Yoongi’s pupils darken, and he leans heavily against the wall so Namjoon can tower over him more, eyes flicking to Namjoon’s lips. “Fuck.”

“Yeah,” Namjoon says, forehead pressed to Yoongi’s. He ducks lower. “You wanna make out with me?”

“Oh, hell yes.”

Namjoon goes home with Yoongi and they don’t fuck because they are both definitely drunk, but they do make out a lot. And they fuck the next day, in the morning, like the ridiculous soulmates they are. Because, they are. Yeah. It’s love at first bite.

Not, like, a bite of Shooky, though, because that would be weird.

“That is the worst way you could possibly have ended that story,” Yoongi says, reaching out like he’s about to whack Seokjin upside the head. He thinks better of it when he sees Seokjin’s Serious
Face, though, and instead he just kind of ruffles their oldest hyung’s hair a little bit. Seokjin narrows his eyes, but he doesn’t say anything.

“I liked it,” Taehyung announces, settling deeper into Jeongguk’s side. He’s still holding Cooky, and Jeongguk really doesn’t mind the showers of sparks that erupt from his spine and glitter through his lungs at the contact. It’s relaxing to just be like this, wine-drunk but not too far gone, snuggled on a vacation house loveseat on a cool December night, on a trip with all their best friends. Time away from everything, when Taehyung and Jeongguk can find every excuse to fall deeper into each other.

Which. Hmm.

Well, whatever the hell that’s all about. It’s less scary to think of Taehyung and Tata in terms of _forever_ when Taehyung’s long fingers are in Cooky’s fur, rubbing behind Cooky’s ears, tugging just barely at Cooky’s tail. There’s something about the sweet-syrup bond-feeling that comes over Jeongguk in moments like these, especially when Tata is curled up with them buzzing away and blinking excitedly up at them as they talk about some cool bug they found up by the ceiling or explains why their favorite ice cream flavor is that one Ben and Jerry’s kind with white chocolate and cherries or presents a treatise on the importance of stroking Cooky’s ears correctly.

“ _Anyways, _” Yoongi says, “Seokjin-hyung is right about at least the making out part. And we did have sex in the morning, but Namjoon was kind of hungover and it was disappointing.”

“Was not,” Namjoon scoffs, shaking his head and shooting Yoongi a smug look.

Yoongi blushes. “It _was_. Shut up.”

Namjoon just keeps chuckling. “Whatever you say.”

“Wait,” Jimin interrupts, “How did you guys meet Jin-hyung, then?”

Seokjin blushes, and when Jeongguk looks, Namjoon and Yoongi are a little bit red too. Interesting.

“Can I tell?” Hoseok asks. “I was there, you know.”
Jimin furrows his brow. “Wait, you knew they didn’t all meet at the same time?”

Hoseok nods. “Yeah, of course. I’ve been rooming with Joon since before he even got with Yoongi-hyung.”

Jimin shakes his head. “I can’t believe you didn’t tell me. We even talked to them about this and you didn’t tell me you already knew!”

Hoseok pouts. “Well I didn’t know everything! I just knew about Namjoon meeting Yoongi-hyung and like insta-dating him, and then about Seokjin-hyung coming in, like, six months later!”

“Sounds like you did indeed know everything,” Taehyung teases, tipping his head against Jeongguk’s. They’re lounging low enough on the loveseat that both of them can rest their sleepy heads against the back cushion, Jeongguk’s temple on Taehyung’s shoulder, their bodies all aligned.

Hoseok shrugs. “Well, I mean, I didn’t know about the whole daemon-touching—”

“Hyung!” Jimin interrupts, “Inappropriate!” He looks suddenly panicked as he tries (and fails) to nudge Hoseok really subtly, and Jeongguk furrows his brow.

“Why?” Taehyung asks, throwing his legs over Jeongguk’s and petting Cooky a little harder, nearly eliciting a moan from Jeongguk. “Wait, does it make you guys feel weird that we, like, cuddle Tata and Cooky in front of you? I mean, you all do it too. Well, Jiminie and Hoseokie-hyung only do it when they can get theirs to sit still for more than ten seconds, but still.”

Tata suddenly leaps up from the side of the couch and worms their way into the cradle of Jeongguk’s lap, and Cooky squeaks and wiggles their nose and lets Tata chirp at them and tug them in with surprisingly normal-sized arms.

“It’s fine,” Jimin smooths over, patting Hoseok on the leg. Those two practically never have their daemons with them; Mang and Chimmy are the most energetic, happy little things Jeongguk has ever encountered, and they’re always dancing in the corner or tumbling on the squishy mat Hoseok bought for them or generally having an absurdly good time on the side of the room, wild and giggling and uninterested in things to do with human conversation. “We don’t really mind. Just kidding.”
Jimin’s smile is flimsy and sort of—nervous? Jeongguk writes it off, because Tata is cooing up at him and he can’t resist the world’s coolest, cutest daemon.

<<cooky! TAETAETAETAE JK go to BED initiate go to bed protocol, JK?>>

Jeongguk smiles and shakes his head. “Don’t worry, Ta-baby, we’re not going to bed yet.” Tata shakes their head and looks weirdly distressed, but Taehyung just shrugs and clearly doesn’t have any more idea of what’s going on than Jeongguk does. In Taehyung’s lap, Cooky is still calm and maybe even sleeping; their eyes are closed, and their breathing is slow, and they’re quieter than they normally are when they doze, not twitching or sniffling or anything.

The look of them in Taehyung’s arms is very nice.

“Anyways,” Hoseok says. “Can I tell?”

Yoongi picks his feet up off the floor so he can stretch out on the couch, his head in Seokjin’s lap and his feet in Namjoon’s. RJ and Shooky and Koya make room for him, and Yoongi settles in like he was meant to be there, which—yeah. He probably was. “I’m going to sleep. Don’t care,” Yoongi says.

“Why not,” Namjoon offers.

“Yes!” Hoseok cheers. “Okay, so. What happened was that Namjoon and Yoongi and I were hosting a party, and we invited Donghyuk and Ikje and Tzuyu and Jihyo and—just, you know, the usual crowd. Seokjin got invited through the grapevine and ended up tagging along. So basically, I’m in the kitchen with Namjoon and Yoongi and we’re all just kind of sitting on the counter and joking around and drinking, and then—in walks Kim Seokjin.”

Seokjin offers a joking bow, and then he looks around the room with his Most Intense expression, and then he blows a kiss.

“Wow,” Namjoon scoffs. “Remind me why I’m dating you?”

“Because I’m worldwide handsome, and we all know it. Worldwide Jin. I’m Worldwide Jin.”
Namjoon raises an eyebrow and strokes RJ, who has ambled over to him and is settling in between Yoongi’s calves. “Shouldn’t it be, like, ‘Handsome Jin’? If you’re gonna pick just one word from the ‘worldwide handsome’ thing to go in front of your name?”

“No,” Seokjin says, crossing his arms. “It’s more important that I emphasize my influence and not my good looks. Influence is often invisible, but everyone can tell that I’m the most handsome.”

“And this is what Namjoon and Yoongi-hyung are hit with the instant Worldwide Jin enters that kitchen,” Hoseok says. “They didn’t stand a chance.”

Namjoon rolls his eyes. “You’re doing a very bad job of telling this story.”

Hoseok fakes a gasp, and Jimin snuggles into his side, hand curled around Hoseok’s hip.

“They’re really cute,” Taehyung whispers into Jeongguk’s ear.

“You’re really cute,” Jeongguk whispers back.

Taehyung turns and presses a kiss to Jeongguk’s hair.

“Keep going,” Seokjin says. “I want to hear more about how my incredible good looks and award-winning personality caused Namjoon and Yoongi to instantly turn into disaster gays.”

“They weren’t already disaster gays?” Jimin asks, giggling. Chimmy and Mang race past, and no one really pays them any attention because it’s honestly exhausting to even look at those spitfire energy-balls sometimes.

“Okay, Jin-hyung turned them into more-disastrous-than-usual gays,” Hoseok says. “See, I was totally fine because, like, I was immune to the charms and good looks of others when I was still waiting for my soulmate to come along. Which would be one Park Jimin, whom I would not meet for another couple years.”

“Aw, hyung,” Jimin coos, leaning up to nuzzle his nose against Hoseok’s.
Taehyung’s face lights up. “Soulmates!”

“We are,” Hoseok says, weighty in a way that feels almost too real.

“Hyung,” Jimin responds, the syllable pressing like he’s trying to remind Hoseok of something, but Jeongguk can’t for the life of him figure out what.

“What? Just—because I love you, that’s all,” Hoseok says, leaning in for a long kiss.

“Ew,” Yoongi says, although his eyes are definitely still closed so he shouldn’t be able to see the kissing. Yoongi clearly has icky-romantic-mush-sixth-sense or something.

“Anyways,” Seokjin says. “Go on. Talk more about me.”

Hoseok kisses Jimin once, twice, and goes back to the story: “Okay. So. I’m sitting on the counter with Yoongi and Namjoon is standing in front of us so his back is to the door, and Seokjin walks in to get a drink and RJ is at his feet. So I see Yoongi staring at RJ—who looks super cute, okay, like it was maybe January or early February and it was cold so RJ had this gray parka on and it was adorable—and then Yoongi looks up and notices RJ’s human, which of course is our very dear Worldwide Jin, and then Yoongi puts his hands on Namjoon’s shoulders and spins him around so fast I thought Namjoon would trip over Koya again.”

“That happens?” Taehyung whispers to Jeongguk.

Jeongguk shrugs. “It makes sense. Joon-hyung would trip over his own soul, probably.”

“And how did Namjoon react?” Jimin asks, reaching up to push hair out of Hoseok’s eyes.

Hoseok smirks. “Well, I couldn’t see the front of him, but he definitely froze. And Yoongi’s mouth was open like a fish or something, and Shooky fell off Yoongi’s shoulder onto the counter, and Koya was—hmm. What was Koya doing?”
Namjoon shakes hair off his forehead. “Koya was asleep. And RJ came over to them and started stroking their fur, and then Seokjin apologized to me, and I’m pretty sure I just, like, instantly died. Just because he was talking to me.”

“New videogame mechanic,” Yoongi drawls, sounding half out of it with sleep, “An enemy type that’s so pretty it insta-kills you.”

“Isn’t that just like Medusa or something?” Jimin asks.

“I thought that was because Medusa was ugly,” Jeongguk says.

“I’m pretty sure it had nothing to do with what she actually looked like and was just a magic mythological power,” Taehyung says, shaking his head.

“But what would be the real-world parallel?” Namjoon asks. “Myths and legends are meant to comment on the real world, so it makes sense that Medusa would be a stand-in for the type of person who freezes you up just by being really attractive. Or really unattractive. Either way, I guess.”

“That sounds very unsubstantiated,” Yoongi slurs. “You studied music, you Classics nerd.”

Namjoon shrugs. “Just saying.”

“Joonie,” Koya murmurs all of a sudden, their lilting voice all buzzy in Jeongguk’s ears. “Joonie, RJ is my favorite.”

Shooky gasps and leaps at Koya and kind of darts all over them, and they start to laugh and Jeongguk realizes that Shooky is tickling them.

A sentient cinnamon cookie tickling a koala. Typical.

“So anyways,” Hoseok says, “Seokjin apologizes for RJ just going up and immediately touching Koya, but Koya is really happy, and Shooky is like peeking out from around Yoongi’s elbow to look at what’s going on because we all know Shooky is secretly as shy and squishy as cinnamon roll-hyun Yoongi—”
Yoongi lifts a hand out from between his legs to flip Hoseok off and then goes back to his usual sleeping position.

“And Kim Seokjin was just really fucking beautiful,” Namjoon says. “We all know. But that wasn’t why I was so enamored.”

Seokjin looks surprised. “It wasn’t?”

Namjoon shakes his head. “No. It was because you were wearing that necklace you have, the one with a silhouette of Peter Pan as the charm. It was kind of hidden beneath your shirt, but I caught a glimpse of it, and I knew right then that you were meant to be with Yoongi-hyung and me. Just because—I don’t know. Peter Pan.”


“I liked your hands,” Yoongi mumbles. “That’s all. No other affection whatsoever.”

“Nothing’s changed there then,” Namjoon says, shoving at Yoongi’s head. Yoongi doesn’t react.

“And?” Taehyung says. “What happened?”

Seokjin looks at Hoseok. “Can I take over?”

“Be my guest,” Hoseok nods, taking the opportunity to press kisses to Jimin’s cheeks and forehead and nose and lips.

Seokjin smiles. “I saw them and I could kind of tell, you know. That they both thought I was attractive. But I didn’t know they were together, and RJ ran over and started touching Koya, which isn’t unheard of for daemons of course, but it’s still kind of uncommon when you’ve never met someone before. So I apologized, and Namjoon was clearly tipsy and he was—honestly, Joonie, you were really adorable. You and Koya both. And then when I knelt down to lift RJ up, Shooky jumped onto my head.”
“What?” Taehyung asks, startling up just as Tata climbs back into his lap. Cooky burrows his way between Taehyung’s hip and Jeongguk’s, curling up in the hollow there and closing his eyes. Tata beeps something and sounds kind of louder than usual, but Taehyung ignores it, so Jeongguk does too. Taehyung blinks. “Wait, what—seriously? Is this, just, like, a common thing? Or is it just our friend group? Like, what is it with all this daemon touching? Honestly, it’s so disorienting, like—it took me forever to get used to feeling half-high all the time with the way Tata is always all over Jeongguk.”

Jimin and Hoseok exchange a look.

Jeongguk narrows his eyes. “What?”

Seokjin look over. “What, me?”

“No,” Jeongguk says, nodding at Jimin and Hoseok. “Them. Why are you guys acting weird?”

Jimin giggles, but it sounds kind of awkward and hysterical. “What are you talking about?”

Hoseok smacks a kiss onto Jimin’s cheek. “Maybe we just wanna get upstairs and have some fun on our real mattress.”

But Jeongguk looks at Taehyung and he can tell that Taehyung has noticed too, that something is going on here that everyone else seems to know about except them—everyone, even Seokjin and Namjoon, who are pointedly looking around the room at random corners. Even Yoongi, whose eyes are now cracked open to study Taehyung and Jeongguk, dark and intense.

“Can I finish the story?” Seokjin finally asks.

Taehyung and Jeongguk exchange a glance, and Taehyung shrugs. “Sure, hyung,” he says. “So Shooky jumped on your head, and obviously Yoongi-hyung felt all weird-daemon-touch-y then, and? What next?”

Seokjin shifts, eyes downcast. Yoongi actually sits up. “Should we just…” Yoongi asks, glancing at Jimin, and then over at Seokjin.
“Yes,” Jeongguk says right away. “What happened that you all apparently know about but we don’t?”

“I didn’t feel anything,” Yoongi says, chin coming up so he can meet Jeongguk’s eyes. “Shooky jumped on Seokjin’s head, and it felt like—I don’t know. Someone brushing past my arm, I guess. Nothing fancy.”

“Which is the part when I left,” Hoseok throws in. “I only found out about all the daemon-touch stuff recently. With Jiminie.”

Jimin nods. “The night we all first met. Or the next day, I guess. That was the first time we ever thought about it.”

“But not us,” Yoongi says. “Donghyuk came in and dragged Hoseok away, like, right as all that was going on, and suddenly it was just me and Shooky and Namjoon and Koya and Jin-hyung and RJ, standing in the kitchen with Shooky on Seokjin-hyung’s head, and I could barely tell.”

“Which was weird,” Namjoon says. “I remember Yoongi looking over at me and being shocked, because—I mean, we’d touched each other’s daemons before, and it had always been, like, super electric. You guys know, yeah?”

“I think of it like butterfly wings,” Jimin says, leaning into Hoseok. Mang and Chimmy choose that moment to hop up into their laps, and immediately Jimin’s eyes fall closed in comfortable pleasure.

“Like holding sparklers in your chest,” Jeongguk murmurs, sitting up a little straighter so he can hold Tata tighter. “Like in the summer when you have sparklers, like fireworks, you know? Those. But they’re going off in your chest and your insides are all showered in warm, glittering sparks.”

Taehyung swallows and doesn’t say anything. He’s watching the way Namjoon is petting RJ, the way Seokjin doesn’t seem to have any reaction at all. Jeongguk had always attributed that to the sheer amount of time Yoongi and Namjoon and Seokjin have been together—they’re just used to the contact by now, and the exhilaration of it must fade with time, right?—but now, he’s rethinking. Sure enough, Namjoon reaches out and offers his hand to Shooky, and when Shooky nuzzles up against Namjoon’s fingertips, Yoongi shivers and throws Namjoon an affectionate glance.

“You can’t feel it,” Jeongguk says. “Jin-hyung, you can’t…”
Seokjin shakes his head. “Not with them. I mean—I can tell that someone is touching RJ, but it doesn’t feel like anything particularly great. And vice versa: when I touch Shooky or Koya, they don’t feel it.”

Taehyung furrows his brow and sits forward on the loveseat, spine tense. “Is it—did you, like, go to the doctor? Have you ever felt it with anyone?”

This is the moment everything falls apart, Jeongguk will realize later, when he’s turning all this conversation over in his head, lying alone in the vacation house bed with Cooky and the dark and the silence, upset and frustrated and fucking sad.

Seokjin blushes, and looks at Namjoon and Yoongi, and reaches out for Koya and Shooky to offer a few conciliatory pets, and then he sighs. “Yes. I’ve felt it.”

Jimin sits up straight in Hoseok’s lap, eyes wide. “What—hyung, you’ve felt it before and you’re not—you didn’t—you’re still with Joon-hyung and Yoongi-hyung when they’re not—”

“Jimin,” Hoseok murmurs, nudging Jimin’s shoulder with his forehead and looking solemn.

Jimin turns to look at Jeongguk and Taehyung then, blinking like he’s confused. “You two have nothing to worry about,” Jimin says, and then his eyes shoot to Seokjin. “Hyung, not—not that you do, but just—what happened?”

Seokjin takes a careful breath and then blows out the air for long, long seconds. Finally, he speaks. “It didn’t work out. It was—right away we clicked, you know? Like, we didn’t ever have to get to know each other because we already knew. I touched her daemon and I felt it, and she touched RJ and—yeah. And then, all that love just…didn’t matter. I mean, it did; of course it mattered. But it wasn’t something we could sustain, even with the ridiculous amounts of love we had for each other. We were both too…I don’t know. Whimsical? Flippant, even? Flighty? She was my soulmate, absolutely, but…sometimes soulmates aren’t something you get to keep for life. Sometimes a soulmate is…hmm. Like a contained little bubble thing. Perfect, so perfect, and just for a while. And then it’s like…the transience of it is actually part of what makes it perfect, so you live all your soulmate-life together in just a few months, and then that’s the end. And it’s beautiful because of that. It’s exactly what you need, and what you want.”

“Wait,” Taehyung says, shaking his crimson head. “Soulmates—are you—what are you talking about?”
“It’s not really soulmates,” Yoongi says, looking back and forth between Namjoon and Seokjin. “I mean—it can be. Kind of. Like, it’s just another facet of compatibility, I would say. A really specific one. Sorta like—that you both really like Bavarian folk music, or you’re into rock climbing without ropes, or your favorite food happens to be pickled beets, I don’t know. It’s something you might have in common with someone, more than one someone even, but it’s rare.”

“Really rare,” Namjoon whispers. “Yoongi…”

On the end of the couch, Seokjin is holding just RJ now. They both look melancholy, and like they’re really thinking about something.

Yoongi shakes his head. “It’s rare. But it’s not a make-or-break-a-relationship sorta thing. It’s not—just because we don’t feel Jin-hyung and RJ—”

“So it’s not soulmates,” Taehyung demands, his body tense. Tata hops off his lap and into Jeongguk’s, and they push at Cooky’s forehead a couple times, but Cooky just shivers and stays asleep.

“It’s…” Jimin says, trailing off as he stares at Hoseok with this look in his eyes that’s—well. Soulmate-y. If that’s a thing.

Which. Fuck. Maybe it is.

Taehyung scoots to the edge of the couch, looking weirdly upset. “It’s not soulmates.”

Jimin shakes his head, looking at Taehyung and then back at Hoseok with something like confusion in his eyes.

“Taehyung-ah,” Namjoon says, gently, “Do you want it to be soulmates? Or do you not?”

Taehyung shakes his head, standing up sort of stiff and frozen. “Is it soulmates or not, hyung? It’s not a difficult question.”

Jeongguk can feel the sudden spike of irritation, a line drawn between them practically out of
nowhere, and he frowns up at Taehyung. “Taehyung, what the hell?” Jeongguk asks, scooting forward and jostling Tata. He ignores the distressed little beep-boop-bong Tata makes and grabs Taehyung’s arm. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Sure,” Seokjin says, “It’s soulmates. Or, like—hyper-compatibility, you could say. I don’t feel it with Namjoon and Yoongi, but they feel it with each other. That won’t ever change, I don’t think. I mean—I guess I don’t know, but…I’ve felt it before. There are some people who spark it and others who don’t. I don’t feel it with them. We still love each other very much.”

Taehyung tugs his arm out of Jeongguk’s grip, laughing something awful as he runs his hand through his hair. “Fuck,” he says, hunching into himself and crossing his arms and looking utterly horrified to even be in the room. “What the fuck, Jeongguk?”

“Me?” Jeongguk asks, shaking his head as he stands up to look at Taehyung head-on, crossing his arms in a mimicry of Taehyung’s posture. “Why are you mad at me?”

Taehyung sort of laughs, sort of scoffs. “Jeongguk, you—we—soulmates?”

Jeongguk blinks and swallows and doesn’t fucking know what to do. “Um, sure? Yeah? I mean, you heard what Jin-hyung said, about how in-sync he was with his soulmate, how much he loved her. Is that not how you feel about me and Cooky? Is that not what Tata talks about all the goddamn time, how much you guys fucking love us?”

Taehyung takes a startled step back, expression fraught with emotion that Jeongguk can’t parse. “I don’t—we’re not soulmates, Jeongguk,” Taehyung says. “And if we are, that doesn’t mean—”

“What?” Jeongguk asks, practically a growl, and—yeah, they really shouldn’t be doing this in front of all their friends on their supposed-to-be-romantic vacation, but whatever. Whatever. “Doesn’t mean what?”

“Anything,” Taehyung says. “It doesn’t matter.”

“You don’t want to be my soulmate,” Jeongguk spits, channeling the sudden desolation he feels into anger, because the only other option available is sorrow, and that’s—too much. It’s all too much.

Taehyung scoffs, flippant. “No? Why does it make a difference either way? We’re not—it’s not, like,
an unbreakable bond or anything. Just because it feels nice when you touch Tata doesn’t mean we’re gonna be together forever.”

Jeongguk jerks back. On the couch, Cooky moans this strangled little horror-sound, and that’s what really makes Jeongguk’s blood go hot and poison with rage. “Oh, okay,” he says, looking anywhere but at Taehyung. “Thanks for letting me know you feel that way.”

Jeongguk scoops Cooky up off the couch a little too forcefully and Cooky squeaks in pain, but Jeongguk just hugs them close and stalks off towards the bedrooms. “Don’t come in later,” he says as he rounds the corner out of Taehyung’s sight.

Taehyung doesn’t say anything in return, nor does he even try to come to bed or apologize. Jeongguk and Cooky fall into a restless sleep.

Sometime past midnight, Jeongguk startles awake.

“Cooky? You okay?” It’s not dark in the room; moonlight shines through the balcony doors because Jeongguk hadn’t bothered to close the drapes before collapsing onto the stupid queen mattress. The bed on which he was supposed to be fucking (making love to) Taehyung, under stupid soft sheets and with stupid downy pillows. Stupid thing.

“Cooky?” Jeongguk asks again, sitting up when there’s no response. He feels kind of sick, he realizes, but it’s not like a cold or the flu or something. More like when you cry a lot, like a lot, and your head feels stuffy and your sinuses are messed up and your face feels tight and salty. Except Jeongguk hasn’t been crying, not really. He shed a couple tears of frustration, maybe, but he’s been through breakups before. Has read relationships wrong, fallen harder and faster than his ex-lovers (whose daemons he obviously hadn’t touched, because then maybe he would’ve known something was different with Taehyung and Tata right off the bat). Jeongguk has, in the past, made the same mistakes he’s obviously repeated with Taehyung. Taehyung and Tata.

Even though Tata professes their ridiculous, sappy, undying love for Cooky all the time, not in those words necessarily, but—
Not in those words. Tata thinks Cooky is funny, likes laughing at Cooky’s soft-spoken jokes. Teases Cooky good-naturedly, wraps Jeongguk’s soul in long, spindly arms when Cooky is cold or sad or feeling small. Rubs Cooky’s ears, tugs Cooky into the Nest, makes sure Taehyung and Jeongguk are giving Cooky enough attention. Convinces Cooky to listen to dancey music, and listens to Cooky’s favorite songs in return, obsessing over them with a fervor that even shocks Cooky sometimes.

And Tata says they love them. Taehyung does too. Shyly, maybe, and hesitantly, and he usually doesn’t say it first—but he’d texted Jeongguk during their days apart, right? He hadn’t wanted to say goodbye at the train station in Daegu when they’d parted ways—

But he had. Taehyung had turned away first, had in fact been the one who hadn’t wanted them to meet each other’s families when they’d arranged their travel and purchased tickets in the first place—

Fuck.

Maybe Jeongguk has been reading things wrong. Maybe Tata’s affection is just temporary infatuation, nothing more. Maybe they are soulmates and Taehyung doesn’t fucking care and is going to leave anyways.

Maybe—

“Cooky?” Jeongguk asks, even more miserable than he’d been earlier. When Taehyung had first gotten upset, it had been easy to stick to offended anger, to frustration at Taehyung for being so overdramatic about his disappointment right in front of their friends. Now, Jeongguk’s anger turns against himself for being so stupid to think pretty, smart, witty, eccentric, perfect Taehyung and Tata would ever want to be soulmates with him and Cooky.

“Cooky,” Jeongguk says, finally reaching down to yank his daemon out from under the covers. Cooky has been pressed against the back of Jeongguk’s knees all night, and they don’t move even when Jeongguk shoves away the duvet and grabs almost violently for Cooky’s little pink arm, white paw shining silver in the moonlight—“Cooky?”

Cooky doesn’t move. Doesn’t open their eyes, doesn’t even make a sleepy protest sound like they often do when someone is waking them up. Cooky lies limp against the mattress, and the force of Jeongguk’s yank sends them sliding towards Jeongguk like a stuffed animal, like—

“Cooky,” Jeongguk says, frantic. It’s like the bunny is unconscious, which has never happened
before even to Tata, and Tata does some weird shit. Jeongguk turns Cooky around and presses a hand to Cooky’s chest, their throat—there’s a heartbeat and it’s in time with Jeongguk’s, fast and fluttery and not quite right, not when Cooky is so terrifyingly still like this. They’re breathing but it’s shallow, chest barely rising and falling with it.

“Holy shit, what’s wrong, Cooky what’s wrong shit Cooky—”

Jeongguk doesn’t know what to do. He grapples for his phone, thinks about searching up the symptoms but he doesn’t want to stop touching Cooky even for a minute, and when he reaches in his mind for the little tendril of a link between them, not strong enough for telepathy but still present, the connection is feebler than it’s ever been. Jeongguk puts both hands on Cooky’s cheeks and presses his forehead down to the tiny form lying lifeless on the mattress, and then he reaches for the bond again and it’s a little stronger, maybe, but still so faint.

“Fuck, fuck,” Jeongguk mutters, eyes welling with tears as he scrambles for the edge of the bed. He’s just got his feet on the floor when the bedroom door opens and no one is there—Jeongguk looks down—

“Tata,” Jeongguk gasps, struggling to his feet with Cooky wrapped tightly in his arms as his brain keeps probing the daemon link. Like how your tongue can’t stop prodding a painful or chipped tooth, checking it again like that will reveal that actually everything’s fine and there’s no damage and you’ve been imagining it all along.

Except he’s not. The bond is wrong, Cooky’s heartbeat is wrong, everything is just wrong.

<<JK, cooky! tatata knows tatata knew cooky! wrong wrong SICK help help HELP TATA HELP TAETA HELP TAETAETAETAETAE—>>

Tata’s long noodle arms come out and wrap around Jeongguk’s ankles and start dragging him forward, and that’s obviously not a great way of doing that so Jeongguk loses his balance and tumbles to the floor, barely managing to keep from crushing Cooky. Tata releases him and forcibly yanks him back up and wraps their arms around Jeongguk’s waist and drags him down the hall to the living room that way, towards Taehyung, towards sweet, beautiful Taehyung who doesn’t love him, who probably never did—

“Cooky,” Jeongguk whispers, his heart breaking all over as they round the corner to the main room —
Soulsick.

Cooky is soulsick, and Tata knew all evening. That’s why Tata wanted to go to bed; they must have sensed something was wrong. And Cooky—they’d been so dead-asleep all evening, in Taehyung’s lap and on the couch and now in bed—

Jeongguk’s heart drops to the pit of his stomach, through his feet, into a black hole. Soulsick. Cooky is soulsick.

Everyone knows what that means.

An interlude on daemon soulsickness:

Although daemons and humans are linked emotionally and are born physically from the same womb (sharing an umbilical cord), daemons do not suffer from illness in the same way that humans do. Ailments like headaches and hangovers do tend to trouble daemons, likely because these result not from viruses or bacteria but from internal physical processes; additionally, symptoms of mental or head-related conditions (most commonly bipolar disorder, dissociative identity disorder, schizophrenia, obsessive compulsive disorder, and depression; but also including traumatic brain injuries and concussions) tend to transfer between humans and their daemons more so than pulmonary or gastrointestinal problems or, say, broken bones.

In some ways, the human-daemon illness/injury connection is self-explanatory—of course a human who falls and breaks a bone will not somehow transfer that break to their daemon’s physical body. The pain of the injury, however, may be felt by both parties (though not as strongly to the daemon, as the pain is not firsthand). A human whose daemon sustains an injury such as a scrape or burn may feel a similar pain, but this is less common and the pain is typically mild.

With illnesses, the connection between human and daemon becomes more nebulous. Someone
suffering from strep throat may report that their daemon also has a sore throat, but the daemon will not test positive for strep (as daemons are immune to most of the bacteria and viruses that humans can contract). Doctors attribute this to the “Human-Daemon Symptom-Sharing Mechanism” (HDSSM), which causes a daemon to physically feel their human’s discomfort even without a shared root cause. In other words, a daemon can’t get a cold from their human, although they may experience a lesser version of the human’s symptoms, particularly symptoms that cause pain. Coughing is not often shared between humans and daemons, although it has been reported as a transferred symptom in rare cases.

Some illnesses are known to infect humans and daemons despite daemons’ general immunity to human disease. Chicken pox is communicable between daemons and humans alike, and Lyme disease has been witnessed to infect daemons in rare but serious cases. Of the illnesses observed to infect daemons, only one can be contracted by daemons and not by humans. This illness, called “soulsickness”, has no known cause, and its symptoms include drowsiness, trouble breathing, rapid pulse or heart palpitations, dizziness, loss of consciousness, and high fever. Only settled daemons can contract soulsickness.

Scientists have pointed to genetic markers that may indicate a higher risk for the disease; they have also found that conditions like depression and bipolar disorder increase the likelihood of a daemon incurring soulsickness. Some studies have shown that high caffeine intake and the use of recreational drugs raises risk slightly, but these findings are still under scrutiny.

Soulsickness is treatable, but it is classified as a neurological disorder (see entry in the DSM-V for more information) and does not respond to over-the-counter drugs. Prescription drugs such as SSRIs have proven somewhat effective against repeated occurrences of acute soulsick episodes, but in general, a daemon that experiences soulsickness will recover on its own with comfort from human touch, cool cloths to combat fever, and rest. Daemons who have not recovered after twelve hours should seek emergency care, as this may be a sign of a rare but serious disorder that may have lasting health effects if left untreated.

(Not that a hospital can actually treat anything to do with soulsickness. Jeongguk knows. Everyone knows. Really, even in the worst cases, the only thing that can be done is to ease the symptoms, hope for the best, and wait.)
The couch is not as comfortable as the bed in their room must be, but it doesn’t matter because even if it were, Taehyung doubts he would be sleeping.

“Ta,” Taehyung whispers when his phone shows that it’s nearly 1:00 a.m., “Ta, why did I do that.”

Tata’s little head appears next to the couch. They’re refusing to sleep snuggled with Taehyung on the principle that Taehyung is a terrible boyfriend and, in fact, a terrible person in general, and—well. Taehyung isn’t exactly going to disagree. Instead, he had helped Tata build a mini-nest between the coffee table and the couch, and Tata is curled up down there with all the good blankets while Taehyung shivers under only a threadbare throw they’d found in the back of the closet after everyone else awkwardly excused themselves to bed.

Which was all Taehyung’s fault. All of it. All of everything is Taehyung’s fault, obviously.

<<meanie taetae is meanie, taetae makes JK and cooky! sad.>>

Taehyung buries his face in the pillow and fights back tears. “Ta,” he says, shuddering through a couple of deep breaths that do nothing to actually make him feel better. “I was so—I’m so—Tata-honey, I’m scared.”

Tata makes a few soft beepy noises that don’t actually mean anything. It’s their idea of a shh noise, the kind of comforting sound that parents make to their children after nightmares or during illness. It probably means Taehyung has been forgiven.

“Thanks, Ta,” Taehyung says, reaching out to pet Tata’s head.

<<taetae sleep, sleep, don’t be scared I love you, tatata loves taetae love you.>>

Taehyung huffs. “Love you too.”
Tata climbs up onto the couch and brings the blankets with them, and they snuggle up to Taehyung like usual, Tata cooing electronically as Taehyung shuts his eyes and tries to relax. He’s finally falling into something like a restful sleep when he feels Tata freeze. Tata vibrates a little, buzzes but Taehyung is too out of it to really do anything, and then suddenly Tata is squirming and climbing off the couch. Seconds later, Taehyung hears Tata pad off. It’s not unusual for Tata to wake up in the night and go investigating stuff, and Taehyung pays it no mind.

Not until he hears the slam of a door opening so hard it bounces off a wall. Not until he hears strange muffled sobs, and emergency beeps from Tata too far away to make out, and two sets of footsteps coming fast down the hall.

“Tata?” Taehyung asks, sitting up and fighting down that weird sleep-vertigo feeling that happens when you try to get up but you’re still drowsy.

“Tata, stop,” Jeongguk says, but Taehyung can see Tata dragging Jeongguk forward, and Jeongguk looks fucking terrified, and Cooky is in his arms but the daemon is limp in a bad way. Not an asleep way.

“Cooky,” Taehyung whispers, standing up.

Tata drags Jeongguk and Cooky into the living room and stops in front of Taehyung. Jeongguk looks more terrified than Taehyung has ever seen him, pale and shaking, with bags beneath his eyes and sallow skin. He blinks at Taehyung hard a couple times before shaking his head. “Tae.”

“What’s wrong?” Taehyung asks, hesitant to insert himself where he probably isn’t wanted.

Jeongguk swallows and his eyes fill with tears, and he looks younger than Taehyung has ever seen him look before. “Tae, I know you hate me and you don’t wanna be my soulmate and you probably want us to break up but I—I need help right now and—please, something is wrong with Cooky—”

<<soulsick soulsick EMERGENCY cooky! is soulsick fever fever fever TATATATA INITIATE FREEZE PROTOCOL EMERGENCY SOS SOS SOS.>> Tata’s arms go long and they tentacle Cooky out of Jeongguk’s grasp and onto the tangle of blankets on the couch, wrapping all around Cooky and—oh, shit, they’re close enough to Taehyung’s leg that he can feel how cold Tata suddenly is. When Taehyung reaches down and puts a hand on Cooky’s forehead, the bunny is burning up.
“What happened?” Taehyung asks, sitting down and practically yanking the whole nest of blankets and daemons into his lap. Jeongguk pulls out the coffee table and falls to his knees in front of them.

“I just woke up and they were like this,” Jeongguk says. “I don’t—I’ve heard of soulsickness before, but it’s—it’s bad, I didn’t ever think it could—I don’t even know how daemons get it—”

“We should go to the hospital,” Taehyung interrupts, looking around frantically because no one has a car here, they’re on vacation, they’ll have to—they’ll have to—

<<too hot, cooky! is too hot tata cool them TAETAE TOUCH hold hold hold taetaetae hold cooky! pleasepleaseplease!>>

Taehyung shakes his head. “Tata, I’m holding them—”

<<違う、違う、 wrongwrongWRONG no blanket hold them PLEASE—>>

“Okay,” Taehyung says, yanking the blankets away from Tata and Cooky so he’s got skin-to-fur contact with the rabbit.

Immediately, Jeongguk’s shoulders slump and he falls forward into Taehyung’s lap, half on top of Tata and Cooky. He lifts his head up just enough to meet Taehyung’s eyes, and Taehyung is startled to see tears flood down Jeongguk’s cheeks as he cries and cries.

“Gukkie,” Taehyung murmurs, lifting a hand off of Cooky to brush away some of the tears, but that just makes Jeongguk tense and shudder and shake his head.

“Touch Cooky,” Jeongguk begs, burying his head down into Tata’s heart-shaped head. “Felt better when you did, they were—they felt better, I could tell.”

“Okay,” Taehyung says, pressing both hands to Cooky’s head, fingertips brushing Tata’s tentacle arms as they continue holding Cooky close, ice cold trying to combat the fever. Jeongguk gets his arms around Tata and Cooky both, shoulders shaking with the sobs that won’t seem to go away.

Cooky is limp for a long time. Their breathing stays shallow, their whole body so still that they could
be just a stuffed animal. Taehyung presses his nose in between Cooky’s ears and inhales, keeps his palms flat on Cooky’s fur and moves them just a little, just enough to remind Jeongguk and Cooky of the contact. Jeongguk finally stops crying, and Tata vibrates through soft classical symphonies for a while.

Cooky shivers and breathes shallow and too fast, burning up in Taehyung’s lap.

“It’s my fault,” Jeongguk whispers, when the clock on the wall says it’s almost 2:30 and Cooky’s fever is down a little, maybe, but they still feel hot.

Taehyung’s eyes startle up to meet Jeongguk’s. “What? How could it be your fault, it’s—I mean, I know there’s no official cause for soulsickness, but I was the one who—if anything, I caused all the distress—”

“I didn’t even fucking notice,” Jeongguk says, cutting Taehyung off. “Tata knew and they tried to tell me something was wrong, but I just ignored them.”

“Yeah, because you were being forced to fight with me,” Taehyung says, shaking his head.

But Jeongguk drops his gaze and gives another little sniff. “It was before that. Way before any of that. Cooky was being weird all night, and I didn’t realize.”

“I didn’t either,” Taehyung admits, guilt sitting heavy in his stomach.

“So?” Jeongguk’s chin snaps up and he meets Taehyung’s eyes with a watery glare, still teary but now obviously angry. Taehyung can’t be mad back. Jeongguk has every right. “Why would you notice? You don’t even want to be with me, or with Cooky. You don’t even care that we’re soulmates.”

“Yoongi maintains that it’s not really soulmates,” Taehyung says without thinking.

Jeongguk scoffs, jerking his head back as his eyes flash hotter. “Right. Yeah. What was I thinking, that someone like you could possibly be meant for someone like me. Maybe it’s not soulmates, it’s just awesome chemistry. Hey, at least the sex was good while this lasted.”
Taehyung grits his teeth, stung. In his arms, Cooky whimpers in distress. Tata starts to beep and Taehyung can hear the peacemaking tone in their hums, but he pays his soul no mind. “Great. Glad we’re on the same page about how little I mean to you.”

This makes Jeongguk blink. “What?”

“What,” Taehyung bites.

“Wait, what did you just say to me?” Jeongguk asks, tone more confused than angry.

Taehyung scoffs. “You need me to spell it out for you? You just said I don’t mean anything to you except good sex. ‘Someone like me’ being meant for ‘someone like you’, yeah. Thanks for the reminder of how unimportant I am.”

Jeongguk blinks at Taehyung again, and again, and then he shakes his head and laughs, kind of relieved and self-deprecating and shocked. “Taehyung, you literally told me the soulmates thing didn’t mean anything to you. That it didn’t matter.”

“Yeah?” Taehyung says, voice sharp and short. “You heard Jin-hyung literally say it didn’t matter, I mean—it doesn’t matter and I thought—I—”

“What?” Jeongguk asks, sounding frustrated and still unsure and Taehyung can’t get his head together to just explain and—

Cooky chooses that moment to hum a little, and hiccup, and blink their eyes open, awake.

“Cooky,” Jeongguk gasps, yanking Cooky in tight and accidentally dragging Taehyung along too, because Taehyung is so tightly wrapped up with the little bunny.

Taehyung starts crying. “Cooky,” he whispers, “Cooky, you’re okay, you’re—it’s okay. You’re gonna be okay. Jeongguk takes good care of you; you’re gonna be okay. He can—Jeongguk will take care of you.”

Cooky hums in distress, and a protective edge flares through Taehyung’s chest.
“What, because you’re not going to?” Jeongguk asks.


“Then what did you mean,” Jeongguk presses, even though clearly the turmoil of it is making Cooky worse. “With any of it?”

Taehyung swallows. “I just—it isn’t that I don’t want to be your soulmate, Jeongguk. It’s just…”

“What.”

“I…”

Jeongguk scoffs and leans back, running a hand through his hair and rolling his eyes. “You can’t even say it. Fuck, if you can’t actually tell me what’s wrong, maybe you can at least tell me that it’s over instead of making me say it for you? Because I can’t, Tae, I just can’t. I love you too much, even if it’s selfish and you’d be happier without me. You can end this now and it’ll be better for everyone involved. You didn’t have to act like you missed me the past few days, or like—you could’ve not texted me. You could’ve just said you wanted to break up.”

“I don’t!” Taehyung snaps. “Yoongi-hyung said it’s not even really soulmates. And Jin-hyung said it doesn’t matter, that the soulmate bond doesn’t actually tell you whether you’re going to work out in the end.”

Jeongguk crosses his arms, and Tata tries to sneak over there and cuddle up against his thigh, finally releasing Cooky. In Taehyung’s arms, Cooky hums and blinks and their eyes look so fucking out of it.

“So what,” Jeongguk says. “You got scared because you realized that even if we are soulmates, that doesn’t give you any reassurance that we’re going to be together?”

Taehyung shrugs, miserable. “I guess,” he whispers, looking down at the still-feverish Cooky. “I just—it would be easier for all that to just—not be a thing. I’m so scared because—because I love you, and this feels once-in-a-lifetime. Every day I wake up and I feel like all we’re doing is running down
the clock; I’m so sad every moment passes because it means we have fewer moments left together, and I was tired from getting on the train so early today and I missed you and everything just got overwhelming and I—I freaked out.”

“But why?” Jeongguk asks, running a hand through his hair. “Why did that scare you?”

“Because what if we do break up,” Taehyung whispers, the awful reality of it unfurling in his chest, sending tendrils into his limbs, down his spine, up into his head. “We can be soulmates and it still won’t stop you from leaving when I get to be too much. When Tata gets to be too much. And then it’ll hurt even more, knowing I’ll never have anything like this again. It’s like living on borrowed time, like—like this poem, fuck. ‘That which we never have, remains; It is the things we have that go.’”

Jeongguk blinks. Blinks again. Tilts his head a little, sits up so he’s closer in to Taehyung.

Then he starts to laugh.

“What?” Taehyung asks, hurt even as he keeps clinging to Cooky. Cooky perks up just a bit, and finally they reach towards Taehyung’s neck, so Taehyung shifts them up like a child, like a baby being burped. Cooky leans their head onto Taehyung’s shoulder, ears falling limp to tickle the back of Taehyung’s shoulder.

Jeongguk shakes his head, smiling. “Fuck, Tae, you think I’m gonna go? You think that you’re going to lose me, soulmates or not? God, Tae, this week—fuck, it was only four days actually—that time we spent apart was torture. I fucking love you, I don’t—I don’t want to leave you. Fucking ever.”

Taehyung blinks. Swallows hard, and cradles Cooky, and watches as Tata wraps their long arms around Jeongguk’s ribcage a couple of times, vibrating softly like a purr. It’s so comforting, the way Tata can do that.

“Taehyung,” Jeongguk whispers, “I love you. I want you to be my soulmate. Even if that whole thing is bullshit, even if it’s like Yoongi said—a sort of special, rare thing that happens with people once in a while, just—it doesn’t matter. You and Tata—you’re it. So I guess you’ve been right all along. It doesn’t matter if we’re soulmates, because I’m going to be with you. I’m going to want to be with you. And that’s the thing that matters. Feeling good when we touch each other’s daemons is just an added bonus, and one that I’m pretty sure is saving Cooky from full-blown soulsickness right now.”
Tata beeps.

<<okay okay, safe safe safe,>>
<<cooky! okay, safe SAFE!>>

Taehyung looks down, and Cooky finally has enough strength to sit up a little, to turn in Taehyung’s arms so they can look over at Tata and Jeongguk. Taehyung reaches up and rubs at Cooky’s ears some more, and Cooky whines in the back of their throat, reedy and sweet.

“I love you,” Taehyung finally manages to say, closing his eyes so he doesn’t have to look at Jeongguk as he does it. “I love you. I want us to be soulmates. We are. Regardless of the daemon thing.”

“See,” Jeongguk whispers, leaning in to press his forehead to Taehyung’s. “See?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung whispers. “Jeongguk, I’m sorry. I just got—I don’t know. There’s no excuse for being a dick to you.”

“It’s okay,” Jeongguk murmurs, reaching down to finally scoop Tata into his lap. Tata goes happily, beeping and flashing their head a few different colors the way they always do when they’re overcome by affection and love. “I mean, at least now we’re even.”

“Huh?”

Jeongguk giggles. “I was mean to Tata when we met. And now you’ve been mean to me, and then Cooky got soulsick, and you’re holding them and it’s making them better. And we’ve gotten through it. Two fights now, and one was before we were even together. I’d say we’re doing pretty well.”

Taehyung sighs, sort of relieved and sort of exhausted and very, very warm. “I love you.” He yawns, wide and jaw-popping.

Jeongguk hums. “Come to bed? It’s really a nice mattress, but I couldn’t enjoy it without you. It was big, and Cooky was cold.”

“He was soulsick,” Taehyung says, dragging himself upright and allowing Jeongguk to get his arm around Taehyung’s waist. “Fuck. The couch was terrible.”
“Yeah,” Jeongguk whispers, reaching out a hand for Tata. Instead of climbing up, though, Tata just pads along next to them, holding Jeongguk’s hand and yawning sleepily, the one human sound they are genuinely capable of making.

“You’re really not mad?” Taehyung whispers once they’re all curled up in bed, Cooky still mandatorily wrapped in Taehyung’s arms, because that seems like the only thing that’s really combatting this soulsickness they’ve got going at the moment.

Jeongguk shakes his head. “Hell, even if I were, I don’t think it would stop me from wanting you here. I’d rather go to bed with you and be mad at you than go to bed without you and not care about having you with me. It was stupid of me to tell you not to come to bed.”

Taehyung blushes and looks down. “I know I’m bad at believing it,” he says, guilt creeping up in his chest. “That you actually love me. And I take that insecurity out on you, and that’s not okay.”

“I love you,” Jeongguk says. “Don’t even wanna say I still love you or something like that. No qualifiers on it. I love you.”

Taehyung feels tears prickling at the backs of his eyes, and he shuffles closer on the bed, squishing Cooky and Tata between his chest and Jeongguk’s. Jeongguk threads his long fingers through Taehyung’s hair and it’s as soothing as the touch of Jeongguk’s skin against Tata’s. Everything is a blur of nice feelings, and warmth, and safety, and happiness.

“I love you,” Taehyung whispers. “No qualifiers.”

They fall into a doze, and sometime later when Taehyung is almost asleep, Jeongguk says, “Soulmates. But not just that. You’re the love of my life, Tae. You and Tata, you’re it. Endgame, permanent, I wanna fucking marry you.”

Taehyung almost opens his eyes, almost says something back, but then he thinks—maybe Jeongguk said it because he thought Taehyung was asleep. Maybe he’s not ready to voice all that and be heard yet.

That’s okay, Taehyung thinks. It’s enough to believe in.
In the morning, Taehyung wakes up with only Cooky in the bed with him. “Jeongguk? Tata-baby?”

There’s no response, but Taehyung sits up and hears the shower running in the adjoining bathroom, and he yawns and picks Cooky up.

“Wanna come with me for coffee?”

“Okay, Taehyungie,” Cooky squeaks back, voice a little rougher than usual.

“You okay, bun?” Taehyung asks.


Taehyung nods. “You don’t look like you’re quite 100 percent yet.”

Cooky shivers and looks up at Taehyung with wide, dark eyes. “Thank you for helping me.”

“You don’t have to thank me,” Taehyung says, pushing open the door to the bedroom. It’s early enough that no one else is up, and Taehyung and Cooky make it to the kitchen in sock-footed silence. They start up the coffee maker and wait for it to brew, exchanging sweet little remarks and nuzzles. The whole time, Taehyung keeps feeling the zings and flutters that mean Jeongguk is touching Tata, and he’s sure Jeongguk can feel all of the touches Taehyung presses to Cooky’s fur. It’s weird feeling the touch without Jeongguk and Tata in the room, but it’s nice. Domestic. Safe.

Once the coffee is ready, Taehyung pours two mugs and heads back down the hall, Cooky padding along sleepily beside him with one tiny paw clutching Taehyung’s pajama pants. They push through the door into the bedroom and head for the bathroom, where the shower is still running.
It’s a Western-style bathroom, so the shower is curtained off. Taehyung can hear Tata beeping away at Jeongguk about the best sweet foods in Korea, and Jeongguk laughs at all the right parts and occasionally reaches out to touch, if the flashes of heat fluttering through Taehyung’s abdomen are anything to go by.

“Jeongguk? Tata?” Taehyung asks, setting the coffee mugs on the counter.

“Tae?”

“I brought coffee.”

“For the shower?”

Taehyung snorts, stripping out of his shirt. “It’s shower coffee. Like shower beer but for the morning.”

Jeongguk pulls back the curtain and fixes Taehyung with an appraising look. “Have you never had a shower beer in the morning? Amateur.”

Taehyung huffs. “Can I get in or what?”

Jeongguk looks over his shoulder and then suddenly Tata is pulling themselves up onto the top of the rod holding the shower curtain, soaked and still in their pajamas like always.

“What do you think, Ta?” Jeongguk asks, grinning up at Tata, who starts using the curtain rod for parkour.

<<taetae come IN come IN initiate showerhead improvement feature SUCCESS!>>

Tata leaps over to the showerhead and wraps around it in this very confusing manner which somehow results in a much better stream of water pouring down into the tub.

“Wow,” Jeongguk says, blinking up at Tata.
Taehyung shoves his boxers down and climbs in with the mugs of coffee, which he sets on the shelf up in the corner. “Why don’t you ever do this in the dorms, Tata-love?”

<<other people might SEE don’t let them SEE they might copy tatatatatatata,>> Tata beeps, all melodic and mellifluous and hypothetically offended.

“I…really don’t think that’s something you have to worry about, Ta,” Jeongguk chuckles.

<<they see me rollin’, they hatin’,>> Tata sings.

Jeongguk and Taehyung burst into laughter, and Tata starts actually playing “Ridin’” by Chamillionaire because that’s the logical thing to do in this situation. Taehyung grins and tugs Jeongguk back under the spray, closing the curtain. They leave Cooky to curl up in a towel outside like usual; Cooky doesn’t like showers because water always falls into their ears, so Jeongguk and Taehyung just wash them in the sink or in Hoseok and Namjoon’s bathtub every now and then.

“You know,” Jeongguk muses as he and Taehyung rub shampoo into each other’s hair, taking breaks to dance to Tata’s music every now and then, laughing as they sing the chorus and nod their heads overdramatically, “Your daemon is, like, a sentient version of an As-Seen-On-TV product. A speaker you attach to your showerhead and it makes the water pressure better while playing gangster rap.”

Taehyung sighs, shaking his red hair and sending pinkish water droplets everywhere. “The only thing that would make it better would be if they were also like those infomercial shower heads that use light to turn the water different colors,” he says. “But yeah. Tata is the best.”

Jeongguk nods and leans in for a kiss. “Yeah, they are,” he says, pressing Taehyung back under the carwash-style cascade of water coming down from Tata’s weird-arm-loop-showerhead-thing. Taehyung closes his eyes and lets the water rinse the shampoo from his hair, and Jeongguk kisses him the whole time, only pausing so they can spit out the suds that inevitably end up in their mouths.

“I’m sorry,” Taehyung whispers as Jeongguk’s broad palms come up to fit against his hips.

“For what?” Jeongguk asks, pressing Taehyung back and turning him just right so he’s caged in against the wall with Jeongguk all in front of him. Jeongguk nibbles at his neck, and Taehyung drops his head back against the tile and lets pleasure curl his toes, hitch his breath.
“Last night,” Taehyung rasps, hands slipping against the wet slope of Jeongguk’s back. “I’m sorry I freaked out and was mean to you.”

Jeongguk bites down harder. “It’s fine, Tae,” he says. “I love you. That’s—it’s so you, honestly, getting freaked out like that, over something that’s—I don’t know. Kind of really, really good.”

Taehyung’s heart clenches hard, and he’s slipping in Jeongguk’s grasp, knees weak. “Oh,” he says, not sure if he’s responding to Jeongguk’s previous statement or if he’s acknowledging the warm intoxication of Jeongguk’s hands all over his bare skin.

“I’m really glad,” Jeongguk whispers, biting bruises into Taehyung’s throat; there’s no way this won’t leave a mark, and Taehyung keens and leans into it. “You are, you know. My soulmate. I could’ve told you that without anything to do with how it feels when you touch Cooky.”

Taehyung’s hands go to Jeongguk’s shoulders; he’s barely keeping himself upright with the pulses of heat that coil in his abdomen and spring out through all his joints, every nerve ending. “Jeongguk.”

“Tae,” Jeongguk whispers, and then they’re kissing again and Taehyung is slipping down the wall so it feels like he’s shorter and smaller than Jeongguk even if they’re the same size. Jeongguk’s hands go to the backs of Taehyung’s thighs and he lifts and Taehyung lets himself be held up, parts his thighs so Jeongguk can fit between them. Locks his ankles around Jeongguk’s back and keens at the way he feels small and safe and protected.

“I love you,” Taehyung chants, arms wrapped frantically around Jeongguk’s shoulders as Jeongguk grinds into him. “I love you, I love you.”

“Soulmates,” Jeongguk gasps, testing out the word and fuck, it’s kind of hot, for some reason, thinking they’re made for each other, that the universe set them out to find each other, to be together. “Fuck, Tae, I can’t believe you let me have this. You.”

“Not just letting you, Kook, fuck, I want you to,” Taehyung gasps. “Mark me again,” he whispers, lifting his chin, and Jeongguk ducks in right away and starts sucking more love-bites into the unbranded skin, staking a claim that Taehyung feels all the way through his bones.

“Taehyung, baby,” Jeongguk murmurs, pressing them closer as the pleasure mounts. Taehyung can feel it sparkling through him, all magic pops of fizzy glitter and bubbly bursts.
Tata loses control over the showerhead thing a few minutes later when Taehyung comes, gasping, all over both of their stomachs.

Taehyung blinks. “That was new.”

“They’re usually under the bed,” Jeongguk points out. “We don’t normally see them while we’re doing that.”

“Is it weird?” Taehyung asks, genuinely not sure whether it should be or not.

<<not weird, not weird.>> Tata buzzes, although they still seem kind of dazed as they sit on the floor of the shower by the drain, blinking dizzily.

Jeongguk shrugs. “I mean, I guess it’s fine.”

“Just as long as they’re not, like, involved,” Taehyung says, shuddering at the thought, because, like, yeah. No.

Jeongguk throws his head back and laughs. “God no. You won’t hear any complaints about that from me.”

Taehyung giggles and pulls Jeongguk back in for another kiss. “You didn’t finish,” he says, nipping his way down Jeongguk’s neck.

“It’s okay,” Jeongguk whispers, looking Taehyung right in the eye. “You don’t have to.”

“Is it okay if I do, though?” Taehyung asks, grinning mischievous.

“Oh,” Jeongguk breathes, pupils wide, “Um—yeah.”

Taehyung’s knees end up bruised about as bad as his neck, but Jeongguk carries him back to bed.
afterwards and sort of babies him a little, so Taehyung doesn’t mind. Tata and Cooky build a nest under the bed like they have back home, and when Jeongguk goes down on Taehyung ten minutes later, the daemons retreat there for the duration of it.

When Taehyung comes for the second time, though, they hear some giggles and beeps, so. Well. Who the fuck knows what happens to daemons, really, when humans have sex. Not Jeongguk and Taehyung, that’s for sure.

Taehyung…

…doesn’t care to find out.

“Have you and Jeongguk—oh,” Jimin says, walking into the kitchen with Hoseok behind him and stopping at the sight of a shirtless Taehyung tearing apart leftover chicken for sandwiches, Tata beeping away about some idol group as they chop up cucumbers using only their arm.

“What?” Taehyung asks, opening his mouth at Tata, who deposits a cucumber slice onto his tongue. “Thanks, Ta.”

Jimin blinks. “You look…”

“Ravaged,” Hoseok says, nodding at Taehyung’s chest.

Taehyung bites his lip and covers the mark on the left side of his neck self-consciously, only—well, the tap of his touch shocks good-pain out through his skin, and he swallows at the memory of the creation of this bite, and. Okay. It’s not appropriate to get turned on in front of friends, but he and Jeongguk have kinda been through a lot in the past sixteen hours, and Taehyung’s head is obviously still swimming in the happy make-up-sex vibes.

“Ew,” Jimin says, wrinkling his nose. “You’re, like, into it, aren’t you. That I noticed. That we know.”
“What were you asking when you came into the kitchen?” Taehyung asks, pushing away his arousal.

“If you guys had talked,” Jimin says, dancing over to the fridge with Hoseok in tow. “But it looks like there wasn’t much talking going on.”

“No, there was!” Taehyung protests, finishing up the first sandwich. “There was plenty of talking. Then there was lots of sexing. In bed. Real bed. *Queen* bed.”

“Yeah, we are well aware of the merits of these beds,” Hoseok says, leaning over Jimin’s back as the pair searches through the fridge for breakfast. Or lunch. It’s, like, 1:00 p.m., even if it doesn’t look like Hoseok and Jimin have really been up yet.

(Ha. They’ve probably been *up*, though.)

“You have a double bed at home, at least,” Taehyung says, layering cheese onto the second sandwich, which is turning out to have considerably more structural integrity than the first. He’ll have to give the good one to Jeongguk.

“Still not as nice as the one in our room here,” Hoseok says, looking over at Taehyung and waggling his eyebrows.

“Gross,” Taehyung says.

Jimin makes a face. “Look who’s talking.”

Taehyung does, in fact, look down at his chest, and. Well. Jimin’s not wrong.

“Shrug emoji in real life,” Taehyung says. “You know, like the thing with the katakana tsu in the middle of it.”

<<¯\_(ツ)_/¯>> Tata says. Because Tata is capable of saying emojis, although only Taehyung can
understand those. Jeongguk still struggles.

Jimin blinks. “I mean. You could’ve just shrugged.”

“Nah,” Taehyung says.

<<¯\_(ツ)_/¯>> Tata says again.

Taehyung is inclined to agree with them.

“You guys coming out of your room at all today?” Jimin asks. “I think Jin-hyung wanted to go shopping.”

Taehyung shakes his head. “I don’t know. There’s—it’s just been a lot.” Cooky is still recovering, and Jeongguk seems kind of fragile and mentally bruised, tender like a too-ripe plum dropped on the sidewalk. Taehyung doesn’t want either of them to have to stand up let alone walk around.

“That makes sense,” Jimin says, scooping Mang up into his arms as he leans into Hoseok.

Taehyung blinks at the sight before him. “Do you feel it?” He asks. “The soulmate thing?”

Hoseok and Jimin share a look, and that’s really all Taehyung needed to know.

“Yes,” Jimin says, though.

“Yeah, we do,” Hoseok says.

“Oh,” Taehyung whispers. “You didn’t tell me.”

Jimin shakes his head. “We weren’t, like—we weren’t keeping it secret, exactly. Just…I thought you wouldn’t believe it. Especially if I just told you and you didn’t find out for yourself.”
Taehyung scoffs. “I guess it didn’t really matter. I still reacted badly.”

Jimin nods, eyes sympathetic. “He still loves you, right?”

Taehyung bites his lip. “Yeah.”

Hoseok nods. “Sounds about right. Nothing could stop that boy from loving you, Tae. I have never, ever seen Jeongguk like this. How he is with you.”

Taehyung flushes all the way down his neck, and the hickeys claiming him as Jeongguk’s ache with it, a radiance that curls warm in Taehyung’s belly. “Oh,” he says. “I don’t—that’s—”

“See?” Jimin says, smiling softly. “I know you have trouble believing it. I know. But you should.”


“Love you, Tae,” Jimin murmurs.

“I’m gonna—” Taehyung says, lifting the plates of sandwiches and cucumber slices and nodding towards the door.

“Go take care of your soulmate,” Jimin nods, grinning with fond mischief.

“I—yeah,” Taehyung says, his chest burning with the overwhelming, all-consuming realness of it. Behind him, Tata shiver-vibrates and clings to Taehyung’s thigh, their face buried in the fabric of Taehyung’s sweatpants. Which are actually Jeongguk’s. Because, like. Yeah.

Soulmates, and all that.
“We should go see everyone else,” Taehyung gasps between kisses.

“No,” Jeongguk growls, sliding a leg between Taehyung’s. They’re on the bed, clothes spread across the floor in a *why-did-we-even-put-these-on-in-the-first-place* sort of disarray. Jeongguk grinds himself against Taehyung’s hip and Taehyung throws his head back, eyes slamming shut.

“It’s, like, 6:00 p.m., Jeongguk. We’ve been in here *all day,*” Taehyung says, choking over some of the syllables.

“So?” Jeongguk asks. He keeps moving his hips and it’s sinful and bright and everything sex is supposed to be, Taehyung thinks, all dazzling-new even though they’ve been together for nearly four months. Like something out of a movie, candlelight and rose petals and trancey electronica playing in the background, except without all those things. Just the *feel* of that.

“So—they might be wondering where we—*fuck, Jeongguk—*”

“Cooky came down with soulsickness,” Jeongguk says, although he doesn’t sound too torn up about it. “I think we have a reasonable excuse to stay in here and rest.”

Taehyung shudders through a moan. “You call this resting?”

“Yeah,” Jeongguk whispers, his pace suddenly softer, sweet. His hips are still jumping into Taehyung’s, and Taehyung would be lying if he said his weren’t matching the fits and starts of it with a sort of soulmate-level perfection—*soulmate—*

“Careful,” Taehyung says, staring up into Jeongguk’s eyes. “Hey, turn over. Wanna—can I—”

“Tell me,” Jeongguk whispers, brushing Taehyung’s cheek with his thumb.

“Can I ride you?” Taehyung asks, leaning up to kiss at Jeongguk’s jaw. Jeongguk sucks in a shaky breath, trembles in Taehyung’s arms.
“Yeah,” Jeongguk says, rolling agreeably to the side so Taehyung can crouch over him.

Taehyung smiles. Can’t help it when he’s got Jeon Jeongguk all spread out under him, soft and sultry and sticky with sweat and other things that don’t feel dirty when this feels like love. “Wanna feel you really deep,” Taehyung murmurs, confident like he so often isn’t as he leans in and meets Jeongguk’s lips in a gentle kiss. Jeongguk whimpers and his hips jump off the bed into nothing with the way Taehyung is still crouching over him, and Taehyung puts a hand on Jeongguk’s hip and holds him steady, calm.

“Shh,” Taehyung whispers. “You wanna watch while I prep myself?”

Jeongguk’s pupils blow wide. “Yeah.”

It’s easy, everything is easy. Tata and Cooky are off in the bathroom doing whatever it is they do during these times, and Taehyung has no trouble with anything until—

“Oh, fuck. We don’t have any more condoms,” Taehyung says, sitting back as his head clears a little from the pleasure of the past minutes, the past hour, the past day.

Jeongguk blinks. “Oh. Shit. You don’t have to…”

“I don’t mind,” Taehyung whispers, crossing his arms. “I mean, it’s…I’ve. I’ve done it before.”

“Without?” Jeongguk asks, blinking. Taehyung wonders if he’s imagining the way Jeongguk’s eyes flash with something like jealousy, and the guilt and regret in him pool a little deeper.

“Um, yeah,” Taehyung admits, twisting his hands together. “I didn’t…I shouldn’t have…I wish I hadn’t. But I have. I got tested after, though. I, um. I’m clean, I can’t—I guess I don’t have the paper that says it, or proof that I haven’t slept with anyone except you since then, but…”

“First of all,” Jeongguk starts, propping himself up on his elbows, “I trust you. So I believe that you don’t have any STIs. Neither do I. But second of all—Tae, look at me—” Jeongguk reaches up and tilts Taehyung’s chin so he can meet Taehyung’s eyes—“I really don’t have any opinion on your past sexual experiences. Unless something nonconsensual happened, which—I mean, you said you
“I told him it was okay,” Taehyung assures him, guilt eating him up. Stupid, stupid to have unprotected sex with that asshole, repeatedly, trying to convince himself every time that if he just tried again it would be better, that the guy wasn’t a complete dick—

“There?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung whispers. “That’s why it feels so bad now. To know that I made a choice and it was—it was disgusting, it was awful, I can’t believe I gave him that—”

“Holy shit, Tae,” Jeongguk whispers, and then he’s sitting upright so quick Taehyung doesn’t even have time to get out of the way before Jeongguk is yanking him in, wrapping him up tight. “Holy shit, you didn’t give him anything. Whatever this story is, whatever you’ve chosen for yourself in the past, it’s fine.”

“We were broke. Condoms are expensive,” Taehyung laughs, sardonic. “And it hurt less without a condom. Who knew a little fucking film of latex could make such a difference in whether it hurt or not.”

Jeongguk strokes the hairs at the nape of Taehyung’s neck, and Taehyung—well, Taehyung is pretty much already a ragdoll in Jeongguk’s embrace, but now even more so. “Tae,” Jeongguk whispers, “Does it hurt for you usually? Does it hurt when we do it?”

Taehyung sighs. “It doesn’t hurt with you. You’re…it doesn’t hurt.”

“Good,” Jeongguk whispers. “You can always tell me if it does, you know. Sex isn’t supposed to hurt. I mean, unless you want it to, I guess, but that requires negotiation and safewords and boundaries and stuff. But—I think so many people don’t know. Sex isn’t supposed to hurt.”

Taehyung nods, miserable. “I guess I do remember that—with him it hurt. With a condom, it always hurt. But then without, it was…bearable.” Taehyung shivers, and not in a good way. A disgusted, sick-in-his-own-tarnished-skin sort of way. “I wanted it at the time, I know I did. And I said yes. But it hurt every time and we tried it without a condom and it hurt less. That’s all. It just—now it makes me sick to know he came inside me.”
Jeongguk sucks in a sharp breath. “Fuck, I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry. That sounds—fuck, I don’t ever want you to feel that way. I want you to feel happy and comfortable and confident and beautiful and capable and—and I just love you, and I know it can be hard for you to feel that way about yourself so I just—I guess I just wanna say that I will be here to bolster you up and reassure you and do whatever you need to make you feel really good, and clean.”

Taehyung tries to laugh it off and all that comes out is a ridiculous sob. “Sorry,” he chokes, “Sorry, I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry,” Jeongguk murmurs, clutching Taehyung in tighter. “God, you don’t have to feel that way at all.”

“I’ve ruined this whole fucking trip,” Taehyung says, tears dripping onto Jeongguk’s bare shoulder. “I freaked out about the soulmate thing, and it’s—it’s not even really a thing, like Yoongi-hyung said, and now I’m crying about having sex without a condom—”

“Yeah, that’s fine,” Jeongguk says, voice this perfect reassuring mixture of amusement and dismissal and understanding. “You’re fine, I love you, it’s fine. The trip isn’t ruined. I love you and I love being here with you and I love that you’re here.”

Taehyung sniffs. “You know, it’s silly? But I’m crying and I just really want you to fuck me without a condom to, like, erase what happened in the past. Which I know isn’t a thing but it’s—after that guy, I just wanted someone so badly to erase the ghosts of his hands on me and you—you have, so much, everything in my past doesn’t matter when I’m with you. But also, I don’t want you to think I’m using you. Like, using you to get rid of him.”

“I don’t think that,” Jeongguk murmurs. “Tae, you’re kind of emotional, are you sure you want to… what do you want?”

Taehyung grinds into Jeongguk’s abdomen again, gasping at the overwhelming love he feels embedded in the motion. Not something lusty and attraction-clouded, but something thick like molasses and slow, rich with desperation and a craving for intimacy, for sincerity. “I want you to—please, Jeongguk, make love with me. Without a fucking stupid condom.”

“Fuck, you’re kind of into angst, you know,” Jeongguk says, like he’s trying to tease but is falling short because he’s so obviously and breathlessly turned on.
“Yeah,” Taehyung whispers, squeezing his eyes shut and picking up where they left off. “Yeah, maybe. That okay?”

“Yeah,” Jeongguk whispers, “I don’t mind. C’mere.”

They fall into the covers and Jeongguk does as Taehyung asks, every bit of it. And fuck if Taehyung doesn’t come out of the whole thing with his body singing clean, I think I am finally clean.

(Which. Problematic, obviously, because virginity is a social construct and slut-shaming is unacceptable and there’s, like, empowerment shit that tells Taehyung he shouldn’t feel like a chewed up piece of bubblegum for having multiple sexual partners or for letting any of them fuck him without a condom. But, you know. That’s the sort of shit that gets pushed on you all your life, you’re going to have a hard time not feeling the weight of it even if you disagree in your head.

Which. Fine. Because Jeongguk is taking Taehyung and unravelling him and helping him sort his way through all the inconsistencies of him, all the internalized shame and disappointment and unresolved shit. Jeongguk is taking Taehyung apart and cleaning him all up and patching him back together, or better yet he’s standing right here supporting Taehyung while Taehyung does all that stuff to himself, and—

Well, Taehyung kind of thinks maybe, maybe he’s doing the same for Jeongguk.)

“Hey, Taehyung? Jeongguk?”

Taehyung drags himself upright and forces himself to actually focus his gaze around the room, eyes landing on the door where someone is knocking lightly.

“Taehyung? Tata? You guys all okay?”

“Namjoon-hyung?” Taehyung asks, yawning even though he hadn’t been asleep. Next to him, Jeongguk blearily opens his eyes, sighs at Taehyung, and closes his eyes again.
“Hey, dinner is here, do you guys want me to bring you some? We ordered pizza.”

Tata and Cooky come scampering out of the bathroom, surprisingly energetic considering the events of the previous night. Hell, they’ve probably just been sleeping all day in a nest of towels on the bathroom floor or whatever; of course they’re awake now, at—Taehyung checks his phone—9:30 p.m.

“I can—well, apparently Tata and Cooky are gonna get it,” Taehyung calls as Tata pulls open the door. Namjoon is standing in the doorway and he looks startled when Tata and Cooky sprint around his legs and down the hall, Tata beeping excitedly about how they want pepperoni and artichoke hearts.

Weirdo.

Taehyung focuses on Namjoon and Namjoon is eyeing Taehyung’s chest, one eyebrow raised. “Wow. Jimin-ah wasn’t exaggerating.”

Taehyung looks down at himself and—yeah, okay, the hickeys are a little bit much. “To be fair, a lot of these are new since Jiminie last saw me,” he points out.

Namjoon wrinkles his nose. “Ew.”

Taehyung grins, kind of wistful. Sentimental. *Fuck,* he’s so in love, his whole heart might burst into firework flames with it.

Namjoon rolls his eyes and turns away. “Even more ew,” he says, leaving the door open as he heads off down the hall. A few minutes later, Tata and Cooky reappear and slam the door and hop onto the bed, Tata carrying a whole pizza box, and at least that happens to be enough to rouse Jeongguk, who blinks sleepily and props himself up against the pillows, looking tired and like he really should be resting.

“Hey, you okay?” Taehyung asks, opening the pizza box and fishing out a slice of plain pepperoni.

“Yes,” Jeongguk whispers, “Just tired.”
“Here,” Taehyung whispers back, because it feels like an evening for the quiet intimacy of whispering everything. He holds out the pizza and Jeongguk opens his mouth to receive the offered bite. A splash of sauce drips onto Jeongguk’s collarbone and Taehyung licks it off before biting into the slice himself and then offering it up to Tata, who eats—

“The whole thing, really?” Jeongguk giggles, reaching out to pat Tata’s head.

“Hey, Ta,” Taehyung chides, gentle but guilty as he says it, because he’s always kind of hated having to chastise his daemon. “You gotta share, babe.”

“Aw, it’s okay, Ta,” Jeongguk giggles. He reaches for another slice, offering it up to Tata, who takes a nice mid-size bite. Jeongguk holds the slice up for Taehyung, and it’s only then that Taehyung realizes how really famished he is.

They eat the rest of the pizza in relative silence; Tata gets distracted midway through by the ceiling fan, and Cooky finds the remote for the thing and turns it up and down as Tata clings to one of the blades and swings around, vibrating their vervey laugh as Cooky giggles in the corner.

“Fuck, they’re cute,” Jeongguk sighs once the pizza is gone, both of their bellies sort of distended from it. “Shit, I’m so full.”

“Does this count as feeding kink?” Taehyung asks, giggling as he drops the empty pizza box to the floor and slides down in the covers all spread-eagle on his back, an arm and a leg thrown over Jeongguk.

Jeongguk laughs. “No, I’m 100 percent sure that it doesn’t, considering we didn’t have sex while we were doing it.”

“Stuffing,” Taehyung says. “That’s a thing, right?”

“Maybe?” Jeongguk muses, giggling as Tata finally drops from the fan, timing their descent so they land on the bed instead of getting thrown across the room by the momentum of the blades.

“Maybe not, though,” Taehyung murmurs. “I kind of just wanna cuddle you.”
“Okay,” Jeongguk says, scooting over and fixing Taehyung with a sweet, sappy look.

“Wanna actually hang out with everyone else tomorrow?” Taehyung asks, curling into Jeongguk’s body like they’re brackets, like they’re a pair of parentheses. Closed carefully, easily containing their secret words in the space between them, contents important but not critical to the plot. More there for their own authorial enjoyment than anything else.

“Okay, hyung,” Jeongguk whispers, leaning forward to press their foreheads together. Their feet interlock too, ankles knocking in the process but it’s worth it. Now they’re more like a rectangular box, sealed to hold all the precious artifact words of them, that which they spill into the crevices of each other in the midnight darkness.

(Okay, so it’s only like 10:00 p.m. Still.)

“Wanna go to sleep early?” Taehyung asks, yawning right in Jeongguk’s face, because they’re soulmates and Jeongguk will probably still love him.

“You smell like pizza,” Jeongguk giggles, leaning in for a soft kiss. “You taste like pizza, too.”

“We can brush our teeth,” Taehyung says, sitting up to drag Jeongguk out of bed.

<<toothbrush, toothbrush!>> Tata beeps, dragging Cooky into the bathroom.

Jeongguk shakes his head and follows Taehyung and the daemons. “I will never understand why your daemon likes watching people brush their teeth so much.”

“They’re just sad that they can’t do it too, like since they don’t have teeth,” Taehyung says. “Tata still really likes the feeling of the brush, like, on their skin.”

Jeongguk wrinkles his nose as he squirts toothpaste onto his brush. “Are you saying there’s a chance Tata has fondled the bristles of my toothbrush, which I’m about to put in my mouth?”
Taehyung shrugs. “I mean, ‘fondled’ is a pretty aggressively terrible way of saying that. But yeah. They might’ve played around with it or something, I don’t know! Tata is a very independent daemon. I would go crazy if I tried to keep tabs on what they get up to all day. I’m still having to get on them about playing with the electrical outlets.”

Jeongguk laughs around his foamy toothpaste. “I thought you gave up on that,” he says, barely intelligible with his toothbrush in his mouth.

Taehyung sighs. “Yeah, kinda,” he admits. “They’re just never going to change.”

“Good,” Jeongguk says, spitting and rinsing his mouth. “I don’t want them to.”

Taehyung’s heart grows three sizes too big.

On the final night of the vacation, the entire group goes out to the beach to build a campfire. They’re not really sure they’re allowed to, but no one is around and it’s late and they didn’t see any signs, so they go for it and hope for the best, carting down hotdogs and marshmallows (“You gotta try s’mores, guys, they were so good when I tried them in America,” Namjoon says, “Although to be fair I wasn’t allowed to actually assemble them…or roast the marshmallows…”) and six different flavors of soju from the convenience store down the road.

Tata and Cooky start up a game of tag with Koya and Shooky and RJ as soon as everyone hits the sand. Jimin and Hoseok take off their shoes even though it’s not exactly warm, their daemons joking and giggling next to them.

“Jeongguk, help me with the firewood?” Namjoon asks. Taehyung is honestly not even sure where they got it, but it had been in the living room when Taehyung and Tata and Jeongguk and Cooky had finally exited their room in the morning.

“Sure, hyung,” Jeongguk says, reluctantly parting from Taehyung’s side. They’ve both been kind of touchy since the soulsickness thing, since they resolved their fight, since—yesterday. Sex-marathon yesterday.
“Wanna dance?” Jimin shouts to Hoseok, and then those two and their daemons are leaping across the beach in their leggings and hoodies, spinning circles and giggling when they trip over unseen dips in the ground, tumbling around in the sand.

“I can’t believe them,” Yoongi says. “If they get sand on any of my stuff, I swear to god.”

“Aw, lighten up, hyung!” Namjoon says as he and Jeongguk finally get the kindling to catch flame.

“Yeah,” Seokjin says, curling up against Yoongi’s side on one of the towels they brought down to the shore. “Sand is exfoliating.”

Yoongi snorts. “I don’t think it works like that, hyung,” he says, but he leans in for a kiss. Seokjin goes willingly, kisses back very slowly and it’s kind of sweet.

Also, at the same time, Shooky is literally trying to push RJ into the slowly growing fire. Not that it’s working, like, at all. The size difference between Shooky and RJ prevents any sort of progress from being made on Shooky’s end.

“Hey,” Jeongguk says, appearing at Taehyung’s side with a hand pressed to the small of Taehyung’s hoodie-clad back. It’s one of Jeongguk’s, a gray and pink one, and Taehyung has always loved how soft it is.

“Hey,” Taehyung whispers back, staring out at the ocean before them, the stretches of sand on either side.

“Sit with me?” Jeongguk asks, guiding Taehyung over to one of the towels.

“Yeah,” Taehyung says, and they settle in together, Jeongguk sitting up and Taehyung with his head on Jeongguk’s thigh, feet stretched out to touch the sand. Tata and Cooky show up a few seconds later holding a few shells each, and Tata beeps and beeps about how exciting the beach is and how much they want to go swimming (“No, Tata, you’ll get too cold and even you can’t regulate your temperature that well,” Taehyung says) and how Taehyung should be very proud of them for not touching the dead fish they found washed up on the shore.
Jeongguk laughs out loud at that particular comment, and Namjoon looks over, curious.

“You can understand them, can’t you?” Namjoon asks, blinking from Jeongguk to Taehyung and back again.

Jeongguk ducks his head and kisses the side of Tata’s head. “Yeah,” he says, a quiet, proud admission that sounds delightful and lovely. “Not everything yet. But I think soon.”

Finally, Yoongi and Seokjin stop making out, and Shooky stops trying to push RJ into the fire, and Jimin and Hoseok and Chimmy and Mang stop dancing, and everyone starts in on the food. The night sky is clear and starry above their heads, and with the fire in front of them it’s really not too cold, and everyone’s faces glow so beautifully in the flickering flames. Jeongguk’s eyes burn chocolate. Taehyung is young and in love.

<<taetae,>> Tata says once they’re done sticking their limbs in the flames and singeing their pajamas, which they magically repair immediately after they catch fire, <<taetae, wanna sit with you.>>

Taehyung and Jeongguk both blink, surprised. Tata isn’t overly affectionate with Taehyung in public, not the way Cooky can get with Jeongguk sometimes. Not like Chimmy has always been with Jimin.

<<pleasie pleasie PLEASIE taetaetaehyung pretty pretty pretty pretty pretty pretty—>>

“Tata, baby, of course,” Taehyung says, reaching out to pull Tata into his arms, feeling almost like he could cry. Tata brrrr-ups contentedly and settles into the cradle of Taehyung’s crossed legs, their back and head against Taehyung’s chest.

<<love you, taetae. love you lots can I have hotdog please;>> Tata vrr-vzzzz-es.

Taehyung leans down and presses his nose into the little divot at the top of Tata’s heart-shaped head. “Sure, baby,” he whispers, holding the hotdog up to Tata’s mouth. Tata’s little hands come up and guide the food correctly, and they vibrate lightly as they swallow it, their temperature spiking up a little before cooling off again.

<<thank thank thank yummy tatatata likes hotdog and taetae.>>
Taehyung smiles.

“Hey, Jin-hyung,” Jimin says then, as Taehyung is lifting his head and taking another bite of hotdog, “You never finished telling us the story the other night. Of how you and Namjoon-hyung and Yoongi-hyung got together.”

Seokjin smiles, his teeth all brilliant white in the light of the fire. “Oh, yeah. Where’d I leave off?”

“Shooky jumped on your head,” Hoseok says, leaning over to rub Jimin’s shoulder.

Seokjin nods. “Right. So Shooky jumped on my head, and the whole daemon touching thing happened. We realized right away that I wasn’t feeling it the same way they feel it with each other, and we talked about it. It was kind of unromantic really, just—’hey, well, you’re not making us feel all fuzzy like we make each other feel but you’re hot and we wanna take you to bed’—Yoongi said that, obviously, while Namjoon stood there too busy blushing violently red to actually say anything —”

“That is not what I said!” Yoongi protests, at the same time as Namjoon shouts, “I wasn’t blushing, hyung — ”

“That’s exactly what you said!” Seokjin laughs, pumping his fist triumphantly when Yoongi opens his mouth, thinks better of himself, and sits back, lips in a tight line.

“Did you actually say that?” Jeongguk asks, grinning over at Yoongi as Shooky jumps up onto Cooky’s head and starts pulling their ears. Cooky lets them. Cooky and Shooky have always been bros.

Yoongi crosses his arms and slumps into Namjoon’s side. “Shut up. I was drunk. Seokjin-hyung was hot.”

Seokjin shakes his head. “Anyways. We were gonna fuck in the bathroom, but it was occupied, and then all the bedrooms were full—”

“Which, ew, because it was our apartment,” Namjoon throws out there.
“Ew,” Taehyung and Jeongguk and Cooky and Tata all say at once, simultaneously wrinkling their noses. Well, Tata doesn’t really have a nose to scrunch up, and they beep their <<ew>>, but their disdain is apparent.

“No,” Yoongi says, tipping his head onto Seokjin’s shoulder. “We watched a movie, and we talked until morning, and it was…”

Yoongi nods, sniffs like he’s trying not to sneeze except probably he’s trying not to cry. Snatches Shooky up off the ground and sets them down with Koya and RJ, who cuddle them close. “Yeah,” he says. “We didn’t even think about it, really.”

“Because things felt…it was just…” Namjoon says.

“Yeah,” Seokjin finishes, hardly more than a whispers. “It was just—right.”
“Soulmates,” Jeongguk whispers, looking around like he’s daring someone to challenge him. “Maybe the daemon thing doesn’t happen for you, but that doesn’t matter. What matters is the other stuff. Talking all night, having a great time even when you’re not doing anything really. Helping each other with things whether they’re easy little things or difficult things.”

“Bringing surprise Starbucks to a date,” Jimin pipes up.

“Leaning down to tie your partner’s shoe when he doesn’t realize it came undone,” Hoseok says, kissing Jimin’s temple.

“Leaning down to show your partner your ass when he’s been checking it out all day and has not been subtle about it,” Yoongi teases, nudging Namjoon’s side.

Namjoon shakes his head. “Putting your boyfriend in his place when he thinks he’s a sass-master but really he’s just a sass-cleric.”

Yoongi and Seokjin both startle into wild laughter while everyone else just kind of looks around at each other, confused.

“Okay, so yeah, they’re definitely soulmates,” Jimin giggles, snuggling Hoseok and Mang and Chimmy.

“I think that had something to do with Dungeons and Dragons, but I’m really not sure,” Taehyung says, snickering into Jeongguk’s shoulder.

“I love that you think you know something about that and that you’re probably right,” Jeongguk says, laughing and then biting Taehyung’s earlobe.

Tata starts beeping wildly but then gets distracted by eating more of the hotdog. Cooky snuggles in between Taehyung and Jeongguk’s legs, all cute and sweet and sleepy.

“He’s still worn out, huh,” Taehyung says, reaching down to stroke Cooky’s ears.

“Yeah,” Jeongguk says.
“I’m okay,” Cooky whispers, almost too soft for Taehyung to hear. “Just tired.”

“Okay, baby,” Taehyung says, leaning down to kiss Cooky’s lop ear.

“Hey, you guys think we should maybe put this out now?” Hoseok asks. “It’s getting late, and we have a reasonably early train in the morning.”

“Oh,” Namjoon says, “Yeah, let’s…um…”

“Hyung,” Jeongguk says slowly, blinking steadily at Namjoon, “Did you not look up how to put out a fire?”

Namjoon gulps. “Well. Um. I mean, I didn’t get that far because I was preoccupied figuring out how to build it without burning myself—”

“It’s a miracle you succeeded at that,” Yoongi drawls.

Hoseok and Jimin burst into a laugh.

“I’m gonna kick sand on it.” Namjoon decides. “That sounds right, right? Or does sand make fire explode?”

“That’s flour, hyung.” Taehyung giggles.

“How do you know that?” Jeongguk asks, pulling Taehyung to his feet, Tata snuggled in Taehyung’s arms.

“Tata has an eclectic collection interests, fire being one of them!” Taehyung laughs.

“Pyro,” Jeongguk says, smiling, and then he kisses Taehyung in front of all their friends under the stars, and everything feels right.
“I miss our bed,” Taehyung says later, curled up facing Jeongguk in the dark. Tata and Cooky are
snuggled up at the top of the pillows, already sleeping soundly.

“Which bed?” Jeongguk asks, tucking a strand of hair behind Taehyung’s ear. “Your tiny twin, or
mine?”


Tata buzzes in their sleep. They’re all comfy with Cooky cradled against them like they’re worried
the soulsickness might come back, and Taehyung can tell by the nonsensical cadence of their sleep-
humming that they’re really fucking out.

Jeongguk snuggles in closer to Taehyung. “Yeah,” he says, “I miss our bed too. And our room. But I
want to have a bigger one with you someday. A bed like this, only it is our bed.”

Taehyung nods and closes his eyes, sighing sleepily. “Yeah,” he says. “Me too.”

“Kiss me on the lips?” Jeongguk whispers.

“Our secret, just us two,” Taehyung whispers back. Their lips come together like a champagne
supernova, slow and mounting into something bigger but not too big, not too rushed, just gentle
strokes of tongues and lips, everything starry and night-blue around them.

They make love once more before sleep claims them, drowsy and half out of it, but it’s nice and slow
and calm. In the middle of the night, Taehyung wakes to the sound of Tata talking (well, okay,
beeping), and then he hears Cooky mumble back something about pastries, and Taehyung realizes
that they’re both asleep and having a conversation. Later, when Tata steals all the blankets and
Jeongguk and Taehyung both wake up shivering, Tata just beeps <it’s ‘kay tatata is warm>> and
then tries to turn their own body into a blanket, which doesn’t actually really work because they pop
back into their usual shape when they fall asleep again.
“Tata, you gotta be nicer at night,” Taehyung says in the morning, poking Tata’s pouty cheek.

“You don’t have to do that, you know,” Jeongguk says, looking over and kind of startling Taehyung.

“What?”

Jeongguk smiles. “Scold them. You did it when Tata ate the whole pizza slice, too. And I mean—you only do it when other people are around, have you noticed? Like, I’ve caught you a couple times playing around with Tata and they were being their ridiculous, amazing self, and you just went with it. But when other people are around, you freak out and scold them. But you don’t have to.”

Taehyung swallows. “I’ve just—they’ve always been a lot to handle, Jeongguk, my soul is a mess—”

“Maybe,” Jeongguk says, leaning in for a kiss, “But I wouldn’t trade it for anyone else’s. And I like you, and I like Tata. I love you both. I don’t care if they sleep-talk to Cooky in the night, or if they steal literally all the blankets even though they’re the size of a medium-small dog. All of that is kind of honestly adorable. And honestly, when I’m alone in my dorm room without Tata making noises in the night, it’s like—it just feels lonely.”

“Oh,” Taehyung says.

“Also, I like texting them.”

“You’ve texted them, like, once.”

Jeongguk shrugs. “It was a rewarding experience.”

Tata beeps and beeps and beeps.

“Come on,” Jeongguk says, dragging Tata into a hug and Taehyung into a kiss. “Soulmate. Let’s go
tnt ❤ [9:23 a.m.]
jk jk jk bored bored BORED 退屈 PLEASE

Me [9:24 a.m.]
aw tata honey, is Taehyungie in class?

tnt ❤ [9:25 a.m.]
boring class cant investigate :((((((((( taetae makes tata sit on floor all can do is flop tatata arms around, sad flop :( TAETAE INITIATES ANSWER QUESTION PROTOCOL ANSWER: CORRECT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Me [9:26 a.m.]
hahaha which class is this?

Me [9:31 a.m.]
tata-lovey? you there?

tnt ❤ [9:38 a.m.]
JK sowwy sowwy sowwy got distracted
Me [9:40 a.m.]

…doing what, ta

tnt ❤ [9:41 a.m.]

tie all shoes together

Me [9:42 a.m.]

tata wait that’s not a reassuring answer

Me [9:42 a.m.]

taehyung hey you should take your phone please oh god

Me [9:43 a.m.]

tata honey can u please give taehyungie love the phone bc JK wants to talk to him real quick?

tnt ❤ [9:44 a.m.]

no

Me [9:45 a.m.]

ta bb it’s really important <3

Me [9:45 a.m.]
please?

tnt ❤ [9:45 a.m.]
password required

Me [9:46 a.m.]
um

Me [9:46 a.m.]
cooky!

tnt ❤ [9:47 a.m.]
I N C O R R E C T

tnt ❤ [9:47 a.m.]
u have two (2) attempts remaining

Me [9:48 a.m.]
fuck, um. toothbrush?

tnt ❤ [9:48 a.m.]
u have one (1) attempt remaining
Me [9:49 a.m.]

uhhhhhh. pleasie?

tnt ❤️ [9:50 a.m.]

ACCESS GRANTED

tnt ❤️ [9:50 a.m.]

taetae got mad bc JK triggered unlock chime sound effect at Maximum Volume!

Me [9:51 a.m.]

TAEHYUNG LOOK AT THIS PHONE PLEASE RIGHT AWAY YOU NEED TO TAKE IT FROM TATA IMMEDIATELY KIM TAEHYUNG PLS

Me [9:52 a.m.]

SERIOUSLY PLEASE TAE

tnt ❤️ [9:54 a.m.]

jeongguk?

tnt ❤️ [9:54 a.m.]

what’s wrong????

Me [9:55 a.m.]

tata tied everyone’s shoes together
Me [9:55 a.m.]

or like maybe not together like tying the laces to other people’s laces but like

Me [9:56 a.m.]

honestly idk they weren’t very clear on that but anyone with shoelaces is in danger

**tnt ❤ [9:56 a.m.]**

shit

**tnt ❤ [9:56 a.m.]**

god dammit

**tnt ❤ [9:57 a.m.]**

FUCK okay thanks I’m

**tnt ❤ [9:57 a.m.]**

looking around and holy shit how did they do this

**tnt ❤ [9:57 a.m.]**

what do I even say oh my god jeongguk this is

**tnt ❤ [9:58 a.m.]**

wow no they really did tie each person’s shoe to a different person’s shoe this is

**tnt ❤ [9:58 a.m.]**

unprecedented and I literally don’t know what to do jeongguk WHAT DO WHAT HAPPEN
Me [9:59 a.m.]
okay calm down just

Me [9:59 a.m.]
what time does class end

tnt ❤ [10:00 a.m.]
10

tnt ❤ [10:00 a.m.]
welp

tnt ❤ [10:00 a.m.]
I mean

tnt ❤ [10:01 a.m.]
everyone knows now.........

tnt ❤ [10:01 a.m.]
and they all know it was tata they’re all looking at me jeongguk fuck what do I do

Me [10:01 a.m.]
okay it’s fine just
Me [10:02 a.m.]

go back to ur dorm I’ll be over in a few minutes

tnt ❤️ [10:03 a.m.]

sad face. :(((((((((((((((((

Taehyung goes back to his dorm, Tata hanging off him in a sad little piggy back. They’d high-tailed it out of the classroom as soon as everyone had turned to glare and roll their eyes and whisper rude comments to each other, and it’s not like it’s the first time Tata has fucked up a class somehow but it still fucking hurts when everyone is rude about it when it’s a university rule that daemons have to stay with their humans without causing fuss. Tata causes fuss because they’re forced to sit at Taehyung’s feet doing nothing. Honestly, everyone would be better off if they were allowed to poke around and climb the light fixtures and things.

And fuck. It’s drizzling outside, and Taehyung is freezing when he finally gets inside his dorm room. Jimin isn’t there but that’s not surprising. It’s Friday; he’s probably already at Hoseok’s.

“Tata, honey,” Taehyung sighs, sinking onto the floor by his bed because he’s wet and doesn’t really want raindrops to get all over the blankets.

Tata beeps just once and looks up at Taehyung with the biggest, widest black eyes, all sad and mewl-humming with their shoulders slumped like they’re going to get lectured, but Taehyung just tugs Tata forward and into his arms and gives them the biggest, most forgiving hug he can manage.

<<mad, taetae is mad. am sorry am sorry,>> Tata vrrrvs.

Taehyung shakes his head and clutches Tata in tighter. “No, I’m not mad,” he promises. “Tata, I’m sorry. I know you get bored in class and I’ll bring more stuff for you to do or something and—and I’m just sorry that I always scold you when we should be on the same side because I’m you and you’re me and we’re just—yeah. I’m sorry. I’m just so, so sorry.”

Tata hugs Taehyung back, kind of like an octopus. <<it’s okay taetae love you, am not mad not ever.>>
Taehyung huffs. “You are when I’m mean to Gukkie. Or when he and I get snappy with each other.”

<<love JK love cooky! the most except taetae, am love taetae most I am thou thou art I.>>

Taehyung sniffs a laugh. “Did you just quote *Persona 5*?”

Tata pulls away and nods. Taehyung snickers and presses a kiss to Tata’s head. There’s a knock on the door.

“Wanna get it? It’s probably Gukkie and Cooky,” Taehyung whispers, leaning forward to press his nose to Tata’s little yellow mouth.

Tata chirps the iPhone marimba ringtone and flings themselves at the door, throwing it open to reveal Jeongguk and a very freezing-looking Cooky, who is—oh god. Who is wearing actual honest-to-god rain boots and a little rubber coat and a hat with *ear holes*.

And all of it is neon yellow.

Taehyung blinks, and blinks, and then he bursts out in the fondest laughter and says, “What the fuck is that?”

Jeongguk looks up from Tata, who is beeping Very Excitedly at Cooky, and fixes his startled baby doe gaze at Taehyung. “What—what’s what?”

“That,” Taehyung says, pointing at Cooky, whose sleeves squeak as they move against the body part of the coat.

Jeongguk tilts his head like he knows something silly and jokey is going on, and it takes a second but then he goes, “Cooky?”

“Cooky?” Taehyung says, overplaying his laughter as he rolls back on the floor and grins up at the
ceiling, deliriously happy.

“How dare you,” Jeongguk chuckles, finally entering the room and tugging his beanie off his thick dark hair.

“How three?” Taehyung asks.

“Sure. One.”

“Two.”

“Three.”

“Oh my God, Guk, you can’t just ask people what their daemon is!” They chorus together, bursting into laughter that has Jeongguk falling to his knees on the floor next to Taehyung, leaning his head forward to touch the floor as he laughs, and Taehyung has actual tears coming out of his eyes, and Tata and Cooky are—somewhere. Probably in the nest under Taehyung’s bed. Wherever they are, Cooky’s rain gear is in a little heap on the floor, so they’re probably snuggling to warm up.

Taehyung brushes tears from his eyes and goes to sit up, but before he can, Jeongguk pushes him back and climbs over him, straddling his hips and sitting down almost too hard. Taehyung’s air goes all out of him in a loud “Oof.”

“Sorry,” Jeongguk says, but he doesn’t sound very sorry.

“Not forgiven,” Taehyung says, but he doesn’t sound very unforgiving.

Jeongguk leans in. Presses their foreheads together, grins wide and cheesy and bright. “Hyung, can I kiss you?”

Taehyung grins back. “I’m sick,” he drawls, and then he fakes exactly two coughs.

Jeongguk pouts. “Boo, you whore.”
Taehyung smiles. “You know, *this* is why I love you.”

Jeongguk shrugs. “Fair enough. I only love you for your music-playing showerhead adaptor you got from Home Shopping Network or whatever. You know, the thing with the heart-shaped head and the blue and yellow polka-dot pajamas.”

“Hey,” Taehyung chirps, giggling, “That’s my actual soul you’re talking about!”

“I know,” Jeongguk says. “I just said it’s the reason I love you.”

Taehyung blinks.

“But you know,” Jeongguk goes on, “You can just go ahead and like me for my *Mean Girls* references and ignore all the other parts of me. Four for you, Glen Coco. You go, Glen Coco.”

“Shut up and kiss me,” Taehyung whispers, breathless.

Jeongguk goes kind of quiet. “I don’t have a reference to respond to that one.”

Taehyung leans up and brushes their lips together once, twice. “That’s okay. I love you for more than just *Mean Girls.*”

Jeongguk is wide-eyed and warm. “Oh. That’s so fetch.”

“Stop trying to make ‘fetch’ happen,” Taehyung gasps between kisses. “It’s not going to happen.”

“Can we stop with the *Mean Girls* quotes and just make out?” Jeongguk asks.

“Stop trying to make ‘fetch’ happen,” Taehyung gasps between kisses. “It’s not going to happen.”

“Can we stop with the *Mean Girls* quotes and just make out?” Jeongguk asks.

“You can make me,” Taehyung croaks back, already fucked out with the pleasure of the way Jeongguk is moving their hips together.
“Challenge accepted,” Jeongguk says.

Under the bed, Tata makes an amused synth noise.

<<JK → Initiate MAKE TAETAE STOP WITH THE MEAN GIRLS QUOTES AND JUST MAKE OUT protocol>>

<<Initiation successful>>

Chapter End Notes

References!
1. In the text conversation, Tae quotes the song "Sweet" by BROCKHAMPTON, so Hoseok's joke then is a play on that title, "Sweet"
2. Jeongguk's line about "obviously the core concept, Taehyung" is stolen from Archer S01E07, "Skytanic", in which a character says "what part of this are you not understanding" and Archer says "Well obviously the core concept, Lana."
3. The poem Tae quotes is "Wisdom (It was a night of early spring)" by Sara Teasdale
4. "Clean" by Taylor Swift was kinda referenced, sry nt sry
5. The part when Tata is texting and just says "no" was totally all inspired by this ridiculous YouTube series called Arby 'n' the Chief which is about two Halo characters, both of whom are voiced by Microsoft text-to-speech voices. So Master Chief talks really ridiculously, and here is a scene of how I was envision Tata to text, lol
6. The entirety of this was heavily influenced by the poem "Failing and Flying" by Jack Gilbert, which is a really lovely musing on "failed" relationships and how many things that end are said to have failed even when really, it wasn't failure at all. If you never look up anything else I reference ever, you should look up this.

*tumblr

twitter
I never planned to write a fifth chapter of this, but here I am. You might maybe expect more in the future.

WARNINGS:
1. this chapter uses "bitch" in a derogatory way that's shitty but also THAT'S THE WORLD and it's mostly a joke and it's discussed in the text and acknowledged to be a word that upholds patriarchal norms etc.
2. They have sex in jk's childhood bedroom while there are other people in the house who are jk's family, but no one hears or is involved in any way and the door is closed, etc. It's not super explicit but if this is weird for you, you can for sure scroll past it!!! It's near the end when it says "On the last morning in Busan" and you can pick up reading again when it says "Helpful." as just its own paragraph.
3. also for me struggling terribly with Korean honorifics and how to differentiate Jeongguk's parents from each other and just yeah
4. Also, warning for parents being...parents. So a couple jokes that are that one particular brand of uninformed but not malicious at all, just generally kind of oblivious and the kids are like WTF WHY ARE YOU LIKE THIS

<3 let me know if I missed any tags or anything important!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Taehyung’s attention is drawn away from the third-to-last episode of *Mob Psycho 100* by the insistent and high-pitched whirring of a cape-flourishing Tata, who has suddenly appeared from under the bed to slide around the cheap linoleum in pajama feet. They’re all space sound effects and too-long arms, pajamas magically turned black and a towel tied around their neck. The cloth trails long across the floor, nearly tripping them as they leap and whirl.

“Oh my god,” Jimin says, snorting a laugh.

“That’s—yeah,” Taehyung says. “Ta, dude, come here and watch with Jiminie and Chimmy and me. You like this show.”
Taehyung sighs, but he’s ducking a grin into Jimin’s shoulder. Chimmy reaches out to pause the show, ears perking up. They stick their tongue out and wag their tail at Tata, who is now brandishing a toy gun that Taehyung has literally never seen before. “What the fuck, where did you get that?”

Taehyung huffs and turns to Jimin and Chimmy. “Sorry, sorry. We used to play this game when I was a kid where we would string up yarn between, like, every chair and table leg and door handle in the house, and then we would close our eyes and try to navigate. It was called Alien Traps. The spaceship was the underneath of my bed, and supposedly there was some plot going on about us being in space and having to stealth our way around the aliens, but I think mostly we just liked tying the strings to everything.”

Jimin shakes his head, smiling. “Bet your mom loved that.”

“They cleanup always involved a lot of yelling, yeah,” Taehyung agrees, beckoning Tata onto the bed in one last attempt to settle them down. They’ve been kind of all over the place recently—more so than usual. Maybe it’s because Jeongguk has been extremely busy with his upcoming dance showcase, and Taehyung and Tata haven’t gotten to spend any real time with him and Cooky for like two whole weeks.

They’ve subsisted on the bare minimum. Sporadic texts, mostly between Cooky and Tata who talk in only emojis which is hilarious to scroll through later; late-night visits wherein Jeongguk stumbles into his dorm around midnight to find Taehyung already curled up clutching Tata, which is a sleeping arrangement Taehyung and Tata don’t really love but they both need to cling to something or they’ll never fall asleep, so. They cling to each other, like they used to for years and years and years, and it should be fine because they did live that way for more than two decades, but now that they know differently—know the warmth of clinging to some other person, to that other person’s soul—to their soulmate and his soul which is the mate of Taehyung’s own—

Well. Tata is all over the place right now because Taehyung can’t offer his super curious soul the comfort it actually wants. It doesn’t help that Tata also can’t offer their human the comfort he wants. Taehyung and Tata don’t want each other, because they’re really not each or other at all; they’re just one thing. One being, one entity. And they need the closeness of Jeongguk and his pinkish tough bunny soul, possibly more than they need to breathe.
Well. Maybe not Taehyung. Taehyung really does, like, need to breathe. Tata…well. Flip a coin.

So maybe Taehyung and Tata are a little touched-starved, a little needy. Whatever. Jimin is here, also left alone because Hoseok is working on a year-end dance showcase with the high schoolers he teaches—the end of the school year is always busy, Taehyung gets it. Hell, he and Jimin should both probably be freaking out, studying more, working themselves sick over the finals they have to sit next week so they can graduate. Monday: start finals. Thursday: finish finals. Friday: move out of the dorms, go to Jeongguk’s dance showcase. Saturday: leave for Busan.

Because, right. Jeongguk asked Taehyung to come with him to Busan.

And Taehyung said yes.

*Anyways.* The point is. In less than a week, college will be over.

The logical thing to do is to exist in a permanent state of denial, ignore all classes and papers and tests and responsibilities, and watch anime with Jimin and Chimmy while Tata plays Alien Traps on the floor, complete with a white terry cloth cape (which now that Taehyung is thinking about it really doesn’t go with the whole space-battle aesthetic of the game, but whatever) and a blue and yellow plastic water gun.

Wait.

“No no no no no!” Taehyung finds himself yelling five minutes later, once they’ve resumed the anime and Jimin is carding his fingers through Taehyung’s hair *almost* as good as Jeongguk does it. Tata has apparently figured out that their toy gun works as more than just a piece of plastic, and they are now dousing random items with its thin but shockingly powerful stream of water. “Stop, *stop,* this is my *computer,* please don’t get water on it!”

<<but tatata is a pretty cool guy. eh kills aleins and doesnt afraid of anythign.>>

“Did you just *talk* typos?” Taehyung shrieks. Jimin and Chimmy muffle giggles into their hands.

Tata leaps onto the bed, shooting the water gun as they make their legs too long and arch up over the back of the laptop to get right in Taehyung’s face. Jimin giggles, and Chimmy yips a couple times and jumps down onto the floor.
“Kim Tata,” Taehyung says, which sounds weird and silly and contains literally no disciplinary power.

<<JK says be nice to kim tatatatata.>> Tata says, playing up the aegyo (which is hilarious because Tata is a daemon with a heart-shaped head for whom aegyo should be impossible, but then Taehyung has pretty much figured out by now that for Tata, nothing is impossible). <<love yourself, love yourself, i am thou thou art i—>>

“You do love that Persona 5 shit, don’t you,” Taehyung sighs, snatching Tata around the waist before they can squirt any more water around the room.

“They’re talking about Persona 5?” Jimin asks, standing up and stretching all long and lean with his ridiculous dancer body. His senior showcase was last week, and all their friends went to support him; Jimin had of course been great, and Taehyung remembers fondly the look on Hoseok’s face as he swooped Jimin up afterwards, leaning him into a dramatic kiss. Mang and Chimmy had been ecstatic too, chasing each other all around everyone’s feet and nearly careening into Shooky, who had narrowly escaped by climbing up Seokjin’s pant leg. On the inside.

(It was awesome. Like, top ten things that have ever happened in the friend group awesome.)

Jimin yawns and rolls his head from side to side. Taehyung keeps struggling against Tata, who is still playing keep-away with the water gun. At least it’s out of water now. Jimin smiles. “I’m gonna head to the library, knock out the last bit of my economics essay. Cool?”

Taehyung nods. “Yeah, okay. I’ll see you later?”

Jemin grabs his phone and bashes his head. “Not sure, I might be spending the night at Hobi’s. Depends whether he ends up having to hold an extra rehearsal tomorrow morning. He told his kids that if they do well today, he’ll give them tomorrow off. Which is obviously what he wants, because if they have tomorrow off, then he does too, and that means Chimmy and I can stay over tonight. But. You know Hobi. If they’re not good enough, he won’t cave just for me. Boo.”

Taehyung nods, resigning himself to another night falling asleep alone—either here or in Jeongguk’s bed, it doesn’t matter. He’ll be asleep long before Jeongguk gets done today. And there’s that stupid 8:00 a.m. history lecture he has to go to tomorrow (why the fuck did he leave that until his last semester) which means he and Tata will be long gone before Jeongguk and Cooky wake up. Might just be easier for both of them to spend a night on their own, so they don’t disturb each other’s sleep.
“Hey. You okay?” Jimin asks as he shoulders into his jacket.

Taehyung nods. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“You look stressed all of a sudden,” Jimin points out. “I mean, more stressed than usual. And Tata has stopped struggling and is making a face like that new emoji with the puppy-dog eyes.”

Yup. Tata is 100 percent making that face. Taehyung flicks their forehead. “Stop that. You don’t even mean it; you’re just doing it to be a menace.”

<<am not.>>

“Are so!”

<<not!>>

“So!”

“And on that note,” Jimin interrupts, reaching out fondly to card his fingers through Taehyung’s hair, “I’m gonna go. Unless you wanna talk?”

Taehyung shakes his head, Tata curling up in his arms, surprisingly docile. The water gun lays forgotten at the end of the bed, and Taehyung unties the knot of the towel cape, the terry cloth falling to the floor. Tata grabs a throw blanket instead and burritos into it. “I’m fine, really. Just, you know. Stress at the end of the semester. The end of college. It’s a lot.”

Jimin’s expression is soft and sweet, almost as loving as when he’s looking at Hoseok or Mang. “Don’t worry, hon. Everything will be okay.” He keeps petting Taehyung’s hair.

Taehyung nods, closing his eyes as he relaxes into Jimin’s touch, wishing it were Jeongguk’s. Wishing Cooky could join Tata in the blanket burrito on his lap. “Yeah. I know. It’ll be okay.” He sighs. “Oh, by the way, before you go—sorry, we keep extending this and you’re trying to leave—
anyways, have you had any luck with our apartment hunting?"

Jimin’s expression gets almost nervous and Taehyung’s gut twists a little—he loves living with Jimin, really, and their post-grad plans have always included finding a nice, affordable two-bedroom apartment within walking distance of good nightlife and good barbeque and good noraebang. But as lovely as that image is, there’s another one that keeps creeping up and threatening to unseat the first—maybe Jimin has figured it out, can sense Taehyung’s unrest—

<<JK and cooky!>> Tata mumbles, all low-dragging vervey synth notes, the way they say their translations of their names whenever they’re feeling wobbly and helpless. <<miss JK and cooky! all the time miss them miss them—>>

“Um, about that,” Jimin says, interrupting Tata’s chant of miss them miss them that doesn’t seem to want to stop tumbling out of their mouth. Jimin straightens, runs an awkward hand through his hair. Chimmy is hiding behind his legs, which is unusual. “Um. So. Hobi kind of…”

Taehyung tilts his head, reaching out to link his fingers through Jimin’s, squeezing for comfort. “What, Jiminie? He’s not being mean to you or anything, right? He’s not—”

“Oh my god, no.” Jimin laughs lightly and shakes his head. “Um. Hobi asked me and Chimmy if we wanted to move in with him. It would…well. Hobi and Namjoon-hyung’s lease is up in a month, so I would move in there for a bit until that happens? But then we would have time to apartment hunt, and just—um. I don’t know if I’m gonna do it? But just…”

Taehyung swallows. Tata makes a nonsensical buzzy processing noise, which then transforms into a ding ding ding! that sounds like someone has won a game show. <<JK and cooky! live with JK and cooky! no more vacationing yayayay! c’mon taetaetaetaetaetaetae—>>

“That’s awesome, Minnie,” Taehyung says, standing up so he can meet Jimin’s eyes. “I’m happy for you.”

<<JK and cooky! JK and cooky!>>

“Yes?” Jimin asks, chewing his lip and reaching down to pick Chimmy up so he can scratch the puppy’s ears.
“Sure,” Taehyung promises, leaning in to smack Jimin’s forehead with a kiss.

“Namjoonie-hyung said you’re welcome to crash on their couch, by the way,” Jimin says, relaxing as he slings his backpack over his shoulder. “Like, until you find a place. You could maybe even take Hobi’s old room at their place after he and I leave? I don’t know if Namjoon and Yoongi and Seokjin are planning on doing anything with it or if Joonie is moving out too, like when Hobi and I do? Anyways,” Jimin finishes, pulling open the door, “thanks for understanding, Taetae. Love you. And like I said, I still don’t really know for sure if I’m even going to say yes to Hobi—”

“It’s fine, Jimin, promise.”

“I’m not sure—”

“You are,” Taehyung says, nodding. “You should. You and Hoseok-hyung are perfect for each other. Chimmy and Mang, too. You’ll be really happy.”

Jimin’s smile is radiant, otherworldly. He’s probably the most objectively pretty person Taehyung knows. “I don’t know, really,” Jimin says shyly, fiddling with the strap of his backpack as Chimmy chews on the other one. “I mean. I think…I think I’ll say yes. I want to, so bad. But. It’s a big step, you know? I don’t want to rush into anything. Especially with my…relationship history.”

Taehyung sighs and yanks Jimin into a hug. “Noooo, Jiminie, stop I love you, I want you to love you.”

“Hobi loves me,” Jimin whispers. “Somehow, after everything I’ve done, every choice I’ve made…somehow, I got Jung Hoseok to love me.”

“Stop that. No shaming yourself. You’re wonderful and your choices are what make you you and of course he loves you,” Taehyung says, squeezing tight and then letting go. “I’m so glad you love him, and he loves you. Follow your heart, you know? If you’re happy, and I know you are, then…don’t deny yourself that because of fake wisdom. ‘Wise men say only fools rush in’ and all that. Do what’s right for you.”

Jimin’s gaze is a little too perceptive, a little too soft. “Tae. When did you get so smart.”

Taehyung frowns. “Fuck you; I’ve always been smart!”
Jimin giggles, but he maintains some semblance of seriousness as he reaches out to brush hair out of Taehyung’s eyes. “You should take your own advice, you know.”

Taehyung swallows. “What do you mean?”

“I can see how sad you are when they’re not here,” Jimin murmurs. “I can see how restless it makes you. And Tata. You guys both get kind of jittery without them.”

“Oh,” Taehyung says, looking down at Tata, who is chewing on his own foot. “I guess.”

Jimin shrugs. “Hey, don’t let me pressure you. Just because I’m moving in with my boyfriend doesn’t mean…”

Taehyung’s eyes go wide, startled. “I mean—Jeongguk still has another two years of college. I wouldn’t ask him to—I mean, he has more friends than just us and they live on campus, and his classes are all here, and—”

“Tae,” Jimin says, “I know you’ve thought about it. I’ve overheard Cooky and Tata talking when the whole group is hanging out, you know, like, what I can pick up from Tata’s beeps and stuff. I’m not as good as Jeongguk but—they both think you guys live together already.”

Taehyung can feel the flush travelling up his neck, staining his cheeks pink. “I. I guess. I’ve…thought about it.” He has. Tata talks about it, obviously, because Tata has no qualms about expressing Taehyung’s deepest secrets and desires to everyone, not that they can understand. And then there’s Jeongguk, who of course does understand almost all those beeps and buzzes now.

“You could talk to him about it,” Jimin ventures. “Not…like, asking. You don’t have to make any concrete plans. Just. Mention it, yeah? I think Jeongguk would be very happy. And Cooky too.”

Taehyung nods. Tata pulls their foot out of their mouth and climbs up to perch on Taehyung’s head. “Thanks, Jiminnie.”

Jimin nods. “Best friends, right? That’s what I’m here for.”
Taehyung smiles and waves Jimin goodbye, and Tata leaps down and hugs Chimmy once before darting back into the dorm room, apparently content to play jungle gym on the drying rack while Taehyung sinks back onto his bed and glares at his laptop, dreading the studying he *knows* has to happen before the end of the day. He grabs his phone instead, figuring he can waste at least ten minutes on it before the anxiety over exams catches up and forces him into productivity.

**JK+Cook❤❤ [4:57 p.m.]**

hey tnt, on break rn and we miss you :<

**JK+Cook❤❤ [4:57 p.m.]**

love you honeys, see you tonight?

**Me [4:57 p.m.]**

our dorm or yours?

**JK+Cook❤❤ [4:58 p.m.]**

mine? if you don’t mind i mean, idk if jimin’s around tonight or what but

**JK+Cook❤❤ [4:58 p.m.]**

idk i like having you at mine. bc it’s just our stuff there and no one else’s, idk does that makes sense

**Me [4:59 p.m.]**

Yes yes it’s cute bb,, i love you
We love you.

Me [4:59 p.m.]
See you tonight. Tbh might be asleep before you get back, idk, sorry jagiya :/

JK+Cook❤❤ [5:00 p.m.]
jagiya Usuario

JK+Cook❤❤ [5:00 p.m.]
gotta go back to dance but no it's okay i’m gonna be done early tonight

JK+Cook❤❤ [5:00 p.m.]
will bring dinner if you want, i should be done here in an hour? you and ta can go over there whenever, will text when we head home

(Home, Taehyung thinks, staring at the word and imagining some lovely apartment with a modest bedroom and a little veranda, and with Jeongguk and Cooky brightening all the nooks and crannies of it with their old pictures taped to the walls, their blankets in a nest on the bed, their domestic presence within the walls of a place called home. A place with Taehyung and Tata, too, a place with non-breakable things for Tata to climb and those fruit-mush pouches they like to eat, and with quiet nights poured over ice and Tanqueray—

Wait, that’s just a Troye Sivan song.)

Me [5:02 p.m.]
I’ve got some writing to do that I wanna get done here but after that yeah

Me [5:02 p.m.]
we’ll be there when u get done, will provide a massage. in case youre sore <3

Jeongguk doesn’t respond; he must be back in rehearsal. Taehyung sighs and tries to buckle down on his final lab report for his chem seminar, and a couple minutes later, his phone lights up.

JK+Cook❤❤ [5:08 p.m.]
❤❤❤❤❤❤❤❤❤❤❤❤❤❤ see you later taehungie see you tata-honey ❤❤

Taehyung smiles and looks up at Tata, who is now hanging from the top of the door frame and spinning around a bunch like their arms are the chains on a swing, and then they (obviously) stop winding and spin back the other way, laughter bubbling up as synthey dance beats the whole time.

“Hey, Ta-baby, you wanna go to Cooky and Jeongguk’s now, or in an hour or so when they get done with dance?”

<<now now NOW!>> Tata chirps, practically a living cartoon with the way their head is moving in a dizzy circle as they sit on the floor under the doorway into the closet. There might actually be little stars and black sketch circles tumbling around them. <<need to improve NEST there is NEST at home need IMPROVEMENTS.>>

“Home.”

Tata blinks up at Taehyung like they’re Extremely Disappointed™ in their human. <<home home home obviously home.>>

“Here is home,” Taehyung says, even though his own soul obviously doesn’t believe it.

Tata shakes their head. <<love jiminie-chimmy but love HOME let’s go home come ON taetaetaetaetae.>>
And. Well. It’s kind of hard to argue with your own soul when it has the capability of dragging you forcibly out of your own dorm room before you can even grab stuff like clothes or a toothbrush or your laptop—

<<taetae has all things many things at home.>>

“The laptop at least!”

<<fine laptop laptop hurry hurry tatata has HOME IMPROVEMENTS need to IMPROVE nest! so cooky! can be snuggled correctly.>>

“Fine, let’s go,” Taehyung says, throwing his laptop and a bag of gummy candies into his bag.

<<hurry hurry taetaetaaaaaaae!>>

The thing is, Tata is right. Taehyung doesn’t need pajamas or a toothbrush or even clothes for tomorrow. Because, yeah. All that stuff is kind of at Jeongguk’s already. Possibly more of that stuff is at Jeongguk’s than here.

<<home home HOME!>> Tata cheers as they race down the dorm hallway, nearly knocking into Momo and her shockingly large and menacing tiger daemon as they meander down the hall.

“Sorry,” Taehyung calls, but Momo just smiles and waves Taehyung off. She’s lived on Taehyung and Jimin’s hallway all year, so she’s pretty familiar with Tata’s antics.

“He’s fine. You guys heading somewhere exciting?” She asks, pushing open her door. Her tiger stalks in ahead of her, and Taehyung shakes his head.

“Nah, not really.”

Momo raises an eyebrow. “Sure you’re not going to see that wickedly handsome boytoy of yours?”

Taehyung tilts his head back in fake annoyance, huffing nice and loud for Tata (who is already
swinging from the handle of the door into the stairwell) to hear. “Shut up.”

Momo laughs and heads into the room she shares with Tzuyu with an air of dismissal. “Sure, Tae. Have fun! Be safe!”

“Oh my god,” Taehyung says, shaking his head and hurrying to catch up with Tata.

<<safe safe safe,>> Tata beeps.

“Not you too,” Taehyung teases, but he scoops Tata into his arms and smiles at them, laughing as Tata starts rambling off about how they didn’t finish the anime and can they please finish when they get home and can they also please eat ice cream. “You weren’t even paying attention. You were playing Alien Traps with no yarn and a water gun.”

<<wanna watch. wanna ice cream. wanna play with cooky!>>


Tata chatters on like they didn’t even notice the slip, and maybe they didn’t. Maybe it wasn’t really a slip at all.

Taehyung hitches his backpack into a more comfortable position and lets Tata’s vrrrr s and zhioooooo-wops and clickclickclick s wash over him all the way to Jeongguk and Cooky’s room. When they get there, Tata cheers. <<home! initiate IMPROVEMENT protocol! home HOME!>>

Taehyung can’t find it in himself to disagree.
“Holy shit I hope you’re here right now because I’m like, dying sore and really wanna eat but my arms are too weak to lift to my mouth and—”

“Oh,” Cooky says, wobbling back and forth at Jeongguk’s feet as they cling to the hem of Jeongguk’s workout shorts. “They look really cute.”

They do. Taehyung and Tata are curled up together on Jeongguk’s bed with a throw blanket overtop of them, looking surprisingly similar with the way their lips are parted, the way their eyes aren’t quite closed. Taehyung’s currently blue hair is a halo on the pillow and he looks shockingly broad-shouldered against the narrow dimensions of Jeongguk’s extra-long twin. It’s so easy to forget how strong Taehyung is sometimes, easy to forget that he and Jeongguk are the same size: it so often feels like Taehyung is a litte little fairy creature what with the bright illumination behind his eager eyes, the way he’s constantly licking his bottom lip, the sound effects he’s always making (and Taehyung wonders where Tata gets their adorable voice). It’s easy to forget even though Taehyung is Jeongguk’s protector as often as he is Jeongguk’s protected, even though Jeongguk and Cooky get small and downtrodden and then Taehyung and Tata take over happily, effortlessly, using their immense joint power to get Jeongguk and Cooky in the shower or straight into bed if it’s that kind of day—

“Jeonggukkie, shh, ” Cooky whispers, even though Jeongguk hasn’t been making noise, just standing here staring creepily at his boyfriend and his boyfriend’s magical soul instead of making a move to set down the package of lamb skewers he has with him or slip out of his shoes. Cooky hops forward a few feet to the bed and eyes it like they’re going to make the jump—they can, of course, but that will jostle the mattress and it might wake Taehyung and Tata up, so instead Cooky turns and blinks at Jeongguk all serious and pouty and very convincing. Taehyung says Jeongguk and Cooky look exactly alike when they do that, and if Cooky’s pout is this persuasive, then Jeongguk’s must be pretty powerful too.

“Hold on,” Jeongguk whispers, finally setting down everything he’s carrying and toeing out of his shoes. He crosses the room, sets Cooky carefully on the mattress. Cooky noses under the bottom edge of the throw blanket by Taehyung’s feet, and soon there’s a Cooky-shaped lump nuzzled up around Taehyung’s waist. There’s a little tingle like the bunny is touching Taehyung’s bare skin, maybe a sliver of exposed belly below the hem of his shirt. Jeongguk closes his eyes and thinks about climbing in with them and going straight to sleep, but it’s only just past 7:00 p.m. and Jeongguk really doesn’t want to fuck around with his sleep schedule even a little bit when it’s this close to finals. Instead, he sighs and figures they can reheat the lamb after he showers.

God, the dorm showers are shitty. Jeongguk practically groans just to look at them, but he drops his towel and steps under the weak stream of water coming from the best shower head (which honestly is still unreasonably bad). At least he gets reassuring little warm sugar zings from Cooky and Taehyung shifting in their sleep, touching firmly enough that Jeongguk’s heart trembles with it. Jeongguk closes his eyes and washes his hair, arms sort of floppy and hands shaking.
Maybe it’s the heat of the shower that sends Jeongguk’s head almost instantly into silken daydreams. He might honestly be asleep standing up, except the thread of fantasy is easy to spin; Jeongguk weaves sense memory into a world of its own: this very moment, sleepy in the shower, but in an apartment, maybe even a house. A nice master bedroom with a huge bathtub in the en suite. Taehyung and Tata and Cooky all sleepy under the pale morning sunlight while Jeongguk stumbles into the shower, knowing they’ll be waiting in bed all soft and pliant for him when he’s done. Getting dried off, dressing for work. Going back to the bedroom to find Taehyung blinking sleepily awake, cuddling both Tata and Cooky because he can’t sleep unless he’s holding onto something (them).

“Hey,” Jeongguk says in the imagining of it. “Morning, sleepyhead.”

Daydream-Taehyung yawns, lips quirking up weakly in the drowsy lull of 7:00 a.m. “Morning, babe.”

“Breakfast?” Jeongguk offers, imagining the way it would feel to lift Taehyung out of bed still wrapped in the sheet, wearing little if anything. Just one of Jeongguk’s button-downs, maybe. Cooky and Tata holding hands as they pad into the kitchen behind Jeongguk and Taehyung. Taehyung burying his face in Jeongguk’s neck against the sunlight streaming into the kitchen through wide windows that face a garden. Tata finding strawberries in the fridge and gobbling them up before anyone else can eat any. Green tea and rice and egg, or toast if Taehyung is still too out of it to stomach something heavier. He sits on Jeongguk’s lap and lets Jeongguk fit bites into his perfect, flower-pink mouth.

In the shitty shower of the dorm bathroom, Jeongguk’s stomach grumbles a dull roar. He sighs and finishes scrubbing out his shampoo, heads back to his room with his shower caddy in tow, feeling childish and stupid and way too old for this dorm shit when he is nearing 21 years of age.

Which. Back to that imagined country cottage with Taehyung and Tata and Cooky and none of this real life responsibility shit. It’s a pipe dream, sure, at the very least because, like, where in Seoul are they going to find a rural cottage? And they do want to stay in Seoul, much to Jeongguk’s mom’s chagrin and Taehyung’s mom’s apathy. Taehyung’s mom doesn’t give a fuck about where Taehyung and Tata are.

Okay, okay, so Taehyung’s mom isn’t that bad. But she definitely isn’t as accepting and lovely as Jeongguk’s mom. Speaking of which, Jeongguk should really tell his mom that he has a boyfriend, and that said boyfriend is the person he is bringing back to Busan next weekend when they go; it’s not some mystery girl like Jeongguk’s parents probably think. Fuck, Jeongguk should really tell his mom that he likes boys.

“Guk?” Taehyung’s voice calls as Jeongguk pushes back into his dorm, yawning and ignoring
whatever was circling around in his head, things about houses and staying in Seoul and it could be an apartment, they could live in an apartment instead of some idyllic cabin…

<<JK JK JK!>> Tata shouts, launching themselves into Jeongguk’s arms and clinging. Jeongguk is still holding his shower caddy in one hand and trying to keep the towel up around his waist with the other, but he ducks his head, inhaling the lovely ozone-sugar scent of Tata.

“Tata-yah,” he grins, planting a kiss at the divot of Tata’s heart head. “Missed you, kiddo.”

<<kiddo じゃないよ! >> Tata verves, and Jeongguk chuckles and kisses their head again. Taehyung is sitting up sleepily, rubbing his eyes and yawning. The only thing that could make him look better would be if he were in a bigger bed in Jeongguk’s imagined apartment which they rent together, just the two of them and their perfect wonderful lovely daemons, one of whom is currently playing intently with Jeongguk’s earrings.

But, well. Taehyung is moving in with Jimin once they graduate. Jeongguk knows. And he and Taehyung have only been together for, like, six months anyways, so moving in together would be a lot. And Taehyung and Tata might be a lot just, like, in general, but they’re also not really great with handling a lot when it’s coming from external high-pressure situations. Which. Moving in together would definitely count as that.

“Guk? You okay?” Taehyung yawns, nap-rough and low.

Jeongguk shakes himself out of his thoughts. “Sorry. Just, like, extremely exhausted.”

“Aw, honey,” Taehyung says, saccharine but not too simpering, just enough tender concern in his voice that Jeongguk’s heart pounds with it.

Or maybe that’s because Cooky is sitting in Taehyung’s lap with Taehyung’s T-shirt stretched over them so they can press directly against Taehyung’s perfect wonderful soft stomach.

(Jeongguk and Cooky both might be kind of obsessed with that stomach, to be honest.)

“I got lamb skewers,” Jeongguk slurs, the bone-deep weariness creeping up on him again now that he’s all shower-soft. He feels sugary and warm from within, crumbling like a pastry.
“Get in bed. I’ll reheat them and bring them back,” Taehyung offers.

“I’m okay—”

“You’re afraid of the microwave.” Taehyung pokes the ticklish spot on Jeongguk’s side as he gets out of bed and heads for the takeout box on the desk. “Cooky is too; they always hide behind my legs when I’m using it and they’re around.”

“Cooky and Shooky had a traumatic experience with a microwave a couple years back,” Jeongguk grumbles, which is true. Also, though, Jeongguk has always been afraid of the microwave. And of other people. And of new situations, and of ordering his own food, and of being too awkward in social situations, and of—

*This is why your daemon is a scaredy little bunny, Jeonggukkie,* Jeonghyun’s voice teases in Jeongguk’s head. It doesn’t hurt to think about it anymore, but Jeongguk does still wonder why he’s the one with a bunny when everyone else in his family has lions and tigers and bears and hyenas and eagles and strong things, *vicious* things.

(Not vicious often, but sometimes. Sometimes.)

“Hey, Jeongguk. *Jeongguk.* Oh my god, you really are like falling-over tired, just—come on, sit down, you’re okay,” Taehyung soothes, guiding Jeongguk to the bed. “Come on, just rest and I’ll bring you food—don’t fall asleep until you’ve eaten! And then we can go straight to bed and try to have an actual conversation in the morning.”

“Sure, Tae.” Jeongguk lets himself be guided under the covers. “Sweatpants at least, please?”

Taehyung’s fingers scritch through Jeongguk’s hair, nails a little longer than Jeongguk keeps his own. It’s so *nice* having someone to take care of him, someone of whom he can ask favors without feeling like he’s burdening them. Taehyung *likes* when Jeongguk asks for things, just like Jeongguk likes when Taehyung asks for things. Instead of being shy and secretive and whatever he thinks Jeongguk wants him to be instead of being *him.*

“Which pair, does it matter?”
“No,” Jeongguk mumbles, although he’s touched that Taehyung remembered to ask. Jeongguk does sometimes get particular about which texture of fabric he wants against his skin.

“It’s kinda hot, so I’m giving you the cotton ones.”

“Mmkay.” Jeongguk shifts around on the cool sheets, soothing and soft against his shower-clean skin. He drags a hand up his bare stomach, tracing the planes and divots of his own abs, prominent now when he hasn’t eaten or had water in hours, when he’s been working out hard for hours every day for the past month. It’s gratifying to feel evidence of his own effort reflected in the hollows and swells of muscle under his skin, and Jeongguk lets out a mumbly sort of moan.

“Hey,” Taehyung chides, recognizing the intent with which Jeongguk is moving—not sexual yet, but Jeongguk is sensitive and when he feels good and safe, when he’s coming down from the overstimulation of a long day, that’s when he wants Taehyung to take care of him. And Taehyung does, just like he’s doing right now, and that just makes it worse. Makes Jeongguk close his eyes and run a palm back up his side, resting heavy on his stomach. Taehyung tuts. “Jeongguk, baby, you have to eat. Drink some water.”

Jeongguk makes a pained sound low in his throat and reaches out for—something. There’s a nudge against his arm: Tata is wrapping their arms up around Jeongguk’s elbow, sort of like a compression sleeve you can get for your joints. Jeongguk’s elbow doesn’t hurt or anything, but his arms are still weak and workout-shaky, and it feels nice having Tata all tight around his skin. “Hey, Ta,” he whispers, turning onto his side to stroke the side of Tata’s head. Tata hums this one particular sound that Jeongguk has determined is basically a purr.

“Lift your hips, babe,” Taehyung murmurs, so calm and quiet like he is whenever it’s late, or Jeongguk is sick, or there’s coddling to be given. Jeongguk lets Taehyung slide the pajamas up to his waist, no underwear but that doesn’t matter, not when the fabric is loose and light across his skin, pleasant and soothing. “I’m gonna go get dinner heated.”

“Okay,” Jeongguk whispers, all kinds of spacey. He can’t quite manage anything else for a minute, and Taehyung gathers up the food and is already opening the door when Jeongguk finally conjures the strength to say, “Thanks, Taetae. Love you.”

Taehyung looks back at Jeongguk over his shoulder and Jeongguk thinks—imagines, maybe—that he sees something in Taehyung’s eyes, something too knowing, too resigned. The look Taehyung always gets when he’s thinking about endings, when he gets bittersweet like white wine tinted citrusy pear and elderflower, when he thinks sad things about himself or about his future or about the general state of the world.
“Don’t fall asleep, Jeongguk-ah,” Taehyung says after a second, and maybe that look was just a trick of the light, or a glint of fond certainty distorted by distance. Maybe.

“Have Cooky go with you,” Jeongguk slurs, nuzzling his nose against Tata’s head.

“I can help,” Cooky whispers, hopping off the bed and after Taehyung. “Just don’t wanna touch the microwave.”

“Sure,” Taehyung smiles, “c’mon, Cook.”

Jeongguk is asleep before the door even shuts.

“I should just ask him, right?” Taehyung asks the room in general, flailing his arms around and knocking over a glass that had contained wine until Tata drank it all. The glass rolls for the edge of the table but Tata shoots an arm out and catches it before it can fall, setting it proudly in the center of the table without leaving their spot halfway across the room.

“Yes,” Hoseok drawls, chin hooked over Jimin’s shoulder to eye the economics notes spread out on the table in front of them. It’s Saturday night and Jimin and Taehyung have taken their studying to Namjoon and Hoseok’s place, partly because Namjoon is awesome at explaining literally everything and mostly because Jimin has been basically living here for the past two months.

Taehyung glances down at his history notes, deems this whole studying thing a lost cause (which is bad because exams start on Monday morning but whatever), and slams his textbook shut. “I can’t do it. He’s gonna think it’s too much pressure, and that I’m just doing it because Jimin is moving in with Hobi now. Traitor.”

“Hey,” Jimin says, although he’s clearly only paying, like, 30 percent attention. Most of his focus is taken up by chewing on the end of his pen as he stares at a graph that apparently means something to someone, although Taehyung is not one of those people. “I’m not a traitor. I just really love my boyfriend.”
“You just want to have morning sex every single day of your salacious life,” Taehyung says, waving a hand dismissively.

“Keep studying, Taehyung-ah,” Namjoon chides. “Focus on your exams. Then worry about your love life.”

“Hold on,” Jimin says, finally lifting his gaze from his book to fix Taehyung with a skeptical pout. “First of all, I already get to have morning sex every day of my salacious life, because I basically live here anyways.”

“That’s true,” Hoseok cuts in.

“You love it,” Jimin giggles, leaning in for a kiss. When he pulls away, he stays close to Hoseok, their faces lit up with the happiness of their shared existence, their companionship.

Taehyung blows blue hair out of his eyes and slumps over the table. “You said ‘first of all’ but you never followed that up with another thing.” He glances over at Yoongi hoping for some solidarity.

Yoongi is asleep on Seokjin’s shoulder. It looks like an uncomfortable position considering they’re sitting in two separate chairs, and probably Yoongi is faking, but either way, Taehyung clearly isn’t getting any support there.

“Okay, I’m ready to follow up,” Jimin says after a few more seconds of sappiness have passed between him and Hoseok. “Second of all, you and Tata basically live at Jeongguk and Cooky’s, and it’s a waste of money that we’ve been paying for our dorm room at all this semester, and you should ask him to move in with you.”

“You should focus on exams,” Namjoon ventures. He shuts up when Taehyung and Hoseok and Seokjin and Jimin all wave their hands at him in various be quiet this is important sorts of gestures, the kind that adults give to nosy kids.

“He’s gonna think I’m just asking as, like, a second choice. A plan B, because Jiminie doesn’t want to live with me.” Taehyung winces as a lot of loud clanging comes from behind him. Wow. Tata is swinging from one of the pots on Seokjin’s fancy pot/pan hanging device (which is here even though Seokjin doesn’t even live here). Seokjin hasn’t said anything, so Taehyung rolls his eyes and ignores it.
“Are you?” Jimin asks.

Taehyung bites his lip, eyes cast down as heat wells up in his cheeks. “No. I—no. Really, I mean. I want to live with him. And wake up with him every morning. Have lots of morning sex in my salacious life.”

“So tell him that.”

“I’m gonna fuck it up. And then he’s gonna think I’m just using him to split the cost of rent—and he probably doesn’t even want to live off campus, I mean because he still has two years left, and he’s gonna hate me—”

“He’s not,” Hoseok says.

“But I’m terrible at phrasing things right,” Taehyung says, shaking his head. “We all know this.”

“Right, and Jeonggukkie knows it too,” Seokjin says. “So he’ll be patient. Seriously, ever since New Year’s you guys have gotten better at assuming positive intent from each other. Plus, the boy is head over heels for you. He’ll probably want to move in with you regardless of what he thinks your motives are.”

“He doesn’t deserve that, though,” Taehyung murmurs, smiling as Mang and Chimmy hop up on Jimin’s lap. It’s a confusing configuration over there, Hoseok on the chair with Jimin sitting on top of him, and then the daemons curled up on Jimin’s thighs. Jimin pets Mang’s back, fingers creeping up underneath the horse’s ever-present mask, and Mang neighs and nuzzles their heart-shaped nose into Jimin’s belly.

“He doesn’t deserve to move in with someone who wants to move in with him?” Hoseok asks, scratching Chimmy’s ears.

“He doesn’t deserve to move in with someone thinking they’re only doing it because it’s convenient,” Taehyung sighs, dropping his chin to look at the glossy cover of his history textbook.

“Then tell him all that,” Namjoon says. “He and Cooky will believe you.”
Taehyung shrugs. “What if they don’t?”

“Then you can crash here,” Seokjin announces. “You can stay here until you find a place, and if you and Jeongguk do, like, stay together but just not move in together, then he can come over and hang out and stuff, and we’ll even volunteer to clear the apartment every once in a while so you guys can—okay, I don’t love the idea of you guys fucking on the couch or in either of the beds here, so um. You can take showers together? That makes for easy cleanup.”

“Hold on.” Namjoon raises his hand. “Jin, you don’t even live here.”

Seokjin tosses his head airily, hair like a shampoo commercial. “I might as well. Maybe I’ll make it official once Hoseokie and Jiminie move out.”

“Um, I don’t live here either,” Jimin points out.

Namjoon and Seokjin fix him with a look. “Yes, you do,” Seokjin says. “And Taehyungie and Jeonggukkie basically already live together anyways, so there is no reason for us to be indulging this level of angst about this.”

“You’re worse than Yoongi,” Hoseok nods.

Yoongi shifts in his sleep and raises a hand to scratch drowsily at his cheek, but then he flips Hoseok off. Typical.

Taehyung slumps down over his notes, head cradled in his palms. “I just want to actually live with him. I hate not getting to see him, I hate that he’s not here right now because he’s working so hard for this dance thing, I hate that last night he fell asleep before I could even heat up the lamb skewers he brought for us—okay, I don’t hate that because it was really cute and he was so out of it when I woke him up to force him to eat something so he doesn’t pass out because he’s working so hard and he doesn’t have time to eat or sleep hardly and last night I stroked his hair for like an hour while he mumbled at me and could barely fucking chew—”

“Okay,” Seokjin interrupts, lifting a hand with his palm facing Taehyung, all calm and composed as he moves so Yoongi can curl up tighter against him. Asleep, Taehyung’s ass. “Look,” Seokjin says, “we get that everything is kind of chaos right now. But you need to talk to Jeongguk, or else you’re just going to get more and more stressed out about things, and that’s the last thing we need when
we’re all stressing out over the end of the year.”

“You’re not,” Jimin says, shaking his head. “You and Yoongi-hyung and Namjoonie-hyung are no longer in school and you have nothing to stress you out during this trying time.”

“We have all of you motherfuckers,” Yoongi says, dragging his eyes open and sitting up like it’s the most difficult thing he’s ever had to do. He fixes Taehyung with a glare and Shooky even jumps up out of RJ’s lap just to fix that exact same look at Taehyung for double impact. “You stress us out enough we might as well still be in school.”

“Rude,” Jimin huffs.

“I am not stressful!” Taehyung says. “And I’m also not stressed out! I’m just—”

“Having a breakdown in my kitchen,” Yoongi deadpans.

“It’s not your kitchen, because you don’t live here either,” Hoseok points out.

“I still have the power to kick you out of it if you annoy me too goddamn much—” Yoongi says, looking actually kind of irritated.

“Hey,” Namjoon says, an offer clear in his tone of voice. “Go lie down in our room and I’ll do something nice for you later.”

“Ooh,” Chimmy and Mang chorus. Well, okay, Mang really says something more like “Oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-ooh”.

Yoongi rolls his eyes. Sniffs overdramatically. “What are you offering.”

“Hmm,” Namjoon says, an edge of mischief in his voice, “I mean, I’m thinking, like…run you a bath with lavender bath salts and pet your hair and coddle you and Shooky all night while you sleep on my chest?”
Yoongi goes paler than Taehyung has ever seen anyone. “Um. What the fuck.”

“Is that your kink?” Hoseok teases, lifting Jimin up and then resettling him on his other leg. “Sorry, babe. Leg was going to sleep.”

Jimin smiles and shakes his head. “It’s okay. Anyways, we should probably go. Yoongi looks like he might actually die of embarrassment—”

“I don’t feel good,” Yoongi grumbles, which is probably bullshit although now that Taehyung is paying attention, Shooky does look a little bit peaky and they have been hanging all over RJ all night, so maybe.

“And that’s why you need a bath,” Namjoon says, just barely chiding, gentler than Taehyung normally sees.

“Come on,” Hoseok nods, standing up with Jimin squealing laughter as he’s lifted out of the chair as well. On the floor, Mang and Chimmy scamper back towards Hoseok’s bedroom, and after wishing everyone goodnight, Hoseok and Jimin follow.

“Anyways,” Seokjin says, stroking Yoongi’s hair and smiling as Koya climbs into his lap, “look. The end of the year is crazy already. Jiminie and Hoseok are going to be staying here for a month at least so they can hunt for a place, and when the lease is up, I think Yoongi and Joonie and I might stay. Or we might look for a studio or something, a place where all three of us can live.”

“But you guys don’t all live here now,” Taehyung points out. “You and Yoongi have your own places.”

Seokjin nods. “Look, if you really need somewhere to move in, you could take over the lease at my apartment. It’s up at the same time as Namjoon’s—Yoongi is on a month-to-month now, so he can leave his place whenever. But really, I mean—we haven’t agreed on anything yet, but…”

“You guys have been dating the longest and you’re not even living together,” Taehyung mumbles. Tata climbs up into his lap holding some unidentifiable kitchen device and rambling about eggs, and Taehyung hugs them and lets them chatter.

“So?” Namjoon asks.
Taehyung shrugs, flicking his eyes off to the side in vague frustration. “It just…makes me think we’re rushing into things. Jiminnie and Hobi-hyung too, honestly. If you guys aren’t even ready and you’ve been together for, what, two years? Three?”

Namjoon steeplets his fingers and presses them to his mouth looking all wise and considerate. “If you’re ready, then you’re ready. Honestly, Yoongi and Jin and I know that we could probably handle living together, but it can be tough with three of us who are introverts and like our own space and sometimes just genuinely can’t handle having the pressure of thinking about others.”

“We’re very selfish,” Seokjin announces, no shame in his voice. In the corner, RJ is stroking Shooky, and Koya has climbed out of Seokjin’s lap to join their little huddle.

“We kind of are,” Yoongi nods. “And we know that about ourselves, that we like to not see each other, actually, and that while we probably will eventually get a place together, right now we aren’t under any pressure to do that.”

“It does get annoying trying to keep track of all our stuff, though,” Namjoon admits. “We can never remember what stuff is at whose place.”

“That’s just you, Joonie,” Seokjin says, fond and amused.

Taehyung sighs. “What if Jeonggukkie doesn’t want to move in with me just because of something like that, though. Like. Not even just because he thinks I’m using him, like—what if he just doesn’t want to.”

“That’s not the end of the world,” Seokjin says. “It probably wouldn’t even be the end of your relationship. Right?”

Taehyung shrugs. “We um. We’re going to Busan next weekend. Leaving Saturday morning, since Jeongguk’s dance thing is Friday. Like. He wants me to meet his parents,” he mumbles, trying to stay still while Tata climbs all over him beep-whistling a melody that might be “Take Me Home, Country Roads” by John Denver.

Seokjin and Namjoon exchange a look, and Yoongi sits up off Seokjin’s shoulder with a jaw-popping yawn. He sways a little as he moves away, and Seokjin reaches out to steady him. “You okay?” Seokjin murmurs.
“Fine,” Yoongi slurs, waving him off.

“I guess we should go,” Taehyung sighs, snatching Tata off his shoulder and setting him on the table. “Help me clean up my books, Ta?”

<<west virginia, mountain mama! take me home, country road!>>

“Yeah, yeah,” Taehyung says, leaning down to smack a kiss to Tata’s head. “Come on. Let’s get home and leave these fools in peace.”

<<kay kay can’t wait can’t WAIT the improvements are so IMPROVED!>>

“Wait, do you mean at Jeongguk’s?”

<<home HOME taetaetae said HOME—>>

“Will you be okay getting back to campus, Taehyung-ah?” Namjoon asks, standing up and walking Taehyung and Tata to the door. Taehyung courteously turns away when he notices Seokjin tugging Yoongi into a hug, or more importantly notices Yoongi accepting said hug gratefully—okay, yeah, he really must be not feeling good.

“I’ll be fine,” Taehyung says, slipping into his shoes. Tata is still beeping away about the improvements they made to the nest under Jeongguk’s bed (at home, Tata keeps insisting that Jeongguk’s dorm room is home) and Taehyung hopes they’re not annoying Yoongi too much considering the headache he must have.

“Okay,” Namjoon smiles. “Text when you get back so we know you’re safe.”

“I will.”

“And seriously. Don’t worry too much about this whole moving in with Jeongguk thing. He’ll be happy if you ask, or—Taehyung-ah, if you’re not ready, that’s okay too. Really. Even if you think
you want to be ready but you’re not, just. Trust yourself, yeah?”

<<—and such BLANKIES cooky! is so happy cooky! loves blankets and tatata heats blankets and
cooky! is warm sometimes cooky! is cold at home taetaetae phone phone wanna text JK please
pleasie pleeepseease!>>

“Tata,” Taehyung says, scooping them up and handing over the phone to placate the loud beeping
which has Yoongi burying his face in Seokjin’s shoulder, apparently too worn out to even bother
 glaring. Oh. That’s kinda bad.

“Good luck with your studying,” Namjoon says, holding open the door.

“Thanks for helping, hyung. See you later,” Taehyung nods, and then he and Tata head into the hall
and towards the elevator.

<<home home see JK and cooky!?>>

“I don’t know, Ta,” Taehyung says, scratching Tata’s back the way they like, “Not sure what they’re
up to,”

<<no no look look,>> Tata says, holding out the phone.

Me [8:21 p.m.]

❤

Me [8:21 p.m.]

❤

Me [8:21 p.m.]

pleasie お願いします
Oh my god. of course tata-yah, come over whenever you guys get done

jfc ur so fckn cute

love you, honey♥ ♥♥

you too, tae. if u look @this

“Oh,” Taehyung says, grabbing the phone.

<<home HOME!!!>> Tata cheers.

hey jeonggukkie

And peanut butter sandwich Cooky ♥

be home soon.
So maybe that one was a little bit leading, saying *home* like that. But Tata coo-hums contentedly and settles down all satisfied when they see it in writing, so at least that should make the train ride a little bit less of a shitshow than usual.

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**JK+Cook❤❤ [8:24 p.m.]**

hurry home, tnt

**JK+Cook❤❤ [8:24 p.m.]**

we kinda miss the shit outta you ㅠㅠ

“Hey, sorry I fell asleep on you last night,” Jeongguk says when he opens the door. Taehyung steps in with a weak smile, Tata leaping out of his arms to Spider Man swing from the closet door to the bed.

Taehyung’s smile is there but it’s perfunctory, not quite right. “Hey. It’s fine.”

“Hey, wait,” Jeongguk says, grabbing Taehyung’s arm, tugging him in for a hug. “Hey, is this okay? What’s the matter? Are you upset with me? I’m sorry for last night, god, I’m so so sorry—”

“I’m fine, it’s fine,” Taehyung says, tucking himself warmly into Jeongguk’s arms. “I’m not mad at you at all. You were really cute being all sleepy.”

“Then what’s the matter,” Jeongguk whispers, pressing his mouth against Taehyung’s hair. He drags his fingertips up and down Taehyung’s back, starts walking backwards to get them closer to the cozy parts of the room, like the bed.

Taehyung groans and slips his shoes off, lets Jeongguk lead him forward. “Just a long day. Finals coming up. Graduation.”
“Yeah,” Jeongguk murmurs, tugging at Taehyung’s shirt. “Come on. Get out of these clothes, lemme take care of you tonight. Since you were super nice to me yesterday.”

“You brought lamb,” Taehyung says, all long-drawn vowels and tired-soft consonants. “It was really yummy, even if I had to feed half of it to you and practically move your jaw up and down for you so you would chew it and not just choke.”

Jeongguk can feel the blush creeping up the back of his neck. “Sorry. God, I was really out of it, apparently.”

“You were,” Taehyung mumbles. He sounds like the one who’s out of it now.

“Come on. I’ll help you change.”

They end up snuggled under the covers with Tata and Cooky dozing in their laps, which is kind of an unusual setup because typically Tata has too much energy to just go to sleep like this, breath coming in little puffs against Jeongguk’s arm. Jeongguk can’t help but smile and pet Tata’s head, nuzzling against Taehyung’s shoulder.

“You wanna go to sleep?” Jeongguk asks when Taehyung yawns.

“No,” Taehyung says. “I wanna talk.”

Jeongguk furrows his brow. “About?”

“Just—not, like, about anything special,” Taehyung says, although Jeongguk gets the feeling that isn’t exactly true. “I just want to talk to you. I feel like we haven’t—we just haven’t gotten to actually hang out in forever, you know?”

Jeongguk hums, guilt panging through his chest. “I’m sorry.”

“No, no, Jeonggukkie,” Taehyung whines, reaching out to pet Jeongguk’s hair with one hand and
stroking Cooky with the other. Warm vanilla loveliness floats through Jeongguk’s chest, and he leans up and kisses Taehyung’s neck, his earlobe, his jaw.

“Sorry.”

“Stop,” Taehyung insists. “Seriously, don’t feel bad. You’ve been working so hard on your dance stuff, and I can’t wait to come see the show. Plus my finals will be over by then, and everything will be stress free.”

“Oh, yeah,” Jeongguk says. “Speaking of which, have you and Jimin-hyung found a place yet?” He hates himself a little for hoping that Taehyung will say no, that plans have changed, hey Gukkie actually can we move in together because that would be seriously awesome—

“Oh,” Taehyung sighs, sounding strange and cagey. “I mean. We’ve been busy with finals, and all…”

“Right,” Jeongguk says.

“Yeah. I mean. It just sucks mostly because we have to move out of the dorms this Friday, like literally right after finals? So I think you’re gonna have to come visit me at Joonie’s for a while.” Taehyung sounds flippant but in a way that makes Jeongguk think he isn’t being flippant at all, that he’s planned this narrative out.

“Hmm,” Jeongguk says, not really sure what to make of any of this. Fuck, maybe they’re both just tired. “Um. Can I ask you something?”

“Oh. Sure?”

“Just…I mean, I know you and Jimin will be looking for a place, and you’ll have a lot to do with that so just, um. I don’t know. I know we said we were gonna go to Busan and whatever, but um. You don’t have to. If it’s too stressful.” Jeongguk turns his face into Taehyung’s shoulder and closes his eyes as his hand tightens around Tata’s wrist. Tata hums sleepily and murmurs something about Legos, and Cooky mumbles back something like “sure Tata-honey I’ll build Hogwarts with you love you”.

Taehyung tenses for a second, just like he always does when Jeongguk brings this up. Fuck, maybe
he should stop pushing this, maybe Taehyung just really really doesn’t do the family thing, which is understandable really considering his relationship with his own parents and siblings and—

“Jeongguk-ah, I—I want to go,” Taehyung whispers, sounding—of all things—insecure. Oh. Oh. “Unless you don’t want me to?”

“Tae,” Jeongguk groans, lifting himself up so he can make eye contact, can duck in and kiss Taehyung’s perfect cheek. “Tae, of course I want you to. I want you to so badly, please, just—talk to me, why do you always get all worried about this.”

Taehyung ducks his head so low his nose is brushing Cooky’s straight ear. “It’s nothing.”

“It’s something,” Jeongguk murmurs, kissing Taehyung’s temple. “You can trust me, please, I won’t be mean. And if you really don’t want to go, I promise you don’t have to. Please don’t feel like you do.”

“It’s not that,” Taehyung whispers. “I mean, I—I am kinda scared to go. But just. I don’t know. I don’t…” His gaze goes to Tata in this weird slow meander that makes Jeongguk think he’s trying not to look at his daemon, he doesn’t want Jeongguk to realize—

“Is it Tata,” Jeongguk whispers, his heart broken to think it let alone say it. “You’re scared that my family won’t like them?”

Taehyung turns his head abruptly, eyes wild and panicking. “I don’t want your mom to meet Tata and think I’m terrible for you,” he cries, clutching at Jeongguk’s wrists. “I—it’s not about them not liking Tata, I don’t care if they don’t like me, or…I mean. Yeah. It sucks when people don’t like them, but I mean. It doesn’t matter if they hate me except for that then they won’t want me to be with you and Cooky. Because they love you, and they’ll want what’s best for you, and…”

“You’re what’s best for me,” Jeongguk whispers, reaching up to cup Taehyung’s cheeks in his palms. “You’re what’s best for me, and I will fight for that even if my parents hate you—which they won’t, by the way, I mean, they definitely won’t. And if it helps, I mean. Cooky is the only bunny in our family. The only prey animal, actually. Everyone else has, like, wolves and cats and raptor birds and shit.”

Taehyung tilts his head. “Oh, that’s—Gukkie. That’s okay, that’s—Cooky is the best.” Taehyung reaches down and pets Cooky’s head a few times, and Jeongguk shivers with it, holds Taehyung’s
cheeks even more delicately.

“Can I kiss you?” Jeongguk asks, biting his lip and closing his eyes as his belly goes all twisty with butterflies. “I love you, Tae, I wanna—wanna kiss you.”

“Please, come on I wanna—” Taehyung cuts himself off when he presses his lips to Jeongguk’s, and they’re probably jostling the daemons but Jeongguk doesn’t care because Taehyung is desperate in his arms, yanking him close and whimpering and—

“Tae, are you crying?” Jeongguk whispers, pulling away.

“I’m just— so stressed,” Taehyung chokes, tipping forward into Jeongguk’s arms. “I’m sorry we have to miss each other all the time right now. I can’t wait to graduate and be done, and I want to go to Busan with you like we planned. Promise.”

“Yeah,” Jeongguk whispers, gathering Taehyung in close. In their laps, Tata blinks awake and lifts their head sleepily. They tug at Cooky’s arm and Cooky hums, wakes up enough for the two of them to slide off the mattress and go hide under the bed.

Taehyung laughs tearily. “Guess they didn’t want to hear me whining.”

Jeongguk shakes his head, leaning in to kiss Taehyung again, hot and burning with intent. He pulls back and fixes Taehyung with a half-lidded look. “Guess they didn’t want to see me kissing you, actually,” he says. Taehyung huffs, and Jeongguk pulls away a little bit, careful. “I mean. We don’t have to. But if you want.”

“We haven’t gotten to in like weeks, Jeongguk. I’ve been horny as fuck for days.”

“You do know how to masturbate, right?”

“Shut up, it’s not the same!”

Jeongguk giggles and nips at Taehyung’s neck. “So. ‘Eh, do you wanna’? He asks in English, mimicking the rhythm of Taehyung’s second favorite GD and T.O.P. song, which everyone knows
is “ZUTTER”. Because Taehyung fucking quotes that song all the time.

“Yes,” Taehyung says, “*keep it sexual* —”

“Do you even know the rest of that line or just the English part?”

“Shut up and have sex with me.”

Jeongguk smirks. “Sure, I’ll stay super quiet the whole time, won’t even moan for you.”

Taehyung narrows his eyes. “Oh. I’m pretty sure I can make you moan.”

Jeongguk raises his eyebrows. “You can try.”

Taehyung grins, and does. *God,* he does.

Shockingly enough, finals week ends up going reasonably well. Taehyung shuffles from exam to exam in a state of perpetual exhaustion, but that’s actually kind of a good thing—it means Tata is dazed and out of it too, that they’re at least slightly more docile than usual and therefore manageable during multiple long-ass tests.

Better than last year’s finals week, during which that dickwad O-chem III professor had forced Taehyung to give Tata daemon sedatives during the exam due to complaints from another student about “distractions and repeated interruptions of learning throughout the duration of the semester”. So Tata had been all drugged out and loopy, and Taehyung had been vacant and spacey too. He barely managed to focus at all. Apparently daemon sedatives also have an effect on humans.

“Okay, I think that’s finally everything,” Jimin sighs as he stuffs his last sweater into his giant suitcase. “Jesus, how did we accumulate this much *stuff.*”
“I don’t know,” Taehyung groans. “It just happens. You move into a room and things start showing up.”

<<empty empty!>> Tata brrrrrr-ups, leaping from bed to bed one last time, launching forward to dangle from the bar in the closet. They keep doing this thing where they shoot out one arm extra long, grab a handhold, and then grapple the rest of their body forward to the new perch as their arm shrinks back to normal size. So. It was definitely a mistake letting Jeongguk show Tata that Spider Man movie.

Jimin looks up from his phone. “Hobi says he’ll be here soon. We should start getting this stuff outside.”

Taehyung nods. Pouts. “If Jeongguk were here, he would carry it and then I wouldn’t have to.” But Jeongguk is in last-minute dance rehearsals all day for the showcase tonight, which means Taehyung and Jimin are left to lug their shit out of their dorm for the last time all by themselves, emotionally drained from finals and from graduating and from the stress of finding jobs and from moving—

“Have you talked to him yet?” Jimin asks, hoisting a bag onto his shoulder and nodding his head to gesture Taehyung out of the room. At his feet, Chimmy is running through some choreography they and Mang have been obsessed with recently.

“No,” Taehyung admits. He grabs his duffle and suitcase, watches fondly as Tata hoists their own backpack off the floor and stares up at Taehyung and Jimin, proud of how helpful they think they are for carrying their belongings in a mini Fjallraven bag. They bought it themselves, to the great surprise of a very flustered shop lady, and Taehyung is, like, a little bit not sure what exactly is in it. But okay.

“So you’re just camping on Hobi-hyung and Namjoon-hyung’s couch until further notice?” Jimin asks.

Taehyung sighs. “I mean, we’re leaving for Busan tomorrow. But we get back on Monday, so after that, yeah. I just—I mean, I don’t even know where Jeongguk and Cooky are planning to live next year. We just—keep avoiding the subject. I kinda assume he’s just gonna stay on campus? He’s mentioned a couple options but like…I don’t know. I don’t know.”

Hoseok pulls up at the curb and saves Taehyung from answering. “Hey Tae! Hey babe!” He hops out of the car and tugs Jimin into a ridiculous, swaying kiss, and Jimin laughs delightedly into his mouth and clutches at his shoulders.

Taehyung sighs.

“Well,” Jimin says, breathless when he finally pulls back. “Come on. Let’s get this shit in the car.”

They load everything up and Jimin and Chimmy are totally shooting Taehyung and Tata pointed looks the whole time, but at least they don’t say anything in front of Hoseok and Mang. Even if Hoseok and Mang definitely know, considering it’s their couch Taehyung will be sleeping on for the foreseeable future.

“Oh my god,” Taehyung groans once he and Jimin and Hoseok have finally gotten everything into the trunk, once they’ve driven back to Hoseok and Namjoon’s, once there’s a big pile of Taehyung and Tata’s stuff in the middle of the living room. Jimin and Hoseok disappear into Hoseok’s room to put Jimin’s stuff there, and Tata and Chimmy and Mang all start up some sort of lava monster-groundies game in the corner using Koya’s fake climbing tree, which is hilarious because Chimmy and Mang can’t climb. Taehyung collapses onto the couch, his new bed, and pulls out his phone.

JK+Cook❤❤ [5:01 p.m.]
Ugh this rehearsal is taking forever

JK+Cook❤❤ [5:01 p.m.]
Like,, cooky is going sir crazy in the corner

JK+Cook❤❤ [5:02 p.m.]
Stir

JK+Cook❤❤ [5:02 p.m.]
Not sir ohmygod
Me [5:05 p.m.]

 SimpleDateFormat: sir

Me [5:05 p.m.]

 SimpleDateFormat: SIR crazy even better actually

Me [5:05 p.m.]

 SimpleDateFormat: u wanna go sir crazy for me, gukkie bb

JK+Cook❤❤ [5:05 p.m.]

 SimpleDateFormat: Ugh jfc stopppppp

Me [5:06 p.m.]

❤❤❤❤❤❤

Me [5:06 p.m.]

 SimpleDateFormat: Anyways you can give your phone to cooky if you want, i’m sure tata will talk to them ❤❤

JK+Cook❤❤ [5:07 p.m.]

 SimpleDateFormat: we just broke for dinner

JK+Cook❤❤ [5:07 p.m.]

 SimpleDateFormat: We have one more runthru after, i’ll give cook my phone during that if that’s okay ❤
Me [5:08 p.m.]

:) ta will be so happy

Me [5:08 p.m.]

Should we still get there @645

JK+Cook❤❤ [5:08 p.m.]

Yeah, see you soon ❤

Me [5:08 p.m.]

What r u having for dinner ❤

JK+Cook❤❤ [5:09 p.m.]

Just like healthy light stuff since the show is so soon

JK+Cook❤❤ [5:09 p.m.]

Wanna facetime

Me [5:09 p.m.]

Calling now
Jeongguk is sweaty and beautiful when he answers, flicking dark hair out of his eyes and grinning that unfair bunny-toothed grin. “Hey,” he says, looking silly and happy, just genuinely joyous.

Taehyung grins back. “Hey. What’s got you so happy?”

“Get to look at your pretty face while I eat my dinner.” Jeongguk’s smile is practically a leer.

Taehyung rolls his eyes. “As if that’s anything special. You look at me while we eat dinner all the time.”

“And you always gobble everything off your chopsticks like a mad man, and make stupid sexual groans the whole time.”

“Just for you, cutie.”

Jeongguk pouts. “Yeah, except we’ve both been so busy lately it’s like I never get to see that spectacle at all.”

Taehyung swallows. “Um. Yeah.”

Jeongguk looks like he wants to say something serious, but instead he sighs. Turns the camera on Cooky, who is curled up in his lap. “Cook says hi.”

“Hey, Cooky,” Taehyung says, feeling soft at the bleary way Cooky blinks up at the camera. Jeongguk’s lips are still visible in the frame, and his shirt is slipping down to reveal a bruise over his collarbone in the shape of Taehyung’s mouth. Fuck. Fuck.

<<JK and cooky! JK and cooky!>> Tata beeps all of a sudden, leaping off Koya’s fake tree and landing gracefully at Taehyung’s feet. They hop up onto the couch and press into Taehyung’s lap, still chanting the melodic cadence that makes up Jeongguk’s and Cooky’s names in Tata-Tongue.

<<JK and cooky! tataTA! me me taetae, pleasie!!!>>
Taehyung smiles and hands over the phone, and Tata starts chattering off at Cooky about the game Chimmy and Mang and Tata are playing. Cooky listens attentively, smirking at the funny parts, whispering cute things when Tata talks about how they almost fell out of the tree.

“Wanna talk to Jeonggukkie?” Cooky asks when Tata finally finishes their story.

<<JK! yes yes! JK!>>

Jeongguk dutifully lifts the phone, smiles bunny-toothed and beautiful at Tata, and chats amicably about dance rehearsal. He even answers every one of Tata’s weirdly specific questions about the sound system at the dance hall.

Eventually, Taehyung leans in and kisses Tata’s head, dropping a teasing hand over the daemon’s mouth. “All right, all right, lemme talk to him.”

<<but JK JK JK love him love him and cooky! ends of earth and to infinity and beyond! and die, would DIE for JK and cooky! want them always miss them always so boring with no JK-n-cooky!, pleasie tae go home hurry sad face :( no sadder face :< ta so saaaaad.>>

Taehyung blushes, and Jeongguk laughs. “Guess you do love me,” he smiles.

Taehyung shakes his head. “Never. You’re the worst.”

“I’m amazing and you wanna hang out with me all the time. Your literal soul just told me.”

“My literal soul was just asking very suspicious questions about the theater’s sound system that make me think they’re…up to something.”

Jeongguk’s giggle is young and his nose is all scrunched up and he looks so, so in love. “Okay, Snape.”

Taehyung can’t even doubt, can’t talk himself out of the warm glow of being loved, of loving in return. Tata shudders in green and yellow and orange and pink and blue before returning to red.
Jeongguk’s expression sobered. “You do love me. Tata can’t keep a secret.”

Taehyung swallowed. “Well. Yeah. We do.”

Jeongguk’s phone is suddenly hijacked, Tzuyu’s smirking face taking over the screen. “Jeonggukkie loves you too,” she grins, playing keep away as Jeongguk grapples for the phone. “He never shuts up about you, you know? We always tell him we get it, you’re dating Taehyung, yes THAT Kim Taehyung the one with the pretty lips and pretty eyes and cute sense of humor, yes, we all know —”

Taehyung can hear Jeongguk whining in the background as Tzuyu darts around, showing Taehyung and Tata a blurry image of the dance studio and all the dancers slumped against the walls gobbling dinner.

Finally, Jeongguk recovers his phone and sends Tzuyu off with a pointed wave. “Anyways,” he says, cheeks burning red, “you all packed for Saturday?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung says, wincing as Tata climbs up his head and then jumps back to the tree. “I mean.” Well, okay, he’s sorta packed. But half his stuff (including the duffel he’s taking to Busan) is in Jeongguk’s dorm anyways, and they’ll presumably be staying there tonight, so Taehyung can finish up in the morning.


Taehyung nods. “Yes,” he says, meaning it even if nerves are creeping up now. He’s meeting Jeongguk’s family, which is like—big. Especially because Jeongguk has told his parents he’s bringing someone, but Taehyung is like 90 percent sure he didn’t tell them that the someone is a guy.

“Really-really?” Jeongguk asks, biting his lower lip.

“Really. Yes, Guk,” Taehyung promises. “I wanna meet your family. Seriously. I’m honored that you asked me.”

Jeongguk nods, looking at least slightly mollified, like he wants to believe even if he’s still unsure. Taehyung sighs and glances up at Tata, who is extremely caught up examining the mechanism that
allows the branches of Koya’s tree to move into different configurations. Typical Tata behavior, investigating stuff really intently when Taehyung is feeling emotionally uncertain.

“Tae,” Jeongguk says after a quiet second, “I love you. I’m really glad you’re coming with me.”

“Me too,” Taehyung says. “Me too.”

“Okay,” Jeongguk nods. “Well. I have to go. One more runthrough and then we have to get dressed and stuff.”

“Good luck. Have fun.”

“Can’t wait to see you,” Jeongguk whispers. “Eat before you come here, ’kay? There’s an after party at a club if you wanna go. Probably lots of drinks. I mean, we don’t have to, but—”

“Trying to get me drunk, Jeon?”

“I’ll take care of you if you’re hungover on the train tomorrow,” Jeongguk murmurs, soft the way Cooky so often is, shy and sweet and lovely.

Taehyung shakes his head. “Of course I wanna go to the club with you. See you soon. Miss you.”

“Miss you. Miss you all the time I’m not with you. Cooky too.”

And Taehyung almost, almost blurs it out right then—do you wanna move in with me, please, please I want us to. But Jeongguk has to go. Taehyung can hear Tzuyu yelling at everyone to hurry up and get ready for the last run.

“See you. Love you,” Jeongguk says, after Taehyung has spent just a second too long having what feels like the twelfth internal crisis of the last hour. God.

“Miss you too. Always,” Taehyung says, quick as he can. “Love you. See you soon, babe.”
Jeongguk grins, blows a kiss, and ends the call.

“Ugh,” Taehyung sighs, flopping sideways onto the couch as he blows all the air out of his lungs, frustrated and missing Jeongguk and Cooky and conflicted over literally everything. Jimin and Hoseok finally appear from “dropping Jimin’s stuff in Hoseok’s room” which almost definitely meant having sex or at least getting off—yep, they both look ruffled and sweaty and kind of red in the cheeks.

Taehyung can’t help the fond eye roll, the genuine gladness in him that his best friend has found someone to make him this carefree and confident and happy, this soulmate Jung Hoseok. “Whatever have you been up to,” Taehyung teases, glad for the distraction.

“Shh,” Hoseok giggles. Jimin just sways into Hoseok’s side with the lazy grin of a cat who got the cream.

Ew.

“Dinner?” Taehyung suggests. “Heard there’s an after party. Should eat now so we can get trashed easier in a couple hours.”

Jimin and Hoseok shout and race for the kitchen, never the kind to turn down an opportunity for intoxicated dancing. Mang and Chimmy leap along, and Tata Spider Mans after them, knocking over a lamp (it’s the one Namjoon always kicks over anyways so whatever) and beeping about how much they want hash browns.

(???)

(Whatever.)
“So, Super-Pretty-Super-Sexy Boyfriend is coming to the party, right?” Tzuyu asks as they do their makeup, Cooky sitting on the counter so they can hand Jeongguk brushes and eyeshadow palettes and tweezers and Q-tips.

Jeongguk fixes Tzuyu with an unimpressed look. “You know him. Personally. You know that his name is Taehyung.”

Tzuyu offers a flirtatious wink. “Sure, but I much prefer calling him the other thing. Since that’s what he is.”

Jeongguk rolls his eyes and goes back to patting magenta shadow just above his lash line. “Yeah, he’s coming. We’re going to Busan in the morning, so.”

“Busan? Like—your hometown, Busan?”

“Do you know of another Busan?”

“You’re taking your boyfriend to stay at your childhood home with your parents,” Tzuyu says, raising her eyebrows. “Have they met him before?”

Jeongguk swallows. Cooky tugs their ears over their eyes. “Um.”

Tzuyu grins. “Good luck. It’s always a little scary bringing someone home for the first time, even if you’ve been dating for a while and your family is all excited to meet the new S.O. and whatever.”

Jeongguk nods, making a noncommittal sound in the back of his throat.

Tzuyu’s mouth drops open. “Holy shit.”

“No,” Jeongguk moans weakly, hoping that whatever is about to happen will just. Not.

No such luck. “You haven’t told them,” Tzuyu says, brandishing a blending brush in Jeongguk’s face. “You haven’t told your family that you’re bringing your boyfriend.”
Jeongguk shakes his head. “No, I mean—I mean they know I’m bringing someone—”

“Do they even know you’re into guys? Do your parents think you’re bringing home a girl?”

Jeongguk sighs miserably and runs a hand through his hair, and Tzuyu immediately scolds him and moves closer to start fixing it. “Sorry,” she says, “I didn’t mean to get that aggressive.”

Jeongguk sighs. “It’s fine.”

“I’m honestly impressed, you know,” Tzuyu says as she adds just a touch of product to Jeongguk’s bangs. “That’s really cool of you. To take Tae home with you, show him off to your family. That’s really brave, and I’m sure it’ll be amazing.”


“Sure, let me just—um. Text Tae?”

Tzuyu rolls her eyes, but she’s smiling. “Go ahead, lover boy. See you backstage.”

Jeongguk turns to Cooky. “Hey, did Tae or Ta tell you anything about them sleeping over tonight?”

Cooky looks confused. “Tata-honey lives in the Nest with me.”

Jeongguk tries not to look too irritated. “Yes, okay, but tonight. Are they staying over tonight, because I forgot to ask and we’re going to Busan in the morning and I don’t even know if Tae has a bag packed or if it’s at Hobi-hyung’s or—I don’t know. Just. Are they sleeping over tonight?”

Cooky shifts and chews their lip, ears flicking as they drop back. “Tata-honey lives in the Nest. Taehyungie lives with Jeonggukkie in the bed.”
Jeongguk drops his head back with a sigh. “Okay, my soul is obviously no goddamn help here.” He pulls out his phone.

Me [6:35 p.m.]
Hey are u sleeping over tonight

Me [6:35 p.m.]
Just wondering bc of like packing and stuff, do u need to go back to hobi hyungs

tnt❤ [6:37 p.m.]
Yo of course, my stuff’s @yours anyways

tnt❤ [6:37 p.m.]
Also don’t u have to get ready? ☺️ g luck break a leg or whatever u say ❤❤

Me [6:38 p.m.]
Good ^.^

Me [6:38 p.m.]
Also if i wanna have drunk sex w u later is that cool

tnt❤ [6:39 p.m.]
hnghhh
Fuck. yeah.

Explicit consent given for that

I fuckin love you

Hehehehehehehehe 😊

“Okay everyone, we gotta go!” Tzuyu yells. The few dancers still milling about the green room scurry to finish up whatever they’re doing, and Tzuyu rushes over to fix the smudge of pink under Jeongguk’s eye and give him some lip gloss. “There,” she says, winking. “Now Taehyung will have to go home with you.”

“He’s coming home with me anyways, he practically lives there,” Jeongguk grumbles, ignoring the look Cooky gives him about that. Because yeah, okay, Taehyung and Tata don’t technically live in Jeongguk’s dorm, and Jeongguk still hasn’t figured out where he’s rooming next year—which is dangerous, like, he’s got a week and Yugyeom had said he could sublet a room in his friend group’s house for a couple months if he needs to which he probably will because he hasn’t signed up to live on campus next semester so he has to move out soon and—

Well. Whatever. Think about that later.

“Come on,” Tzuyu says, nodding towards the door to the green room. “It’s time.”

Jeongguk has always loved performing, even when he was a kid. This time it’s no different, going
out on stage with his fucking good college dance troupe to perform in front of a crowd of his classmates and professors and friends and—

Taehyung.

This is the first time Jeongguk has had a boyfriend in the audience. Taehyung and Tata have seen Jeongguk dance, but only at parties or in clubs, or at home when they’re hanging out with Hoseok and Jimin and the daemons are all dancing with them and everything is a giggly mess. Now, though, the lights are low, the daemons are off in the wings—it’s kind of a toss-up whether choreographies include daemons or not; for this performance, the troupe has elected to leave them out because one of the girls has a tiny butterfly that wouldn’t really be able to dance with them anyways, and one of the boys is still only 17 and his daemon hasn’t settled.

As soon as the curtain comes up, Jeongguk catches sight of Taehyung and the rest of their friends in the front row on the left side. He winks and Taehyung smiles; it’s kind of hard to make out the dimensions of him because of the weird way the lights don’t really illuminate the audience, only showing off the first couple rows incidentally because those people are so close to the stage. But Jeongguk lets the music rush through him and maybe he’s playing up the sexuality of it, maybe he flashes his abs on purpose even though that wasn’t in the choreography originally—it’s all worth it for the way Tata is enraptured, sitting still for once in their young life. For the way Taehyung shifts in his seat like—well.

Taehyung is a work of art. He’s dressed up in anticipation of the after party, a cream button-down decorated with rich amber and crimson flowers and ultramarine butterflies, buttons and collar and cuffs a lovely emerald. His pants are tight and black, and his shoes are those stupid pretty loafers that cost way more money than Taehyung probably should have spent on a single pair of anything but who cares, because they look fucking awesome.

God, how did Jeongguk get so lucky.

Finally, the blur of move after move comes to a screeching heart, and Jeongguk is practically floating backstage, he’s finding Cooky and scooping his stuff out of the green room, he’s running into the hall—

“Gukkie!”

Taehyung and Tata stagger into Jeongguk and Cooky seemingly out of nowhere, Taehyung recapping the whole show using sound effects and expansive hand gestures even as he wraps himself around Jeongguk and screeches at full volume even though Jeongguk’s ear is literally right there.
Tata is equally animated, beeping and vrooming and vibrating so hard Jeongguk can barely stop them from falling off of Taehyung’s shoulder and onto the floor.

“—and that part in the middle with the—like, *pow pow pow* thing with your arm and like! Oh, I brought you flowers—”

<<Jiminie has the flowers but they’re from US from TNT!>>

“—and we’re gonna probably lose them at the club—”

<<wanna CLUB love CLUB!>>

“—wanna get really drunk and dance *with* you instead of just watching you, *fuck* —”

“Okay, okay,” Jeongguk grins, pressing a kiss and another and another to Taehyung’s cheek and then to Tata’s.

Tata leaps out of the tangled embrace with an emphatic vocaloid whooshy sound—“They like doing that now because they think it makes it sound like they’re moving faster,” Taehyung explains—and after a flurry of praise and general excitement from the entire friend group, they finally all head out into the night to walk to the club.

“I wish you wouldn’t do that,” Seokjin grumbles as Yoongi lights a cigarette and takes a long, seductive drag.

Namjoon throws an arm around Yoongi’s shoulders and grins. “Aw, lay off him,” he says, nearly tripping over Koya as the koala darts with surprising speed away from RJ, who is now chasing after both Koya and Shooky. “It’s not like you don’t want one.”

Seokjin groans. “That’s *why* I wish he wouldn’t do it.” At his feet, RJ captures Shooky and the cookie squeals, their voice all disorienting and staticky in Jeongguk’s ears. He winces, and when he looks around, Jimin and Hoseok and Taehyung are wincing too.

“Smoking really is terrible for you,” Hoseok points out, although Jeongguk is genuinely not too sure
whose side he’s on. He’s leaning over into Jimin, though, so—well. Jimin’s side. Jimin doesn’t even have a side in this argument and Hoseok and Mang are obviously on it.

“Whatever,” Taehyung declares, sidling up to Yoongi with a vibrant smirk. “Hyung, can I please, please have a cigarette? Please?”

Yoongi growls, but he hands over the pack. Taehyung carefully taps one out, fits it between his lips—he looks fucking sinful like that and it punches Jeongguk in the gut. Fuck, they haven’t even starting drinking and he’s already dizzy on the sight of Friday-night, dressed-for-going-out, lighting-a-cigarette Taehyung.

“Think we should get some soju in us before we get to the club?” Hoseok asks, gesturing to the convenience store a few doors down.

“Frickin—I just lit this, Hobi-hyung,” Taehyung gripes, his cigarette balanced delicately between the long fingers of his left hand.

“Just wait out here, we’ll get you a bottle,” Jimin promises. “Savor your slow and intentional death.”

Ah, so Jimin does have a side. Hoseok nods along, and at their feet, Mang and Chimmy join in, just as resolute and judgy as their humans. What a perfect family.

“Me too,” Jeongguk says, “I’m staying out here.” A flash of red catches his eye and he snags Tata around the waist before they can run out into the street after—hmm, probably it’s just a candy wrapper or something, but Jeongguk can’t tell. It’s shiny and it’s in the middle of the road, and Tata does not need to risk their life obtaining it.

“Thanks,” Taehyung says—about Tata, but probably also about Jeongguk staying outside. He takes a long drag, chin tilted up, eyes fluttering shut. Jeongguk swallows hard.

“Well? Hurry up, let’s go, ” Hoseok says, hopping towards the convenience store.

Yoongi grunts and finishes off his cigarette, and Seokjin rolls his eyes. “You must be feeling better if you’re seriously doing that,” he says. “And to think you moped around all week overplaying a tiny head cold.”
“Ha. Head cold. I mean, it did get you to give me really fuckin’ good head, didn’t it?” Yoongi grins all casual and cheeky, reaching up to poke Seokjin’s cheek. Namjoon cracks up, and Seokjin goes bright red and starts spouting something about orgasms helping with congestion.

“Give me that,” Jeongguk says, nodding at the cigarette. Taehyung happily hands it over, gleeful to have a partner in crime, a co-conspirator in this apparently terrible thing they’re doing. Jeongguk doesn’t smoke often—*ever*, really—but tonight feels like it warrants it. Youth, and transience, and invincibility. All that nonsense that doesn’t feel like nonsense when you’re 20 years old. Jeongguk takes a long drag and looks at Taehyung all sultry and heavy-lidded, and at their feet, Cooky and Tata whisper to each other, secret and grinning.

“What flavor soju do you want,” Seokjin gripes, holding open the door as everyone else files into the store with their daemons in tow.

“Grapefruit,” Jeongguk requests, grinning as Taehyung makes the exact disgusted face Jeongguk knew he would.

“Ew, you *know* I hate sour things.”

“Tata likes sour.”

“Tata likes everything consumable—”

<<*tataTA,*>> Tata complains, tugging on Jeongguk’s pants with one arm and Taehyung’s with the other and frowning. Cooky stands next to them and nods judiciously.

“What did they say?” Seokjin asks.

“Just their name,” Jeongguk says, grinning at Tata. “Tata *ta,* ” he amends, bending down just enough to touch Tata’s head. Tata starts vibrating and Cooky giggles. Jeongguk’s heart swells; he’s high off the adrenaline from the dance show, buzzing with nicotine—Taehyung is still kind of fake-irritated about the sour thing, and Jeongguk *loves* him. Loves riling him up, because he knows Taehyung likes it too. Taehyung probably would’ve been disappointed if Jeongguk *hadn’t* suggested a sour flavor just so they could have this interaction.
Seokjin, though, looks confused. “That’s how they say their name?”

“Yeah?” Jeongguk and Taehyung both say, tilting their heads simultaneously. Jeongguk isn’t sure if it’s a habit he picked up from Taehyung or a habit Taehyung picked up from him, but they definitely both do it all the time now.

<<tataTA. tataTAtata.>> Tata confirms.

Seokjin raises an eyebrow. “That’s not what I expected that to sound like.”

“What did you expect it to sound like?” Taehyung asks, reaching down to pick up Cooky, who has started shivering a bit in the night air. Jeongguk suppresses his own shiver at the feeling of Taehyung’s hands in Cooky’s pink fur.

Seokjin shrugs. “I don’t know. Like, tapping, I guess? It’s so synthy and melodic. But also definitely the same little sound multiple times in a row. Which makes sense, I guess.”

<<tataTA.>> Tata says one more time. In case anyone was unclear on that by this point.

Seokjin shakes his head. “Sorry, Taehyung-ah. I didn’t mean to make it seem like I think it’s weird or anything. I was just surprised.”

<<it’s ’kay! yes that’s my name my name ME! it's tatatatatatataaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa.>> He cuts off with a sound like a microphone being unplugged.

Seokjin, Taehyung, and Jeongguk all stare. Cooky giggles in Taehyung’s arms, and Tata grins before Spider Man-ing himself into a tree beside them. Taehyung smiles, and Jeongguk shakes his head, fond.

“Okay, so what flavor,” Seokjin says, looking into the store where all their friends are crowded around the alcohol fridge. Koya is sitting on Yoongi’s head, and RJ is lifting Shooky up so the cinnamon cookie can reach Yoongi’s favorite potato chips on a too-high (read: waist-level) shelf.

“Anything but grapefruit, please,” Taehyung finally says, stroking Cooky’s fur like that will make
Jeongguk more compromising.

“Pineapple?” Jeongguk suggests, because that fucking *distracting* flutter feeling of Taehyung’s hands on his literal *soul* is absolutely fucking *not* going to make him give in.

“Cherry,” Taehyung says, with a wicked grin and a soft tug on Cooky’s ear.

“You just said that because I said grapefruit,” Jeongguk says, trying not to whimper as Taehyung tugs a little harder.

“Raspberry?”

“Orange.”

“Cotton candy.”

“That isn’t even a flavor!”

“I’m getting you plain,” Seokjin announces, turning on his heel and flouncing inside.

“Hyung, noooo,” Jeongguk whines, but Seokjin is gone. He whirls on Taehyung.

“We’ll drink it fast?” Taehyung suggests, holding the cigarette to his lips—

It’s basically just ash by this point.

“Fuck,” Jeongguk says, staring from the cigarette to Tata in the tree (holding onto the trunk and playing the *Pirates of the Caribbean* Jack Sparrow theme song and pretending they’re on a fucking boat) to Taehyung’s shocked-open mouth.

“Well this has been a disappointing turn of events,” Taehyung says, eyes still fixed on Jeongguk’s
behind his round, gold-rimmed glasses. Which are 100 percent fake.

Jeongguk doesn’t care. *Fuck, Jeongguk loves Taehyung,* loves Cooky in his arms (obviously taking care not to start on fire from the cigarette), loves Tata playing Captain Jack Sparrow in the tree. Jeongguk’s giggles start slow and more huffy than anything, but then Taehyung’s mouth cracks into a grin and he’s laughing too, and then they’re hysterical.

“So much for that,” Jeongguk manages between gasps, and Taehyung tries to take one last drag before giving up and dropping the butt into the receptacle near the front door of the convenience store. Tata drops out of the tree and starts playing Concentration with Cooky. It only takes another few seconds for everyone to pour out of the store touting soju, and the bottles get passed around quickly, grins bright and sharp.

“To Jeongguk, for his awesome dance recital,” Namjoon announces. “And to Jimin and Taehyung, for graduating from college and moving out of the dorms finally!”

Everyone toasts and then they drink, and the soju goes down easy as they amble towards the club, laughing as the daemons get progressively clumsier with the intoxication of the humans.

“You know, they should stop calling this flavor ‘plain’ or ‘original’ or whatever and just call it ‘gasoline’,’” Taehyung points out halfway through the bottle. He’s verging on drunk, Jeongguk can tell—mostly because Tata is stumbling around trying to wrangle all the rest of the daemons into a group hug (made possible by Tata’s super long arms) and also playing “We Can’t Stop” by Miley Cyrus at a volume that is probably illegal.

Jeongguk snorts. “Or ‘lighter fluid’.” He takes the bottle back from Taehyung for another swig, head spinning happily. “Come on, help me finish this fast. We’re almost there.”

The club is packed, which isn’t really surprising because it’s the Friday at the end of finals week and the whole dance department is there. Namjoon and Seokjin procure a table which RJ, Koya, and Shooky all settle into while Yoongi goes to find more drinks, and Jimin and Hoseok and Chimmy and Mang obviously hit the dance floor.

<<dance dance REVOLUTION,>> Tata chirps, or—okay, maybe that’s not exactly what they say, but Jeongguk can’t quite hear them over the noise of the club. <<dance!>> Tata frowns and tugs at Jeongguk’s pant leg.

<<dance!>>
Jeongguk grins at Taehyung. “I think your soul wants to dance with me.”

Taehyung raises an eyebrow. “They didn’t say anything about it being with you,” he teases, grinning conspiratorially at Tata, but he’s grabbing Jeongguk’s wrist and leading him to the dancefloor, checking to make sure Cooky is safe. The bunny hops over to the booth and snuggles up with Shooky.

What follows is a blur of dark hiphop beats and watered-down drinks, shots later when they decide the whiskey cokes aren’t strong enough. Tata finds a speaker to dance on so they’re out of the way, and at some point Jeongguk realizes that Mang and Chimmy are up there too. Jimin and Hoseok aren’t exactly having sex on the dancefloor because that would be a little bit much even for them, but—like, it’s close.

Taehyung dances in this perfect mixture of sexuality and playfulness that is so typical of him, grinning just a little too brightly to really be seductive and having too much fun to look dark and mysterious—but there’s effortless sexy genuineness to him as always, and Jeongguk keeps his hands on Taehyung’s hips and guides the motion, gets them grinding together—lifts Taehyung’s hands up high in the air, traces patterns down his arms, kisses him hard in front of everyone—

They go from tipsy-bright to drunk-hazy to trashed-clingy, hanging off each other like they’re the only people there, oblivious. It’s not the drunkest they’ve been together—that would be the night they met—but they’re both reasonably gone.

“You wanna go,” Taehyung whispers against Jeongguk’s lips after the sixth or seventh or twentieth minute of trying to kiss and dance at the same time.

“Yeah,” Jeongguk growls, and then they’re heading for the booth to grab Cooky, they’re snatching Tata off the speaker—they’re alone now, and when Jeongguk looks around, he realizes that Chimmy and Mang are standing at their humans’ feet. Jimin and Hoseok, for their part, are up against the wall kissing now. Oh, shit. Jimin’s legs are up around Hoseok’s waist, so that’s. Appropriate.

“Let’s go, Jeongguk, let’s goooooo,” Taehyung whines, dragging Jeongguk away towards the door.

“You guys leaving?” Seokjin says as they pass him and Namjoon and Yoongi (and their daemons) at the bar.

“Yep. See you when we get back from Busan,” Jeongguk says, brusque enough that Seokjin raises
“You in a hurry?”

“Yep,” Taehyung grins, and then he and Jeongguk are practically running out of the club, laughing and drunk and happy, not too trashed for this kind of giddy delirious glad.

“Come on, wanna go home so you can fuck me,” Taehyung whines, hailing a cab.

“On it,” Jeongguk promises, grinning drunkenly as he tugs Tata into his arms and watches Taehyung shiver. *Feels* Taehyung shiver too, because Taehyung is standing all pressed up against him, and stays that way as they slide into the cab. Cooky hops in and curls up at Taehyung’s feet, and there’s just enough contact between them that Jeongguk can trace the gossamer tendril of it in the shiver up his spine.

They go back to Jeongguk’s dorm and kiss long and hard against the door, divest each other of clothes with the same fervor as always but with more clumsy intoxication. The sex is kind of mindblowing considering they’re definitely drunk while they’re doing it, but Taehyung is being loud and Jeongguk is biting probably too hard and everything is a blur of intimacy and smiles, warmth and giggling and foreheads pressed together as they tease each other to the end.

“I love pre-negotiated and explicitly-consented-to drunk sex,” Taehyung sighs afterwards, when they’re sticky and tired but still too spinny to sleep.

“I love you,” Jeongguk growls. Taehyung giggles, and Jeongguk kisses him through the laughs.

“You should go to sleep now,” Taehyung slurs, throwing an arm across his eyes.

“You won’t be able to,” Jeongguk mumbles. “Can’t sleep when you’re drunk.”

Taehyung sighs. “It’s okay. I was dancing, I’m actually pretty tired.”

“Hmm. ’Kay, night, Taehyungie.”
“Night, Jeonggukkie. Love you.”


There’s a lovely sweet sigh and a dazed little synth hum from under the bed. <<<love love,>> Tata beeps. <<<love love.>>

Taehyung wakes up with an aching head and a not-quite-queasy stomach and a warmth in his chest that seems as unlikely to go away as the hangover.

“Hey,” Jeongguk murmurs, looking tired and red-eyed as he holds a still-sleeping Tata.

“Hey,” Taehyung croaks, blinking just as blearily as Jeongguk is. “Fuck, did you even sleep? You look exhausted.” Cooky is curled up somewhere in the covers tangled at the bottom of the bed; Taehyung can feel their weight (slight as it is) against his calves. The daemons obviously climbed up onto the bed at some point in the night, but Taehyung was way too out of it to notice.

“Yeah, barely,” Jeongguk says, fingers dancing over Tata’s little arm. “I’m surprised you did, honestly. You usually have trouble when you’re drunk.”

“It wasn’t good sleep,” Taehyung admits. “Fuck, did Ta keep you up or something?”

Jeongguk shakes his head and then winces like he regrets that choice. “Ugh. No. Tata-yah and Cooky-yah climbed up about ten minutes after you closed your eyes, and Tata crashed out and only mumbled at me, like, once. It made no sense, though. Like listening to you talk when you’re tired or excited,” he teases. Or tries, anyways—mostly he just looks way hungover.
“Hey, you know how you promised to take care of me if I ended up hungover?” Taehyung whispers. “I feel like that’s gonna be the other way around.”

“You’re hungover too.”

“Yeah, but less, maybe.”

Jeongguk shrugs. Then he leans in, careful not to disturb Tata, and kisses Taehyung once, twice on the lips. Taehyung closes his eyes, revels in the softness of it, the subtle differences from the first time they woke up together after a night of drinking—uncertain of each other still, Tata clinging around Jeongguk’s thigh as Jeongguk puked in Hoseok and Namjoon’s sink, everything too nebulous and unformed between them, impossible to pin down.

When they draw apart, Jeongguk’s eyes flick immediately and reverently down to Tata. Taehyung’s soul is sprawled on their back in the middle of the mattress, mouth partly open, eyebrows furrowed. Their eyes are shut tight, and their little chest is rising and falling slowly with their breaths. Their arms and legs are all small and adorable, covered by their blue pajamas; one little arm is looped around Jeongguk’s bony wrist. It’s possibly the cutest thing Taehyung has ever seen—except, of course, the look of Cooky when they’re asleep, usually in Taehyung’s lap if they’re at home but sometimes in his arms when they’re out and about and the little bunny needs a nap. That’s the fucking cutest.

“I love you,” Jeongguk whispers. He strokes lightly up and down Tata’s side and Tata’s leg twitches a couple times. They synth-purr once before stilling again.

Taehyung blushes. “They love you too.”

Jeongguk’s eyes flick up to Taehyung’s. “No, Tae, holy shit, you don’t—” he chokes up. “You don’t get it. Like—seeing Tata like this every night when I get home and I mean—this is. God. I’m the fucking luckiest person alive, ever. Holy shit. Holy shit.”

Taehyung’s heart skips its way forward, like a smooth stone over a clear, glassy pond. The pond of these feelings, the figurative ocean, actually, of emotion Taehyung and Jeongguk have for each other. And then gravity wins out and Taehyung’s heart-stone slips below the surface; he’s overwhelmed by this love too.
“Jeonggukkie,” he chokes, sort of, almost crying too. He’s hungover and Jeongguk is touching Tata so carefully and they’re soulmates and this feels so much like that first night but so much more —

Wait.

“Wait,” Taehyung whispers, “wait, every night? Like—you see Ta when they’re asleep a lot?”

“Huh?”

“You said that,” Taehyung whispers, blushing, looking down.

Jeongguk’s eyes are wide like he doesn’t realize what a big deal that is. “Yeah? I mean, especially since lately I’ve been getting back so late and stuff. I always see them when they’re asleep. And whenever I wake up in the night or something, they’ll wake up too but then they go back to sleep like on my chest or something.”

Taehyung swallows, a lump of—something—in his throat. “I never see Tata sleep, hardly,” he whispers, breathless at the idea that Jeongguk sees a side of Taehyung’s soul—regularly—that Taehyung hardly sees himself.

Jeongguk smiles. “They’re really cute. I wanna watch them sleeping all the time.”

Taehyung swallows, assured. He can ask, he can do this, Jeongguk will say yes. Fuck if it’s too soon, fuck if Taehyung’s parents would hate it if they knew, fuck if Jeongguk’s parents do end up finding out and then hate it too.

“Jeonggukkie,” Taehyung starts, hungover and overwhelmed in love and brave, “um, do you, um. Want to…”

“What?” Jeongguk asks, distracted as he looks for his phone under his pillow.

“Do you want to—”
“Shit,” Jeongguk screeches, looking at his phone. “Fuck, *fuck*, the train!”

Tata opens their eyes and sits up all dreamy, literally swaying as they try to stand. Cooky disentangles their limbs from the blankets with an agitated hop and hurries to steady Tata’s wobbling. Jeongguk flings himself out of bed and stumbles into the desk, clutching his head.

Oh fuck. They’re super late. “*Shit. Okay, let’s go.*” They’ll have time later; it’s *fine*, Taehyung doesn’t have to ask a question he knows the answer to right exactly now.

“Sorry I interrupted,” Jeongguk says as they frantically finish stuffing things into their bags, both palish-greenish and trying not to puke as they get dressed and eye their toothbrushes, wondering if they have time. “Tell me on the way?”

“Nah, it’s fine,” Taehyung says. “Come on, we have to.” They scurry to the bathroom, brush their teeth as fast as they in good conscience can, and then run back to the room, where Tata and Cooky have finished gathering things up.

“It looks like rain,” Jeongguk says, grabbing Tata’s rain gear. Tata is already holding their backpack but they happily accept Jeongguk’s help getting into the little plastic coat and boots.

“Got it,” Taehyung says, bundling up Cooky just the same.

“Thanks, Taehyungie,” Cooky mumbles, looking just about as hungover as their human. Taehyung is sure he and Tata aren’t much better off.

“Come on. Gotta hurry,” Jeongguk grumbles, grabbing a water bottle off the top of the dresser and heading for the door. “We can split this.”

“Got everything?” Taehyung asks Cooky and Tata. The daemons nod, and Jeongguk nods too.

“Let’s go, then,” Jeongguk says. They head out the door.

<<*busan! busan!*>> Tata shouts as he dances down the hallway. Then they wince, the hangover apparently catching up with them, and scurry up on top of Jeongguk’s suitcase. They slouch against
the handle and hum a miserable little tune as they scurry to catch the train.

The train ride to Busan is surprisingly less painful than Jeongguk expects it to be. Tata and Cooky build a temporary nest in the rack between their suitcases, and Taehyung keeps his mask up and curls small in the seat by the window. Jeongguk gives up on his own mask after about ten minutes—it’s too hot and stifling and it’s just making the nausea worse—and sits slumped against Taehyung. They fall asleep practically on top of each other, and at some point Cooky and Tata get down to snuggle too. Aside from the occasional bout of nausea that gets both Taehyung and Jeongguk clutching each other’s wrists and breathing carefully and trying to calm each other down, the ride passes in a dozy blur.

When they get off the train, the sea air hits Jeongguk with its usual wave of salt and nostalgia, and he and Cooky exchange a wistful look. Behind them, Taehyung and Tata are breathing heavily, exhausted from the stairs and still hungover—not that Jeongguk isn’t; it’s only been a few hours since they got out of bed and they haven’t eaten anything yet, and sleeping on the train might have done more harm than good because now Jeongguk’s back kind of hurts too.

At least the coastal air is nice. That kind of helps to clear Jeongguk’s head.

“So,” Taehyung says, finally joining Jeongguk at the curb, “what kind of car does your mom drive?”

“Um…that one,” Jeongguk says. Yep, there’s his mom and her fox daemon, pulling up to the curb in their new Hyundai Palisade.

“Jeonggukkie! Oh, honey, welcome home!” Jeongguk’s mom exclaims as she gets out of the car. “So! Where is the lovely person you said you were bringing home to meet us?”

“Um,” Jeongguk says, shifting back and forth as Cooky hops nervously at his feet. He glances at Taehyung, afraid to see frustration that Jeongguk can’t come out and say it—but Taehyung is just looking patiently back, soft and wearing a black mask and still clearly feeling somewhat sick but accepting, understanding. Jeongguk swallows. “Mom—Eomma,” he says, to be respectful, “this is Kim Taehyung. He’s…my—”
“Boyfriend,” Jeongguk’s mom finishes, smiling, a glint in her eye. “Yes, I thought this might be why you’ve been acting so secretive.”

Jeongguk splutters, face going hot with his blush. “Huh? What, Eomma, I—you—”

“Knew?” She laughs. “I mean, I didn’t want to assume anything, but I suspected. Hence the reason I asked you where the person you brought was, not the girl. ”

“Mom,” Jeongguk mumbles, shifting back and forth more anxiously, embarrassed.

Mrs. Jeon smiles and shakes her head fondly before turning to Taehyung. “Sorry about that, dear. It’s nice to meet you.”

Taehyung nods, keeping it together surprisingly well for someone who totally almost puked on the train twenty minutes ago. “Nice to meet you, Jeon-ssi. Thank you for your hospitality in having me. I brought a gift—just some chocolates, I mean, I hope you like them.”

Jeongguk’s mom nods and bows, still smiling. Her daemon prowls around Cooky for a second and then sniffs at Tata, who looks pleased at the attention but also unsure how to handle it. In all the time Jeongguk has spent with Tata, it might be the first time he’s seen the daemon looking self-conscious.

“I hope it’s not impertinent of me to ask your daemon’s name?” Mrs. Jeon says, peering politely at Taehyung. It’s not out of the ordinary to ask that, to acknowledge that daemons exist when meeting someone new. In fact, most people introduce their daemons along with themselves, if they’re meeting someone who might one day be important to them. Potential new friends, love interests—

Future in-laws?

(Maybe Jeongguk is being a little bit presumptuous. Like, because gay marriage isn’t even legal in Korea or anything, and that’s if Taehyung would even want to, so like. Yeah. Presumptuous.)

Taehyung nods. “It’s Tata. Um. Sorry they’re…”
Mrs. Jeon raises an eyebrow. “Mischievous and super curious?”

Taehyung shoots a worried look at Jeongguk, who blushes as red as Tata’s head, probably. “I may have…mentioned them. Or like. Told stories.”

“Don’t worry, Taehyung-ssi,” Mrs. Jeon says, smiling. “He didn’t tell me much. Just that he knew someone with a daemon unlike anything he had ever seen—and something about that daemon sneaking off with Cooky one time?”

“More than one time,” Jeongguk mutters, glaring at Cooky and Tata, who look sheepish and proud, respectively.

“Um,” Taehyung coughs. He must remember that he’s still wearing his mask, and he pulls it down below his chin in a rush that seems to leave him a little worse for wear. Hungover, obviously, and Jeongguk is too, and Jeongguk’s mom almost definitely can tell—

“I’m just kidding!” Mrs. Jeon laughs and introduces her daemon as almost an afterthought—Jeongguk kind of wonders if the daemon-human relationship changes as you get older, if it settles in and gets so deep-rooted that you can hardly even remember your daemon is there, maybe, separate from you but also not? The connection is so natural that Jeongguk can’t imagine it getting even more so, but maybe it will over years and years of life and experience.

“Be nice, Eomma,” Jeongguk mumbles. There’s a squeeze around his hand and he realizes Taehyung has grabbed it. He’s clearly trying so hard not to look as terrible as he feels.

Then there’s a good-natured laugh, and Mrs. Jeon’s daemon curls around Cooky and nudges the bunny towards the car. “I have to say,” Mrs. Jeon says, opening the trunk, “you boys look dead on your feet. And I doubt the long car ride is going to help, right?” There’s a knowing glint in her eyes again, and she smirks as she helps Jeongguk and Taehyung put their bags in the back.

“Don’t talk to us,” Jeongguk grumbles, no real aggression in the words.

Mrs. Jeon just shrugs. “You know, your father isn’t home right now, and neither is Jeonghyun-ah. You guys can probably sneak a nap in if you want. And I’ll make bibimbap for when you wake up. My recipe cures even the worst hangovers!”
“Oh. Um. Yeah. Thanks, Mom,” Jeongguk murmurs, shoulders slumping.

“Um. Did you need help getting the guest room ready, or…” Taehyung offers, looking endearingly earnest if still sort of wobbly.

Mrs. Jeon laughs and waves him off. “That’s very sweet of you, but you’re adults. You can share Jeongguk-ah’s bedroom; I don’t think either of you will complain about that?” They both shake their heads, and even Tata and Cooky join in the affirmation. Mrs. Jeon smiles. “Anyways, it’s not like there’s any risk of teen pregnancy—I mean because you’re not teenagers.” She laughs, loud and unselfconscious. “Sorry, was that too far?”

“Eomma,” Jeongguk grumbles, but Taehyung snorts and Jeongguk can practically hear the thought in his head—well, if that’s what gets us the pleasure of sharing a room...

“Come on. Let’s get home,” Mrs. Jeon says, shaking her head. Jeongguk and Taehyung slump into the back seat with Cooky and Tata. “Thanks, Eomma,” Jeongguk mumbles, too nauseated not to rest his head on Taehyung’s shoulder as they drive. He doesn’t feel bad anymore, but the weird icky sick feeling is still clinging on like vine tendrils sucking the life out of the tree within. Taehyung doesn’t look much better, but he does manage his own “Thank you, Jeon-ssi,” which earns him a smile.

She shrugs. “No problem. Although you do realize one of you could’ve sat up front?” The smirk is back, that knowing glint—in her daemon’s eyes too, actually. Like she can see right through everyone and everything. Jeongguk’s mom has always been that way.

“Wake us when we’re home,” Jeongguk asks rather than responding to her pointed look. He closes his eyes and tries to ignore the motion of the car the rest of the way.

When they finally get to the house, Jeongguk’s mom sends them off to bed right away. Taehyung and Jeongguk climb the stairs in sleepy silence, dump their bags in the corner, shimmy out of their clothes, fall into bed. Taehyung is quick to cuddle up, malleable and soft and groaning with how good it feels. Tata and Cooky construct a makeshift nest between the pillows and the wall, and Jeongguk gets Taehyung into his arms, strokes the lovely golden planes of him.

“Mn—blankets smell like you,” Taehyung mumbles into his pillow, shifting even closer to Jeongguk. “You comfy?”

“Mmhmm,” Jeongguk hums, not capable of much else.
“Go sleeeeeep ,” Taehyung slurs, and he’s out like a light.

When Jeongguk wakes up again, Taehyung is still down for the count. Tata and Cooky are murmuring softly to each other, sitting up against the wall with a blanket around their shoulders; they look wide-eyed at Jeongguk when they notice he’s awake, and then they pull the blanket entirely over their heads and whisper even quieter.

Jeongguk snorts. “Okay,” he says, loud enough for the daemons to hear. They giggle and suddenly Tata’s head glows like a bright heart-shaped lamp, lighting up the sheet they’re under. Jeongguk sighs and wonders at the magnificent circumstances of his life: his pink bunny soul cuddled up with its heart-headed soul mate that has extendable limbs and a surprise talent for phosphorescence, both of them whispering like kids trying to trick their parents into thinking they’re asleep. Meanwhile: said parents nap in Jeongguk’s childhood bed because they’re hungover and comfortable enough with each other not to hide it even a little, to lie in unshaved and unshowered intimacy, uncaring of sleep-breath or the icky residue of sweat and travel. Jeongguk buries his nose in Taehyung’s hair and doesn’t even mind that it still smells like cigarettes from the club.

Finally, Jeongguk heaves a sigh and evaluates how he feels. Not too terrible—he’s way better now than he’d been earlier, that’s for sure. Good enough to take a shower. Good enough to want a shower.

There’s a moment of awkward squirming; Taehyung clings when he’s asleep, just like Tata in all other circumstances. Jeongguk will have to replace himself with a pillow or Taehyung will mumble and toss fitfully without something to hold. Maybe Tata is so perpetually needy because Taehyung feels that way but it’s not socially acceptable for Taehyung to hang all over everyone (Jeongguk) during the day, and he only lets that particular guard down at night. Hell, Taehyung might not even know that’s why Tata wants to climb all over Jeongguk constantly, Taehyung might be walking around touch-starved all the time and not even realize it, which means he can’t even ask for what he needs —

Oh. Maybe that’s—kind of really tragic, and Jeongguk wants to fix it, and knows he can’t, and hopes he can spend his life trying anyways.

Jeongguk successfully disentangles himself from Taehyung’s octopus arms and gets a stuffed moose from when he was a kid to put in his place. He’s just about to slide out of bed when Taehyung gives a little sniffl and a sigh, the obvious signals that he’s waking up.

“ Mmm jeong—goo.” Taehyung shifts and buries his head into the stuffed moose.
Jeongguk bites his lip as he smiles. “Go back to sleep, baby,” he whispers, carding his fingers through Taehyung’s blue hair. “I’m just going to shower. Be back soon.”

“Me too,” Taehyung whines.

Jeongguk chuckles. “My mom might be chill with me bringing a boyfriend back here and letting us stay in the same room, but she’s probably not gonna be particularly jazzed about us showering together in her home, you know?”

Taehyung whines. “Hmmmm yeahkay.” His breathing evens out, back to the soft patterns of sleep.

The shower is as rejuvenating as it could possibly be; Tata and Cooky amble in at some point and Tata washes themselves while Cooky insists that their fur smells smoky and they need a bath. As always, though, they won’t actually get under the stream of water. Tata volunteers to scrub Cooky with shampoo if Jeongguk will stand in one place and shield them from the direct spray, and Jeongguk smiles and lets Tata order him into the right position, acquiescent as he lets Taehyung’s soul coddle Jeongguk’s own.

“Come on, Tatata-yah,” Jeongguk says once Cooky is all sudsy and content and ready for rinsing. “I know you can turn yourself into some sort of device for this problem.”

<<can CAN! initiate cooky!-rinsing mechanism protocol!>> Tata funnels their arms all weird and twists them up, moving so their hands (okay, not hands per se, but like. The ends of their arms. So. Their hands.) catch the water so it travels down in a thin stream that goes over Cooky’s body perfectly. Jeongguk shakes his head and pats Tata on the back a couple times, and Tata coos happy nonsense beeps up at him.

There’s a knock on the door. “Jeongguk-ah?” Mrs. Jeon calls, “you and Taehyung-ssi in there?”

“Just me,” Jeongguk says, rolling his eyes. “What’s up?”

“Just figured you must be up since I heard the shower. Is Taehyung-ssi okay?”

“You can call him ‘Taehyung’, Mom,” Jeongguk shouts. “He’s fine, just sleeping still.”
“Wake him up; it’s almost 3:00 and I’m starting the bibimbap.”

“Got it,” Jeongguk confirms, kneeling down to help Tata sluff the suds off of Cooky’s back. “Okay, you’re good, Cooky. You all clean too, Ta?”

<<clean!>>

“All right. Prepare for the cold; I’m turning off the water now.”

Tata of course shivers overdramatically once they’re all toweling off—which is bullshit because that fucking creature can change their body temperature at will, but Jeongguk would expect nothing less from the soul of the person who can get his way over anything using that one particular pout of his lips, that wide-eyed, beseeching look of torment and despair.

Acting majors.

“And chemistry,” Cooky says, apparently reading Jeongguk’s mind like daemons occasionally can—only occasionally, though.

Jeongguk nods. “I know. Taehyungie and Tata-chan are pretty ridiculous, huh, chemistry and acting?”

Cooky nods and hops over to Tata, grabbing their wrist and dragging them to the door. “Come on,” they demand, un-shy the way they are only with Jeongguk and Taehyung and Tata. “Wanna see Taehyungie, pleasie.”

<<pleasie! pleasie pleasie!>>

“Me too, guys, me too,” Jeongguk commiserates. They hurry back. Taehyung is sitting against the headboard looking at his phone, all bedheaded and bedraggled but with clearer eyes, less of that tension in his shoulders that says he’s forcing back nausea.
“Hey,” Jeongguk says, crawling onto the bed to kneel over Taehyung’s thighs, uncaring of the way his towel comes undone and exposes his junk. Not like Taehyung hasn’t seen it (and touched it, with his hands and his fucking sinful mouth) a bunch of times.

Taehyung glances down, raising judgy eyebrows. “Hello, Jeongguk’s dick.” His voice still sounds a little wobbly.

Jeongguk snorts. “Don’t forget the rest of what’s down there.”

“The rest of— oh my god, you want me to greet your balls too?” Taehyung snorts, reaching up to cradle the back of Jeongguk’s neck and pull him into a tonally dissonant kiss, all soft and gentle.

“Hey,” Jeongguk whispers when they pull apart, keeping their noses close enough to brush.

Taehyung smiles. “Hey. Sorry I’m all gross still.”

Jeongguk shakes his head. “It’s fine. Go shower; my mom’s making us food.”

“One does not simply use the shower at a friend’s house,” Taehyung says, blinking vapidly, if Taehyung could ever really be called ‘vapid’.

Jeongguk blinks. “Is that a meme. Did you just quote the fucking Boromir meme at me?”

Taehyung giggles and surges forward, kissing Jeongguk hard enough he falls backwards, dislodged from Taehyung’s lap—

“Hey!” Jeongguk shouts as Taehyung leaps out from under him and darts for the door. “You don’t even know where the bathroom is!”

“Tata will show me,” Taehyung says, snatching Jeongguk’s discarded towel as an afterthought and following a far-too-eager Tata. It’s pretty 50-50 whether Tata will side with Jeongguk or Taehyung in situations like these, and although he likes to win, Jeongguk always finds it unbearably cute when Taehyung and Tata are in league together. They’re adorable when they’re giggling and talking in a weird mix of Korean and techy beep sounds—Taehyung is pretty good at actually making the
sounds Tata makes, and he uses enough sound effects anyways that talking to either of them is like talking to the other.

“Don’t use Jeonghyun-hyung’s shampoo or you’ll smell like my brother and I won’t wanna fuck you later,” Jeongguk shouts—an extremely ill-advised choice considering they’re in his childhood bedroom in a house that contains his mother and possibly other family members if they’re home by now fuck fuck fuckity fuck. But Taehyung’s cackle lilts down the hallway—

“Which one’s that?”

“The tryhard Axe bottle called Mountain Ice or something!”

“You use Old Spice and you have the audacity to call your brother a tryhard?” The bathroom door closes hard, and Jeongguk sighs and flops onto the bed naked.

“Why do we love them,” Jeongguk grumbles to Cooky, pushing himself up after a minute to get dressed. There’s no sign of Cooky anywhere in the room, though; they must have gone with Tata and Taehyung. Traitor.

At least Jeongguk can feel bond-tingles of Taehyung’s feather-light touch against Cooky’s fur while he’s pulling on briefs and sweatpants and a baggy shirt. Probably not great to greet his father looking this sleepy, but whatever. Jeongguk is home, and he’s recovering from a nasty hangover, and he has a fucking awesome, beautiful boyfriend, and he’s going to be comfortable, god dammit.

Taehyung comes back shortly smelling of Jeongguk’s shampoo, not Jeonghyun’s. “Gonna fuck me later then, right, Jeonggukkie?” Taehyung teases, pulling Jeongguk into a kiss against the wall that lasts honestly too long—and okay, yeah. Maybe. Once everyone is asleep. At least Jeongguk’s parents sleep downstairs. Probably no one will hear.

“Come on,” Taehyung says once he’s dressed (in jeans, so at least slightly more nicely than Jeongguk) and holding the box of chocolates he brought for Jeongguk’s parents. “They’re not gonna…I mean. Your mom was nice, but your hyung and dad aren’t gonna, like…”

Jeongguk faces Taehyung with as much bravery and honesty as he can conjure up. “I don’t know. I mean—Jeonghyun won’t care. He might tease us and make shitty jokes, but he won’t be, like, disapproving.”
“But your dad…”

Jeongguk ducks. “Maybe. He might be. Difficult.”

Taehyung takes Jeongguk’s hands, tugs him close. Jeongguk bows his head and feels small next to Taehyung’s broad shoulders and formidable height. Not that Jeongguk isn’t that size too, but still. Still.

“Hey,” Taehyung says, “if your dad is mean, um. I mean. We can leave, or we can just—come up here and ignore him, yeah? Is it weird for me to say that when it’s your dad and like, your house?”

Jeongguk shakes his head. “It’s fine. It’s—yeah. I mean, I don’t think he’ll be, like—he probably won’t disown me. But if he’s mean to you, or to Tata. Fuck, I’ll—we’ll come up here and hide out and leave on the first train in the morning. Or last train tonight, fuck, I don’t care. I just…I really hope he just…is nice.”

“Yeah. That’s extremely valid,” Taehyung says, squeezing Jeongguk’s hands. It looks like maybe he’s going to say something else, but Tata tugs on Taehyung’s arm and says something about wanting to eat. Taehyung nods. “Come on. Ready?”

“Shouldn’t I be asking you that?” Jeongguk asks, smiling as they file out of the room, daemons quiet behind them.

Taehyung smiles. “I’m always ready. I was born ready.”

“Sure,” Jeongguk snorts, but he looks at the affection and Taehyung’s eyes and thinks—yeah. Jeongguk is ready, too.
“You must be Taehyung-ssi.”

Taehyung looks up from his bibimbap, startled, as a man who can only be Jeongguk’s father walks into the room.

Jeon-ssi is formidable the way Jeongguk has described him before; his hawk daemon is sitting silent and sharp-eyed on his shoulder, and he’s wearing a suit even though it’s a Saturday. He’s taller than either Jeongguk or Taehyung, and his dark eyes aren’t cold exactly but they’re evaluative, skeptical.


Mr. Jeon blinks in sync with the hawk and Taehyung gulps in sync with Tata. And possibly Jeongguk. And definitely Cooky.

“My wife tells me you’re very cute and personable,” Mr. Jeon says, “but I’m assuming that’s just because you bribed her with chocolates.”

Taehyung bites his lip and glances at Jeongguk, entirely uncertain about how to follow up this comment. “That’s—I mean. Just a thank you. For having me. When you didn’t know…”

“That you weren’t a girl?” Mr. Jeon asks, shrugging out of his suit jacket and draping it over the back of a chair.

There’s a moment of awkward silence that leaves Taehyung feeling like any charm he’s ever had has been wicked away—and would have been useless anyways.

“Now, now, honey,” Mrs. Jeon says, sweeping into the kitchen with water and a couple of painkillers each for Jeongguk and Taehyung. She sets them down and heads to her husband, kisses him just once, a perfunctory but affectionate peck. “Be nice to our guest. He loves our Jeonggukkie and our Jeonggukkie loves him.”

Jeongguk and Taehyung both splutter, but Mr. Jeon—*laughs*. Suddenly, with his mouth wide in a smile, Taehyung can see the resemblance he has to his son. Mrs. Jeon is smiling too, and Taehyung’s heart swells to see these two people who created Jeongguk looking so radiantly in love after years and years together.
Jeongguk’s dad relaxes into a chair. “I’m sorry for being so austere; I have a reputation to uphold, you know,” he says, still formidable but considerably less so with a loosened tie, his sleeves rolled up. His daemon swoops off into the kitchen, Mrs. Jeon’s fox following on the floor below. Mrs. Jeon settles into a chair as well, taking her husband’s hand.

“Mean,” Jeongguk grumbles, but he leans over and gives his dad a quick sitting-down hug. “Hey, Appa.”

“Hey, kiddo,” Mr. Jeon says. “Good to see you bringing a significant other home finally.”

“I’m only 20,” Jeongguk groans. “Did you want me bringing boys here when I was still in high school or something?”

Mr. Jeon gets a little quieter, a little more serious. “You knew in high school, huh? And you didn’t think it might be respectful to inform your parents?”

“That I liked guys?” Jeongguk scoffs, tightening his grip around Taehyung’s hand. “I don’t know, it just seemed like that would kind of suck for me to have to tell you, I mean—Jeonghyun-hyung always had these smart, nice girlfriends and then there I was, like—not. I don’t know. I didn’t wanna…upset you. Disappoint you. Whatever.”

“Honey,” Mrs. Jeon says, unerringly sincere, “you wouldn’t have disappointed us. We love you. We want you to be happy, and do what’s right for you.”

Jeongguk ducks his head, and Taehyung suddenly wonders if maybe it’s weird for them that he’s here, that Tata is here playing some game with Cooky under the table and beeping sporadically while this happens. This seems kind of private, kind of personal.

But then Jeongguk squeezes his hand again, shifts their grip so their fingers are intertwined. Lifts their joined hands and sets them on the table, love on unashamed display. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you,” Jeongguk murmurs, staring down at his hand in Taehyung’s. “And um. Thanks for like. Being nice about it.”

Mr. Jeon looks over at Taehyung, gaze full of hawk-like gravitas. “Taehyung-ssi, you must be one special guy if Jeongguk finally came out to us because he wanted to bring you home with him.”
Taehyung blushes hard, feeling kind of out of his depth and a lot terrified that their reception at his own home in Daegu wouldn’t be nearly this accepting. At least that’s something he can continue avoiding, preferably forever. “Thank you, Jeon-ajeossi.”

Mr. Jeon waves Taehyung’s formality away. “Just Jeon-ssi is fine, please. Thank you for coming all the way to Busan to meet us.”

“And for the chocolates,” Mrs. Jeon says. “I’m eating all of them!”

“Oh,” a new voice says, “wait, did you mean all of these?” A young guy who pretty closely resembles Jeongguk steps into the room, cheeks crammed full and Taehyung’s box of chocolates held in his hands. At his feet, a coyote is eyeing whatever is going on under the table with Tata and Cooky.

“Jeon Jeonghyun,” Mrs. Jeon scolds, half aggrieved but mostly laughing and affectionate. Jeonghyun stutters some excuse out around the chocolate in his mouth as everyone else laughs, even Jeongguk and Taehyung.

“Sorry,” Jeonghyun says, still chuckling as he sets the rest of the box down on the table. His eyes turn to Taehyung. “Hey. You must be Taehyung.”

“How did you all know his name?” Jeongguk whines, frowning at his mom. “Did you call them and tell them?”

Mrs. Jeon shrugs, reaching for a chocolate. “I was excited. My son and his cute boyfriend, how could I not brag? To the rest of the members of my family, I’ll remind you.”

“Yes, Eomma,” Jeongguk and Jeonghyun chorus.

“We get it; you’re the matriarch,” Jeonghyun adds.

“You’re goddamn right,” Mrs. Jeon says, pointing a finger at Jeonghyun and then standing up. “So. Anyone else want bibimbap, or is that just for our very hungover but very adorable couple?”
“Hey,” Jeongguk pouts.

“Hungover—is that why she made bibimbap two hours before normal dinner?” Jeonghyun laughs, and Jeongguk rolls his eyes and glances at Taehyung, who gives him an uncertain smile.

Jeongguk turns to Jeonghyun. “Stop it. You’re overwhelming him.”

“Sorry, kid,” Jeonghyun says, shaking his head. “I guess we are kinda overwhelming. Like, as a family unit.”

Taehyung shakes his head. “It’s fine. Just—new, I guess.”

“No siblings, hon?” Mrs. Jeon asks, tapping red shellac nails against the back of a chair. “I guess that would make for a quiet house.”

Taehyung shakes his head shifting uncomfortably. “No, I have a little brother and a little sister. But they’re still pretty young, really, so. I have to be the hyung, and all.”

Everyone nods like that explains it, but Jeongguk just pulls their joined hands back under the table so he can squeeze solidarity into Taehyung’s fingers. He knows enough about the distance between Taehyung and his family, the vague weirdness about Tata, but it’s not like he’s going to say anything.

“Well,” Jeonghyun says, leaning in to grin at Taehyung, “you any good at Yahtzee? Because Jeongguk-ah and I have an ongoing tournament from 2004 that still hasn’t been resolved, so if you want in on a sibling rivalry that runs deeper than the ocean and thicker than blood, I want you to know that I will kick your ass.”

Taehyung goes quiet for a second, evaluating, and then he breaks into a wide, mischievous grin. “Oh, hell yeah. You’re on.” He pauses and turns to Jeongguk. “But I don’t care about beating you, Jeonghyun-hyung. Kookie and Cooky, I’m coming for you.”

There’s a moment where you could probably hear a pin drop, it’s so quiet.
And then, Jeongguk’s family—all of them, every single one—bursts into wild laughter, and Taehyung smiles bright, so glad he came.

Jeongguk smiles and, in an apparent fit of bravery, leans in to kiss Taehyung’s cheek. Taehyung is blushing, he still thinks maybe he overstepped, but it doesn’t matter. Just like that, Taehyung is part of the fold.

“So anyway,” Jeongguk’s dad says, finishing off a bite of bell pepper as he gestures with his chopsticks, “I told Im-ssi that if anything like that ever happens again, it’ll be the last time he ever sets foot in our building. No excuses.”


“Yeah, dad,” Jeonghyun agrees. “Good thing you were there to show him who’s boss.”

Mr. Jeon’s chest puffs up, but Jeongguk can tell he’s mostly faking the machismo. Mostly. “That’s right. What would they do without me? And on a Saturday. I go in on Saturdays to keep those young kids in line.”

“Um,” Taehyung ventures, raising his hand, “how old exactly are the guys who work under you?”

Jeongguk’s dad looks pleased at the fact that Taehyung has asked this. “Early twenties. Millennials, and here I have to deal with them with all their—their phones, and their—clicking on stuff before I’ve even read the whole page, I’m always asking them for help setting things up on my computer and they just come over and know exactly how to do it—they’re competent in that regard, I suppose, but they’re all terrible with deadlines.”

Taehyung nods, not quite so mocking as Jeonghyun and Jeongguk’s mom get with their gentle ribbing, but Jeongguk can see a tiny smile curving the edge of his lips as he indulges Mr. Jeon. Tata
and Cooky have frolicked off to the living room with Jeonghyun’s coyote trailing them, side-eyeing them for the way they were skipping. Mrs. Jeon’s fox is lounging in the corner, eyes seemingly closed—although Jeongguk is pretty sure they’re actually watching everything. Mr. Jeon’s hawk is perched on his usual stand by the door.

“Anyway,” Mr. Jeon says, popping more rice into his mouth, “at least one person at this table is actually interested in what I’ve been saying.” He gestures at Taehyung and then gives Jeongguk a very serious look. “You’ve picked out a very polite one, I see.”

Jeongguk shakes his head. “*Picked*—one of *what*, I mean—Dad, what does that even *mean*—”

“Watch when he says something super politically incorrect right now,” Jeonghyun smirks, leaning back in his chair and crossing his arms behind his head.

“Like what,” Taehyung giggles.

Jeonghyun sits up straight in his chair, arranges his mouth and eyebrows so he looks all self-important and patriarchal. “*You know, one of the gays*—”

“*Jeon Jeonghyun,*” Mrs. Jeon scolds yet again, and Mr. Jeon splutters about how he was just going to say *boyfriend.* Jeongguk huffs, not used to this kind of joking from his family, but Taehyung is cracking up, forehead on the table as he tries to keep it together.

“He might’ve said that,” Jeonghyun maintains, shaking his head as everyone pulls it together. “It wasn’t an unreasonable guess.”

“I would not have said that,” Mr. Jeon says, sitting up straighter, all self-important and patriarchal. The resemblance between his expression and Jeonghyun’s earlier impression is super high, and Jeongguk giggles.

Dinner descends into its usual organized chaos, conversation passing off between different ends of the table as Jeongguk’s parents get caught up discussing something that the kids don’t understand at all, Jeonghyun complaining that he’s starting to use bullshit words like “yeet” and “yikes” unironically and he wants to punch himself every time he does it. The dishes get passed around and around until all that’s left is the scant remains of noodles and veggies lingering on Taehyung’s plate. Jeongguk is still hungry, but his mom is marveling over Tata, who is now standing next to her chair with their mouth open as she tosses little bits of food to them which they can of course catch with a
100 percent accuracy rate due to the fact that they can extend their legs to the perfect length for every toss of broccoli or beef or tofu.

<<thank you thank you thank you love you jeon-ssi BEEF YAY!>> Tata is chirping, not that Jeongguk’s mom could possibly understand. She’s clearly enamoured anyway.

“Tae,” Jeongguk whines, looking sadly at his own empty plate and then at the noodles on Taehyung’s. “Tae, Tae, hyungie.”

“What,” Taehyung asks, grinning over at Jeongguk. “What do you want from me?”

“Hyungnim,” Jeongguk whines, playing up the aegyo as much as he can, “hyungnim, hyungnim.” He opens his eyes wide, blinks all big and pleading. Lets his lower lip jut out just enough, not too much.

Taehyung’s chin comes up a little, and he looks like he’s going to call Jeongguk on his shit. But then he softens instead, mouth coming up in that one smile that says I’ll take care of you, that says don’t worry, honey, I’ve got you. Jeongguk loves that smile, love love loves it, and Taehyung is nothing but careful and kind as he lifts his plate, turns to Jeongguk, and scoops noodles into Jeongguk’s open mouth.

“Whipped,” Jeonghyun fake-coughs.

“Don’t embarrass your brother,” Mrs. Jeon says. “He’s being very cute with his equally cute boyfriend right now and we should let them be.” Ugh. So not helping.

Jeongguk blushed and swallows the noodles, glancing around to see everyone looking at him, even Taehyung. Taehyung doesn’t look embarrassed, though; he just smiles. “Want some more?”

Okay, so maybe Jeongguk panics a little. He glances around the table to evaluate whether he can say yes to that question and not literally melt into a gooey pool of embarrassment, but Jeonghyun just looks amused, and their mom looks very fond, and their dad is looking pointedly at his phone. Jeongguk ducks his head and nods. “Yeah.”

“Here, open,” Taehyung murmurs, and then there are more noodles being pressed to Jeongguk’s lips. He accepts them shyly, happily, all docile and quiet like Cooky. It’s strange, really, how sometimes
Jeongguk feels like Cooky. He almost wonders if they can switch places or something, if their consciousness is so joined that Cooky doesn’t just bleed into Jeongguk but actually takes him over every once in a while, during moments like this, when Taehyung is being playful yet in-charge, caring and supportive the way a good hyung should be. As much as Taehyung isn’t Jeongguk’s older brother, he still gets protective and instinctively directive, especially when Jeongguk needs him to.

“Yo, snap out of it. You guys have been staring at each other dreamily for, like, two whole minutes now,” Jeonghyun says, startling Jeongguk’s eyes away from Taehyung’s. Oh. They were kind of staring.

“Would you like help cleaning up the kitchen, Jeon-ssi?” Taehyung offers, standing and reaching out to clear Jeongguk’s plate as well as his own.

Mrs. Jeon waves him off. “I’ve got it. I’ll do it later; let’s just get everything in the sink and then we can play Yahtzee?”

“Oh, hell yeah,” Jeonghyun says, pumping his fist in the air.

Jeongguk grins. “Not gonna be that happy when I get a Yahtzee on my first roll.”

“That happened once.”

“Twice!”

“One time, Guk,” Jeonghyun insists. “You cheated the second time and changed that five to a four when I wasn’t looking.”

“Did not,” Jeongguk says, although to be honest he can’t really remember. That was like legitimately ten years ago.

“Come on, Tata wants to play,” Taehyung says, scurrying back from carrying plates to the kitchen and perching at the edge of his chair.
“What, no,” Taehyung says, snatching one of Tata’s flailing arms and pulling them—well, nope. Tata stands their ground on the floor next to Cooky, letting their arm get longer and longer as Taehyung tries to move them forwards. “Seriously, how is this possible. You have to literally run out of—of body material at some point.”

“I kinda don’t think they do,” Jeongguk says, shaking his head in wonder.

Tata says, sounding perfectly composed even as Taehyung keeps pulling their arm longer and longer. It’s literally coiling up in Taehyung’s lap now, and Jeongguk and Taehyung are looking at each other in disbelief as they crack up.

“Fine,” Taehyung says, distracted as he keeps tugging on Tata’s arm. “Whatever you want. You and Cooky first, then you and I against everyone else.”

“I can’t believe you’ve never tested how long Tata’s arms can go before,” Jeongguk says, snorting as Tata’s arm just keeps coming.

Taehyung is flat-out cackling now, tears leaking from the corners of his eyes as he shakes and shakes and tries to get Tata to run out of arm.

“Your own soul just called you annoying,” Jeongguk teases.

“I call them annoying all the time; I think I can live with that,” Taehyung manages.

“What is going on over there,” Jeonghyun says, looking up from his phone to stare across the table in awe. “The fuck.”

“Language,” Mr. Jeon says.
“Ta seriously how long will this keep happening?” Taehyung laughs, ducking his head into his arm as he tries to collect himself. Jeongguk isn’t much better off.

<<don’t know, how do i stop making arm longer do i run out of arm, do i die—>>

“DIE?! ” Taehyung screeches, letting go of Tata’s arm in a moment of panic.

Tata’s arm snaps back to its normal size almost instantly. They laugh, like a real human laugh, not their usual buzzy-click chuckle. It takes Jeongguk a second to realize they’re actually just playing the beginning of “Feel Good Inc” by the Gorillaz.

“Are they streaming music right now,” Jeonghyun asks.

Taehyung grins, looking proud. Jeongguk’s heart definitely doesn’t skip a beat. “They can do that.” Taehyung leans down and snatches Tata up into his lap then, and Cooky hops up into Jeongguk’s, and Mrs. Jeon returns with the old, half-destroyed *Yahtzee* box that has seem way too many brotherly fights to not be ripped all to hell.

“All right,” Jeonghyun says, “who’s playing?”

“Tata and Cooky are a team first, so I guess Jeongguk and I will be too,” Taehyung says. “But second game, Tata and I are going to crush everyone.”

“They better not cheat,” Jeongguk says. “Can Tata cheat?”

Taehyung opens his mouth right away, but he stops short before he says anything. He takes a second, rubs his chin. “You know what? I really don’t know.”

<<can can can,>> Tata says. <<also, won’t.>>

“He says he won’t,” Taehyung says to the table at large.

<<no biting no cheating,>> Tata says, nodding.
“That’s ri—wait, what?” Jeongguk asks, shooting Tata a confused look.

Taehyung sighs and ducks his head. “Jimin and I were at a bar one time and a really drunk guy kept saying no biting, no cheating and Tata thought it was the most incredible thing.”

<<no biting no cheating! no biting no cheating!>>

“I’m so confused,” Jeongguk says, shaking his head as he lifts the lid off the box and gets the dice ready. Jeonghyun passes around pens and score cards.

“We were too.” Taehyung leans forward in his chair, channeling the kind of drunk intensity that comes with way too much soju. It gets everyone at the table crying-laughing all over again. “This is a good bar, sir! No biting, no cheating. Good people, good bar.”

“Oh my god,” Jeongguk says. There’s a stitch in his side, he can’t even remember the last time he laughed this hard. “How have you not told me this story yet.”

Taehyung giggles. “The best part was that then he invited me and Jiminnie back to his house. ‘I live right over there, sir. You should—come meet my wife. Very good city here, no biting no cheating.’”

“Did you go?” Jeonghyun asks, his coyote as riveted as he is.

“No,” says Mrs. Jeon, waving away her own laughter. “You didn’t, right?”

Taehyung shrugs, and Tata laughs harder, playing the opening sounds of “Feel Good Inc” basically on repeat at this point. “Well. Yeah, I mean, we couldn’t really say no. The guy was nice! Just really drunk. It wasn’t until the next day that Jimin turned to me and out of nowhere went, ‘OH! No fighting! He was saying no fighting!’”

Everyone stares at each other, and then they laugh so hard Jeongguk’s abs actually start to hurt.

<<no biting no cheating.>> Tata says again. <<no biting no cheating YAHTZEE!!>>
“Wow,” Jeonghyun says, shaking his head. “That’s hardcore. That you actually went to the guy’s house and met his wife.”

“Yes, we absolutely did. She was a lovely lady.” Taehyung agrees. “I can’t believe I haven’t told you that story, Guk.”

Jeongguk grins. “Well, now you have. And I’m gonna use that phrase against you all the time. ‘No biting, no cheating’.”

“*When?*” Taehyung asks, laughing and shaking his head. “When will that ever be applicable to any situation we’re in besides playing Yahtzee?”

Jeongguk opens his mouth to retort, realizes that what he’s going to say is extremely Not Safe for Work (or, like, his parents’ house), and goes beet red. All in the course of, like, six seconds.

Everything is quiet for a second, and then Jeonghyun bursts out laughing, harder even than he laughed at Taehyung’s story, so hard that Mrs. Jeon smacks him on the arm and Mr. Jeon goes back to aggressively tapping at his phone.


<<*yahtzee yahtzee,*>> Tata says, flat this time, like they’re sick of waiting around for this game to get started.

“Don’t worry,” Taehyung says, “now that you’ve been thoroughly embarrassed, I will consider going easy on you.”

“We’re on the same team for the first game,” Jeongguk says.

Taehyung nods. “And I’ll go easy on you.”

“That doesn’t even make any sense!”
“You,” Taehyung says, which is one of Tata’s favorite words to throw around like it’s some grand insult.

Jeongguk stares at Taehyung and Tata and realizes—like he has countless times, with countless people—just how similar a human and their soul are.

And even though he’s grown up with it, it’s a phenomenon that punches him in the stomach with its force every time, really. Especially when it’s with Taehyung and Tata and they’re focusing identical grins on him, their eyebrows tilted in congruent angles, their eyes dark and bright.

“Come on, let’s go,” Jeonghyun moans.

“Yeah, Jeon,” Taehyung grins, smirking as Tata reaches out to ruffle Jeongguk’s bangs all up.
“Come on. Let’s go.”

An interlude about the facial features of the manifestation of the human soul as a physical creature:

While it is a scientific commonplace that daemons take shape in a form that represents anthropomorphically the internal and therefore invisible character traits of their humans, there is still debate over whether humans and their daemons look “alike” by design or whether this phenomenon is some sort of fantastical belief stemming from confirmation bias. Many people report that their friends, family members, and coworkers “look like” their daemons, but until recently, scientists took this as an old wives’ tale that perpetuated itself simply because people believed it to be true and then unknowingly searched for physical similarities between people and their daemons.

It has never been contested that daemons and their humans have similar mannerisms and styles of speaking, as well as (of course) similar ways of interacting with the world and with others. Human friends and family members “pick up” habits of speaking and gesturing from each other and from the cultural atmosphere in which they are raised; daemons are likewise affected. Scientists have postulated that this type of gestural resemblance can be confused for actual physical similarity.
The first groundbreaking study to explore human-daemon resemblance was conducted by Kim, Hayashi, and Mayes (2013), which used facial recognition software to show that there are often similarities in the measurement ratios between people’s/daemons’ eyes, the distance from the mouth to the bottom of the chin, etc. Results were understandably skewed by the fact that many humans possess daemons that do not possess the same features as a human, most notably those with insect daemons or more cartoonish non-animal daemons, rare as these daemons may be.

A recent study forwent computers in lieu of testing humans for their responses to the possible human/daemon resemblance question. Merkel and Rose (2017) took pictures of humans and their daemons separately, mixed up the photos, and asked other subjects to match the human to their daemon based on physical features. They found that people of the same race as those in the photos had a 71% success rate while people matching photos of other-race human-daemon pairs had a 53% success rate (pg. 10). This result was expected and may be explained by Brigham and Ready (1985), who showed that people of a given race have more difficulty correctly identifying people of other races in crime scene lineup photos than they have when asked to identify people of their own race (pg. 415).

New theories propose that daemons are not just a manifestation of invisible attributes made into an (often) animal form, but in fact have an evolutionary advantage in mirroring the physical features of their human as well. This may be because physical features influence the way people are treated in the world, as shown by many studies including one by Fink and Penton-Voak (2002), who concluded that the brain reacts more favorably to people considered more traditionally attractive than to others. It then may follow that daemons must, from an evolutionary standpoint, settle into a form with essentially the same level of attractiveness as their human (pg. 157).

Jeongguk and Taehyung haven’t really spent that much time studying this or anything. But Taehyung can definitely see the resemblance between Jeongguk and Cooky, and it’s honestly kind of terrible. You know, because the force of their combined pouts is honestly off the charts.

“We’re gonna beat you,” Taehyung says as he accepts the dice from Jeongguk for the last roll. He and Tata have already scratched their Yahtzee, but Jeongguk and Cooky had to take a 12 in their sixes category and scratched Yahtzee and Large Straight. Taehyung and Tata have the last roll of the game right now, and all they need is to score one point in their ones, which will give them the 35-point bonus.

Jeongguk and Cooky turn twin pouts up on them, eyes all wide, bottom lips all quivery and sad. “Hyung,” Jeongguk says. “Hyung.”

Taehyung shakes the cup and hands it to Tata, who completes the roll.
“Hyung ieeeee,” Jeongguk whines.

“Taehyungie, love you,” Cooky whispers.

In that second, they look exactly alike.

In that second, Taehyung and Tata love them for it, love them so hard that Taehyung can feel the overwhelming force of Tata’s affection slamming into his own head, an effect that happens only when Tata’s emotions get so wide and wild that they can’t contain them in their tiny little (infinitely extendable?) body.

“Aw, Jeong-Cooky,” Taehyung says, smiling.

<<love you love you,>> Tata says.

For a second, Jeongguk seems to think maybe he’s won, that Taehyung will just forfeit or something, not even pay attention to the roll.

“Sorry, babe. Not today.”

Taehyung turns to the table and cackles, head thrown back as Tata beeps and beeps and beeps.

“Hyungie,” Jeongguk whimpers again as Taehyung scoops up the dice. No ones this time, but he’s got two more rolls.

“Come on, Ta. Only need one.”

Tata grabs the cup and rolls.
“Okay, your family is awesome.” Taehyung and Jeongguk are sitting in the family room and it’s late; Jeonghyun and Mr. Jeon have retreated to bed while Mrs. Jeon bangs around in the kitchen cleaning things up. She’s singing quietly in a voice that reminds Jeongguk of how she used to tuck him in every night, carrying him up from this very couch, Jeongguk all sleepy and limp in her arms with Cooky still an unformed blob of light. It’s a nice memory. It’s nice being back and having these memory-ghosts floating into Jeongguk’s head. Nicer with Taehyung here.

Jeongguk smiles and nuzzles deeper into Taehyung’s shoulder. “I feel silly now. That I didn’t just tell them.”

“No, no, it’s totally fair to be really scared to come out even if you, like, know it won’t be bad. Or even just think it won’t be bad.”

Jeongguk hums. “Yeah. I guess.”

“I mean,” Taehyung murmurs, “I haven’t. Told my parents that I’m…bi. Pan. Whatever, I don’t even know. Not-straight, I guess. I think my dad kind of suspects, but he hasn’t really said anything. Definitely nothing that makes me think he would, like. Give his blessing. If that, um…matters. To you. That my family won’t—might not…”

Jeongguk tightens his arms around Taehyung, heart aching so hard that Cooky lifts their head and gives Jeongguk a supportive look. “It matters to me because it’s not fair to you.”

“But we might—they might never be okay with having you around. I don’t—I mean, I guess I don’t know if that’s true, but—maybe my family will try to tie this in with Tata being Tata? You know? Like, oh, of course you’re not a normal straight boy like you should be, we all knew you’d be messed up because of that weirdo soul of yours kind of thing…I don’t know. Maybe I’m not giving them enough credit.”

Jeongguk sighs. “I want you to have a family that loves and supports you and that you want to go home and see. And I want to be included in that, you know, like—I love having you here. I’m so glad my parents are okay with us being a thing, and I’m so glad that you beat Jeonghyun-hyung at Yahtzee—”
“I beat you too, bitch,” Taehyung grins.

Jeongguk snorts. “Reinforcing the patriarchy there but okay, thanks for that.”

Taehyung nods. “I know but it’s so ingrained, I just—am probably terrible for kind of not caring.”

“It’s fine; I’ve heard Yoongi-hyung talk on the phone with his mom and get exasperated with her and say shit like ‘oh my god will you just listen to me, woman?’ Which is terrible, but like. Amusing as shit.”

Taehyung giggles into Jeongguk’s collarbone. “We gotta be a little bit terrible sometimes. If I can’t be terrible with you, who can I be terrible with?”

Jeongguk kisses Taehyung’s forehead, a loud smack that isn’t even slightly romantic. Mostly kind of campy and dumb. “I love when you’re terrible with me. So, you know. All the time, really.”

Taehyung giggles. “Fuck you. Quit being terrible.”

“You love it too.”

“Yes, Jeongguk. I love when you’re terrible with me.”

It’s quiet for a minute, and Jeongguk spends the silence looking around the room at the pictures on the walls: his family in a staged portrait they’d had taken when Jeongguk was maybe ten or eleven, Jeongguk and Jeonghyun sticking their tongues out while they stand in the waves at the beach, wedding photos of Jeongguk’s parents looking young and as hopelessly in love as they are now.

They say you can’t go home again. You can’t, not really—there’s something irrevocably changed about this place, something dusted over and faded so the goldenness of childhood is discernible in the air but not able to be touched. Ghosts, the friendly kind, but ghosts nonetheless. Maybe that’s why people like to call a place from the past the old haunt—because you grow up, and the connection you had to the walls and the floors and the staircase you fell down and broke your arm on—all that is inaccessible to you now. Still, the haunting of those memories sits in the corners, delicate as vintage thread. It holds together if you look, falls apart at the gentlest brush of fingertips. You
remember that it was here, but that here is now, forever, there.

Jeongguk can feel it, the home-ness of this place, but it’s old. A hallmark of the past. His new home is curled up in his arms, possibly dozing, possibly just resting himself inside the fortress of Jeongguk’s arms, the home of that.

Taehyung sighs. Not asleep, then. “Hey, Jeonggukkie?”

“Yeah?”

“Can I tell you something?”

Jeongguk sinks lower into the cushions, tugs Taehyung closer still. “Yeah, jagiya. Tell me anything.” He tucks a lovely lock of hair behind Taehyung’s ear, the aqua washed near seagreen in the lamplight.

Taehyung tips into Jeongguk’s hands, malleable and soft, the warm home of sea water pouring liquid and calm through his fingers. “I always thought no one would ever love me like this.”

A rush like the cold water at the ocean floor swelling up on a current through the reef of Jeongguk’s ribs. “Taehyung-ah.”

Taehyung takes a shuddery breath. “Growing up, before Tata was settled—they were still kind of strange, you know. They couldn’t talk. At all.”

“Oh,” Jeongguk says, glancing down at the rise and fall of Tata’s chest as the daemon rests, not sleeping but eyes heavy, in Jeongguk’s lap. “That’s—I didn’t know.”

Taehyung closes his eyes. “It was okay. I could hear them. Inside my head. I guess that’s why I could understand them once they settled and could make all their soundboard noises, so. I don’t know. It’s just. Surprising, to me. That you can talk to them. Jiminie too, even though he only gets bits and pieces.”

Jeongguk swallows back the swell of the tide in his throat, there’s love like water flowing up to flood
him through. “That’s—Taehyung.” Can’t make his throat work to say anything else, can’t communicate this except through touch, and the desperation that must be bright saltwater in his eyes. “Tae.”

“People just thought Ta was shy. And me. Most people didn’t realize they were…mute, I guess, because they weren’t around enough to realize Tata literally never talked. That they couldn’t, I mean—they told me. They said when I was really little, I remember, it’s like my first memory. Tata telling me they didn’t know why but they couldn’t talk. I was lying on the floor in our living room and I was really sick with pneumonia, and I think The Lion King was playing in the background? I was all wrapped in a blanket and Ta was next to me and they said <taetae i don’t know what’s wrong i can’t talk> and I said ‘right now?’ and they said <no never> and I just hugged them. We were still little, and most people’s daemons don’t start talking until they’re like four or five, right? So I must’ve been a little older than that. We were waiting for Tata to talk. But they couldn’t. And my parents were so—I don’t know. They didn’t know what to do with it. The fact that my soul was…silent.”

“Did they know Tata could talk to you?”

Taehyung lets out a wet laugh. “I don’t think so. I told my mom about that particular conversation but she didn’t believe me, said I was imagining things. But then Tata just never did talk out loud, and it was—I mean, it was fine, because usually daemons aren’t that talkative with other humans anyways? It wasn’t, like, glaringly obvious. We never told the doctor because my parents were afraid they would say I needed therapy or something and we couldn’t afford it. So it was always just—that Tata was shy. Didn’t like to talk to strangers, not even their daemons.”

Taehyung is quiet then, and Jeongguk lets him think. It takes a minute, but Taehyung sighs and nuzzles into Jeongguk’s neck. “That’s why I thought no one would love me. Because my soul was fucked up, and couldn’t talk to anyone. We all just thought I must—I don’t know. Be…not normal. I guess. And I thought it was just impossible, that anyone would—would hold me this gently, would let me be all clingy, would look at me and love my soul. But then you—you came along and you love us, you don’t—you can talk to Tata, you can have a whole conversation with them and you’re the only one besides me and your soul can do it too, you can—you just love me.” Taehyung squeezes Jeongguk’s waist, head buried now in Jeongguk’s stomach. “I can’t believe you love me. I mean, I can. I do. And that’s—amazing.”

“C’mere,” Jeongguk whispers, grabbing Taehyung’s biceps and lifting him. Taehyung lets himself go, and Jeongguk leans in and kisses him once, twice. There are tears in both their eyes. Saltwater like the sea, like childhood memories of the beach just a few miles from here, like a mermaid turned to seafoam, except this story isn’t sad. “Taehyung, I love the way you look at the world. I love how marvelous you are, and full of wonder and kindness and love. You’re so earnest. You see things differently from so many people and it’s the most amazing thing, really, that I was born in this close of proximity to you. Everyone on this planet is lucky because of you. In the grand scheme of things, not our lives but everything there is in all of space and time, all of us—we could’ve been born anywhere. A few years too early, or too late. In a different reality where you were never born, or in a galaxy far, far away where no one will ever be aware of you, or of any of us. Getting to walk the
same speck of dust as you in a massive galaxy and an even more massive universe—that’s such an honor, you can’t even imagine. Your presence makes things better for all of us, Kim Taehyung. I’m so glad every single day that I wake up and I know who you are. Gladder that I wake up with you holding onto me, because so many people don’t get that, and for some reason I do, and I don’t even know how to handle it.”

Taehyung’s expression is smashed open and brilliant, glittering like diamonds and just as valuable. “I love you,” he whispers, voice cracking on the wobbly tenor of it.

“I love you back,” Jeongguk promises, leaning in for a long kiss. It’s warm in the living room, the heater whirring away in the corner because it’s still the end of February and the winter chill hasn’t quite deserted them yet. Tata and Cooky are a comforting weight in Jeongguk’s lap, and Taehyung is pliant and sweet in his arms, and the soft glow of yellow light in the room feels like nostalgia, feels like childhood, feels like something to build a love on, a real love, with a house and nice furniture and a bed that isn’t a college dorm extra-long twin. Decades upon decades building community and family and home.

Taehyung pulls away, a silver glint in his eyes. “Jeongguk, I—um.”

“Yeah?”

Their faces are still so close, noses pressed together, lips brushing as they speak. “Well—”

“Do you boys want—oh,” Mrs. Jeon says, and Taehyung and Jeongguk spring apart. She smiles at them from the doorway. “I was going to offer ice cream, but you seem busy.”

“Mom,” Jeongguk says, so aggrieved he really might just burst with it.

“Sorry, Jeon-ssi,” Taehyung says, recovering quicker than Jeongguk can. “We were just talking,” he adds, which isn’t really helpful but he’s clearly tired and therefore allowed some ridiculosity. Jeongguk snorts into his shoulder and Jeongguk’s mom shakes her head, amused.

“Well, if you’ve finished up with that—”

<<ice cream ice cream!>> Tata beeps, because of course they do. Tata loves ice cream. <<taetaetae, JK cooky! ice creamie!>>
Mrs. Jeon smiles. She and Jeongguk’s dad and Jeonghyun have all become seemingly endeared by Taehyung’s honest little R2D2-voiced soul, even if they all have no idea what Tata is saying.

“Yeah, Mom,” Jeongguk says, “apparently we want ice cream.”

Taehyung shakes his head, tapping Tata at the spot where their nose would be if he had one. “Just one dish, though. No puking up ice cream later, and also no eating our nice hosts out of house and home.”

Mrs. Jeon smiles. “I’ll bring three bowls. You know, I’ve never seen a daemon that could actually eat before. Leave it to Jeongguk to fall for the most special boy at the ball, huh,” she teases, smiling softly at Jeongguk, and then she flounces off, her fox trailing her and yipping something that Jeongguk can’t quite catch.

Taehyung groans. “She’s way too nice to me. It’s weird. Adults don’t usually like me this much.”

“Do you want her to be meaner to you?”

“No, I just—parents are so weird.”

“They’re all a little crazy,” Jeongguk agrees. “If it’s weird for you, think how weird it is for me. My mom is all obsessed with me being, like, in a relationship. I had no idea she was gonna be this extra.”

Taehyung giggles. “Aw, she’s just sappy because her little baby boy is in loooooooove —”

“Stop that’s so weird you’re so weird—”

“Don’t want me to call you ‘baby boy’?”

“No —”
“How ’bout just ‘baby’?”

“Stop this my mom is gonna come back in any second—”

“Are you still gonna fuck me once everyone else is in bed?”

Jeongguk falls silent. Oh. “I mean.”

Taehyung sighs and ducks his head into Jeongguk’s neck. “You don’t have to. If it’s weird, having
sex in your childhood home.”

Jeongguk leans in and bites Taehyung’s earlobe. Gets a nice squeak in return. “It’s not that. You
might be feeling better now that you’ve eaten and napped and the hangover is gone, but we still had
sex last night. Which was very fumbly because we were drunk. Don’t want you to be sore, Tae.”

Taehyung smiles so wide Jeongguk can feel it against his Adam’s apple. “You’re so considerate. Be
less considerate, come on, maybe I just really wanna be special. The most special boy at the ball,
who got to sleep with Jeon Jeongguk in his actual real life bedroom that he grew up in.”

Jeongguk closes his eyes, not really out of lust, but because there’s something yearning and sweet in
Taehyung wanting that, in asking for it. “You could fuck me,” he offers. “Or we could just do other
stuff, see what we feel like later.”


“Hey, what were you gonna say when my mom came in?”

Taehyung shakes his head. “Oh, nothing. I don’t even remember, probably just more sappy shit.”

“I still wanna hear it,” Jeongguk shrugs, but his mom chooses that moment to come back carrying
three bowls of ice cream.

Tata perks up immediately and reaches out for their bowl, and Mrs. Jeon laughs as she hands it
carefully to them without letting their skin brush. “Thanks, Jeon-ssi,” Taehyung nods, accepting the other two bowls and passing one to Jeongguk.

“You’re welcome. Thank you for coming here and spending a few days with us. I know Busan isn’t exactly a getaway destination at this time of year, but we’re really happy to have you.”

Taehyung ducks his head in an informal bow. “No, it’s my pleasure. Thank you for everything.”

Maybe Jeongguk’s mom kind of gets it, then, how much it means to Taehyung that he has been so readily welcomed here, super curious soul and all. Mrs. Jeon smiles. “I’m going to bed. See you boys in the morning?”

“Goodnight,” they chorus, even Tata and Cooky, and then Mrs. Jeon and her fox disappear down the hall as Taehyung and Jeongguk dig into their ice cream. It’s warm in the living room, under the blankets on the couch, snuggled up with Tata and Tae. Jeongguk feeds Taehyung a couple bites, smacking his spoon into Taehyung’s nose and eliciting a shriek, then licking it off while Taehyung giggles against Jeongguk’s chin.

“Is it more cliche to put frosting on each other’s cheeks at your wedding than it is to not do that at this point?” Taehyung asks, grinning as he accepts another bite of Jeongguk’s ice cream. They’re eating the same flavor. There’s no reason for all this sharing except in the value of the sharing itself. It’s nice to be this unified on stuff, even if it’s just eating dessert.

Jeongguk hums. “I don’t care whether it’s cliche or not, I would definitely put cake on your face at our wedding.”

“Oh, are we having a wedding?”

“I said would,” Jeongguk says, blushing. “That means it’s hypothetical.”

“Okay,” Taehyung says. He shrugs and offers Jeongguk the last spoonful of ice cream, and Jeongguk takes it—or, well, he tries, but Tata intercepts him, and the laughter that startles out of Taehyung at the sight is at least as sweet as that bite would have been.
The second day in Busan is spent shopping with Jeongguk’s mom and dad and brother, everyone piling into the car and heading for the mall. “We always go shopping on Sundays when we’re all home,” Jeongguk explains, shaking his head as his mom puts on some old rock playlist.

“I had to make this playlist just for the Sunday Mall Excursions,” Jeonghyun says, grinning conspiratorially as he leans over the middle row of seats in the Palisade. “Eomma and Appa don’t know how to work Spotify.”

“Eomma won’t even put the app on her phone,” Jeongguk groans, tipping his head back against the seat. “She’s convinced every app is going to hijack her data and make her operating system crash.”

“She also won’t install updates, though,” Jeonghyun adds. “So the phones always crash because their software is so out of date that they can’t run anymore and then she goes to the phone store and they have to try not to laugh at her.”

“Hey! I know you’re making fun of me back there,” Mrs. Jeon yells over the music.

“Love you!” Jeonghyun yells back.

Taehyung laughs and looks around for Tata, who is—oh, okay, just investigating the very back of the car, that’s reasonably safe. At least they’re not under the seats like that one time when they were in Taehyung’s mom’s car and Tata was under the seat right when Mrs. Kim slid it backwards so Tata’s arm got caught in the track. Tata bled a lot, even had to go to the hospital for stitches. Taehyung had to drive them there himself.

“Hey, if you want, we can probably lose the rest of them and go to the electronics place and sit in the massage chairs,” Jeongguk leans in to whisper.

“Rude,” Jeonghyun says. “Making illicit plans to ditch our parents without me, what kind of brother are you?”

“The kind who got mega-beat at Yahtzee last night—” Taehyung snickers.
“Hey,” Jeongguk pouts. Taehyung and Jeonghyun high five.

No one ends up ditching anyone else, though, because Taehyung is having a pretty entertaining time following Jeongguk’s mom as she struts around the mall like she owns the place, buying a few shirts that she makes Mr. Jeon carry, asking all four of the men how she looks in every outfit she tries on. She tells a shopkeeper at one point that she’s with her “escorts” and Jeongguk goes bright red and squeaks something about how that is really not what you think it means, Eomma while Jeonghyun and Taehyung crack up in the background and Mr. Jeon just rolls his eyes fondly at his wife.

They get lunch in the food court and Mr. Jeon buys Tata their own kids meal (with a toy!) at the fried chicken place. Taehyung can’t believe how full his heart feels from all this. When Jeongguk asks later if they should execute their plan and “get lost” after lunch, Taehyung shakes his head, hoping Jeongguk won’t be too disappointed that Taehyung wants to keep luxuriating in the warm family vibes he hasn’t felt in so long.

Jeongguk gives him a knowing look and grabs Tata around the middle before they can run off to the kids’ playplace the daemon has been eyeing this whole time. He kisses the top of Tata’s head. “I kinda figured you wouldn’t want to,” Jeongguk admits. Then he leans in and kisses Taehyung’s cheek, right in front of Jeonghyun and Mr. Jeon and Mrs. Jeon and all their carnivorous (although, like, not really because they can’t eat) daemons.

That somehow settles it. All the nerves Taehyung has had about asking Jeongguk if they can move in together—gone. Completely. They’re in the middle of the food court at some mall in Busan, so Taehyung isn’t going to ask right this exact minute, but the feeling he’d had the other morning is back full force; there’s no doubt in his head that this is how things should be.

“Jeongguk?” Taehyung asks when they get home late that afternoon, retreating to Jeongguk’s bedroom to relax for a while before dinner later, “can we talk about something?”

“Sure, yeah,” Jeongguk says, pulling Taehyung onto the bed and getting Tata and Cooky comfortable in a nice pile of snuggles with them. “What’s up, baby? You’re not dumping me because my family is crazy, right?” He’s smirking, but there’s vulnerability there, and Taehyung smooths the edges of Jeongguk’s lips with the pads of his thumbs.

“No, no ,” Taehyung says, smiling. “Okay, so logistically this is kind of not great, but um. I’m not nervous. Like, if I stumble trying to communicate this, it’s not ’cause I’m worried or anything. It’s just because this whole thing is a big hassle and I budgeted my time terribly and so now there’s, like, no time and just—anyways. Um. Do you wanna move in with me?”
Jeongguk blinks. Cooky makes a little confused whimper, and Tata beeps away. <<official official only one Nest only ONE tg tg tg.>>

“It’s okay if you already signed the paperwork to live in the dorms again or something, I mean—you don’t have to or anything, just Jiminie and Hobi-hyung are moving in together, like they’re moving out of Hobi and Joon’s, and—I mean, that’s not the only reason I’m asking you! It’s not that I don’t really want to but just need a roommate or whatever! But we see each other literally every night and it sucked during the past couple weeks when our schedules were all off and we hardly got to see each other but if we just shared a place then my stuff wouldn’t be half at yours and half at mine, and obviously Cooky and Tata already have this wild impression that Tata and I just vacation at Jimin’s and my dorm room, did you know that? So I mean, um. Yeah. Sorry. That was a lot. I should be quiet now so you can talk.”

Taehyung stops and looks up. Jeongguk is smiling.

“You do just vacation there,” Jeongguk nods. “Cooky and Tata have told me all about that. And now you don’t, because you and Jimin moved out. Now you vacation on Namjoon’s couch. Tata told me that while you were asleep on the train.”

Taehyung blushes and licks his bottom lip. “Cool. Thanks for giving up all our secrets, Ta.”

<<secret じゃない‼ 皆様は知っているよ‼>>

“I think that means ‘everybody knows’,” Jeongguk says. “Which is true. Of course I wanna move in with you. And I didn’t sign the dorm contract because I was going to ask if you wanted to move in with me, but then you and Jimin-hyung had all these plans and I didn’t want to intrude on those, if you guys really wanted to keep living together.”

Taehyung shrugs. “I mean. It’ll be weird, honestly, not living with him and Chimmy. They’ve been my roommates for three years now, like—like sharing an actual room, you know? But also…I know we’ve only been together for like six months, but I want to move in with you. Deliberately, as the next step in our relationship.”

“Me too,” Jeongguk murmurs, looking wistful and lovely in the light coming in the open curtains. “Yugeyom said I could sublet a room at the house he and his friends live in. If you wanted to live there while we find a place. I guess one of the guys in the house is studying abroad right now, so the room is open for a couple months.”
Taehyung nods. “I can deal with that. Yugyeomie is nice; his friends can’t be complete assholes.”

Jeongguk snorts. “They are. But not any worse than our friend group.”

“And once we find an actual apartment, we can move there and live happily ever after.”

“I bet we could build Tata a climbing wall or a jungle gym or something.”

“We’re renting, we can’t damage the walls—”

<<jungle gym! jungle gym!>>

“Tata likes my ideas,” Jeongguk pouts.

“We’ll lose the security deposit!”

“Make Tata pay it,” Jeongguk smirks.

“Literally how,” Taehyung deadpans, shoving at Tata’s head when the daemon keeps beeping jungle gym! over and over and over. Tata quiets, mimes zipping their lips, and then opens their mouth like they’re popping the key inside and swallowing it. Because that makes sense.

“I don’t know; they obviously have money. They buy stuff to put in their lil backpack, it’s adorable.”

“It’s probably just full of snacks.”

“Ta, what’s in your backpack?” Jeongguk asks.

<<secret.>> Tata says, sounding very serious.
“Cooky, what’s in Tata’s backpack,” Taehyung asks.

Cooky looks at Tata and smiles. “Secret,” they confirm.

Taehyung squints at Tata. “That better not mean you actually have a bunch of shit from Victoria’s Secret in there or something.”

Jeongguk laughs and laughs at that, and then Taehyung joins in, and Tata and Cooky do too. All of them in a pile on Jeongguk’s bed, in the middle of the afternoon, delighted with each other and worn out from a long day of shopping and happy to be here, right now.

“Come on,” Jeongguk says. “Wanna go back downstairs, see if we can help my mom in the kitchen?”

“Sure,” Taehyung says.

As it turns out, Mrs. Jeon is very impressed with Tata’s cooking skills.

On the last morning in Busan, Jeongguk wakes up sore and well-used, well-loved. Loved in the dark quiet hours of the night, late, with everyone else sleeping and Tata and Cooky under the bed: Taehyung had pressed Jeongguk into the blankets, pressed fingers so careful and lovely inside until Jeongguk was panting and clinging to Taehyung’s broad shoulders, pressed in so their hips were knocking together and pressed their mouths together to muffle their near-silent whimpers and pressed —

“Good dreams?” Taehyung murmurs, tugging Jeongguk into his chest from behind. It’s nice being the little spoon.

“Just remembering last night,” Jeongguk mumbles. It was really only a few hours ago, probably—
they’d retreated to the bedroom around midnight after another loud round of Yahtzee which Tata and Taehyung of course won, and judging by the light coming in the window, it’s still early-early. The sun is barely peeking up over the horizon, and Jeongguk’s room is bathed in the pale blue of dawn.

Taehyung hums sleepily into the back of Jeongguk’s neck. “Hmm. That was nice.”

“Yeah,” Jeongguk whispers, husky. He’s buzzing, kind of, that familiar ache just beneath his skin that pleads for completion, for touch. “I’m—sorry if I woke you up or something, was I—like, doing…something?”

Taehyung hums, rocking his hips forward against Jeongguk’s lower back, tugging Jeongguk up so the angle is better. “Just making lil noises, I don’t know. I might’ve been doing something too, but I just woke up. Sorry if I was, like, grinding on you.” Taehyung rubs at Jeongguk’s lower belly and Jeongguk sucks in a ragged breath, the teasing heat in him spreading out along his ribs, his arms. His fingers that clench in the sheets. His toes that curl around nothing.

“It’s—hn—fine,” Jeongguk whispers. “Hh-ha.”

“Shh,” Taehyung commands, the sound hushed against Jeongguk’s ear. “Gotta be quiet, baby. You’ll wake everyone up.”

“Hh—wanna fuck, Tae,” Jeongguk whimpers, shuddering as Taehyung curls his fingers around Jeongguk’s hips, moves with a little more intention.

“Again? The other day you were all concerned that I would be sore if you fucked me two nights in a row—”

“Tae,” Jeongguk groans, one hand finding Taehyung’s wrist and squeezing. Taehyung squeezes Jeongguk’s hip in answer, and Jeongguk moves his ankle over Taehyung’s calves, a hint of the fun things they could do.

Taehyung purrs and drops kisses on the back of Jeongguk’s neck. “Sure, baby?”

“Yeah,” Jeongguk says, reaching for the nightstand to fumble for the lube. “Shouldn’t take much, I’m already—hng. Fuck, Tae.”
“Hmm, relax, ’kay, baby?”

“’Kay,” Jeongguk murmurs, and he lets Taehyung work him open again, slide easily in with a groan against the nape of Jeongguk’s neck. Jeongguk shudders and moans a little too loud, and Taehyung brings his hand up and presses two fingers against his mouth, which almost makes Jeongguk whimper even louder.

“You okay? Can you suck on these for me, baby?”

“Hh-hng— yeah,” Jeongguk whispers, knowing Taehyung will want explicit consent, and then Jeongguk takes Taehyung’s fingers into his mouth, lets the weight of them muffle his whimpers as Taehyung keeps moving, gentle and sweet.

Eventually the pleasure mounts until it’s too much, and they have to stay quiet so Jeongguk shivers and shudders almost worse as he tries to stay quiet through the overwhelming waves of it, sparks popping behind his eyelids as Taehyung squeezes him hard around the waist and comes too.

“Shit,” Jeongguk whispers after the cloudiness of orgasm has subsided. “Now I have to walk to the bathroom with spunk all over me.”

“And inside you,” Taehyung adds.

“Helpful.”

“Relax, I’ll go get a washcloth for you. Then we can shower separately, because that’s the appropriate course of action for two respectful adults, and then we can go have breakfast with your family before heading back to Seoul.”

“You’re really organized for someone who just came inside me,” Jeongguk says, shutting his eyes and letting the lull of early morning sink him deeper into the mattress.

Taehyung snorts and leans down for a soft kiss. “Love you. Love your ass.”
“Yeah, yeah,” Jeongguk grins, keeping his eyes closed as Taehyung crawls over him and kisses harder, deeper. They spend a few minutes like that, just exchanging lazy kisses and a couple little whispers and giggles, and finally Taehyung pulls away and sneaks down the hall to the bathroom for a wet washcloth.

“Did you see anyone on your way to the bathroom?” Jeongguk slurs, half asleep as Taehyung wipes his thighs.

“Nah, but I realized halfway there that I should’ve just sent Tata.”

<<shhhhsleeping,>> Tata beeps from under the bed.

Jeongguk shrugs. “Guess your soul is still in bed. Like you should be, why are you going away from me, whaaaaaattt,” Jeongguk fake-mopes, making grabby hands as Taehyung stands up off the mattress and picks up the towel draped over the back of the desk chair.

“We can’t take too long. The train’s in a couple hours,” Taehyung explains, wrapping the towel around his waist. “I’m gonna shower.”

“Come baaaaaack,” Jeongguk whines, but he smiles and blows a kiss as Taehyung shakes his head and leaves the room. Taehyung is right; they do need to get moving.

Breakfast is a subdued affair; it’s Monday and Jeongguk’s parents both have work, so the meal is simple, but Taehyung exchanges easy conversation with Jeongguk’s dad and Mrs. Jeon fusses over Jeonghyun’s new haircut, and finally they’re heading out the door into the Palisade with all their bags, hugging goodbyes.

“Stay safe in Seoul, Jeongguk,” Mr. Jeon says, clapping Jeongguk on the shoulder and then pulling him into a hug. “Bring Taehyung back any time.”

“Thanks, Appa,” Jeongguk whispers, and then he pulls away. “See you soon. We’ll plan a trip for summer so we can go to the beach.”

“Tata loves swimming,” Taehyung nods, shaking Mr. Jeon’s hand.

“I need to start driving,” Taehyung says as Mrs. Jeon ferries them back to Busan station, buildings rushing by outside the windows of the car.

<<tatatata too,>> Tata says. <<already have car.>>

“What?” Jeongguk giggles. “You have a car?”

Tata pauses for dramatic effect. <<it’s toy car.>>

Jeongguk and Taehyung and Cooky all laugh, and Mrs. Jeon shoots them a grin in the rearview mirror. “Can you understand what he’s saying, Jeongguk-ah? That’s pretty impressive.”

“Uh,” Jeongguk says. “Yeah. I guess I just sorta…picked it up.”

“Hmm. Maybe you’re soulmates,” Mrs. Jeon teases, and Taehyung and Jeongguk freeze and shoot each other a look. Jeongguk suddenly wonders if his mom knows, if she and his dad feel all giddy and happy when they touch each other’s daemons, if they’re soulmates, or at least if they have that sort of compatibility. If it even matters. Jeongguk’s parents have always been very in love, so Namjoon at least would definitely say it doesn’t. And then lecture everyone about how it’s not really soulmates and all that.

They get to the station and Mrs. Jeon lets them out, hugs them both goodbye, makes them promise to come back soon. It’s nice walking into the train station not hungover, and having extra time to stop by the convenience store for kimbap and cold green tea and candies for the ride.

“You have to move out of the dorm by Friday, right?” Taehyung asks as they wait in line to pay.

“Yeah, we can probably ask Hobi to let us use his car to get our stuff to Yugyeom’s.”

“Okay,” Taehyung says. “Hey, you know, I was thinking.”
“Yeah?”

“Animal testing is bad, right? Like, it’s cruel and bad for the animals and not okay and stuff, yeah?”

“Um, sure? Why are you thinking about this?”

Taehyung shrugs. “I don’t know, just thinking.”

Jeongguk raises an eyebrow and puts his hand on Taehyung’s back to guide him forward as the line moves. “Did you, like, have a solution to this problem, or like…”

Taehyung huffs a sigh, very serious-like, and turns to Jeongguk with an air of nonchalance. “I mean, I guess just get rid of all the animals.”

Silence. Jeongguk looks at Taehyung and Taehyung looks at Jeongguk. At their feet, Tata stops chasing Cooky, and both of them look up at their humans, surprisingly still.

Then Jeongguk starts to laugh. He laughs and laughs, so hard that Taehyung has to usher him up to the counter and buy all their items because Jeongguk cannot stop, Jesus Christ, that isn’t even funny and Jeongguk is standing here losing it because, well, okay, it kind of is. It’s really funny, in the dumbest way possible.

“You’re insane,” Jeongguk says, still snickering as they leave the store. Taehyung is grinning too, all proud in this way that seriously resembles Tata when Tata has pulled off some sort of plot to, like, rearrange all the books on the shelf in reverse chronological order or something. “You’re ridiculous, why do I love you?”

“Because I just made you laugh for like ten minutes over a bad joke about animal testing?”

“Bitch, please,” Jeongguk laughs, rolling his eyes.

“Rude. Reinforcing the patriarchy.”
“Fuck the patriarchy.”

“Right?”

“Um, excuse me, I think you dropped this,” a girl with a knee-high doe demon says, holding up a toy car. Tata chatters excitedly and snatches it without actually touching her, and the girl smiles. Taehyung blushes.

“Thanks,” Jeongguk says to the girl, and then turning to Tata. “Is that the car you bought?”

<<car is from mall yesterday bc Sir JK’s Dad bought tatatatata kid meal set with CAR!!>> Tata shouts, or, well. Beeps. Like a car horn. Really loudly.

Everyone on the platform turns to look at them, and Taehyung claps a hand over Tata’s mouth. “Could you not be an attention whore for one minute?”

<<you,>> Tata taunts back when Taehyung lets go.

“They’re not wrong,” Jeongguk smirks, turning towards the train car.

“Hey,” Taehyung gripes.

“Come on. Let’s go home,” Jeongguk says as the train pulls up. “This is Tata’s favorite method of transportation.”

“Like they say in ‘ZUTTER’,” Taehyung nods. Jeongguk grins at him, and together they chorus, “Shinkansen!”

“Francis Bacon in my kitchen,” Taehyung grins, and then he starts dancing badly (on purpose) as he tries to rap the rest of T.O.P.’s verse. Jeongguk laughs and starts dragging their stuff onto the train.
“Come on, that’s enough, you’re getting looks,” Jeongguk grins at Taehyung.

Taehyung nods, smiling, his eyes lit up behind his round-framed glasses, his hair glowing in the morning light, stunningly blue. “At least I’m getting looks from you,” he says, cheesy as all get out.

Jeongguk rolls his eyes as they sit down in their seats, Tata on Jeongguk’s lap and Cooky on Taehyung’s like usual. “Sure, baby. Whatever helps you sleep at night.”

“Actually I get really sleepy when I look at lots of words, you know, so I just look at lots of words and it makes me tired and I can just go to sleep—”

“That sounds—are you sure you don’t have—”

“Wanna get ramen tonight and then have really loud sex in your dorm room since most people are probably gone for the week because of the holiday before next school year?”

Jeongguk blinks. “Um. Yeah.”

“Cool,” Taehyung smiles, leaning in for a quick, affectionate kiss.

“Yeah,” Jeongguk says, suddenly realizing how little angst there’s been in his life for the past couple weeks. “Hey, do you think we’re getting better at being soulmates or something? We didn’t agonize over anything to do with meeting my parents or moving in together.”

Taehyung smirks. “Yes,” he says, “but don’t worry. I have plenty of overdramatic angst planned out for the future.”

“Great.”

“Keep things interesting.”

“That makes sense.”
“I love you.”

“I love you too,” Jeongguk sighs, acting like this is an annoyance or something. Of course it’s not.

“I love Taetae but not Jeonggukkie,” Cooky interrupts, smirking.

“Did Tata tell you to say that?” Jeongguk asks.

<<…no.>>

“Okay,” Jeongguk nods. “To be fair, same.”


“Are you just saying it ironically at this point, or—”

“No. Yes. I love you.”

“This conversation is going in circles.”

“I agree. Better go find new seats and ignore each other the whole ride.”

“Let’s go,” Jeongguk says.

They don’t move.
Chapter End Notes

References:
1. "Tata is a pretty cool guy" is from the Youtube series "Arby n the Chief" season 1 episode 6, "Brawl"
2. That whole bit on how you can't go home again: so I haven't ever read the book "You Can't Go Home Again" but I read the wikipedia page on it and now I really want to read it? Anyway, Thomas Wolfe wrote it and the title comes from a conversation he had with Ella Winter.
3. A bit about "the fun things they could do" came from "Delicate" by Taylor Swift
4. "it's toy car" and also the thing about Taehyung getting sleepy from looking at a lot of words are actual quotes he said, and I first saw them in this video.
5. End shamelessly stolen from the end of "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett (I love love love absurdist lit/philosophy)

AND the citations for the actually real scientific articles I used (sorry if my APA is wrong; I'm trained in a discipline that uses MLA hahahaha):


All other references were discussed/cited in the text itself, so I didn't list them here.

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