The Danger Within

by Supermans_crib

Summary

You're trapped in a four-room cell. There are two other omegas, three alphas and one beta trapped with you. They're all strangers. You were drugged and you don't remember how you got there.

What do you do?

Go.

Notes

Back at it again with another A/B/O fic!

The tags are undetermined because I'm still not decided on where this is going to go (and yes, that includes the pairings), but I want this to be balls to wall batshit insane. Ya'll better be prepared for your bias to be morally fucked up in this fic or you are going to be in for some major trauma. I suggest looking at the tags every update just to check I've made any changes to it, cuz you know, I might do a line of cocaine and decide I want someone to get fucked in furry suit or something idk.

Don't get it twisted though it ain't some fucked up shit for the sake of torture, I mostly aim for this to be an unfolding mystery fic where the characters and their backstories are slowly and gradually revealed. With extreme circumstances thrown in to make it more interesting.
The POV changes every chapter, so keep that in mind when you're reading it. What you read is from THEIR perspective. It's very important that you keep that in mind.

I'll put a warning at the beginning of chapters though as reminders. Read them. For your own sake. Please.

If you wanna I'm also open to suggestions in the comment section about pairings or whatever, but I draw the line at dismemberment... it freaks me out.

If you wanna be anonymous, here's my Tumblr.
Jimin wakes up to a headache so violent it’s like someone fucked him in the ear with a jackhammer. His season-long bender in Itaewon last summer didn’t even hit him this hard. His mouth is dry. Dry like paper. Dry like he just ate sand from the Sahara Desert on a 50-degree day. Even the thought of speaking has him wincing with discomfort. Opening his eyelids requires immense effort. Like he has dumbbells attached to his lashes. What the fuck did he do last night? Sifting through his brain to find answers, he comes up with a few conclusions. He definitely drank—he honestly can’t remember a time he didn’t have a cold, hard glass nestled in the palm of his hand. Who he was drinking with is a little less easy to remember. Some foreign man was drinking at the bar that night—Alec? Alex? A Swedish man. Dark hair, blue eyes, conventional-looking. A forgetful face.

Did he end up sleeping with Allen—Adam—

Fuck, what was his name…?

With great effort, his eyelids peel open. He immediately regrets it. His eyes squeeze shut again. The room is bright. Much brighter than the usual sunlight that assaults his crappy, hole-ridden bedroom curtains in the morning. Like, so light he’s almost certain there’s a blaze burning beneath his eyelids. Wherever he is, he’s definitely not in his crappy little apartment, tucked away in a shit-smelling side-street in Namguro. There isn’t a street lamp with enough energy to even compare to this amount of light.

After some time adjusting to the unfamiliar—and rather artificial brightness—the first thing that he notices is a body laying next to him. Broad-shouldered, topless, with grey, loose-fitting sweatpants around what—he’s certain—is a man. Judging by the length of his hair, a rich chestnut brown, and his small waist, anyway. The man is too tanned to be the pasty Scandinavian alpha that’d been on the look out for horny, desperate betas or omegas that’d settle for someone just sitting below the conventions of physical attractiveness. No, Jimin could already tell this man is Korean.

And he doesn’t have the scent of an alpha.

Quite suddenly, he makes the mistake of sitting up. Which invites the excruciating pounding that
follows. He clutches his head and bites his tongue. God he wants to fucking scream at the ceiling he’s in so much pain.

Looking at the other man—really looking—he notices that next to the man is another man. Then another, and another. All sleeping on what he could only describe as thinner than thin futons that’d been squashed under the immense weight of a sperm whale. Horrified, he backs away, only to feel something solid behind him. He falls straight over it.

It groans.

This time Jimin has no reservations on screaming at the top of his lungs. This one isn’t strictly topless—but he may as well have been. There seems to be some sort of see-through, mint green nightgown draped over him. All that stands to hide his modesty is a pair of tiny panties to match the centre piece. Around his neck is a lacy choker with white teddy bears on it.

Then he makes the regretful mistake of looking down at himself.

He’s wearing the exact same thing as the young man next to him, the only difference being the colouring. What the actual fuck? The glare he sears into the banana yellow georgette material should’ve been enough to set the damn thing on fire. The last time he was stuffed into something this girly (but much less provocative) was when he was a toddler that had no comprehension for independent thought whatsoever. Because if he had comprehended back then, he sure would’ve thrown a lot more tantrums to let his mother know that omega certainly did not automatically equate to feminine.

The choker is almost suffocating as he runs his fingers over it. The yellow lace is itchy. He can feel little figurine birds stitched onto it. It takes only a few tugs at the choker to realise he can’t pull it over his head or remove it. Whoever put it there had sewn it directly onto his neck.

The man adorning the matching atrocity groans and turns over onto his back, shocking pomegranate-red bangs falling over quite possibly the most attractive person Jimin has ever laid eyes on. Intense, sharp eyes snap open and then immediately flinch at the brightness.

“Can you please hurry and wake the fuck up so you can tell me where we are?” Jimin doesn’t give a shit if he sounds rude. To be quite frank, he feels the whole situation to be rather rude.

Squinting up at him, handsomely confused, the man then realises he’d been sleeping next to a
complete stranger and promptly springs to his feet. Then, with quiet amusement, he watches the man stumble at the ill-advised exertion and fall hard onto his hip. The omega lets out a whimper, as the futon did virtually nothing to cushion the accident, but continues to squirm away from him regardless. He remains relaxed with his back against the wall. If the man’s reaction is anything to go by (and the fact he’s virtually mimicked how he had awoken), it’s very clear the other has just as much of an idea of where they are as Jimin does.

“Who—who the fuck are you?” his voice is naturally deep—something he hadn’t anticipated from an omega. Their voices are generally higher and sweeter. His mother told him at the age of nine that it’s because they’re born pleasers.

It took a couple more years before he actually realised what she meant by that.

“Could ask you the same.” It’s strange, but he’s feeling and acting a lot less distressed knowing someone else is in the same situation as him.

“Where—oh my god—where are we?” The Cherry Deep-voiced Twink looks around frantically, pupils blown wide.

Where are they indeed.

A quick glance around the room Jimin could tell there was little effort to the décor. The walls, the floor and the ceiling all seem to emit white light. There are no picture frames or windows—but there are doors. Two of them, to be exact. One is facing straight ahead of him, the other to his right. There’s nothing special about the doors. They’re plain, wooden, with silver round knobs and no discernible way to lock them. However, above the door directly in front of him it says in grey letters: Zone 1. Near the ceiling are slitted vents so thin Jimin would probably struggle to fit his whole hand through it. Attached to the wall to his left is a steel box of some sort with a tiny, red light bulb above the box. The light bulb is not on. Next to it is a laminated sheet of paper. In bold, red lettering on the top of the page Jimin can easily make out the words: Laws of the Subjects.

Something in his gut is telling him that maybe the red-haired dude had nothing to do with it.

Jimin sighs heavily, gripping his hair. “I need a fucking drink.”

“Do you know where we are?”
The other omega looks back at him, scared out of his mind.

“No. I literally just woke up, too.”

“Oh fuck—oh fuck, I was supposed to meet my girlfriend at the airport. I was—at the airport bar having a drink and I was just about to leave and meet her at the gate—oh my god she’s probably freaking out. Where’s my phone, I need to—” and just like that he looks down and then goes completely still. “What the fuck am I wearing?”

Jimin snorts. “Some sick pervert’s fantasy is what we’re fucking wearing.”

The stranger flinches, as if momentarily forgetting he’s there, and his arms immediately cross over his armpits in some pitiful attempt to cover his nipples. Like Jimin gives a shit. If anything he should be a little more worried about protecting himself from the other non-omegas that are stinking up the place.

“This is so fucked up,” the omega mutters. “I can’t remember anything after having a drink. It wasn’t anything heavy either—just a beer. Now I’m here in this—this room and I’m wearing—this thing. What the fuck. My girlfriend’s probably so worried.”

“What’s your name?” Jimin asks, not so interested in the fact that the omega is in a steady relationship with someone. Because to be frank, anyone who is in a happy romantic relationship can go shove it.

“Tae—Taehyung. Kim Taehyung. You?”

“Park Jimin.”

“What do you remember before you woke up here?”

“Nothing much, honestly. I’d been drinking—like you, but I was nowhere near an airport. It was just in some dive near Shindaebang.”

“Do you—” but Taehyung immediately quietens when one of the bodies start to shift and mumble.
This time it’s an alpha.

He’s a few futons away from Jimin, and wearing perhaps even less than he or Taehyung. The alpha —like the other alphas—is in nothing but a pair or tight, black boxer briefs that leave very little to the imagination. The material clings to every curve of his lower region. Jimin isn’t saying the man is packing—but oh is he packing.

A pattern seems to play out as the man slowly sits up, struggles to open his eyes due to the brightness, and clutches his head as though he’s sporting a nasty migraine. Like Taehyung, the alpha is very, very handsome. Round face, thick lips, big, strong build, tan skin and dusty, light-brown hair. The man’s the spitting ideal image of an alpha. Which makes Jimin immediately hate him.

“Ugh, my head.” His voice is deep, too. “Where am I?”

Jimin’s eyes jump to the line of lying bodies to count just how many times he’ll have to sit through explaining the unexplainable. Excluding he, Taehyung, and the alpha that just came to, he counts two more alphas, one other omega, and the beta sleeping to his right.

“I’m Park Jimin, this is Kim Taehyung, and we have absolutely no idea where the fuck we are. Welcome to every kidnapped person’s waking nightmare.”

The alpha’s name, as they come to quickly know, is Kim Namjoon. As it turns out, he doesn’t appear to be anywhere near losing his marbles over the situation. Matter of fact, he seems a little too calm, but Jimin chalks it down to good ‘ol classism. Alphas are meant to be the stoic type—the “rock that grounds the Earth”. Omegas are the hysterical ones. Flighty, irrational, not an intellectual thought to be found in their pretty little skulls other than the desire to worship and serve good, respectable alphas (and maybe betas, too).

God, he hates alphas.

After formal introductions are over with, Namjoon gets up and starts observing his surroundings. If Jimin didn’t know better he would’ve thought the alpha was fascinated, but any sane, rational human being would be distressed by the unprecedented circumstances they have so unpredictably found themselves in, right?
Namjoon shuffles over to the metal box and raps his knuckles against the steel.

“It’s hollow,” he observes, before tapping his fingernail against the red light bulb. “Strange.”

Jimin’s eyes narrow in suspicion. Taehyung seems to crawl away from the alpha, clearly uncomfortable (but whether it is because he is a strange alpha or because of his odd behaviour, he couldn’t accurately tell). “What’s the last thing you remember?”

“I was at a bar on campus,” Namjoon provides nonchalantly. He seems to glance at the laminated sheet but ultimately decides to leave it be. “Just had my PhD approved by the board and went out to celebrate with a few of the other successful candidates. Drank a lot. I don’t recall faces.”

“There seems to be a pattern, then.” Namjoon looks over at him questioningly.

Jimin explains how he and Taehyung had been drinking when they blacked out, too. Namjoon nods, accepting this easily, before walking over to the closed door opposite the futons.

Taehyung gasps. “What the hell are you doing?”

“Opening the door?” the alpha states arrogantly, like Taehyung is the dumbest thing to have ever been conceived.

“You don’t know what’s behind there!” Taehyung protests.

While Jimin isn’t quite as obvious as the other omega, he is quite alarmed by Namjoon’s audacity. The others haven’t even roused yet and the alpha is already causing trouble.

“Could be freedom,” Namjoon speculates curiously. His hand is on the doorknob.

“Could be a trap,” Jimin snaps. Namjoon has no interested in listening to them—which shouldn’t come as a surprise, seeing as they are omegas. Who are they to question the actions of a strong,
“Would you rather we all just sit here, staring at the walls, do you?” The words aren’t scathing or malicious, but the dry sarcasm is clearly there. Jimin can sniff this guy’s prejudice from a mile away.

Then the door is opening, and Taehyung is pressing himself as far as possible into his little corner beneath the steel box. Even his heart jumps into his throat as he watches, unable to look away, as Namjoon peeks through a gap in the door, cautious but unafraid. Then the alpha swings the door wide open, and it’s—

It’s just a bathroom.

Namjoon makes a point of walking to the centre of the bathroom before turning back towards them, gesturing his arms as if to say: “See?”

Frankly, he has no patience for Namjoon’s brazen attitude. Instead, he gets up, and dares to walk over to the door frame to get a better look inside. It’s exactly the same size as the room they woke up in, but this time the walls, floor and ceiling are covered in mini, light-blue tiles. It isn’t the sort of bathroom you’d find in a house or apartment. No, this particular bathroom has no stalls or privacy. The showers are simple shower heads coming out of the walls. There’s a single drain in the middle of the floor that acts as a focal point to the entire room. To another side are two toilets and one urinal, all impeccable white and clean. There are three sinks beside them, all sharing one big, square, porcelain bowl. A mirror sits above it, large and imposing. It directly reflects where the shower heads are, almost as if to banish any semblance of privacy any of them could have. There’s also something eerie about the mirror, as though it hides eyes that spy on them. Above the mirror—in grey letters, just like in the other room—it says: Zone 2. To the right is another door. It is closed, just like the others.

This time, Namjoon has no hesitation to stride up to the door and open it, and this time Jimin immediately follows.

The next room is the same size as the room with the futons and the bathroom. The walls, floors and ceiling are all covered in red, velvety material. Something heavy drops into Jimin’s stomach as he sets his eyes upon three very large, spacious, dome-like cradles. They’re also padded with velvet, but are different colours. One is mint green, one is banana yellow, and the one in the centre is lemonade pink—they’re all matching the colours he and the other omegas are wearing. He loses all feeling in his legs and he collapses. On the wall on a steel plaque high above it says: Zone 3.
“What’s going on—” but Taehyung cuts off behind him with an intake of what he could only discern as horror.

“They seem to be nests,” Namjoon comments casually as he approaches them, clutching his chin curiously. “Three alphas, three omegas, and one beta. Beds, a bathroom, nests and—” he crosses the room to open the door to the right, which Jimin hadn’t even seen he was so stunned “—ah-huh. An eating area. It would seem that whoever brought us here is conducting some kind of experiment. It’s very clear they intend for us to breed.”

“I think I’m gonna be sick,” Taehyung says, right before he turns and throws up in the large sink.

Running a trembling hand through his sweaty hair, he barely even notices Namjoon walk straight into the other room—barely notices anything until there’s a light tap at his shoulder. He turns around, only to flinch and scream bloody murder when he sees Namjoon standing behind him.

“How the fuck did you—”

“Omegas shouldn’t use such vile language—”

“—get behind—? Wait, what did you fucking say to me?”

“It’s a square,” Namjoon provides bluntly. There’s four rooms—all the exact same size, all connected. No doors in or out. It’s a square. Whoever built this meant for us to be confined and observed.”

“I—but why?” That’s the ultimate question, isn’t it?

“We might be able to gather more information if we wake up the others. We seem to have running water, electricity, and the rooms are temperature-controlled. There wasn’t any food I could find in the eating area, but I’m assuming that—and this is only if I’m correct in thinking this is an experiment—that things will work on a meticulously timed schedule. We’ll likely have to sleep at certain times, eat and certain times, maybe even bathe but—nothing’s certain, yet.”

Once Taehyung is done heaving into the sink—nothing but bile and saliva comes out, which makes them wonder just how long they’ve been under for—they return back to Zone 1. Only Namjoon is level-headed enough to really do anything, so he approaches the sleeping victims and starts shaking
them all awake. Jimin helps only somewhat. He kneels next to the beta and tries to rouse him. It
takes a little more effort with some of them, but eventually, they all come to, disoriented and
scared, but otherwise OK. There’s something unsettling about the fact that they are all rather
attractive. Jimin would never brag, but he has been told he’s pretty on countless occasions (mostly
by drunk, pig-like alphas that like to slip their pudgy fingers between his legs). He’s certain every
person in this room has lived lives showered with flattery.

The beta’s name is Kim Seokjin; 26. There’s isn’t anything distinct about him that says he’s from a
rich family, but somehow, Jimin just knows. This man attended a preppy private school in his youth
and took vacation trips to Europe in the summer. Probably. His dad likely owns a major tech
empire and their family live in the most upscale neighbourhood in Seoul. Probably. He’s the kind
of guy Jimin would glare at on the street. Not that it matters how many pretty pennies this man has
in his pocket now, since they’re both stuck in the same situation regardless of their economic
status. Though he will admit, it is very nice to have a beta to somewhat quell the tension.

The other two alphas couldn’t be more different from each other. One is frantic and on the verge of
hyperventilating (perhaps the stereotype that all alphas are stone cold calm is a tad bit untrue), dark
mahogany hair and a cupid’s bow lip that disappears when he shows his teeth. This alpha’s name is
Jung Hoseok; 24.

The other alpha is cool as can be, completely and utterly emotionless. Dark circles sit under his
small eyes, his skin flawlessly pale, as though he’s never seen a sunny day in his entire life. He’s
thinner and smaller than the other two alphas, and there’s holes in his ears where he likely had
piercings before they were taken out. At first glance some might pick him as the weakest link
among the other alphas, but Jimin begs to differ. It’s the look in his eyes. The man has experienced
some shit. This mysterious individual’s name is Min Yoongi; 25. He provides no further
information about himself (other than his age) or what he saw before he passed out. The real
uncooperative type. Great.

The last one—the omega in lemonade pink—takes a little longer to come to. His head lolls and he
has a hard time concentrating. It makes Jimin wonder if they were all given the exact amount of
drugs to knock each of them out, or if they’d used different doses for different people. He has a
cute face and pink hair to match his outfit. Around his choker are little white rabbits. When
Taehyung comments on this, the other omega seems to sober up alarmingly fast, staring at
Taehyung with barely restrained terror in his big eyes. His hand shoots to the choker, looks down
at what he’s wearing, and then bursts into tears.

Namjoon immediately rises to the occasion, a true hero, responding before any of the other alphas
can comprehend what’s happening. He takes the omega into his arms. Jimin expects the omega to
flinch away, to scream and shove the nearly-naked stranger. But the exact opposite happens. He
watches, questions running a mile a minute in his mind, as the omega coils up in Namjoon’s lap
and clings to his neck like a child.
Pathetic isn’t exactly the word he’d use to describe him. But it’s certainly close.

“The rabbits,” he whimpers. “My big brother used to call me ‘bun’.”

Taehyung and Jimin share a glance.

“Teddy bears?”

Taehyung gulps, fingering his choker. “I have a collection of them in my bedroom at my parents’ house.”

Jimin racks his brain for any reason as to why there might be birds on his choker. He can feel his heart sinking. His lungs constricting. “I go to the park every Sunday to feed pigeons.”

“Oh fuck!” Hoseok groans. “They were stalking us—every one of us—for god only knows how long! For all I know my apartment was bugged and they put cameras in my shower.”

Yoongi rolls his eyes. “Like anyone would like to see you naked.”

“I would.” All eyes fall on Jimin and he cannot believe he just fucking said that out loud. Heat rushes up his face and down his neck.

“What’s your name, little one?” Namjoon asks gently to the omega in his arms. He certainly hadn’t used that tone when talking to he or Taehyung. Biased, much?

“My—my name is Jeon Jeongguk,” he croaks in a soft voice.

Jeongguk and Namjoon so fittingly fall into their own class stereotypes he wouldn’t be surprised if they started fucking by the end of the day. Or night. Or whatever time it is. There isn’t a clock to be found throughout all four rooms.

“How old are you?”
“I’m twenty-one.”

So they’ve found the youngest, it would seem.

Good to know they’re all at least legal or else things could get *really* fucked.

“What’s the last thing you remember?”

“I was on a date with— with a beta. I met him through a friend…” Jeongguk sniffs and Namjoon wipes his tears away. “It wasn’t going well. He got up to go to the bathroom and I was going to tell him I was heading home as soon as he got back but…”

“But you don’t remember anything after that,” Jimin provides glumly. It’s the same story they all pretty much had.

Jeongguk nods his head.

“Were you at a bar or a club?” Taehyung questions.

“At a restaurant. But we were drinking.”

“What’s that on the wall?” Seokjin asks, rising to his feet. Jimin follows his gaze to the notice he’s all but forgotten about.

“Rules,” Namjoon answers stoically. “Didn’t read it, but it was probably left by whoever brought us here.”

Seokjin takes the laminated piece of paper off the wall. It’d been put there with Blu-Tack. They all gather in a half-circle around Seokjin’s futon as he sits with his back to the wall. Thankfully Jeongguk is no longer in Namjoon’s lap, although they do sit unnecessarily close together. Namjoon has a hand on Jeongguk’s back. He’s rubbing circles into the small of the omega’s spine like they’ve been dating for six months and have been discussing moving in together but their
parents are ultimately against the idea. And Jeongguk doesn’t seem the least bit _bothered_ by the contact. In fact, he seems to _enjoy_ it. So fucking weird. He’s been locked in a room with a bunch of sex-perverts.

The beta clears his throat and places the sheet of paper down on the floor in front of them. “Laws of the Subjects,” he says with clear disdain. The term is rather dehumanising.

Jimin leans over to get a better look at the list as Seokjin carefully reads them aloud. “Zone 4: Subjects must eat when they are provided food in the eating hall. Trays will be distributed through shoots in the wall. All subjects must eat everything that is given to them. Once subjects have finished eating, they must place the trays in a pile by the shoot at the very end of the table. Food must not be taken out of the Eating Hall. If a subject has not given food, but other subjects have, that subject is not permitted to eat from another subject’s tray or accept any food that is offered to them by other subjects. Failure to comply will lead to punishment by random selection.”

“That’s very strange to have as a first rule,” Taehyung points out, tearing at a hangnail on his thumb.

“It’s a control tactic,” informs Namjoon. “They want us to be totally dependent on them for survival. You are the master if you control the food.”

“So, essentially, if they up and decide to starve us we’re fucked,” Jimin groans. Hoseok and Jeongguk exchange nervous glances and Yoongi looks particularly grim—more so than he was before, anyway.

But Namjoon is as calculating as ever. “If their intension was to kill us then they wouldn’t have gone to so much effort to build this place for us. They’re simply using food as leverage against us because we obviously need it to function on a day-to-day basis. Forbidding us from sharing our food is also a way of revoking our ability to make that choice.”

“You seem to have an awful amount of knowledge about this shit,” Jimin brings up, not even attempting to hide his suspicion.

Not even faltering, the man answers, “I spent most of my academic career in Biological Science. I’ve researched countless experiments involving animal _and_ human subjects, and even observed and conducted a few myself. You can think what you want, runt, but it is not exactly in my best interest to be locked in a room full of strangers.”
Deep seething rolls through Jimin at the derogatory slur. *Runt.* Now he *really* doesn’t like Namjoon.

Pressing his lips together nervously, Seokjin continues, “Z-Zone 2: All subjects are privileged to use the bathroom as much as they please, but abuse of the water is heavily frowned upon and will be met with retaliation. Subjects are expected to keep this area as clean as possible. Toilet paper rolls will be provided and distributed at the end of every week. For this reason, we advise the subjects to use toilet paper sparingly. Failure to comply will lead to punishment by random selection.”

“How many rolls are in the bathroom right now?” Yoongi asks.

“Five,” Jimin answers, jaw still tense from Namjoon’s insult.

“That should be enough, shouldn’t it?” Taehyung changes his position to have his legs crossed in front of him.

“If we use it sparingly.”

“Yes, if we use it sparingly,” Seokjin echoes, frowning at the rules. “Zone 1: This is the Rest and Recreation area, where subjects will be spending most of their down time. Sleeping arrangements require no particular order and can be changed at any time. The steel box in the corner of the room is the Mystery Box. If the red light bulb is on, we have put something inside it. Whatever is inside this box will come with brief instructions. Subjects must follow these instructions. Those with good behaviour will also be awarded additional items to be used for recreational purposes. Abuse of these items, such as being used as weapons to bring harm to other subjects or themselves, will have the item immediately revoked. Failure to comply will lead to punishment by random selection.”

Almost as if drawn by magnets, their eyes fall upon the Mystery Box on the other side of the room. There isn’t anything particularly special about the box aside from the light bulb, but the fact that its contents can’t be seen from the inside torture Jimin’s imagination. What kind of shit would a psychopathic scientist put in that box? Would it be something to fuck with their emotions? Their mental endurance? Why have the box at all? What purpose does it serve them from a scientific perspective?

“What if they put needles in it and when we stick our hands inside we get jabbed—”
“You got that from a movie,” Jimin cuts Hoseok off with biting tone. He doesn’t like Hoseok feeding into his fears.

“But it could be anything! Rats, spiders, knives or—or infectious bacteria—” before Jimin knows what the hell he’s doing he has Hoseok by the hair, jaw set and teeth bare.

“Shut the fuck up! Look what you’re doing to the other omegas—” Taehyung looks green in the face and Jeongguk is trembling like leaf “—Act like a fucking alpha or don’t fucking say shit at all!”

Then he’s shoving Hoseok away. Hoseok falls onto his side, gaping at Jimin, surprised and—is that arousal or does he really just have a fucking hard-on for the pussy-ass alpha of the group? Stupid fucking alphas and their stupid fucking pheromones. They like leaking that shit everywhere and making things all blurry and confusing.

“Jimin-ssi,” Namjoon urges with a very strong lilt in his tone, almost—almost on the verge of using his biology to control him, and Jimin doesn’t like that one bit, “calm yourself. That’s no way to treat an alpha.”

*You mean that’s no way to treat my superior, fuck face.* Jimin knows the implications in Namjoon’s tone, but he sits back down anyway, avoiding everyone’s gazes.

“Read the next bit,” Taehyung encourages Seokjin, but the beta looks up at them, hesitating.

“Well go on,” Yoongi drawls, completely unaffected by what just happened. Fucking weirdo.

“Zone 3…” Seokjin gulps. Jimin can already feel the pending dread start to creep up inside him. “This will be the Nesting Room. All three nesting stations correlate to the colour of the omega subjects. They are padded with Hungarian goose down feathers and are custom made for optimal comfort. These areas are not for sleeping. Only for mating and pregnant omega. If this area is misused privileges will be revoked. Failure to—”

—-to comply will lead to punishment by random selection, yes, yes—but also, what the fuck?—” It’s a little startling to see Yoongi, of all people, speaking up in response, since so far he’s barely batted an eye at every other thing Seokjin has said so far.
“They expect us to breed?” Jeongguk squeaks, sitting up straighter.

“There’s—there’s some other stuff here, too.” Seokjin bites his lip. “Mate selection will be held exactly a week from today. All alphas must fight. The first winner will get to choose an omega of their choice, the second winner can choose between the last two, and the remaining will be paired together.”

It’s quiet for a moment. Nobody really knows how to respond to this. They all barely know each at all, but as the ‘Law’ dictates they’re expected to fight and mate with each other. It’s like all the societal progress mankind has made over the past five centuries has been thrown out the window, and they’re reverting back to olden-day rituals where alphas would fight like cavemen to whisk away non-consenting omegas. Of course Jimin had to be one of the omegas chosen for this sick experiment. There are millions of omegas in Seoul and he was just the unfortunate bastard who chose to go drinking at his local dive.

“Why just the alphas?” Seokjin then says with a frown. “Why am I left out of the equation? Betas can impregnate omegas just fine.”

Just why Seokjin even cares if he can participate in this stupid thing is beyond his comprehension. He’s about to say as much, before Yoongi butts in.

“Well you can take my place. I want nothing to do with this stupid thing.”

“But,” Jeongguk speaks up apprehensively. “You might be punished.”

“Why would I? It doesn’t say any of that ‘failure to comply’ bullshit like the rest of the rules. There are three omegas so there should be three pairs. If they decide to punish me then that’s just fine, too. I’d rather be punished than fight for an omega I don’t even wanna fuck.”

“Gee, thanks,” Jimin says sarcastically.

Yoongi raises an eyebrow at him. “What? You want to hop on my knot, do you?”

“I’d rather choke on a dead rat.”
“That’s what I thought.”

“We don’t even know what the punishments may entail,” Seokjin states critically. “It’d be *wise* not to tempt them.”

“Well, unlike everyone else, I’m not so inclined to bend over and let these fuckers screw us of our sanity. If you wanna play by their rules that’s your fucking choice. I’m sitting this out.” Yoongi folds his arms over his chest in stubborn finality.

“But they could really hurt you…” Jeongguk whispers so quietly Jimin almost doesn’t catch it, but since Yoongi is to the omega’s left, he certainly does.

The alpha’s eyes slide to the pink-haired boy and Jeongguk seems to shrink in to himself. “What do *you* care what happens to me, huh? You don’t even fucking know me.”

“Don’t be an ass!” Taehyung beats Jimin to Jeongguk’s defence.

“Yeah, Yoongi, with that attitude we might start hoping you get punished,” Jimin snaps.

Eyes narrowed, nose pulled back in a snarl, Yoongi looks ready to throw punches, but before he can open his fat trap to respond, Namjoon suddenly reaches over to the list and says, “Seokjin-ssi, you missed something.”

“O-Oh, I did?” Seokjin blinks, flustered. “What does it say?”

Namjoon frowns down at the page. They all stare at him, patience gnawing away at their insides like a flesh-eating parasite. “We—” but before Namjoon finishes, he’s reaching to the back of his neck. “Oh.”

“What? What is it?” Hoseok squawks.

“We all have microchips at the back of our necks.”
Jimin’s hand immediately flies to the nape of his neck, and sure enough, his fingers brush over something small, cool and metallic, right where the two sides of his choker meet.

Without even asking for permission, Namjoon grabs Jeongguk and manhandles him over his lap. It’s a little disturbing how Jeongguk noiselessly falls and doesn’t even give a wisp of protest. Namjoon straight up disregarded his personal space. Despite how Jimin feels, though, he still leans forward in curiosity as Namjoon gets a better look at the microchip at the back of Jeongguk’s neck. The chip itself is covered with a tiny, plastic rabbit head. Its eyes are flashing red, a dead indicator that the chip is active. With some effort, Namjoon peeks underneath Jeongguk’s choker to get a better look at it. From what Jimin can see, the chip seems to have its claws deeply embedded into the skin.

“It must be connected to the nervous system,” Namjoon ponders. He lightly touches the microchip, and Jeongguk’s whole body spasms. “Does that hurt, little one?”

“No,” the pink-haired omega answers shyly. “It just feels strange.”

“Interesting.”

“What does it say about the microchips?” Yoongi snatches up the paper, looking peeved. “Microchips at the back of each subject’s neck will act as a behavioural guide. If a subject does something displeasing, we will send minor electrical currents through the microchip to let them know. If the subject ignores the warning and continues to do it, the electrical currents will escalate in volume.”

“Wonderful,” Hoseok’s response is drier than the heat of a thousand suns, “just wonderful. You know, I’m really starting to warm up to our captors. I get the feeling that they’re perfectly stable, rational individuals.”

“They can probably hear us,” Jeongguk murmurs, eying the vents stretching all four corners of the room. “And see us.”

“That, I have no doubt about,” says Namjoon, patting Jeongguk romp. Jeongguk immediately sits up, face violently red. “If we are part of some experiment, then they will be observing our movements all day every day.”

“Even in the bathroom?” Taehyung whispers fearfully.
“Every room. Even Zone 3.”

Jimin’s face contorts, sick and tired and so goddamn frustrated it’s starting to gain sentience in his brain. “This isn’t some stupid science experiment. If it was, there’d at least be some purpose to it. This is nothing more than some pervert’s sick little fantasy! There’s a reason the bathroom is open and evasive. They clearly wanna see us naked.”

“Jimin-ssi,” Jeongguk’s voice is so quiet, as though saying anything over 20 decibels might shatter the ceiling, “they’ve already seen us naked.”

Jeongguk then looks down at what he’s wearing, and Jimin does the same. Jeongguk is right. They’d stripped them down and put them in these clothes before they were even conscious. The wardrobe selection was no random fitting, that much is absolutely clear. All the alphas have been put in black boxer briefs, leaving little to no skin left unexposed, Seokjin—the only beta—was dressed in grey sweat pants, and all the omegas have been dolled to look like porn stars ripped straight out of a 1960’s Playboy magazine. He reflects back on a time when his little cousin used to play with Lulu dolls. Sometimes she would peel the clothes off of them and have them play out the most mundanely domestic scenarios imaginable. There was an omega doll named ‘Georgie’ that she’d usually put in an apron.

“I think I need a shower,” Taehyung groans sickly, itching at his skin as if to try and tear it off. “I can’t function knowing some pervert’s had his hands all over me.”

“But the microchip…” Jeongguk starts, but then abruptly stops when everyone collectively looks at him. He blushes and looks coyly down at his lap.

“Jeongguk’s right. We don’t know whether the microchips are waterproof, yet. Maybe we should hold off trying to use any water until we can fully understand how these chips function,” Namjoon asserts firmly.

Despite Taehyung’s reservations, he sits still after that.

He would think, considering they had all but been given permission to use the showers and sinks, that the microchips would be waterproof. Their captors have clearly thought this whole thing down to a goddamn T, he can’t see them dropping the ball at the chip they’ve wired to their nervous system. But who knows? Maybe their intension is to kill them and they’re just placing bets on all the many different possibilities they could off them—electrocution by shower being one of them.
Though, that doesn’t shed light on why they would have a nesting area. If they intend for them to breed they’d have a hard time achieving it with all of them dead.

It’s extremely frustrating. How they’ve been left all these rules to follow, and yet haven’t been given a single straight answer as to why they were taken. It’s clear they weren’t snatched at random. They’ve been watching them for months—possibly even years.

“What’s the last thing you remember, Hoseok?”

Hoseok seems startled to have even been acknowledge, let alone by Jimin. “I…I was at home, alone.”

That gets their attention. Jimin stares at him intently. “Are you sure you weren’t at a bar or a restaurant?”

“Yes, I’m sure.” The alpha’s eyes flicker, confused.

“Were you drinking?”

“I… I don’t think so? It was a Monday, so—”

“Wait, Monday?” Taehyung frowns. “I was picking my girlfriend up from Incheon Airport on a Friday.”

“I was out on a Friday, too,” Namjoon ponders aloud, finding the revelation curious more than anything. “Just a small bar in Hapjeong.”

“My last memory was of Saturday night in Shindaebang,” Jimin sighs. This would explain why some of them had a harder time gaining consciousness. Some of them could’ve been drugged for a long as a week.

“My date was also Saturday,” Jeongguk says. “But it was in Suwon.”
“I can only remember as far as Wednesday.” Seokjin shifts where he sits, clearly disturbed.

“What’s the last thing you remember?” Jimin is quick to interrogate.

“I’d decided to stay back at work. I didn’t leave the building until around midnight… I might’ve met up with some people after, I’m not sure.”

“Where is your workplace?” Taehyung asks.

“Seocho.”

So he is rich. He fucking knew it.

Jimin Whips his head around to Yoongi, who cocks an eyebrow full of attitude at him. Smug dickface. “And what about you?”

“None of your business.”

“Don’t be a bitch. We need to know if you remember anything significant.”

“I don’t.”

“Yoongi-ssi, please…” Jeongguk coaxes softly.

Yoongi looks at the pink-haired omega, then rolls his eyes and sighs. “Fine. It was Wednesday. In Daegu. I was drinking at home, then went for a walk.”

“What time?” Jimin presses.

“About 2am.”
“Anything else?”

The alpha pauses to think. Pressing his lips thin, he answers, “I remember a van.”

“What colour?”

“Black. I think, or dark blue. Too dark to tell.”

Namjoon sighs. “Well that doesn’t help.”

“I told you I don’t remember,” Yoongi grumbles, annoyed that he was forced to talk at all.

“It helps,” Seokjin insists. “Now we know that we were all taken from different locations. If they were stalking us, it must’ve been for a while. They knew where we would be, and how to get to us without anyone seeing or stopping them.”

“We don’t know if they were seen,” Hoseok’s voice is just a little too hopeful under the circumstances. “Someone could’ve seen and reported it to the police. They might be looking for us as we speak.”

“I hope they find us.” Taehyung keeps scratching at his skin and it’s giving Jimin anxiety just watching him. He has half the mind to pin the other down and tie his hands behind his back.

Hm. What an oddly sexual thought.

But Taehyung isn’t his type.

“They won’t find us,” Yoongi deadpans. “This was executed a little too well. They knew exactly what they were doing.”

“Don’t say that,” Seokjin snaps. “We can’t think that way or we’ll all go insane.”
“I don’t care if we’re found,” Jeongguk’s voice trembles as he speaks. “No one’s waiting at home for me.”

“We I want to be found.” Taehyung glares and he looks a little intimidating. “I have a girlfriend and family and they’re all probably worried sick. All those omegas they see go missing on the news—my mum’s going to have a heart attack.”

“Well good to know the world gives a shit about you,” Yoongi says dryly. “I wonder what that’s like?”

“Guys, stop bickering,” Namjoon has the balls to use the voice, and everyone—even the alphas—go silent. Did he seriously have to be stuck with the biggest assholes on the planet? “This is getting nowhere. We need to figure out how they’re getting in and out of this…enclosure.”

Jimin makes a face. “Ew.”

“How?” Jeongguk turns to Namjoon with his wide, doe-eyes alight with wonder, as though Namjoon held all the world’s hidden secrets in the palms of his hands. Jimin didn’t know whether to be fond of how Jeongguk acts or disgusted by it. He’s leaning more towards the latter.

Namjoon looks at the walls. Then at the ceiling. And lastly, at the floor. “At first glance, it doesn’t seem like there’s a way in or a way out, but this obviously isn’t true. We were brought here and lain on the futons. If something went wrong, I’d also assume they’d have an easy access point. Meaning, we’re looking for a secret door.”

“That would make sense but…” Seokjin frowns. “If it can’t be seen, how can we find it?”

“We’ll have to wait for them to come to us.”

Taehyung groans. “That could be ages. We don’t even know how long it’s been since they left us here.”

Shrugging, Namjoon says, “It’s the best I can come up with, and I doubt you can think of anything better.”
“Because you’re an omega” is something that isn’t explicitly said, but is heavily implied.

The red-headed omega opens his mouth as if to dispute this, pauses, and then closes his mouth again. Because he doesn’t have a better plan. As classist as Namjoon is (and super punch-able, at that), he’s clearly a very educated and intelligent man.

A bell suddenly chimes so loudly that they all collectively jump out of their skins. Hoseok screams at the top of his lungs and jumps to his feet, Taehyung starts clutching his ears and rocking back and forth, and Jeongguk coils into Namjoon’s shoulder. The chiming lasts for about twenty seconds before it stops, and then sudden sliding noises echo from the Eating Hall. Jimin immediately stands up and runs to Zone 4. A red light flashes in the corner on the ceiling, and seven stainless steel shoots open up one at a time and push out trays of food. Each shoot has a symbol and hangeul written above them. To the right, attached to the wall, is a massive container filled to the brim with filtered water. Humiliatingly, it looks like a giant hamster bottle, with the end of it being a long, silver cylinder with a silver ball at the tip. Their captors did not intend for them to drink from cups.

“This is so fucked up,” Yoongi says from behind him. The others seem to have trailed in after him.

Cautiously, Jimin makes his way closer to the shoots. The trays look nicer than cafeteria food. There’s a portion of rice with sliced seaweed and seeds on top, a small portion of sliced chicken breast and a side of steamed vegetables. It all appears to have been freshly cooked.

“Dude,” Taehyung is still tearing at his hangnails and causing them to bleed. The red-head points at one of the shoots nearby. “This one’s yours.”

Jimin looks up. Omega 1, it reads in hangeul, and then beneath it, the sign of a bird.

Son of a bitch.

They won’t even call him by his own name. Unbelievable.

The order is deliberate. His shoot is at one end of the room, then it goes Omega 2 with the teddy bear underneath, Omega 3 with the rabbit underneath, Beta 1 with a cat, Alpha 1—a wolf, Alpha 2—a fox, and at the very end, Alpha 3, a monkey.
Jeongguk’s stomach grumbles loudly and he blushes, clutching his stomach. “I guess they want us to eat.”

“It could be poisoned,” Taehyung says, and Jimin can see Hoseok nodding furiously behind Seokjin. He really is a pussy.

Yoongi shrugs. “If I die, I die.”

He then proceeds to sit down by the shoot with the fox symbol on it. Jimin leers at him suspiciously. Why would he just assume he’s the fox? He hasn’t even asked what animal is covering his microchip!

But nothing seems to happen to him as he picks up the rubber spoon on his tray and takes a bite out of the chicken. They all stare, waiting in anticipation for something to happen, but as Yoongi continues to peacefully eat his food without any issue, it gives Namjoon enough confidence to sit to the alpha’s left—right under the wolf symbol. Jeongguk scampers to sit where he’s supposed to, kneeling, back straight, glancing timidly over at Namjoon. Jeongguk doesn’t touch his spoon until Namjoon has gulped down his first bite of food. The boy is strange. Very strange.

Seokjin is next to take the leap of faith. The aroma of food is quick to remind Jimin just how empty his stomach is, and thinks, _fuck it_. He sits at the very end and starts to eat. The only two people hesitant to make a move are Taehyung and Hoseok.

“Will you _stop_ making your fingers bleed and eat something? You’re probably starving,” he says to Taehyung.

The other omega looks at him, and then at the others, and slowly nods. He sits quietly between he and Jeongguk and picks up his spoon.

“You’re all insane,” Hoseok stresses. “You’re willingly eating something your abductors are giving you. It could be laced with anything—poison, drugs, heat or rut-inducers! You’re all going to be sick!”

_“You’re going to be sick if you don’t have something in your stomach,”_ Yoongi points out flatly. _“You don’t even know when you last ate.”_
“Yoongi-ssi is right, Hoseok-ssi,” Namjoon speaks between mouthfuls. “If you don’t conserve your energy, you’ll have to wait until the next meal, whenever that will be. It is also a violation of the rules, so you’ll likely be punished.”

“No. I refuse to eat! I—” and almost as soon as Hoseok proclaims this, he lets out a piercing scream and drops straight to the floor.

Jeongguk gasps and Seokjin and Namjoon leap to their feet. Hoseok is on the floor, writhing violently, bucking his lips and kicking his legs and clawing at his throat. Seokjin steps forward to touch him but Namjoon puts a firm hand on his shoulder. If they touch him, they’ll get shocked, too. All they can do is simply watch in horror as Hoseok is brutally electrocuted for what feels like an eternity—but is only for about ten seconds. Then as soon as it started, it stops.

Hoseok stills, limbs going slack, tears leaking down the sides of his face as he struggles to gulp down air.

“You might want to reconsider eating, Hoseok,” Yoongi suggests as he continues to eat. The silver-haired alpha seems to be the only one who isn’t totally baffled by what just happened. Jimin sends him a weird look and Yoongi shrugs at him. “What?”

“Of all the people…” Jimin mutters quietly to himself.
Day 2

Chapter Notes

Warning(s): Mentions of schizophrenia.

Day 2

At some point during their first day in confinement, Namjoon purposed that their prison worked on a “day” and “night” cycle. They have no means of knowing what day it is or what time it is, but Namjoon speculates that the lights have been rigged to work on a fourteen-hour period before shutting off for ten hours, which is the time they’re expected to sleep. The only light that runs around the clock is a dim light in the corner of the bathroom so that they can see when they get up to relieve themselves during the night. It was a tad bit suspicious that the alpha had automatically jumped to this conclusion without any evidence, since they hadn’t even spent a full 24-hours in this place, but Namjoon said that experiments he’s researched in the past that monitored human patients often used this method. If the amount of sleep a subject has can be monitored, less variables are involved when analysing the results.

Taehyung shouldn’t be all that surprised that their kidnappers control when they’re awake and when they’re asleep, since they seem so determined to control every other aspect of their lives it’s psychotic, but it irks him all the same. Pretty soon the medication is going to start wearing off—if it hasn’t already, and then what the hell is he going to do? Staying awake could lead to punishment or something much, much worse and he has no means of complying with their expectations without his prescriptions. The nail biting is beginning to be a dead give away that the drugs are nearly all out of his system. Back before he was on his current medication, he’d torn his fingers so mercilessly that his girlfriend had to wrap them in gauze and douse them in horrible-smelling solution to try and get him to stop. The kidnappers must know, mustn’t they? If they’ve been watching them all this time, they must have some idea as to his condition…?

These are the thoughts that haunt him in what he hopes is the early hours of the “morning”. The lights haven’t come on yet. It’s dead quiet. It was a miracle that he’d been able to fall asleep as quickly as he had yesterday night, but he chalks this up to the overwhelming stress they’d all been subjected to. Surrounded by mysterious strangers. Not having any memory on how he got there. The rules. The microchip—all of it took its toll on him.

But the insomnia was crawling back to him.
He’d gotten a solid few hours of sleep, that much he can confirm, but not knowing the time is driving him a little insane.

Pretty soon the voices will come creeping back.

And it hasn’t even been 24-hours since they’d woken up to this nightmare.

The other prisoners are sleeping softly, soundly. Taehyung can’t comprehend how they can be to peacefully *complicit* in falling asleep in this unfamiliar place. He’s thankful he has his corner though, right under the shade of the Mystery Box. If he were to stand up suddenly, he’d hit his head, but he doesn’t mind. He’d rather have a wall to his back than a potential maniac. The line is as follows: He, Jimin, Seokjin, Hoseok, Namjoon, Jeongguk and then Yoongi. It’s the exact order they’d woken up in, and no one is keen to make any changes *just* yet. Taehyung is more than happy to have Jimin on his other side, seeing as he is a lot less weird than some of the others (although his sudden outburst yesterday does bring into question his anger management).

The truth is Taehyung doesn’t know *what* to think of the prisoners. He is particularly wary of Namjoon and Yoongi, mostly because they seem to be the immediate stand-outs. Namjoon has made no effort to hide his prejudice against omegas, which can be a very dangerous thing for all the omegas trapped with him. Because no matter how hard liberals have pushed for better treatment of other classes, there’s no denying the tragic biological disadvantages omegas are at against alphas. The PhD student (or so he claims to be) even used *that* tone on them yesterday, something that has been rightfully condemned by countries around the world. An alpha could lose their entire career for using it (whether it was used inside or outside the workplace). But Namjoon had used it anyway. Hadn’t even hesitated. It leads him to believe this isn’t the first time he’s used his tone to control classes lower than him. A violent red flag.

The other outlier is Yoongi. There’s nothing particularly alarming that the alpha has said or done to suggest any malignant intent, but rather his whole response to this surreal situation. He’s too calm, too accepting of the circumstances to *not* cause suspicion.

They’re also very handsome. Every one of them. Especially Seokjin. The man looks like he just strolled off a photo-shoot and into the jacuzzi belonging to some multi-billionaire. His eyebrows are dark and intense, princely hair falling over his eyes in a deftly manner. His aura and pheromones speak the language of a beta, but his body structure is all alpha. Broad shoulders that go for miles, rich voice and big, strong hands.

Shaking his head furiously, he tosses over to the other side of his futon. Now is no time to be thinking about how attractive the other victims are. Soomin is likely so worried she’s called every police precinct in the country trying to track him down. A small smile touches his lips at the thought. He can still remember her waving goodbye to him over her shoulder as she wheels her
carry-on past the gate. Her small, doll-like lips had pulled into a pleased smile and the curtain of her long, black hair fell over her shoulder as she turned back around. “Be good, Tae,” was the last thing she said to him before she vanished among the waves of busy, bustling travellers. Taehyung can feel his eyes water.

He’d promised her that when she got back from her business trip in Hong Kong he’d start looking for jobs. He had said something along those lines a few times in the past, and every single time he had failed her. Spiralled, down and down until he couldn’t even leave the house because the voices in his head were telling him that the government was watching him, that Soomin’s boss was watching them.

But this time…this time was going to be different. He was on the right medication. He was getting better…he was finally going to start pulling his weight and show her parents he was a capable omega.

Now he wonders if he’ll ever see Soomin or her family ever again. He became quite close with her family after the two of them moved in together. Things in his own family were…tumultuous to say the least. Soomin and her family were there to accept him with open arms when he thought he’d never feel familial love ever again. The thought of never being held by her ever again…of never smelling her French toast on Sunday mornings or running his hands through her thick, shiny hair. Her smile, her laugh, her kisses…

Without even meaning to, he starts to fall apart. In the darkness and the silence he sobs—sobs like a baby. Bounce off the walls and echo hollowly in his ears. Steal the air from his lungs and constrict his heart. He might never make it out of here. He might never feel the breeze caress his cheeks or the rain pelt against his back. This might be the last place he ever knows. The people sleeping in this room might be the last people he ever speaks to.

So overcome with intense emotion, he doesn’t hear the movement of a body or the shuffle of bare feet. It isn’t until a hand touches his shoulder that he gasps, jerking away, vaguely making out a shadow standing over him in the dark. His mouth opens to scream but a hand clamps down on his mouth and a soft ‘shhhhh’ is hissed from the shadow’s lips. Taehyung begins to tremble, afraid of what the unknown person might do to him with all the lights out and not a soul nearby that’d be willing to save him. Maybe he should scream. Maybe someone will come and save him. Surely their captors wouldn’t want them killing each other so soon—

A sudden calmness spills over his shoulders like cool water, and immediately he realises who it is.

“It’s me, Seokjin—” even his voice reminds Taehyung of an angel “—are you okay?”
“I…” he blinks.

Beta pheromones are quite profound. One minute he’s trapped in his own mind, coming to terms with the fact that the world as he knows it is going to end, and then abruptly he can’t remember why he was being so dramatic in the first place. It’s almost like hypnosis. Only—criminal temporary. When Seokjin retracts his hand and dampens the intensity of his pheromones the feelings will come back. He won’t necessarily break down into tears again or anything, but the emotions certainly haven’t been removed permanently. Just cast beneath a blanket of warmth.

“Is it your family?” Seokjin deduces softly.

“My girlfriend.”

“I see. You miss her?”

“Just…wondering if I’ll ever get to see her again.” He sits up, wiping his face furiously, a little embarrassed.

“What’s her name?” the beta whispers as he settles down beside him, their backs against the wall.

“S-Soomin.”

“That’s a pretty name.”

“Yeah, she was—is pretty. I hope someone else was able to pick her up from the airport…”

“Where do you live?”

“Daegu.”

“Ah.”
Taehyung closes his eyes and focuses in on his breathing. That’s what his therapist told him. Breathe easy—nice and slow. “Do you…do you have someone special in your life?”

Not that Taehyung cares or anything.

He has a girlfriend.

She’s waiting for him back at home.

And I love her very much.

A chuckle sings in his ears and does weird things to him. I love my girlfriend, I love my girlfriend, I love my girlfriend—“Unfortunately, no, I don’t. Never had time for partners. I was raised to helm my father’s law firm and any distractions that strayed from that weren’t allowed. After graduating and becoming deputy CEO, I did consider putting myself out there, but I guess that really isn’t in the realm of possibility at the moment.”

Taehyung feels his mouth go dry. Handsome, wealthy and powerful. He didn’t think such a person actually existed. Unless… Unless Seokjin is lying to him. Which—it’s definitely a possibility but he just doesn’t see the reasoning behind it. Why lie about being wealthy? What are they going to do, eat a fancy, candle-lit dinner and then drive off in his Ferrari? Yeah, like someone like Seokjin would even spare him a glance outside this stupid box.

“I’m sure we’ll find a way to get out of here one way or another,” he tries his best to reassure the beta, even though he knows deep inside he doesn’t quite believe it himself. “They can’t keep us forever.”

They bask in the silence for a little while, not saying anything to each other, until Taehyung adds, “Thank you for—you know… I was getting a little emotional.”

Seokjin hums. “Don’t mention it. Being a beta, I’ve always had a talent for comforting other people. It’s not a trait that’s really favoured in the corporate world but—” he feels him shrug “—it helps a lot when finalising mergers or signing business contracts. You’d be amazed how many alphas withdraw their decisions purely because they’re under too much pressure.”

“Are you the only beta at your firm?”
“I’m the only one that wields any power.”

“What’s that like?” Taehyung genuinely wants to know. As an omega he has no ambition for any high-paying jobs because—well, omegas are rarely given any semblance of power in the workforce. The most he could hope for is being a retail assistant or maybe even a school teacher if he went back to university.

Betas generally have access to medium-wage jobs, becoming accountants or lawyers—but rarely ever reaching executive status.

“I enjoy it. It’s a shame I had to rely on my father for the position but, I guess as a beta that’s the best you could really hope for.”

Quietly agreeing with this, he opens his mouth, about to ask if Seokjin lives with his parents when a sudden, grating noise has them flinching away from the wall. Taehyung accidently falls over Jimin, and the other omega growls and shoves him off.

“What the fuck, Taehyung,” Jimin snaps, sounding groggy.

“Shhhh!” Seokjin hisses.

They all keep quiet, listening intently. Taehyung can hear something happening on the other side of the wall. It sounds like someone is stacking something.

*Clink, thud, clink, clink, thud, clink, thud.*

It’s almost as if he’s holding on to the last bit of air in his lungs. It’s so dark that he can barely see anything. The thud of his heart pumping in his ears only seems to feed his anxiety, his eyes blown wide, fearful of what might be happening on the other side of the wall.

*Clink, clink, thud, clink, thud, clink, clink, thud.*
Then it stops.

Suddenly the grating of metal screeches like a banshee throughout the room and Taehyung is so scared he might just piss himself. The noise slows to a gradual stop, and then there’s a distinguishable *click*. The red light bulb flashes on, bathing the three of them in a dim, bloody glow.

For a moment, none of them dare to breathe.

Then all the lights come on at once in a bright flash of white. Groans of protest can be heard from all around as it rouses the others. Jimin buries his face in his hands as if he wants to burst into tears, but instead of sobs he says something along the lines of, “Fucking cunts.”

“Do you think they’d punish me if I committed suicide?” Yoongi asks to no one in particular. He’s lying flat on his back, glaring up at the ceiling, his hair in a bundle of knots.

Namjoon sits up and rubs his knuckles against his slightly swollen eyes. Taehyung watches, somewhat fearful, as the alpha’s predatory gaze falls to the omega coiled up next to him. The alpha runs his fingers through Jeongguk’s pink hair, grazes over his sleeping face and traces almost the muscle of his neck. Jeongguk doesn’t move. He seems to still be completely dead to the world. The hand Taehyung scrutinises nervously snakes under the nightgown to rub at the omega’s tummy. Jeongguk shivers, responding unconsciously by nestling further into Namjoon’s side.

If they were a couple, it would have been sweet.

If they were in love, it would have been endearing.

But Namjoon and Jeongguk are neither of those things and the implications of Namjoon’s hand on Jeongguk’s stomach is just a little bit too creepy for Taehyung to handle.

Taehyung doesn’t know why—and he neglected to mention the day before—but he recognises Jeongguk from somewhere. Every time he looks at the omega it drives him a little insane, because he cannot, for the *life* of him, remember where he’s seen his face before.

“Guys, they put something in the Mystery Box,” Seokjin is responsible enough to announce.
That gets their attention. Hoseok sits up against the wall, more awake than he’d been before. He gazes warily at the box. Taehyung feels the same. None of them know what to expect to be in this Mystery Box. With what’s happened so far, the sky’s the limit as far as he’s concerned. Acid, gag balls, heat-inducers…? It could be anything. There’s no predicting just how far these sadists will go to mess with them. They don’t know their limits or reservations. It’s likely they have none. And a psychopath without any limits is a very dangerous thing.

“Who’s going to open it?” Yoongi asks.

They all look at each other.

“I think Jeongguk should do it,” Jimin says after a moment.

Namjoon’s eyes narrow. “Do you now?”

“Yes, I do,” Jimin crosses his arms petulantly over his chest, meeting Namjoon’s glare without a pinch of fear.

“Why?” Even from a distance, Taehyung can see the tendon in Namjoon’s jaw twitch at the challenge—from an omega, no less.

“Because Jeongguk would never say no to a hyung.” The smugness in Jimin’s tone is as clear as day. It’s then Taehyung realises that this has absolutely nothing to do with Jeongguk, but rather, Jimin wanting to get under Namjoon’s skin.

Sleepy, puffy-eyed and—admittedly—adorable, Jeongguk slowly rises to his feet, fully willing to approach the box, before Namjoon’s hand shoots out and roughly yanks Jeongguk back down to the floor. The omega whimpers, his shivering body curling up against Namjoon as if to apologise.

“I veto that,” Namjoon growls.

Jimin’s eyes narrow. “Since when did you start making decisions for other people?”
“Jeongguk is an omega. He shouldn’t be forced to do anything that’ll endanger him.”

*Or his womb*, Taehyung wants to add tartly, but doesn’t. He rolls his eyes. “Well then, according to your logic, *you* should be checking the box then, right?”

“I think Yoongi-ssi should do it,” Hoseok says quickly—nervously.

“What?” Yoongi snaps, angered that he’s even been volunteered as a candidate.

“You said it yourself—you won’t take a mate so you have nothing to lose.”

“Oh, yes, I don’t want to impregnate strangers to satisfy the people who *drugged* and *kidnapped* us, therefore I should be the guinea pig.” The sarcasm is sharp enough to cut skin in Yoongi’s tone. “Why don’t you fucking stand up, Hoseok? The way you’ve been acting I have half a mind to think you aren’t even an alpha. Why don’t you prove it? Unless, you’re too much of a pussy bitch to do it.”

“Pussy bitch?” Hoseok blanches. “At least my behaviour is justified. You’ve been acting so goddamn nonchalant about everything I’m starting to think you’re in cahoots with these maniacs!”

Something deadly shifts in the air as Yoongi’s face darkens. The atmosphere is suddenly oppressive, like there’s a weight baring down on his shoulders. Jimin and Seokjin feel it to, if the way they hunch over is anything to go by. Jeongguk shakes violently, getting the full brunt of Yoongi’s pheromones, and Namjoon quickly snatches him into his arms. Hoseok audibly gulps.

Yoongi’s voice is rough and gravelly when he speaks, “Careful with your words, Hoseok. You can throw all the insults you want at me, you can call me a bitch or runt or whatever the fuck you can think of…but I will *not* let you imply I had anything to do with this.”

It’s amazing how easily Hoseok turns. The alpha immediately bows his head as a gesture of submission, arms shaking precariously. “I—I apologise. I shouldn’t have said that.”

The air lightens and Taehyung, Jimin and Jeongguk all simultaneously collapse. Seokjin is able to catch himself before falling, but only barely. Taehyung lies on his side on the floor, panting for air. He can’t remember the last time an alpha’s pheromones asserted so much raw power. In history books, it says that alphas would excrete intense odors whenever they or their pack were threatened.
by an outsider. By lowering their voice, they can ward off potential dangers that may cause harm to their families. It’s almost never used in modern-day society. Much like exploiting other classes for their biological shortcomings, releasing pheromones as a scare-tactic is just as frowned upon.

Feeling rushes back to his limbs after a few moments and he weakly lifts himself up. Yoongi has stood up and is crossing the room, making his way toward the box.

“P-Please be c-careful,” Jeongguk says sweetly, just as Yoongi’s hand hovers over the handle of the box.

God, his voice is so familiar. Where has he heard it before?

Without further hesitation, Yoongi yanks open the container, the screeching causing the hairs on Taehyung’s arms to stand on end. Yoongi takes a look inside. He almost expects an alien creature to come flying out to grab Yoongi’s face, but none of the sort happens. Visibly, Yoongi’s shoulders seem to drop with relief.

“It’s just stuff,” he informs bluntly.

“Stuff?” Seokjin clarifies.

“Yeah, take a look for yourself.”

Not one to miss out, Taehyung lifts himself up on shaky legs and stumbles over to the box, Seokjin a solid presence by his side. The contents of the box are about as anti-climatic as one expects “stuff” to be. There are six little glass bottles full of pills, all with tags attached to the corks cutely (or creepily) saying: *Eat me.* Written on the side of these bottles are white labels with hangeul written on them—*Omega 1* or *Alpha 3*. In a bundle tied together by an elastic band are toothbrushes, and next to it, a white tube of toothpaste. There are three bars of soap, and little bottles of shampoo and conditioner. Neatly piled in the corner are two plastic combs.

There’s a paper note neatly folded beneath one of the glass bottles and Seokjin pulls it out and unfolds it. He reads it aloud. “Basic needs are a privilege. Naughty subjects will have their privileges revoked.”

Yoongi picks up one of the glass bottles and inspects the pills inside. He shakes it. The pills make
clinking noises against the glass.

At some point Namjoon must’ve come up behind them, because he’s reaching over to inspect a bottle for himself. Taehyung instinctually flinches away. “They look like vitamins.”

“Maybe that’s what they want you think,” Taehyung says sceptically. “It wouldn’t make any sense to give us vitamins. They’re probably designed to screw with our biology.”

“I disagree.” Namjoon offers the bottle to Taehyung. He looks at the alpha in confusion, but when he takes it and turns it over, it clearly reads *Omega 2* on the side. “Parents trying for children take different vitamin supplements to increase the chances of conception. Especially in recent years, with more and more people having difficulties conceiving. The scientists will want to cover all variables to guarantee success.”

Pale with realisation, Taehyung makes no further comment. Namjoon reaches in, takes out four bottles, and then walks off. The alpha tosses a bottle to Jimin, then to Hoseok—who has his knees to his chest and doesn’t respond, so his bottle lands softly on the blanket near his feet—and then he sits cross-legged opposite Jeongguk, offering him his own bottle. The very meagre display of kindness is enough to elicit the biggest smile from the youngest omega. Taehyung forces himself to look away, ignoring the churn of disgust that turns inside of him.

Seokjin takes the sanitary supplies and declares that he’s going to put them in the bathroom. Taehyung is quick to help him, stacking the little shampoo and conditioner bottles in his arms and following the beta into Zone 2. Beneath the sink is a little cupboard that they put most of the stuff in, except for the combs, toothbrushes and toothpaste, which they leave on the curvatures of the porcelain sink.

The alarm goes off. Their yells echo off the tiles before they realise what it is. Then they laugh.

“You should’ve seen your face,” Taehyung cackles.

“You should’ve seen *your* face.” The laugh Seokjin produces is unlike anything he’s ever heard before. It reminds him of windscreen wipers.

They make their way to the Eating Hall (via Zone 1, because they’ve all been avoiding Zone 3 like the plague). Everyone is already sitting by the time they enter. Seokjin sits himself between Jeongguk and Namjoon, and Taehyung makes himself comfortable on the pillow between
Jeongguk and Jimin. They’d eaten lunch and dinner yesterday. This would be their first breakfast in here. On the tray is a cereal bowl full of fibre flakes and milk. There’s a small container of yogurt sitting on the corner of the tray, and some berries sitting in the indent opposite the yogurt. All the meals so far have been nutritious, healthy, and didn’t taste bad at all. If anything, it’s a step up from the diet he’d had when he was free (but that’s mostly because he’s a terrible cook).

Jimin dumps all the berries into his cereal and starts shovelling it all into his mouth like a rabid dog. Jeongguk, on the other hand, plucks a berry from the tray and quietly nibbles on it. Taehyung watches him intently.

The omega in pink pauses when he catches Taehyung staring. “Is there anything I can help you with, Taehyung-ssi?”

“Hyung.”

“Huh?” Jeongguk blinks, wide and cute.

“Call me hyung.”

A blush dusts the younger’s cheeks as he nods. “Hyung.”

“I didn’t say this before, but you look very familiar. Have we met before?”

Jeongguk looks away, his face paling like he’s seen a ghost. He places the berry down, his appetite lost. “No, I don’t think so.”

“Are you sure? Your face and your voice…” Taehyung frowns in thought. Jeongguk quietly picks up his spoon and starts eating his cereal, no longer keen on continuing the conversation. He seems to look at his food with soft disdain. In spite of this, though, the younger continues to eat, knowing that refusal to do so could end in punishment.

Maybe he’s completely wrong.

Maybe they really haven’t met in the past and the drugs in his system haven’t worn off yet.
Shrugging, he picks up his rubber spoon and starts on his cereal before it goes soggy. For a while the entire Eating Hall is full of nothing but the sound of crunching, sipping and slurping. The meal isn’t halfway bad. The bran cereal doesn’t have any particular taste and the yogurt is plain vanilla, but the berries are fresh and sweet-tasting, and just a little bit cool on the tongue to indicate maybe they were kept in a fridge beforehand.

“You mentioned you studied Bio-Science,” Seokjin brings up conversationally to Namjoon, who has finished his meal and is scrutinising his own bottle of pills.

“Yes, I’d just gotten my PhD approved by the board,” Namjoon states this as a matter of fact, but sounds as though he’s gloating all the same. Taehyung rolls his eyes.

We get it, Mr Alpha, sir, master, you’re a genius. A gift from God.

“Where were you studying?” Either Seokjin chooses to politely disregard Namjoon’s penchant for jerking himself off or has simply dealt with so many alphas at work that he’s accepted it as standard alpha behaviour. It kind of annoys Taehyung just a little that someone as reasonable as Seokjin could even tolerate a conversation with Namjoon.

“I did my undergraduate’s degree at Yonsei before transferring to Seoul National University for my PhD research.” Jimin snorts quietly into his spoon of yogurt, too quiet to be heard by the beta and alpha.

“You must be very intelligent to have studied at those universities. What was your thesis proposal?”

Before Namjoon even has time to answer, Taehyung drops his spoon and slams his palm flat against the table, causing serval trays to tremble. Both Jimin and Jeongguk flinch in surprise. Even the alphas turn their heads to look at him strangely. A grin splits his face as he points a finger at Jeongguk, who goes adorably cross-eyed looking at his finger.

“I know where I’ve seen you before!” The colour seems to immediately drain from Jeongguk’s face, a horrified look in his eyes. “You used to do acting as a child, didn’t you? *The Little Reindeer, The Last Strike, Beware of the Pumpkin King*—you’re *the* Jeon Jeongguk, aren’t you?”

A soft gasp leaves Jeongguk’s petal-like lips, his eyes dilating and almost choking on his spoon, and that’s when Taehyung knew he’d hit the nail on the mark.
“Oh my gosh—I can’t believe this—you—your movies defined my childhood! Every single Christmas I used to watch The Little Reindeer with my brother and sister and at the very end when Santa Claus gave you the exact same replica of the toy train you lost in the house fire it would always bring me to tears—and—and Spring Lullabies! I found that movie so relatable because I always felt like I was weird and an outcast at school and my dog Molly was like, my best friend too—you were so great in that movie—who am I kidding? You were great in all of them and oh my gosh I’m sorry—I just can’t believe that it's you!”

When Taehyung finally pauses to catch his breath, the silence that follows is so thick even paper could slice it in half. Then—he’s being shoved side and Jimin gets up in Jeongguk’s face.

“How the fuck did you end up here?” Jimin bunches the front of Jeongguk’s nightgown in a fist so harshly the material could at any moment tear. “You were a child star. I saw your face on TV and on billboards—you were fucking hired, weren’t you? Weren’t you? This is some elaborate Big Brother bullshit reality TV show and you’ve been in on it the whole time!”

“N-No,” Jeongguk whimpers, tears spilling down the sides of his face, his bottom lip trembling. “I haven’t acted since I was fourteen. P-Please I swear to you I—I don’t know what’s going on!”

“Oh, so it’s just a coincidence that you were one of the people kidnapped? You honestly think these people risked snatching someone like you—a goddamn celebrity—and it wouldn’t get any media attention? Who are these people? Who the fuck hired you?”

“I’m a nobody,” Jeongguk sobs, “A has-been. As far as the media’s concerned I d-died the day I left the f-film industry.”

Just as Namjoon stands—likely to make a move on them—Jimin throws Jeongguk to the floor, glaring at the younger omega with such hatred in his eyes, it even takes Taehyung a little off-guard.

“Probably because you didn’t have the spine for it,” Jimin sneers before deliberately going back to his seat cushion and settling down to finish his meal.

Taehyung is about to check if Jeongguk is okay (even though he clearly isn’t), but before he can move a finger, Namjoon is already there, scooping Jeongguk up into his arms and getting comfortable in front of the omega’s half-eaten tray of food.
“You have to finish it,” the alpha says softly to the omega, picking up the spoon and dipping it into the barely-touched yogurt. “Then when you’re done, we need to take our vitamins.”

“Is he—” Taehyung hesitates over Namjoon’s shoulder. “Jeongguk-ssi, are you okay?”

“Leave him alone,” Namjoon mutters, not even inclining his head to look at him. “Haven’t you done enough?”

Taehyung feels as though he’s swallowed a pebble. He didn’t mean to cause any harm. He’d just been overcome with uncontainable excitement. Jeon Jeongguk—the Jeon Jeongguk. During the late 90’s to early 2000’s there wasn’t a family movie produced in South Korea that didn’t feature Jeon Jeongguk in some shape or form. As a child he’d been the country’s darling. He appeared on talk shows with other notable celebrities, or featured on talent shows where he’d sing sweetly to the audience. People always said he’d grow up to be a gorgeous omega, that he’d have suiters lining up from all around the globe. He may have even been on his way to becoming the wealthiest omega in South Korea.

Then somewhere between thirteen and fourteen Jeongguk suddenly fell into obscurity. He no longer acted in movies. He no longer guested on talk shows or featured in talent shows. No one seemed to see hide nor hair of him. It was just one of the many famous mysteries—one that spawned many conspiracy theories online. Some said he tragically died in a car-accident while trying to outrun the paparazzi. Others said he was abducted and the parents tried to cover it up by saying he needed a “break” from acting. That last one now seems a tad ironic. But Taehyung had never believed any of the theories personally.

He just assumed Jeongguk was sick of being famous.

Taehyung barely concentrated on his food after that. Now that he knows who Jeon Jeongguk is it has become problematically distracting. There’s so many questions he wants answered. Was Jeongguk’s past somehow related to what’s happening now? Was he hired to be here? Did he have anything to do with their abductions?

After Namjoon made Jeongguk eat every last bit of his meal, and helped him take the vitamins, the alpha whisks him off to the other room, leaving the rest of them to marinate in the new information.

“I can’t believe he’s the Jeon Jeongguk,” Taehyung finally bursts, unable to keep himself contained any longer.
“My little brother liked his movies,” Jimin mumbles, poking distastefully at his cereal. “What a fucking little traitor. He’s been in on the whole thing this entire time—and I bet that walking testosterone on legs is in on it, too.”

“We don’t know that,” Seokjin says quietly. “It could be just a coincidence. I didn’t recognise him when I first saw him.”

“Neither did I,” Hoseok adds, arms crossed and shoulders hunched. He hasn’t touched his food since he sat down.

“You need to eat,” Yoongi nudges Hoseok in the side. “You can’t keep getting electrocuted every meal. You’ll have a stroke.”

Hoseok had been electrocuted a grand total of two times since they all woke up. The first time was refusing to eat his lunch. The second time was refusing to eat his dinner. But he always begrudgingly picked up his fork after getting shocked, so it’s likely to become a routine in their daily schedules.

“I don’t want to.”

Yoongi sighs, mildly frustrated but unwilling to push him any further.

“I think we should interrogate Jeongguk a little more,” Jimin continues, agitation growing as he bounces his knee. “He’s clearly hiding something.”

“Jimin…” Taehyung says disapprovingly.

“What? It wouldn’t be hard. The boy’s so sensitive he probably cries during sex.” Then Jimin throws his head back and laughs. “Could you imagine? What a dumb little cum bucket.”

“Shut up,” Hoseok snaps, face unexpectedly red. “There’s nothing wrong with crying during sex.”
“Oh?” Jimin leans forward to give Hoseok a sly look from across the room. “Is that a confession? Do you cry during sex, Hoseok-ssi? Like it when you’re dominated and held down by a big, strong, omega—?”

“I don’t need to take this from you.” Hoseok stands up shakily and turns to leave.

“Hoseok-ssi, your food—” Seokjin yells after him.

Jimin’s taunting follows the alpha out the door. “How about I tip it onto the floor? Would you prefer it then?”

Hoseok slams the door leading back to Zone 1 behind him.

The oldest omega snorts and shakes his head. “Unbelievable, the whole lot of them. Between all of us I think those three are the most suspicious, don’t you think?” Jimin nudges Taehyung with his elbow. Taehyung chooses to politely ignore him. “Hoseok always looks one small breeze away from having an anxiety attack—so he’s obviously some sort of drug addict—” Taehyung feels a pain in his chest “—Namjoon is a goddamn classist and he’s creepy as hell, and Jeongguk—that floosy’s been strange since the moment he woke up. Mark my words—it’s always the one’s you least suspect, and my money’s on the human sexdoll.”

“He is rather docile, even for an omega,” Seokjin comments with a ponderous frown, but he doesn’t seem to want to take sides on the matter.

Yoongi suddenly gets up and starts stacking trays and bowls—including Jeongguk and Namjoon’s abandoned ones—in the corner by the farthest shoot.

“Why would he just disappear, anyway? He was on his way to becoming the biggest star in South Korea. People were saying he might even make it to Hollywood one day.” Jimin shakes his head, as if he couldn’t fathom the logic behind walking away from all the fame and the fortune.

“You mustn’t have been watching the news lately then,” Yoongi comments breezily as he kneels down by the water bottle and starts guzzling his vitamins.

Jimin turns his head to leer at the alpha, defensive. “What’s that supposed to mean?”
“One of Korea’s top movie producers, Lee Dongho, was arrested for sexually assaulting forty-five omegas in the industry. Twenty of the people who came forward were underaged at the time.”

“Yeah, so? Everyone knows about,” Jimin brushes off flippantly.

“Lee Dongho produced many of the movies Jeongguk starred in.”

Then Yoongi leaves, as if unable to stand their gossip any longer. Taehyung feels like he’s been punched in the gut. Because Yoongi is absolutely right. Lee Dongho was the man behind NamHwa Productions, a company that financed and produced many famous films over the past couple of decades.

And in many of his most famous films, Jeongguk was the star.

He wants to cry.

“That still doesn’t prove anything,” Jimin scoffs, and he’s so sick of hearing Jimin talk he wants to lean over and strangle him. “Jeongguk wasn’t one of the victims who came forward.”

“That’s enough, Jimin,” Seokjin says sternly, unwilling to listen to him any further.

The beta picks up his tray and stacks it with the others and leaves. But just as Seokjin’s fingers graze the doorhandle, he freezees.

“Seokjin-ssi…?” Taehyung asks tentatively.

“Is there…smoke coming through the vents?”

Taehyung follows his line of sight to see that yes, there is in fact some sort of misty gas coming out of the vents overhead.
Jimin leaps to his feet. “Oh fuck. The fuckers are gassing us!”

Panicked, Seokjin tears open the door and rushes into Zone 1. Taehyung gets up quickly, even though he still has a berry or two left on his tray he should’ve eaten, and sprints after the beta. The gas is leaking through the vents in the sleeping area as well. Just as Jimin comes in after him, they hear Yoongi’s voice shouting from the bathroom.

“It’s coming through all the vents!”

Hoseok paces back and forth, making a valid attempt to rip the hair follicles out of his skull. Seokjin grabs the alpha and tries his best to calm him down, but whatever the mist is, it seems to have neutralised the effects of their pheromones, because Hoseok doesn’t calm down. In fact, he gets more hysterical and pushes Seokjin away. Judging by Seokjin’s reaction he isn’t used to people rejecting him. It would almost be comical if not for the circumstances.

On the futons, Namjoon has his back to the wall and Jeongguk—predictably—in his lap. The omega is crying, afraid, and the alpha is tearing up a blanket with his hands and teeth.

“Are we going to die?” Jeongguk asks Namjoon, voice shaky.

“No,” the alpha answers firmly as he wraps a piece of torn blanket around Jeongguk’s mouth and nose. He places a big hand on Jeongguk’s chest, the other between his shoulder blades. “Try to breath nice and slow, little one. We’re not going die. Now—close your eyes.”

This incites panic from Jeongguk, as he clings more furiously to Namjoon, as if he’s about to slip away. “No—no don’t leave.”

“I’m not going anywhere. I promise. I just want you to close your eyes and count. Can you do that for me?”

“Yes…?”

Namjoon nods. “Count aloud. Go on.”
Jeongguk’s eyes flutter shut and he rests his head on Namjoon’s shoulder. He starts to count.
“One…two…three…”

Taehyung feels light-headedness hit him all at once. He almost falls flat on his face—but Seokjin quickly catches him. Suddenly he has the intense urge to sleep. Which doesn’t make that much sense—they’d only just had breakfast. Why does he feel so heavy…?

“…eight…nine…ten…”

“Yoongi, what do we do?” he hears Seokjin asks, voice higher than usual.

“I—” but the alpha doesn’t have time to respond before a loud thud vibrates the floor. Hoseok’s already lost consciousness. “Fuck!”

Yoongi and Jimin go over to check on him. Seokjin gently lays Taehyung on his back. He can barely move now. It’s like all the feeling in his limbs has been sucked dry.

“…fifteen… … … s-sixteen… … sevent-teen…”

His vision blurs.

Another thud.

“Jimin…!”

“…twenty-one… … …”

“Little one…?”

“…twenty…twenty… … …”
A weight falls on top of him but Taehyung can barely feel it. His head falls to the side. He can’t hear anything anymore, and he can barely *see* the fog has become so thick.

Just as his eyelids are falling, he sees shoes—a few of them, heavy against the floor.

That’s the last thing he recalls before everything goes black.

The nature of his awakening feels eerily familiar. Like he’s waking up all over again to discover that he’s trapped in a four-room prison with six other strangers. Only this time, there’s a tiny, tiny part of him that hopes that it was all just a dream, and that he’ll wake up to the wooden ceiling of his apartment in Daegu with Soomin fast asleep beside him. But when he opens his eyes, he doesn’t see wooden panels or a rickety old ceiling fan. There isn’t a window that has a prime view of a telephone pole and a scatter of blue-tiled roofed houses. As he turns his head he can almost imagine the half-empty bookcase pressed against the wall with books he always said he’d read but never did. Or the desk they use as an impromptu nightstand because there’s no room to fit a desk, double bed *and* a nightstand in their little room.

They were going to raise a dog together. They were thinking of getting married. Someday.

A hot tear escapes him.

As feeling floods back into his system, he soon has to acknowledge the numbing weight pinning him down. It’s Seokjin’s limp body. He must’ve fallen on top of him when he lost consciousness. At first, he concentrates hard on wiggling his toes, then his fingers, and finally his arms and legs. With a burst of strength, he pushes Seokjin off of him. The man’s dead weight rolls onto a pillow, not quite ready to embrace consciousness.

“Hey…” Taehyung sees Yoongi shuffling out of the bathroom. There’s droplets rolling down his neck and his face is glistening, so he must’ve wet his face after coming to.
“Hey,” Taehyung croaks, then his hand immediately flies to his throat, parched. “What happened?”

Yoongi sits down opposite Taehyung, leaning back on his hand for support. “They knocked us out.”

Rolling his eyes, Taehyung says, “Yes, I know that, but why?”

Running a hand through his hair, Yoongi answers, “It may have had something to do with Hoseok.”

Taehyung frowns. Confusion festers in his gut, and perhaps even a smidge of anxiety, too. “What makes you say that?”

“Because they took him.” Taehyung feels his blood pressure spike.

“What? What do mean?”

“Hoseok is gone.”
It’s almost stifling, kneeling under the glare of stage lights in a full Christmas outfit. Ruby red shoes twinkle over black, waist-high tights that disappear behind the curtain of a red cloak with white fur rimming the hem and collar, a pompom sitting over his chest to keep it all together. Underneath he’s actually wearing something wardrobe hadn’t picked out for him today, but went along with the overall theme nicely. It’s a Christmas sweater his grandmother gave him for his birthday. The background is black, with red sleeve cuffs and a collar, and a green zig-zag pattern design crossing horizontally over his torso, interlaced with little dots to represent snow. Just over his belly button is a decorated Christmas tree with presents nested around the pot, smiling reindeer prancing on either side of it. He loves the sweater, he truly does, but under the lights, with bullets of sweat dotting his forehead, he wants nothing more than to tear it off his body.

The baby deer sits quiet, sedated, in his arms. He saw some people give the deer something. He asked mamma, and she said it was medicine to help the reindeer act. She said they get nervous around cameras. He doesn’t know if he believes her.

Instead of just dropping him off on set like mamma usually does, she decided to stay for the entire shoot. If he were to glance just shy of the set he’s kneeling in, he’d be able to see her watching him like a hawk beneath the glare of her aviator glasses. He doesn’t like it when mamma comes on set to watch him work. It makes him nervous.

Through some miracle, though, he’s managed to get through most of his scenes without much trouble. This is the last scene of the day. It’s been such a very long day. He’s asked mamma many times if they can go home yet, and each time she’s told him gently to be patient. Jeongguk can do that. He can be patient. He’s always been patient.

“But surely Santa misses his reindeer! He must see every single one of them as special in their own way,” he exclaims to the ‘farmer’ wearing a pair of faded-blue dungarees. “I’ll bet if I take Freckles all the way back to the South Pole, Santa will be very, very happy to see his missing reindeer!”
The farmer tips his hat, leaning over the makeshift pig-pen fence set design constructed for the scene. “Santa lives in the North Pole, not the South Pole, lil darling, though it sure is cute of you to give the fawn a name.”

“Even so! Freckles needs to go back to his home. If you won’t do it mister, I’ll surely have to do it myself!”

“Cut!”

He and the beta actor who plays the farmer, Kim Wonjun, turn their heads to the director for instructions. The director’s name is Kim Gwanghoon, a very famous, very influential South Korean movie director. Jeongguk had only worked with him once before, on a short TV special about bank robbers. At every set he enters, he always wears a pair of sunglasses, even if the set is entirely inside, like it is today. His hair is a choppy, light-brown, and he has a small goatee that shows where his first chin is—not to be mistaken for the two other rings of fat underneath. The chair he sits on seems to work harder than anyone on set. The material equipped to hug his bottom stretches beneath the immense weight, and the cheap wood for legs looks on the verge of snapping at any moment. The alpha’s great, whale belly hangs between his legs, covered by a shirt that’s too small to accommodate his size.

With a pudgy hand, Gwanghoon wipes the sweat from his brow with a grimace. “That’s a wrap, people. Pre-production crew, you have an hour break to have dinner and do whatever you gotta do—but I want you to meet me back here when the hour’s up. Don’t be tardy—that includes you Junho—”

“Yes, sir.”

“—also Hyunji, tell Yeojoo to come to set at nine tomorrow, not eight like we originally planned.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Alright.” Gwanghoon’s gargantuan stomach jiggles as he struggles out of his chair. Jeongguk wonders how he can even move, let alone carry all that weight around, but he’d learned early on not to ask too many questions.

Jeongguk then sees something that doesn’t settle right in his tummy. The director makes a hand
gesture at his mother before trudging off to his trailer. Numb with fear, he doesn’t even register the handler taking the baby deer out of his arms, or makeup trying to usher him over to remove his painted face.

“That won’t be necessary,” his mamma says from behind the makeup artist. The makeup noona turns, looking at his mamma in confusion.

“It’s no trouble, ma’am, it’ll only take a moment—”

“It’s perfectly fine,” his mamma’s cherry lips pull into a smile. She reaches out and places a kind hand on the woman’s shoulder. Her nails are red, too. “I’m taking little Jeongguk to a family function. It’d be nice to have him dolled for his grandparents.”

“Oh, okay then. Enjoy your family function then!” the artist says before teetering over to Wonjun. A strong part of him wants to call out to the noona, to say something—anything, he doesn’t know what but it’s better than nothing at all.

The opportunity is lost when his mamma offers her hand. Jeongguk looks at the slender, feminine hand, then up at his mother’s smiling face. She’s always been a pretty omega. Family friends would always say he’s the spitting image of her. Except for his nose. He has his papa’s nose. Despite his mamma’s beauty, there’s always been something about her that makes him uncomfortable. Most people don’t see what he sees. They all gravitate towards her, trust and adore her. But they don’t know her. They don’t know her like he knows her.

“Jeongguk, dear, take my hand now,” she coos sweetly. To any untrained ear, it’s a loving request.

But to Jeongguk, it’s a demand.

His palm is sweaty as he accepts mamma’s hand. The bustling production crew seem to pay them no mind at all as they pass by. Unable to see how Jeongguk lags behind his mamma just a little bit, or how he looks around, hoping to catch someone’s eye. Nobody looks, though. Nobody sees.

Leading him out back to where all the trailers are, where there are very few people loitering around, Jeongguk starts to resist, kicking his feet against the gravel and yanking at their linked hands, which his mamma now has in an iron fist. Tears spring in his eyes and his bottom lip trembles. It hurts. Mamma’s hurting him.
“No, Mamma, please—not today. Please, I don’t want to,” he begs, trying with all his might to escape her grasp.

She’s practically dragging him now.

“Don’t be selfish, Jeongguk,” her voice is like stone, nothing like the voice she used back on set. “Gwanghoon-ssi is a very rich man. After today, you’ll never have to worry about university tuition fees—and I’ll even buy you that big, shiny bike—the one you pointed out in the window the other day. You remember that, don’t you, sweetie?”

“Mamma—I don’t want the bike—please I’ll never ask for anything ever again, I promise—I just wanna go home.”

“You’re an omega, Jeongguk,” his mamma says, quietly, “This is what good omegas have to do to get anywhere in life. You said you liked acting so I made sure you’d be a star. You said you liked singing so I got you into musicals and on those talent shows. But do you think mummy could’ve ever achieved those things without a little sacrifice, hm? You think those alpha executives would have ever given me the time of day if I didn’t give them a little extra on the side?”

Jeongguk doesn’t understand what she means by this, but he’s upset all the same.

“I’ll stop acting, I’ll—” but he doesn’t get to finish his sentence because a hand strikes him over the cheek.

He looks up at his mother, betrayal in his eyes. Mamma is angry. “Don’t ever say that again, you hear me? I’ve invested too much into your career for you to just back out. Now stiffen up that upper lip, sugar, or I’ll shove a splint in your mouth.”

After that, Jeongguk walks willingly and silently. They stop outside Gwanghoon’s trailer door. His stomach has sunk so far it’s at his knees. A light-heartedness overtakes him, the urge to throw up all over his sparkly-red Mary Janes nearly visceral. There’s no feeling in his legs at all. He just wants to go home.

His mother walks up half a step to knock on the door. It makes a hollow sound in the metal trailer.

There’s a guttural “come in” before his mother turns to him, a smile back on her face. She leans
over and places a kiss to his forehead. She fixes the clip of fake holly in his hair, and places something in his hand. It looks like a lollipop wrapper. But he knows it isn’t a lollipop.

“Do as he says. I’ll be back in half an hour.”

Jeongguk jerks awake with a gasp. The heart in his ribcage is palpitating so heavily it’s trying to burst out of him. He can’t see a thing. Not a whisper of light. Before the anxiety can burrow through his stomach to fester, though, he smells the warming presence of an alpha. It washes over him like a summer breeze. The distinct, musky scent reminds him of the summers he’d spend at his grandparents’ house as a child. Namjoon’s scent is almost enticing enough to lull him back into an effortless slumber, but instead, he decides to go wash his face. The clamminess on his face and hands simply won’t do.

Navigating through the dark, he’s beckoned towards the tiny, dim sliver of light that peeks beneath the bathroom door. His eyes are swollen and itchy. He might’ve been crying in his sleep again. God, he hopes he wasn’t. Swollen eyes are such an ugly look. It’d be a shame if anyone saw him like this. It’s taken years and years of therapy to keep his nightly terrors at bay, simpering them down to make only meagre appearances here and there—usually if something triggers a suppressed memory. Jeongguk can’t bring himself to hate Taehyung, no matter how painfully he’d picked at the scars that had opened and healed over. There was a sweetness in his eyes as the older omega had spoken of his movies. So much fondness and childlike wonder. At least someone was able to get some unadulterated enjoyment out of his movies, because Jeongguk doesn’t think he could sit through a single one of the movies he’d starred in without getting queasy.

In the corner of the bathroom is the one light that’s never turned off. It’s so small and dim that its light doesn’t even reach the farthest corner of the bathroom, but it’s enough to see around the toilets and sink. Jeongguk shuffles his half-dead shuffle over to the basin. He makes sure the water is icy cold before splashing it over his sticky skin.

“Jeongguk?” He near flinches at the sound of another voice. He turns his head to see Yoongi sitting down in the centre of the bathroom. He’d been so out of it he hadn’t even noticed the alpha.

“Yoongi-ssi?” Jeongguk squints, certain his eyes are playing a trick on him. What is Yoongi doing sitting in the middle of the bathroom, anyway?

“Call me hyung.” The alpha’s voice is as even and rough as ever. There seems to be no indication that he’d recently gotten up.

“Hyung.”
“You were whining in your sleep,” Yoongi informs him casually, turning back to face the blank wall in front of him. “Had a nightmare?”

“It’s nothing,” he answers quietly, and a little too quickly.

Jeongguk doesn’t know what compels him to cross the room to sit on the cold, tiled floor beside Yoongi, but he does, looking at the wall as if expecting to see something interesting. He doesn’t, though. It’s just a blank wall, situated between the showerheads and the never-ending nightlight. At least it isn’t light enough for Yoongi to see that he’s been crying. An alpha shouldn’t be allowed to see omegas at their most vulnerable.

“What are you looking at?”

“Yesterday, Taehyung said that he saw pairs of shoes come in through the bathroom right before he passed out. This means they must’ve come from here. I’m thinking there’s a secret door.”

Looking harder, Jeongguk still can’t make out any lines or curvatures to suggest that there’s a door there, but their captors must have gotten in here somehow, and a secret door is the most logical conclusion.

“Are you waiting for them…?” he asks hesitantly, not exactly sure how sitting here is going to lead to any break-through revelations.

“I’m waiting for Hoseok to be brought back,” he says simply. Jeongguk stares. How strangely… sweet.

“But…” he looks away with a frown. “You didn’t seem to care when they took him—Taehyung said you weren’t panicked or stressed at all.”

The other two omegas like to gossip quite a bit behind the others’ backs—especially Jimin. Jeongguk listens, but never contributes. He gets no pleasure from talking ill of people who aren’t there to defend themselves. Rather, he gets no pleasure from talking ill of people at all, even if they’re disagreeable.
“I care, in my own way,” the alpha’s voice is quieter, more distant, as though his thoughts are far away. “I keep going over in my mind what I could’ve done to stop them gassing us. It’s been pretty stressful, lately, but when that shit started coming through the vents, I felt…scared. There’s nothing we could’ve done to stop it, it was everywhere—it got so thick that I could barely see, and after a while, I couldn’t think much either. To know that at any moment they can just do that…”

Jeongguk looks hard at the wall. Yoongi is right, there’s nothing they could’ve done. Even the blanket Namjoon had torn to cover his mouth and nose hadn’t done much in the end. He’d passed out all the same. So many thoughts had been running through his head, like hundreds of little mice on treadmills, as Namjoon had clutched him in his safe embrace and told him to start counting. He wondered if the next time he opened his eyes he’d be somewhere else, that they would take him away. It shouldn’t have logically scared him that badly, to be separated from all these strangers, and yet somehow, he had. His therapist, Dr. Moon, used to tell him that he gets overly attached to people, even those that’d shown him only the slightest bit of kindness. That’d been said years ago, but it seems to still be applicable today.

“What were you dreaming about?”

“Hm?” he blinks out of his reverie.

Yoongi regards him, expression unreadable. “Did Lee Dongho hurt you?”

“He was one of them, yes.”

“How many others were there?”

“Countless. I can’t remember them all.” Jeongguk feels the emotion drain slowly from his body as his eyes glaze over. It’s a state of mind he usually retreats to whenever talking about his past. “It started with an elementary school teacher. Then when I started acting a manager fondled me in his car on our way to get ice cream.”

The alpha seems to purposely allow the information to settle within a moment of silence before cautiously asking, “Did you ever tell anybody?”

“I told my mother—about the manager. She went to confront him, and they settled on a five-hundred million won pay-out. She signed a few papers, then made me sign them, and it was then my mother discovered she could make a career out of whoring me out to rich alphas in exchange
for hush money. I never told anybody after that—not until my grandparents eventually found out, anyway.” Jeongguk almost couldn’t believe he was telling Yoongi—this complete stranger, about some of the darkest times in his childhood. And as remarkably misguided as it may be for someone like him, he’s always found deep comfort in some alphas. There’s this part of him that trusts them irrevocably, with his mind, his body, his soul. That’s what his father used to tell him when he kissed his cheeks with the callouses of his knuckles. He doesn’t belong to himself. He belongs to alphas. Alphas always know what’s best.

And he’s right. Alphas do know what’s best.

“How did you manage to leave it all?” Yoongi isn’t sympathetic or judgemental—and Jeongguk is glad. He doesn’t want to stranger’s pity, nor does he need it.

“Ran away to live with my grandparents in Changwon. My parents didn’t come after me. They kept all the blood-money they made and also the money from my royalties.” He catches a stray tear with his thumb and sniffs. “Not that I wanted any of it. Every single won I made was tainted… But enough about me—you’ve barely talked about yourself. All I know is that you’re from Daegu and you like to drink alone in your apartment.”

“I don’t like to do it,” Yoongi denies, mildly defensive. “I have a Masters in Psychology and I never did anything with it. My parents hate me and I won’t accept any of my little sister’s calls because I’m ashamed. Not much else to say, really.”

It’s very apparent Yoongi is leaving a lot of out of his story, but Jeongguk has a feeling that pushing it will garner very few results.

“I’m sure your parents don’t hate you,” he tries to reassure. He could never believe a parent could ever truly hate their own child. He doesn’t even think his parents hated him—refuses to believe it. If he had a child, he’d love it from the moment it formed a bump in his belly.

“What do you know?” Yoongi snaps harshly. Jeongguk flinches. They sit in tense silence, staring at each other. Yoongi then sighs and looks away. “It’s not something I wanna talk about. Unless you can manage to smuggle alcohol in here. Then I might reconsider.”

Despite himself, Jeongguk giggles. “I might. If our captors are alphas.”

“How are you so comfortable around alphas?” Yoongi asks, and Jeongguk falters. “It’s just—I
studied behavioural psychology, so I’m a little curious, that’s all. If you’ve been mistreated so badly, shouldn’t alphas make you uncomfortable?”

“It’s complicated,” he answers softly, because that’s the only honest answer he can give the alpha.

Confessing to Yoongi about the abuse he suffered during his short acting career is one thing. With help from his grandparents and the therapist he’s been seeing for years, he’s come to accept the fact that none of it was his fault, and the blame could entirely be put upon his parents. Fine. But there are much darker, more twisted things that began to manifested inside of him when his body began developing. Things that even he fears to this day. The psychological influences of his past controls him like a puppeteer. As time goes on, he begins to wonder what he would be like as a person if he’d just had a normal childhood like everyone else. Would he be so psychologically deformed? So willing to relinquish all control to the alpha with the biggest ego?

Yoongi seems to accept this answer. He isn’t ready to go there, and he can respect that. He sighs with relief.

“I’m scared, though,” Jeongguk confesses, hand clutching his knee. “I’ve—I’ve never experienced a heat in my entire life.”

“What?” Yoongi turns his head so quickly in his direction he’s surprised his neck didn’t snap. “Aren’t you twenty-one?”

Gulping, he sighs a quiet, “yes.”

“How is that possible?”

“My mother—she—” his jaw tenses. He will not cry. He will not cry “—had me on heat-suppressants since I was eight. I continued to obsessively take them throughout my teens because I was so scared to get pregnant—it’s my biggest fear, to have an omega—I couldn’t do that. I couldn’t punish a child like that.”

“But you weren’t being abused anymore, right? Once you ran away?”

“No, the others were consensual.”
“Consensual? What was?”

“N-Nothing.”

“Look—Jeongguk—I don’t know the biological consequences of taking heat-suppressants for that long, but you may want to mention something to Namjoon about it.” Then, apprehensively, Yoongi reaches over and takes Jeongguk’s clenched hand into his own, giving it a reassuring squeeze. “He might hurt you, otherwise.”

A smile twitches at his lips. “Hurt me? Namjoon-hyung? No, he’d never hurt me.”

“He’s dangerous, Jeongguk,” the alpha emphasises severely.

“I didn’t say he isn’t dangerous, I said he’d never hurt me.”

“How are you so sure?”

“I’ve lived my entire life surrounded by people who’ve wanted to hurt me. I can see it in their eyes. The ones that want to hurt you are always the liars, and Namjoon-hyung hasn’t pretended to be anyone else but himself from the very beginning. I trust Namjoon-hyung. He won’t hurt me.”

Yoongi lets go of his hand, scoffing. “Trusting in a complete stranger. You’re a fool, Jeon Jeongguk. Run along back to your alpha. If he finds out you’ve been talking to me, I might lose an eye and—no offense—you’re not worth losing an eye over.”

He smiles at that. “I suppose I’m not.”

He glances at the plain baby-blue wall, then back at Yoongi. Standing up, he murmurs softly, “You’re much more of a softy than you give yourself credit for.”

Then he leaves, but not before saying a gentle “goodnight” to him before closing the bathroom door.
He swears he hears Yoongi echo the sentiment out into the quiet, empty room. But it must have been his imagination.

A question that Jeongguk often asks himself is why Namjoon, sexy, intelligent, alpha Namjoon, took it upon himself to treat Jeongguk differently to the other two omegas of the group. Jeongguk’s not stupid—or maybe he is, but he certainly isn’t blind. He knows that Namjoon has shown favouritism towards him. At even the slightest sign of distress, the alpha is there by his side, and even when he hasn’t spiralled into a mental withdrawal—Namjoon is still there, beside him. Perhaps he’s staking his claims before the week is up, getting across the message that Jeongguk is strictly off-limits, regardless of the alpha (or beta?) who comes out on top.

He likes it. He likes the man’s protectiveness. It makes him feel special—wanted.

Of all the alphas that have used him—in childhood and in adulthood—not one of them ever saw him as anything more than gum. Something to chew and spit out on the curb. A disposable thing with nothing but a hole between his legs. A bitch to breed. And perhaps Namjoon does see him as nothing more than an incubator for his pups, but he sure knows how to talk and behave like a real alpha.

And oh is he ever so handsome.

Tall and broad-shouldered, body lean and well-defined, a man who grooms and looks after himself well. His cousin Songyi once said to him if he ever wanted to know how an alpha looks after their future family, you must first scrutinise how they look after themselves. Namjoon’s also an educated academic, has passion for science, philosophy and poetry. Everything that leaves Namjoon’s lips has a touch of honesty few recite in their modern-day society. The way he touches him and treats him, like he knows what to do with him, how to handle him. A broken, fractured mess of an omega who needs someone to take control, to tell him how to act, how to behave, how to survive.

There’s no hatred or disdain for the other alphas. He thinks Yoongi is a sweetheart—somewhere, deep inside the dark catacombs of his ribs, and while Hoseok doesn’t seem fit to hold the crown of an alpha, he thinks Hoseok is more of an alpha than any of the self-proclaimed “professionals” in the film industry. They’re both undeniably handsome, and have their own desirable qualities.
Hoseok and Jimin would go well together—what with Jimin’s outlandish, pseudo-dominant attitude and Hoseok’s gentle heart, he couldn’t think of a more pleasing match (aside from he and Namjoon, of course).

Jimin doesn’t appear to be all that fond of him. But that’s okay—once he has a mate, he’ll be more open to reason.

“It turns out, that lump of a creature we discovered in the trash heap turned out to be a Beagle,” Taehyung giggles fondly into his bowl of rice, and Seokjin releases a surprised “Ha!” to Jeongguk’s right. “We took it back home, gave it a bath and some food and water—then we had to explain to mum why we were adopting a fifth dog. You should’ve seen the look on her face. She looked ready to pick us up by the hairs and swing us over the fence Ms. Trunchbull-style.”

“But did she let you keep the dog?” Seokjin asks, craning over Jeongguk’s head, appearing invested in Taehyung’s lunch-time narrative.

“Oh, well, we didn’t give her much of a choice. She could never resist my little sister’s crocodile tears.” The omega and the beta laugh.

Jeongguk focuses strictly on his food, trying not to involve himself. There appears to be a budding friendship—of sorts—between Taehyung and Seokjin. He wants Taehyung to find a mate that will make him happy, he truly, truly does, and perhaps on paper Seokjin ticks all the right boxes for a suitable mate. Tall, broad-shouldered, handsome, witty—he’s much like Namjoon in many ways, aside from being a beta, of course. Seokjin would’ve been perfect for Taehyung.

Only, something doesn’t quite sit right with him when it comes to the beta.

Why have a beta at all for this experiment? Surely an added adjudicator to maintain the peace under these strange circumstances is hardly necessary if it disrupts the number of even pairs to be made? Or was there another reason behind making their peculiar little bunch an odd number, perhaps? To cause tension? Controversy? When the week is up they’ll have to fight, but why have them revert back to ancient practices if they could’ve paired them at random? Sure, it leaves room for added tension and uncertainty, but why?

Is this some sick and twisted reality TV show? Are they here at the expense of someone else’s entertainment? Had someone seen him at the local market in Suwon and recognised him? Is that why he’s here?
He imagines a family sitting at home watching television. The alpha father, cradling a remote in his pudgy hand, says to his omega wife something along the lines of: “Isn’t that the guy that was in all those family films a few years back? You know, the kid that always looked like a doll?”

But back to Seokjin, though.

“You know you never did tell me your thesis proposal yesterday,” the beta turns to Namjoon and smiles politely.

He also doesn’t like how Seokjin is so keen with making conversation with Namjoon, but that has nothing to do with his distrust of the man.

“The Biological Dictations of the Omega Anatomy and the Exploitative Influences of Alpha Superiority”, in other words my research was heavily based on the physical, social and emotional dynamics between alphas and omegas, and how an alpha can use their superior biology to navigate and manipulate omegas to do their bidding. Did you know omegas have fifteen different erogenous zones that can induce speech incoherency, temporary physical paralysis and in some cases, even premature heat?” Jeongguk can already feel his panties dampen at listening to Namjoon talk smart. He wouldn’t mind Namjoon shoving him over the table to give the rest of them a demonstration.

“Of course that was your fucking proposal, why would I expect anything more from a classist, egotistical asshole,” Jimin shouts from the other side of the room.

“His research must have had had some validity to it if it was approved by a board,” Seokjin comments. And Jeongguk realises that Seokjin is right, there must have, which means Namjoon has a hundred-thousand-word thesis backing his research and knows intimate details of the omega anatomy like the back of his hand.

Jeongguk shivers with arousal. A heated blush dusting his cheeks.

Seokjin inclines his head towards him, and Jeongguk makes the mistake of meeting his eye. A smirk coils the edge of his perfect mouth. Jeongguk chokes on a whimper. The beta leans over, so close that no one else can hear them over the commotion Jimin is kicking up.

“Excited, are we?” It isn’t the airy, high-pitched voice the beta usually uses in conversation.
Jeongguk shies away, staring at the beta in shock. “Seokjin-ssi…”

“No need to act coy, I can smell you just fine.”

The last comment has his stomach churning. He immediately closes his knees, extremely embarrassed. Seokjin straightens, and casually joins the argument taking place between Jimin and Namjoon, playing the middle-man without an opinion. No one seems to have noticed that Seokjin had whispered anything to him, nor could they see the horror on his face.

“Gguk?” He isn’t expecting the affectionate pet name or the hand on his elbow. He snaps out of it. Taehyung is looking at him with concern. But it shouldn’t be Taehyung showing him concern—no, in fact, quite the opposite. “Are you alright? You’re looking a little spooked. Is it what Namjoon said?”

“Oh no,” he forces a smile. He’s very good at it. “Nothing’s wrong, hyung. I think Namjoon’s thesis proposal is very fascinating. He must know so much about class dynamics and the secrets of our biology.”

“Oh—fuck you, Jeongguk, seriously, fuck you,” Jimin continues to rant. His insults barely scratch him. He’s still fearful of the man sitting to his right. “Why don’t you and Dr Big Dick go buy yourselves a nice big cottage by a lake and fuck like bunnies til your cunt is so loose his cum slips right the fuck out of you.”

Why would Seokjin say that to him? How had his voice and his demeanour changed so drastically in that single, brief moment? No one had noticed or even reacted. Had he really just imagined it? He turns to look at Seokjin. The beta continues to innocently eat his meal, smiling and shaking his head at Jimin as though he no longer found his insults repulsive, but rather amusing.

“What’s that?”

Jeongguk turns back to Taehyung, confused. “I’m sorry?”

The pupils of Taehyung’s eyes are so large they look owlish. “Didn’t you just say something?”

“No?”
“Oh. Never mind.” Taehyung turns back to his meal and starts tearing at a hangnail on his finger.

“You shouldn’t do that,” Jeongguk chides softly. “You’ll open a wound.”

“Huh? Do what?” the omega seems fidgety, distracted.

“Bite your nails.”

“Oh.” Taehyung immediately tucks his hand under his armpit sheepishly. “Hadn’t even realised I was doing it.”

“Oi—why is everyone ignoring me?” Jimin screeches, clearly peeved neither Jeongguk nor Namjoon seem to care very much about his grievances.

“Are you all done yet?” Yoongi grouches from his lonely end of the table. There’s an empty pillow to his left where Hoseok should be sitting, but alas, the alpha has not returned to them, yet. “I haven’t had a shower in God knows how long. I’m fucking rank.”

Ah yes, the dreaded shower time.

Not long after awakening from the sleeping gas yesterday, a stack of fresh, fluffy white towels had been left in a stack by the door of the bathroom with a note sitting innocently atop it. It’d read that they were all required to shower after lunch the following day. Together.

What’s more is there’d been a box next to it with fresh clothes identical to the ones they have on, tagged to let them know whose is who. In the bathroom, there’d also been a basket that had magically appeared, with instructions telling them to dump their dirty clothes in there.

Jimin had been livid, of course—and this time Namjoon had agreed with his complaints. It didn’t sit well with the alpha that anyone aside from him got to see Jeongguk naked. Took Jeongguk all the willpower in the world not to stick his ass in the air and beg to be bred right then and there. He likes an alpha concerned with protecting his modesty. Such a sweetie.
Sighing, Taehyung polishes off the last of his rice before settling down his rubber spoon. Jeongguk guesses they opted for spoons inside of chopsticks since they’re less likely to be used to poke people’s eyes out. “I suppose we should just get this over with.”

“Fuck, I’m gonna barf. If any of you pervs look at me while I’m bathing I’m going to cut your fucking dick off,” Jimin grumbles.

“God, whatever, Jimin—come on, Gguk,” Taehyung grabs his hand and pulls him up to his feet.

“Um, hey,” Namjoon snatches Jeongguk’s other wrist, pulling him the other way. “He’s showering with me.”

Taehyung glares at Namjoon, nostrils flared. “I’m not letting a naked Jeongguk anywhere near your grabby hands—he’ll shower with me,” the omega emphasizes this by yanking Jeongguk harshly—more harshly than he thinks Taehyung means to.

“Hyung, it’s okay—Namjoon-hyung won’t hurt me,” he tries to reassure Taehyung calmly.

Namjoon quirks an eyebrow at Taehyung. “See? He wants to bathe with me.”

“Oh please, Jeongguk doesn’t know what he’s talking about half the time. Jeongguk, come on.” Taehyung yanks him again and he whimpers, pain shooting up from his wrist.

“Hyung please let go, you’re hurting me.”

That’s when Seokjin steps in, a hand on Taehyung’s shoulder. “I think you should just let it be, Tae. There’s not much you can do if Jeongguk wants to bath with him.”

Maybe Seokjin was using his pheromones to manipulate the situation, maybe Taehyung trusts Seokjin enough to listen to him, but he lets Jeongguk go. He’s pulled against a warm, solid chest, encased within Namjoon’s strong, capable arms, and he allows the musky pheromones to wash over him.

Namjoon leads him by the hand into the bathroom, their towels tucked up under his arm. He places
the towels slightly off to the side so they wouldn’t get soaked by the shower spray. The alpha strips off first, peeling the underwear from his skin and tossing it flippantly into the basket. The way he strides, cock full on display, is evident enough that he’s proud. And what’s not to be proud of? His cock is worthy of an alpha of his stature, thick and long, hanging flaccid against his thigh. It sways slightly as he walks and Jimin catches a glimpse of it and wavers, stumbling straight into Yoongi, who shoves him off and tells him not to fucking touch him. Namjoon smirks at that before turning back to Jeongguk.

Even with the alpha in front of him, hands on his hips, Jeongguk can’t take his eyes away from Namjoon’s cock, hunger rearing its ugly head.

The alpha’s nose brushes his temple as he whispers, “I’m going to take your clothes off okay, little one?”

Jeongguk can all but nod, speechless.

Namjoon carefully slips the choker off first. He has to be extra tentative, considering the thin line of material is attached to his microchip, but the man is so tender with him he barely feels a thing. Namjoon lays it down atop their towels. Jeongguk raises his arms up in the air as the alpha lifts his nightgown, and then lastly, slides off his underwear. Without inching his foot away, Namjoon bundles the clothes and tosses it across the room towards the basket. It misses its mark and goes skidding across the floor and stops by the sink.

The alpha shrugs, “I’ll get it later.”

That’s when Jeongguk realises why Namjoon hasn’t moved. He’s blocking the view of his naked body to the others. Ever the gentleman, Namjoon backs him up against the tiled wall, successfully caging him. It’s quite nice. From this angle Jeongguk can see everyone, but no one can see him—rather, his body, anyway. The others seem to have spread out. There are seven shower heads in total, one for each other them, but somehow the group—pack—whatever you wanna call them, had deigned it necessary for Jeongguk to need to bath alongside someone else. He was always going to bathe with Namjoon. It is only natural, of course. But Taehyung had volunteered, too, and Seokjin had thought it best for Jeongguk to bathe with the alpha and—and it was all strangely, nice?

Jeongguk frowns at Namjoon’s chest as he deciphers why his thoughts have led him to such a conclusion. Maybe his need to be taken care of stretches beyond the realms of just needing an alpha in his life. He doesn’t want to venture down that alley right now. His mind has a tendency to take him to weird places, and as a result—lead him into compromising situations.
They start by massaging each other’s scalps first. Namjoon initially argued that, as an alpha, he’s perfectly capable of washing his own hair, but Jeongguk kindly insisted that he knows Namjoon is perfectly capable, he just wants to do a little something nice for him. This explanation satisfies the alpha enough to let him shampoo and condition his hair, beautiful, dusty brown locks that—when dried, fall handsomely over his brow.

Namjoon’s eyes flutter shut, inhaling through his nose, and for the first time Jeongguk sees him relax. The alpha has, by no means, reacted as strongly to the situation as some of the others, but his mind has been switched on from the beginning. Thinking, investigating, theorising, stressing over Jeongguk and making sure he’s happy. He’s noticed that when Namjoon is thinking hard, his eyebrows furrow and he tilts his head to the side, gazing at nothing in particular. Now his expression is completely smooth, mouth slightly open as Jeongguk tilts his head back into the spray of water.

In turn, Namjoon is very tender when he washes Jeongguk’s hair. It’s almost odd, how unadulterated showering with the alpha is. Pheromones are thick in the air and their naked bodies are only a hair’s-width from brushing against each other, and yet—Namjoon doesn’t do what any other alpha in his position would’ve done.

Not that Jeongguk would’ve stopped him, but this treatment is so foreign, so different from what he’s used to.

He almost doesn’t know how to respond.

Is Namjoon expecting him to make the first move? Should he get on his knees—is that what Namjoon wants him to do?

Tilting his head slightly to look up at the alpha, he searches his eyes, trying to find something—anything to indicated that’s what he wants. But when Namjoon meets his questioning gaze, the alpha only smiles—it meets his eyes—and then he’s brushing his thumb beneath the curve of Jeongguk’s right eye.

“Close your eyes, little one. Let’s rinse the suds out of your hair.”

As Jeongguk does as he’s told, Namjoon places a hand at the back of his head and carefully tilts him back, water flowing down from the crown of his head and running across the curve of his spine. Still, he doesn’t understand. How an alpha could sanely stand before him, naked as the day he was born, and not touch him suggestively. Namjoon, in all honesty, could get away with whatever he pleased. No one would stop him—he wouldn’t stop him.
After he’s rinsed the conditioner out, Namjoon turns to Seokjin, who’s the closest to them (and he doesn’t think this is a coincidence). “Are you done with the soap?”

“Oh, yeah—here you go.” Seokjin takes a step closer to hand Namjoon the bar, and for a split second the beta glances at Jeongguk.

He just looks away, face burning. It’s at this moment he’s truly grateful for Namjoon’s protective nature. He doesn’t know what he would’ve done if he were showering alone in front of all these people.

After they cut the shower, Namjoon towels him off first and secures it around his torso. They get dressed in Zone 1 and then take their vitamins. As strange as it sounds, he feels a lot better after the hot shower. They, at the very least, have that luxury in this prison. Namjoon decides to do some stretching on the floor while Jeongguk lies on his stomach on his futon, watching him with mild interest. The man’s muscles flex and ripple graphically beneath his tanned skin, and he wonders just how long those nice juicy muscles will keep form without any physical activities to keep them stimulated. Well, there is one activity, but he’s not even going to go there.

“What would you do if someone else chose me?” he asks idly, kicking his feet playfully in the air.

Namjoon nearly stutters on a one-armed push-up. “Uh?”

“You know, at the end of the week when you’ll have to fight. What if someone else wins and chooses me?”

The man’s eyes narrow at him. “What? You think I won’t win?”

Jeongguk smiles, finding his bruised ego endearing. “No, I think you’ll win, I’m just wondering what you’d do if you didn’t.”

“And you were chosen?”

“Uh-huh.”
“Not going to happen,” the alpha says bluntly, continuing to do his push-ups. He’s starting to struggle under the weight.

Jeongguk pouts. “Aw, you’re no fun.”

“I won’t lose, little one. Do you honestly think Hoseok or Yoongi would stand a chance against me?”

No, he doesn’t care for the background of either alpha. Skill and speed are no match for brute strength, and he can tell Namjoon is in no shortage of that. He’s taller and heavier—much harder to knock down.

But Hoseok and Yoongi aren’t his main concern.

“I meant Seokjin-ssi.”

“Seokjin?” Namjoon sits on his heels, panting slightly as he runs a hand through his hair. Jeongguk stares at Namjoon’s abs. “Sure, I could take him. He’s just a beta.”

Don’t be cocky, he wants to say, but doesn’t. It worries him, that Namjoon is so painfully confident. As attractive as it is, it might just be to his own detriment, and Jeongguk will be the one who suffers the most because of it. Even if either Yoongi or Hoseok were to win over Namjoon (which they won’t), they probably wouldn’t consider Jeongguk for one reason or another. He doesn’t blame them. So many alphas have used his body he’s likely lost all value in their eyes.

But Seokjin is a different story.

For some reason, he feels like Seokjin—if he were to win—might choose him just to torment them both. To rub salt on the wound of Namjoon’s terrible defeat and seize power of Jeongguk’s body. And Jeongguk would let him, too, but somewhere inside something might just break just a little bit.

Maybe he’s being irrational.
He has no evidence to suggest Seokjin would do that to them.

The beta would probably choose Taehyung, because that would be the most reasonable pick. Then the two of them can be happy together. Right?

“Hey,” a hand cups his face and he looks up at Namjoon, who smiles reassuringly. His dimples make him look kinder. “I’m not going to let anyone claim you, okay? There isn’t a chance in the world I’d let the others win.”

And Jeongguk believes him.

A commotion wakes them up in the dead of night.

Coughing and spluttering and groans of pain. It comes from the bathroom, where the noises echo ominously. Whoever it is makes so much noise that it wakes up all of them. Jimin and Namjoon are the first to spring into action, running through the pitch blackness to get to the bathroom door. The door is flung open wide, the minimal light flooding into their bedroom. Jimin audibly gasps. Jeongguk stumbles after them, peeking over the slope of Namjoon’s shoulder.

The sight immediately strikes fear within his chest, almost like a stab of pain. On the tiled floor in the middle of the bathroom, is Hoseok, his stomach so bloated that there’s veins and stretch marks bulging from his stomach. As the alpha breathes, his entire belly rises and falls, reminding Jeongguk of an alien. Yoongi rushes over to Hoseok’s side, Seokjin not far behind. Jimin seems frozen in the hallway, unable to move, unable to speak. Jeongguk moves to get closer but Namjoon holds him back—holds all the omegas back from getting any closer to him.

“Fuck, Hoseok, what did they *do* to you?” Yoongi asks in a harsh, hushed tone.

“I—” then the man turns onto his side and suddenly starts vomiting. Seokjin and Yoongi immediately jump away in shock.
Jeongguk doesn’t get to see any of it, because Namjoon orders him to close his eyes. In *that* tone. All the omegas have to follow. Jeongguk is just fine with that. Neither Taehyung nor Jimin seem to complain, either, which is a first.

But that doesn’t mean Jeongguk still can’t *hear* it. The noise of Hoseok regurgitating everything in his grotesquely swollen stomach. It seems to go on for *ages*. Jeongguk can feel bile rise in his own throat but he stubbornly swallows it back down. Hoseok is in real pain. He doesn’t want to take any attention away from him.

Then finally, *finally*, after literally *minutes* of vomiting, it comes to a stop, indicated by Hoseok’s harsh, violent coughing. The pungent smell that lingers in the air is so disgusting Jeongguk has to pinch his nose. It smells like death.

“Seokjin—go get water,” Yoongi says.

“There’s no cups—”

“Use your fucking hands if you have to—just go get water!”

Then Jeongguk hears bare feet slapping against the tiles. Doors opening and closing. Seokjin must’ve gone through Zone 3 to get to the Eating Hall.

“What happened, Hoseok?” Yoongi is more serious now, deadlier.

“Eat—th-they made me e-e-eat.”

“Eat?”

“Yes.”

“Fuck, Hoseok. I fucking told you—”

“Th-there’s something else…”
Silence.

Then—“What? What is it?”

“P-Punishment by random s-selection.”

“What about it?”

“They told me…” Hoseok is still gasping for air. He sounds like he’s in so much pain. Jeongguk wants to hug him. “They told me to remind you… If s-someone fucks up, th-they’ll punish one of us at random.”

Yoongi curses. “So one of us will have to pay for the sins of another.”

“Y-Yes.”

Jimin groans. “We are so *fucked.*”
Yoongi dedicated years of his life to studying people. He’d also dedicated years of his life to doing other things, too—stuff that he isn’t all that proud of. But the time he’d spent at university working towards getting his undergraduate degree in psychology (along with half a year of his Masters before dropping out) had been one of the happiest times of his life. Buried beneath the weight of thick, expensive books and research reports for four years, he’d trained himself in the art of scrutinising human behaviour. What he had been most interested in was Classist Psychology and how pheromones play a role in social interactions. Most specifically, the influence of beta pheromones and their chemical influences. A tonne of research had been conducted over the years about omega and alpha pheromones—mostly as a tool to be used to prove omegas as the inferior class, but very little interest had been garnered with their middle-class brothers and sisters. It’s as if society had given an entire class of people a shrug, and acknowledge that they are, in fact, superior to omegas, but not alphas.

Funding for beta pheromone research, Yoongi quickly found, was even more scarce than the amount of academic papers written about it, which promptly led to him dropping out of his Masters degree when the university ceased funding on their research altogether. It had left Yoongi with a fuck tonne of debt and no money to pay it all off.

As he sits on his futon in his personal corner of the room, recently disturbed by the lights turning on, he observes the other prisoners—as he’s done since the moment he woke up here. Yoongi isn’t much of a talker. It’s not that he doesn’t like human interaction. He’s simply learnt to be a little distrustful. Maybe it’s connected to the time he sold drugs, maybe it’s affiliated with something else entirely. Yoongi doesn’t know and he doesn’t want to find out. All he knows is that trusting a single person in the prison is going to be harder than any drug-abuser he’s had to talk down out of a psycho-psychedelic episode. To amuse himself he’s associated each personality with a different drug: Jimin acts like a smoker who’s been off nicotine for two weeks and treats everyone like the shit at the bottom of his shoe because of it, Taehyung is the user who’s having a bad reaction to marijuana and it’s making him paranoid, and Jeongguk behaves like a high-functioning heroin addict—he can still move around but barley reacts or cares to being manhandled. Namjoon and Hoseok are obvious. Namjoon’s taken one too many testosterone shots that’ve blown his ego through the roof, and Hoseok acts like he’s had one too many LSD trips and can’t calm the fuck down.

Oddly enough, Seokjin is the only person who Yoongi can’t associate with any sort of drug. The way he’s been acting so far suggests that he’s a completely normal, compassionate beta who wants...
nothing more than to help the others cope with the situation at hand.

Which makes Yoongi immediately suspicious of him.

How the others behaviour is strange to be sure, but from observing them, they’ve given him no real reason to suspect anything. They’re flawed and emotional and selfish and very much human in attitude and mannerisms. Looking at them even now—in his corner, he sees that.

Jimin, while he has proven to be a sharp-tongued, snarky omega that bristles at even the slightest interaction with an alpha, kneels beside Hoseok’s form, asking if he needs water. Prejudice and hatred always have an origin that can be found deep within the human psyche. Looking at Jimin and the way he talks and acts, it’s plain to Yoongi that he didn’t have the best childhood. Whatever happened spawned a deep disdain towards alphas and the hierarchical system, paving the way of getting sexual gratification out of dominating the dominant class. This is one of the many possibilities he has pondered over the oldest omega and how he has taken a bit of a liking toward the least aggressive alpha of their group. This theory also supports why Jimin seems to have such harsh words for the youngest omega, Jeongguk.

The theories he has chalked up in his mind regarding the youngest—the maknae, if you will—are less speculation, and more or less been confirmed through the information he’s picked up. Considering his violent childhood, the betrayal of his omega mother and the promiscuity implied in his later years, Jeongguk latched himself to the alpha most capable of protecting him and taking care of him. His concern is less about wallowing in the unfortunate circumstances and instead, forming an alliance with the strongest alpha in the room. As a sickly dependent omega, he’s siphoned off his responsibility to the safest bet—the alpha who feeds off of the reliance and worship of an omega to give him the reassurance he needs for validation: Namjoon. Their emotional and sexual magnetism towards each other is based off of mutual insecurity and survival. Neither can function well without the other, and their circumstances posed as the perfect catalyst for their relationship to take shape.

Namjoon’s ego obviously stems from a place of insecurity. The alpha hasn’t expressed any vulnerability to allude what insecurity, exactly, but Yoongi could make a few educated guesses. Omega mother could’ve been a whore, father could’ve been classist and abusive—if even in the picture at all, maybe had a conservative upbringing or witnessed something traumatic that warped his few of the world, but either way, whatever it was, it played enough to his insecurities to tear a void inside of him. Past relationships were likely never successful. No omega or beta would tolerate blatant, 1850’s classist ideas in the modern-day. That is, until Jeongguk came along. The pair is so twistedly perfect that he’s beginning to believe it wasn’t a coincidence. They were chosen to fill a certain purpose. There’s a chance Namjoon and Jeongguk were specifically targeted because they would work so well together—and perhaps the same could be said for Jimin and Hoseok.
Hoseok is—well. Flickering his gaze to the man lying boneless on his futon, waist wrapped in a towel, stomach no longer bulging but the stretched skin still adjusting, he wonders. He doesn’t think Hoseok’s personality stems from anything psychologically traumatising. Yes, he is paranoid, and yes, he is quite submissive by alpha standards, but that’s just what they are, aren’t they? Standards. Whatever “ideal alpha” society sells to them in magazines and on billboards is nothing but an illusion. The ideal alpha doesn’t exist. It’s an image that gives them purpose to strive towards—something that insecure people like Namjoon near obsess over because they believe it gives them power over others. Hoseok doesn’t seem to care much for it, honestly. And the paranoia is only natural. It’s likely he simply isn’t emotionally equipped to handle extreme circumstances because he’s never experienced anything like it before.

Which leads him to Taehyung. The other paranoid person of the group. He’s currently sitting with Seokjin, backs against the wall, shoulders touching as they discuss something privately. It seems to be something serious, if the way Taehyung frowns and gnaws at a jagged fingernail is any indication. While Hoseok’s paranoia stems from personality, what Taehyung has seems a little less emotional and a little more psychological. Yoongi doesn’t know exactly what to make of it all yet, because whatever it is hasn’t come out in full force yet, but the way his eyes flicker and how he bites his fingernails almost obsessively is enough to raise some concern. The way he almost turns to Seokjin, as if for guidance and advice, is also alarming.

Seokjin is a beta. While society has all but stuck their noses up at pheromones that pacify emotions, it has more power than one might initially assume. Yoongi’s parents were both women—a beta and an omega. For years, his beta father would extinguish all arguments his omega mother would try to bring up by exerting pheromones to cloud his mother’s judgement. This went on until Yoongi was five and his parents got divorced. His mother won custody over him—as most omegas do in custody disputes—and it was only later that he found out his father discontinued using her pheromones up until around the time of the divorce. Beta pheromones are such a blatantly destructive weapon that it baffles Yoongi that nothing more is being done about it. Many changes have been made to govern alpha and omega pheromones—bans on pheromone enhancers, biological manipulation and the obstruction of free will were all bills to do with alphas and omegas. Not once did any ever stop to consider the dangers of beta pheromones. They’re no less manipulative or malicious, but because its generally associated with positive influences, no one takes it seriously.

Which is why, despite there being three omegas that could, at any point, spiral into heats and throw off the fragile establishment they’ve created, and three alphas that could, at the mere deepening of their voices, have omegas do whatever they please, Yoongi is most afraid of the beta in the middle.

At first glance Seokjin’s comfort could be seen as innocent, commendable even, but who’s to say Taehyung couldn’t soon develop a reliance on Seokjin’s pheromones to pacify whatever he has going on? What possible advantage could Seokjin hope to gain otherwise? His willingness to replace him in the fight for an omega was almost instantaneous, unflinching under the circumstances to commit to breeding one of the omegas. And Taehyung—Taehyung appears to have been a no-brainer decision on the beta’s part. Seokjin had certainly moved quick to secure an
alliance with an omega—but not quick enough. Namjoon was quicker, smarter, moving on Jeongguk the moment he awoke, narrowing the pool to two—but even then, going for Jimin would’ve been a dumb move. Jimin’s unpredictable, a vixen, harder to manipulate and control. Taehyung is tentative and sceptical, but plainly unstable. All Seokjin had to do was make his move and now—

Now Yoongi can only watch as another omega is taken to the slaughter. He can see Seokjin sinking his claws into Taehyung from across the room, leaving Jimin to be the only one without a solid alliance.

Not that he needs one, in all honesty.

Hoseok seems the one who needs it more.

They’d all gotten a few hours’ sleep at best last night, after finding Hoseok on the floor of the bathroom. The whole ordeal is still shrouded in mystery. Jimin and Taehyung had helped clean him (they’d had to strip off his underwear because it was covered in piss and vomit), while the rest of them tried their best to get rid of the vomit by turning on all the showers. It did it’s work getting rid of the liquid, but chunks of half-digested (and even undigested) food still remained, and they were at odds with what to do with it, since they didn’t have bins. Seokjin suggested flushing the rest down the toilets, but then Namjoon brought up the concern that it might clog them and lead to punishment.

In the end no one could decide on what to do with the rest, so they called it a day and worked on taking care of Hoseok. They’d shut the door for good measure to keep out the smell from the bathroom, and through the dark they did their best to navigate their way around, whispering and holding onto each other.

Pretty soon Hoseok had passed out from exhaustion and they all agreed to deal with the mess in the morning when they had more light and energy. But something happened in the time that they were all asleep. Someone had come in and cleaned out the vomit and spritzed air-freshener to get rid of the smell. The basket of dirty clothes had been emptied, old towels had been swapped out for fresh ones, and the blanket that Namjoon had torn up was also replaced with a new one. The red light atop the Mystery Box was on, and this time they were a little less scared to approach it after the first time. This time Namjoon had bravely opened it, volunteering himself as though expecting an applause of some sort. He got no such reception, but Jeongguk did swoon and give words of sweet encouragement. That seemed to be enough for Namjoon.

Inside were the usual tablets they had to take every day. Yoongi is beginning to think that Namjoon was right all along, and that they are, in fact, just vitamin pills. He doesn’t feel much different from when he started taking them, and they all seemed to have been given vitamins
relative to their class. What’s more, though, is that they were given books, envelopes and a deck of cards.

For good behaviour.

The note had said.

Yoongi begs to differ. They’re giving them things to help stimulate their brain cells. Keep them busy, occupied. Four days is a long time to be kept in a box. If they don’t have something entertaining them then pretty soon they’re going to start strangling each other.

The envelops were another store. Each one was addressed to each other them. Not with their actual names on the front—of course, but their assigned names. Alpha 2. The letter in question sits, open and torn apart, to Yoongi’s left.

It’d said something along the lines of: ‘Examinations conducted on Subject Alpha 2# concluded that the subject’s sperm count and mobility are high. Estimated time of rut: 5 weeks, granted that the subject is obedient during this time. A routine check-up will happen a week before the subject’s rut and an update will be provided.’

Everyone else had been given something similar.

Jimin had stood up and, in a fit of rage, tore his letter to shred and screamed ferally at the top of his lungs. “The fuckers gave us pap smears while we were drugged! Fuck this shit—fuck everything. They expect us to breed? Well I expect all of them to go DROP DEAD!”

“I’m extremely fertile?” Jeongguk had stared at his letter incredulously, then blinked up at Namjoon, who’d been reading over his shoulder.

“That’s a good thing, isn’t it?” Namjoon nudged him. “It says on mine that my sperm count and mobility are high, too. Not that I was scared—I knew that already.”

With glassy eyes, Jeongguk had blinked away his tears of relief and met Yoongi’s gaze. It must come as a major reassurance to the omega, to know he’ll never have to breathe a word of his suppressant abuse to the one person he has any affection for. It does make him wonder how Namjoon would have reacted, though. Would it come as a rude shock if the omega of his dreams
turned out to be infertile or, at the very least, have difficulty conceiving? Would he have been angered, or saddened? Spiteful, or sympathetic?

There’s still so much to learn about the others. It’d be almost interesting to dissect the different personalities living and breathing around him, if it weren’t for the fact that they were all forced here against their own free wills.

The letters weren’t what fascinated Yoongi the most, either. The letters could be written off as a foreboding reminder—they are all fertile and perfectly capable of breeding (whether they’re emotionally ready to undertake it or not), and that is their purpose.

Yoongi assumed that already.

It’s the books he finds the most notable. Translated texts from American and British researchers—right up Namjoon’s alley (and disturbingly his own alley)—Becky Abraham’s *The Feral Within Us*, Harold Pettergan’s *The Nature of Alphas and the Nurture of Omegas*, William G. Whitaker’s *A History of the Class Dynamic*—all books that seem to point towards why they were taken, why this experiment is being conducted, what scientists have to gain from it.

Yoongi himself had actually only read one of the three books that were given to them—*The Nature of Alphas and the Nurture of Omegas*. The research mainly explores the debate of Nature vs. Nurture, but expands on the argument that’s as old as time by instead looking specifically at how the class of a person influences the development of children. For example, an alpha born into a family is more likely to develop a mental illness somewhere down the line if its omega mother has a family history of mental illness. A beta, on the other hand, is more likely to have issues with alcoholism if the alpha father has a family history of alcoholism. It also goes into detail on how “nurture” can heavily sway the results if they’re raised in happy homes with loving parents.

While Yoongi found the read kind of slow, the “nurture” side of it focused its attention on adopted children raised by an omega mother and an alpha father. There were no mentions of a child being raised by two alphas, two omegas, or even a cross pair of a beta with an omega or an alpha. For this reason, he found the research unreliable. The clear bias meant that it had very little to say other than bringing attention to research that has been thoroughly conducted in the psychology field throughout recent decades.

“Do you want to read one of the books?” Yoongi snaps out of his revere, tilting his head up, up, up to see Namjoon towering over him. He wants to get an axe to chop him down to size.

He’s nursing all the books in one arm. “The others aren’t interested.”
In the background he can clearly see Jimin has set up some sort of blackjack scenario with Taehyung, Seokjin and Hoseok huddled around it—though Hoseok is leaning mostly on the wall to keep him upright. Jeongguk must’ve gotten up to go to the bathroom or something, because he isn’t in Zone 1.

“I would’ve thought you’d want to read them all yourself,” he says quizzically.

Namjoon smiles. “Actually, I’ve already read them all before.”

“Of course you have,” he retorts bluntly.

The younger alpha throws his head back and laughs. “I might give ‘The Feral Within Us’ another read, since I’ve only read it twice.”

“I’ll take William G. Whitaker, then.”

The alpha hands it over to him and then, to Yoongi’s surprise, sits down beside him. “Have you read any of these books before?”

“I read ‘The Nature of Alphas and the Nurture of Omegas’ before, but I didn’t find it all that interesting.”

“Really?” Namjoon straightens, attention piqued. “I found the role of parents in a child’s life quite fascinating. Neglect or rejection from omega mothers can have catastrophic consequences on the child’s mental and emotional state, regardless of whether there is a history of family illness. Children who grow up without alpha fathers in their lives have an increased chance of depression. You don’t find it all interesting?”

“I was mostly disappointed in the lack of variety the research took into account. It focused on omega and alpha parents exclusively, and never took into account couples of other classes. One in ten children are born to a beta father and an omega mother, and one in a hundred children are raised by same-class couples. Those numbers are large enough to warrant at least some acknowledgement, but the research ignores alternative couples altogether.”
Rubbing his chin with interest, the younger alpha ponders, “That is true. But alpha and omega couples are more abundant, so perhaps Pettergan was only concerned with covering the majority rather than the minority.”

“It’s just frustrating,” Yoongi sighs. “Pettergan had done so much research on something that’s already been covered by many other psychologists before him. I just think that by narrowing down on more unconventional family dynamics he could’ve taken his research in a more engaging direction.”

To Yoongi’s ultimate surprise, Namjoon nods in agreement. “The research is pretty broad.”

“What?”

Namjoon looks confused for a moment. “What?”

“You’re not going to go off on a tangent about how children should be raised by one omega and one alpha?”

The younger smirks. “It’d be a little hypocritical. Both my parents were alphas.”

Oh.

Oh.

“You… You were adopted?”

“Surrogate. They used one of my father’s sperm, an egg from a donor and my other father’s sister was generous enough to carry me until birth.”

Suddenly Yoongi is regarding him a completely different light. His earlier assumptions were wrong. Namjoon didn’t have a promiscuous mother, and it’s likely his fathers weren’t abusive either.
“Did you ever have any siblings?”

“A younger sister.”

“And she was a…?”

“An alpha.”

No omegas or betas in the family. No omegas roaming around the house complaining about the biological injustices of heat, no betas to give the young, impressionable mind an idea of how their pheromones influence other people.

Well, this just got very interesting.

The door to the bathroom opens and closes, and Jeongguk comes ambling over to where they’re sitting. The omega sinks to his knees, craning his head curiously with a soft smile. A certain flicker of gentleness passes over Namjoon’s face as he regards Jeongguk.

“What are you two talking about?”

“Nothing to worry your pretty brain over, little one. Just two alphas harking on about the philosophy of nature versus nurture.” If Namjoon had said that to any other omega it would’ve come out condescending and classist, but even the manner in which he speaks to Jeongguk is brimming with affection.


“And what exactly is your thing, Jeongguk?” he drawls, expecting something superficial—in line with what stereotypical omegas tend to like. Fashion, accessories, or perhaps social politics.

Though he has a distinct feeling the latter is excluded in this case.

“I was in the middle of my undergraduate degree in Fine Arts—with a minor in music theory.”
“You study?” he doesn’t mean to sound so incredulous, but—well, it’s Jeongguk. It seems to also be news to Namjoon, who has both eyebrows raised, impressed.

Jeongguk grins. He isn’t offended. Nothing seems to faze him. Probably because he’s heard it all before. “I didn’t know what I was going to do with it,” he admits sheepishly. Then his face falls slightly, looking around their prison. “I guess it doesn’t matter now.”

“We’ll get out of here,” Namjoon says, probably in the most uncertain, softest tone Yoongi has ever heard him use. “We’ll find a way.”

During lunch Jimin complains about how his limbs are getting sore from sitting around doing nothing all day, and it is at this time Taehyung brings up that he knows yoga. With a sudden burst of enthusiasm, Jeongguk asks if Taehyung could teach them some yoga positions. Jimin is a little less enthused with the idea, but Jimin is a little less enthused about most things. Taehyung takes one look at Jeongguk’s pleading eyes and the next thing Yoongi knows their futons, pillows and blankets are being piled in a corner and Taehyung is showing the other omegas positions like the ‘down dog’ and the ‘half-moon’. Hoseok also expresses interest to join, but Seokjin brings up that his body is still healing from the trauma and he should wait a few days before doing anything strenuous.

While they’re doing their thing, he and Namjoon settle down in Zone 4 for some quiet reading. Yoongi opens up Whitaker’s *A History of the Class Dynamic*. He doesn’t know where to start, in all honesty. There are so many chapters touching on varying different time periods throughout the human revolution, dating all the way back to when they were wolves. He glances through the Contents Page, skimming over the titles.

Excited voices and giggling can be heard from behind Zone 1’s door. He thinks he might have heard Jimin chuckle, but no—that can’t be right. Must be imagining things.

Picking a chapter between 120C.E.-140C.E., he opens the book and begins to read. It’s theorised that around this time, humanity lost the ability to change between human and wolf form, but maintained the classes that continue to dictate society today. It’s all speculations made by anthropologists, since there are no written scripts dating back that far.

*Chapter XII: Post-Metamorphism*

The most primitive state that modern-day homosapiens are in close relation to is the Post-
Metamorphism of our species. At this time, connections to our canis lupis ancestors have been all but severed, bringing forth a new dawn in our biological history. One trait has persisted in our specie’s genome—that of the second-sex chromosome determining our social class. Alphas have the instinct to be natural-born leaders, to be driven, ambitious, and family-orientated. Betas are gifted with the natural means to heal conflict and provide comfort to both alphas and omegas alike. Lastly, omegas, unambitious, fragile-minded and inherently maternal—the date the book was published is starting to show its age—All classes are bred and raised to play crucial roles in a pack.

The concept of packs has long since faded into obscurity. The closest thing we have to packs in the modern-day are families. A pack predating Metamorphosis could be anywhere between 20 to 80 in size. Once we were completely separated, however, numbers in packs dwindled to range from 5 to 20. According to G. K. Thomas, renown anthropologist at Cambridge University, the reason packs became smaller in sizes were because humans at this time prioritized closeness and intimacy over strength and power.

A leader of the pack would be instated to look after and protect their pack from outside threats. The most capable, responsible and strongest alpha of the pack would be chosen. Lower-ranking alphas would serve as an advisory to the leader, and would carry out the most labour-intensive tasks, such as hunting and building. The betas often played midwives for the omegas and provided stand-in relief to alphas in rut who either haven’t claimed an omega yet, or their omega is in prenatal or postnatal stages. Betas would also play diplomatic roles to settle territorial or merger disputes between packs. Out of all the classes, omegas are the most vulnerable to their own biology. Before pregnancy and motherhood, they are savages of pleasure and eroticism. Slaves to the heat only an alpha’s knot can satiate. Once they are with child, their hormones relax and their pheromones are rewired temporarily, until the litter is born and their bodies return to their original purpose...

The door opens and Yoongi doesn’t even look up to see who has joined them. It isn’t until the person sits down in the space between he and Namjoon that Yoongi finally looks up to see Seokjin. The beta is smiling at him easily. Yoongi can feel the beta’s pheromones reaching out to probe him —and likely Namjoon, too. The younger alpha has barely looked up from his book. Doesn’t acknowledge Seokjin. Blind to the threat he poses.

“Hope you don’t mind if I join you two for a little peace and quiet,” the beta says in a perky, upbeat voice. “It’s nice watching the omegas have fun, but they’re a little too excitable for me to handle right now, what with everything that has happened.”

“Hoseok is with them?” Yoongi asks evenly, trying hard to mask his suspicion.

“Yes. I think he’s taken a liking to Jimin-sssi. I suppose it’s just as well,” he chuckles. “I don’t think any of us would’ve been able to control him.”
“You seem to be spending a lot of your time with Taehyung.” Again, even, unsuspecting.

“He’s a very agreeable omega, wouldn’t you say so, Namjoon-ssi?”

Namjoon looks up from his book, baffled that he’s even invited into the conversation. It’s clear the alpha wants to be left to his own devices. Either Seokjin can’t read a person, or he can read them too well. Licking his finger, the younger dog-tags his page and sets the book down, surrendering to the fact that he may not be able to escape this discussion.

“Personally, I never really noticed,” he answers without any ill-intent.

Seokjin’s sharp, intelligent gaze regards Namjoon with amusement. “No, I suppose you’ve only ever had eyes for another, haven’t you?”

“I guess so.”

“So it’s decided then. You’ll be fighting for Jeongguk?”

“Yes,” Namjoon replies firmly, leaving no room for argument.

“What about you, Yoongi-ssi?” Seokjin turns his attention back on him. He doesn’t appreciate it at all. “I know you said you weren’t going to participate, but surely you have some interest in one of the omegas…? Any hot-blooded alpha would take one look at those three and at least one of them would incite some passion or desire. Jimin’s sharp-tongue and untameable attitude, Taehyung’s beauty and boundless enthusiasm, or Jeongguk’s sweetness and submissive demeanour—all extremely covetable. Unless…perhaps it isn’t necessarily an omega you have eyes for?”

“Just what exactly are you implying?” Yoongi knows exactly what the piece of shit is implying, he just wants to hear him say it first.

“I’m simply saying that it might not be those of the O-equation that get your blood pumping, hm?”
“Come on now, Seokjin-hyung, don’t be coy,” he hisses sarcastically. “Share with us, in your effortless wisdom, who might be the person that gets my knot throbbing with desire?”

“Hm,” Seokjin purses his lips and smirks, eyes sliding over to Namjoon. Namjoon looks at them both as if to say: “Are you fucking serious?”

“I don’t think it’s Namjoon,” Seokjin concludes finally. “Too head-strong, cocky and looks like he’s staving off a rut whenever he’s within arm’s reach of the omega pup.”

“Well, at least you have a semblance of perception, then,” Yoongi drawls, rolling his eyes. While Namjoon is pleasing to look at he has very little interest in alphas with egos two the size of Mt. Everest.

“There’s Hoseok…weaker, more submissive. Perhaps your type?” Seokjin cocks his head to the side in a manner that makes Yoongi really want to punch him. “No, I don’t think it’s him, either. You like someone with a little bit of backbone. Someone that challenges you. Someone that makes you think.”

“Which would leave…” Yoongi trails off, glaring at the beta expectantly.

“You think Yoongi is attracted to you?” Namjoon finishes, astonished.

Seokjin leans over then, and despite being used to an abundance of alphas towering over him all the time, somehow the shadow Seokjin casts has an edge of an intimidation he can’t explain. There’s a conflict of intuition and pheromones vying for dominance within him. His mind is screaming that something is off about Seokjin, but the beta pheromones are singing softly that there isn’t a thing to be concerned about.

“I don’t see why he wouldn’t be,” the beta says, voice radiating dark confidence. “The alpha has barely taken his eyes off of me since the moment we all woke up. Tell me, Yoongi-ssi, what it is about me that you find so incredibly fascinating?”

Yoongi can barely breathe. There’s an underlining power that Yoongi hadn’t sensed before. Something that may even bring alphas to their knees.

“I…” but he hesitates. For the first fucking time, he hesitates.
“You know, if you’re into betas, you have my full support,” Namjoon pipes in from the other side of Seokjin, and the fact that the other alpha—who has proven to be intelligent—hasn’t picked up on the sinister undertones convinces him that the other alpha has unwittingly fallen head-first into Seokjin’s pheromone trap without even realising it.

The situation is far more dangerous than Yoongi even realised.

Just when Seokjin opens his mouth to say something, the door bursts open, and Jeongguk comes running in, giggling and covered in sweat. The omega falls easily between Namjoon’s legs, completely obviously to the heavy ambiance.

“Yoga with Taehyung-hyung is so much fun! I wish you’d tried it with me.” The omega pouts. Yoongi watches as the malicious expression on Seokjin’s face vanishes, and he falls easily, seamlessly, back into his façade.

“Oh no, little one, I’m doing everyone a favour by not trying it,” Namjoon chuckles, placing his hands on the omega’s waist. “You leave philosophy to me and I’ll leave yoga for you to handle, hm?”

Jeongguk grins and hops up onto his feet, “Aw come one, hyung, lemme show you how to do a yoga position! Unless you wanna admit you aren’t perfect. Which definitely isn’t true, right?”

“Come ‘er, you,” Namjoon snatches Jeongguk’s wrist and pulls the shrieking omega down into his arms. Jeongguk giggles and squirms, making poor effort of trying to escape the alpha, and when Namjoon tickles his ribcage the omega releases peals of high-pitched laughter. Twisting violently, Jeongguk gets up and runs. Namjoon stands up, hot on the omega’s tail, pretending to growl in annoyance despite the grin that splits his face.

But then Namjoon trips over Seokjin’s outstretched leg—which hadn’t been outstretched a moment ago, if Yoongi remembers correctly, and Namjoon takes a nasty tumble.

The alpha goes stumbling, ankle rolling in a way it really shouldn’t, and he hits the floor so hard it can be heard from the other room. Jeongguk gasps, immediately jumping to help Namjoon, and Seokjin stands up and makes his way over to help him, too.

“Sorry about that, Namjoon-ssi,” Seokjin says, leaning over the groaning alpha. “You should’ve
watched where you were going.”

Yoongi gets up to, because it’d be a bit dickish of him to just sit there and do nothing. It’s also a little alarming that Namjoon—cocky, full-of-himself, confident Namjoon hasn’t sprung back to his feet yet and proclaimed that he’s completely fine. The others come rushing in from Zone 1 and are immediately on the defensive.

“What happened?” Taehyung asks.

“Did Namjoon trip over his ego?” Jimin jokes, it’s met with little reaction.

“His ankle…” Hoseok looks green.

The ankle in question, the very one that rolled awkwardly during the tumble, is looking particularly red—likely to swell in the next few minutes. Looking back at Jeongguk, he’s expecting the omega to look upon the injury in horror. But he isn’t. As the omega cradles Namjoon in his arms, he’s looking up—up at Seokjin standing over them, fear as cold and bone-chilling as the winter.

It’s then that Yoongi realises maybe he isn’t the only one that has noticed Seokjin’s suspicious behaviour, and the danger that it poses to them all.

Seokjin and Yoongi had to help Namjoon into Zone 1 because he simply refused to let Jeongguk carrying him, not because the omega isn’t capable (because Jeongguk very much is capable, he’s much taller than Yoongi is), but he believes omegas shouldn’t be allowed to do any heavy duty (to which Yoongi interpreted that as “My pride is wounded and I won’t add insult to injury by letting the only person who worships me carry my weight”). They ease him onto his futon and Hoseok assesses the ankle.

“Do you have any medical experience?” Jeongguk asks Hoseok anxiously, fiddling with his fingers. “Will he be okay? Has he broken his ankle?”

“I did some first-aid classes when I was training to be a social worker,” the alpha explains, gnawing on his bottom lip. There are dark rings under his eyes. It’s likely he didn’t get a wink of sleep last night. “Namjoon, give me numbers between one and ten—one being some discomfort, and ten being extreme pain—okay?”
Hoseok starts kneading into the ligaments around Namjoon’s ankle, causing the alpha to immediately groan and flinch away. “S-Seven.”

“Here?”

“Ah, ah—eight!”

“Here…?”

“Six.”

“Such a baby,” Jimin snaps. “It doesn’t look that bad.”

“Please, Jimin-hyung,” Jeongguk begs quietly. “This isn’t the time.”

For once, Jimin seems to listen to the youngest omega, as if sensing the precarious emotion in the boy’s voice, knowing that at any moment he might burst into tears. Yoongi’s surprised Jimin has in him to hold back at all. He’d pegged the omega as someone to kick an alpha when they’re down—both figuratively and literally.

“Oh fuck—don’t do that!” Namjoon curses at Hoseok.

“Sorry. I needed to know if I could rotate it at all,” the other alpha explains. “Can one of you please get me a pillow? One from the Eating Hall will do just fine.”

Jeongguk immediately bolts for Zone 4 (“Not my pillow!” Jimin yells after him) and comes back with one of the seat pillows. He hands it to Hoseok, who then places Namjoon’s ankle gently on top of it.

“How is it? It’s not fractured, is it?” Jeongguk kneels down beside Hoseok, eyes wide and fearful.

“It seems to be fractured, but not severely,” Hoseok answers gently, like he would a child. “He should refrain from walking on it for a little while.”
“How long?”

“How long before he can use his foot again?” The slight edge to Jeongguk’s tone eludes to his inner distress.

“Shouldn’t be more than a week or two, if I had to guess.”

That’s when Jeongguk keels over and sobs heavily into his cupped hands, taking them all by surprise. Taehyung squats down beside the younger omega, placing a hand on his back. “Gguk, it’s not the end of the world. He’ll survive.”

But Jeongguk isn’t crying because Namjoon’s in pain. Yoongi knows this. While his initial reaction may have been concern for the alpha, the moment Jeongguk looked up into Seokjin’s face he knew just how devastating the consequences will be now that Namjoon’s disadvantaged. The fight over the omegas is less than three days away, and any hope that the injury might be healed before then was shot down with Hoseok’s diagnosis. In other words, unless Hoseok and Seokjin play into expectations and make favourable choices—Jimin and Taehyung—Jeongguk could be in very real danger. Yoongi isn’t even sure if Hoseok and Seokjin will choose Jimin and Taehyung. He’s seen them interact. He’s seen them smile and laugh with each other, but there’s no guarantee things will go that way. Namjoon and Jeongguk were the only couple Yoongi would’ve placed all his bets on to succeed, and he’s sure the others assumed this, too—until Namjoon got injured. Now…

Now Yoongi isn’t too sure.

“Jeongguk…” it’s the first time Yoongi has heard Namjoon call the omega by his name. Looking up, the omega in question reveals his puffy, red face and glistening tear tracks. “We’ll be fine. I promise.”

_I won’t let anyone else claim you_, Namjoon implies in his tone, unwilling to let the true concern slip through the cracks. Jeongguk crawls over to him and Namjoon unflinchingly pulls him against his chest. Crying softly into Namjoon’s chest, it’s as if Jeongguk and Namjoon no longer notice that the rest of them are all there, like they’ve slipped into their own little bubble of insecurity and the rest of them are nothing more than voyeurs to their anguish.
“Oh you’ve got to be kidding me,” Jimin rolls his eyes and turns to stride away. “It’s only a rolled ankle. God forbid the alpha catches a cold.”

The rest of them scatter like flies, unwilling to awkwardly linger as an extra witness to the intimacy. Jimin scoops up the deck of cards that are in the corner and starts shuffling them. “Oi, Yoongi. Get over here. Let’s have a game of blackjack.”

“Fine.”

It’s either the game or going back to reading his semi-engaging classist history book. He’s thinking maybe he could save it for before bedtime. The time after dinner is perhaps the least productive time of the day for everybody. For the most part they either spend their time getting ready for bed, brushing their teeth and cleaning their faces, or just lounging around the futons talking about having a purpose in the universe. It’s the perfect time to do more reading. For now, he figures he’ll humour Jimin for a little while (even if he’s rude), and hopefully leave everyone else alone. The last thing any of them need is another person bursting into tears because Jimin hurt their feelings. Again.

They sit cross-legged opposite each other, and Hoseok decides to watch because he has nothing better to do. Seokjin and Taehyung go to Zone 4 for—what he assumes is some privacy—but exactly what would warrant the need for privacy has yet to be known. They can only hope Seokjin doesn’t lynch Taehyung and hide his body in one of the shoots for them to discover at dinner time.

“Wanna make things a little more interesting?” Jimin asks, wiggling his eyebrows as he cards the deck between his hands.

“How?” Yoongi asks, disinterested.

“You and me. Closest to 21 gets a piece of tonight’s dinner rations.”

“Jimin…” Fear riddles Hoseok’s expression. “You’ll be punished—you don’t fuck with the food. The rules were clear on that.”

“We won’t get in trouble. I didn’t say winner takes all rations. Just the best part.”
“Which part?” Interest piqued, he leans forward on his elbows.

A smirk quirks the edge of Jimin’s lip. “Whatever the winner wants.”

“This is madness,” Hoseok continues to protest.

“You want in?” the omega dares the younger alpha.

“Absolutely not.” He crosses his arms over his chest stubbornly. “You think I’m gonna risk being tortured again? I’ll have nightmares for years after what happened.”

“But Hoseok, my dear, sweet, naïve little alpha, it’s ‘punishment by random selection’. They clearly didn’t leave that much of an impression if you’ve completely forgotten the message already.” Jimin deals them two cards each and Hoseok bites down hard on his bottom lip.

“What if they choose me? I don’t think I could go through that all over again. I’d rather die.”

“Hoseok, calm down,” Jimin says, suddenly seriously. “No one’s going to get punished. We’re swapping food. It’s not against the rules. The rules only state they we aren’t allowed to give food to those who haven’t been given any at all. Everyone will still get to eat, the stakes of the game have risen slightly so it’s more entertaining—everyone’s a winner.”

“I still don’t think you should give them a reason…”

“Hoseok,” Yoongi cuts in, “If you’re so against us betting you don’t have to stay and watch us.”

“I—” the younger huffs, pulling a face as though he just swallowed a lemon. Despite his morals it’s clear the other alpha would rather stay out of some morbid curiosity.

Yoongi checks his cards, then meets Jimin’s gaze. “Hit me.”
I just wanna say that I'm actually aware that the alpha/beta thing has been scientifically disproven in wild wolf packs, but for the sake of this a/b/o universe let's say the wolves they're loosely decedant from do practice those dynamics.
Day 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Day 5

Dinner had suspiciously blown over without a hitch. As Jimin had begrudgingly shovelled his mashed potatoes onto Yoongi’s tray, Hoseok had sat in stiff panic as he waited for the inevitable sleeping gas to come filtering in through the ventilation shafts. But the gas never came. Then he began to suspect the food. Knowing that they’d gambled in advance they must’ve drugged the food and soon they’d all start dropping like flies. But that didn’t happen either. Jimin continued to sulk in a corner while Yoongi reaped the rewards of his victory over pseudo-blackjack (because whatever they were playing was a completely dumbed-down version of the actual game played in casinos). Seokjin talked about how working in a high-paying position at one of Korea’s most reputable companies isn’t as a good as it’s cracked up to be, and that the money earnt is hardly worth the fifteen-hours you spend a day sitting at your desk. Namjoon had disputed this, saying that alphas have a duty to suffer to support their families, to which Seokjin had politely reminded him that he’s a beta and doesn’t have a family to support (discounting his parents, who have enough money to feed the next ten generations of their dynasty).

Hoseok had eaten his food. They’d given him specific instructions to act out, so that he could be punished first, and thus garner the least amount of scrutiny from the other subjects. He hadn’t wanted to do it—these people don’t see them as anything more than lab rats, and they wouldn’t hesitate to put a needle in his neck if he ever let slip what’s going on.

So, he’d done as he’d been told, like a good dog, and they’d tortured him for it. They needed to eliminate any distrust the other subjects had for him and, at the same time, send them a clear message: Don’t fuck around. If you break the rules there will be consequences. If you do anything detrimental to the experiment, you’ll be tortured for it. The others, so far, have done remarkably well all things considered. But he knows it’s only a matter of time before it all turns to shit. People aren’t meant to be held in captivity. Intelligent life can’t function under the thumb of a tangible force. They hadn’t held back, either. Even being an informant for these psychos, there was no mercy. And, to be honest, he hadn’t expected any.

Hoseok has been waiting for hours now in the dark, waiting for the others to go to sleep. Taehyung has been growing progressively more restless each time the lights go out. Even from where he lies in the middle of the group, he can hear the omega tossing and turning from one end of the room. Whimpering in his sleep, kicking and jerking awake every so often and muttering incoherent babble under his breath. For the most part, Taehyung has kept himself together during the day, perhaps to not cause a panic from the other subjects, but pretty soon his illness will start to take hold. When that happens, all bets are off.
He can’t, however, go to Zone 4 to talk to the male alpha scientist waiting for him behind the farthest shoot to the right. Not because of Taehyung, but because of a certain alpha and omega who’ve been whispering quietly to one another since Jimin started to snore. To the others, they’re barely audible, but because he’s “sleeping” right next to Namjoon, he can hear everything.

For the past five minutes there hasn’t been much talk, but Jeongguk fills the silences by humming a sweet tune under his breath, quiet and sad and full of so much anguish. Eventually, the lullaby comes to a slow and solemn end.

“You have such a beautiful voice,” Namjoon praises adoringly. “You could sing to me everyday and I’d never grow bored of your lovely voice.”

There is no immediate reply from the youngest omega, but Hoseok can hear shifting of blankets, as if he’s sitting up or squirming closer to Namjoon.

“I’m scared, hyung,” Jeongguk says for the third time that night, voice quivering in the darkness. “The fight is less than three days away. You’re not going to be able to fight—not with how your ankle is…”

“It’s fine, little one,” comes Namjoon’s deep baritone. “I told you. I’m not going to let anyone pick you. You have nothing to worry about. Hoseok will choose Jimin, Seokjin will choose Taehyung, and Yoongi doesn’t want to participate so you’ll be mine by default. Everything will work out. I promise.”

The amount of confidence Namjoon exudes is almost impressive, considering he’s all but incapacitated and unable to assert his dominance over the rest of the subjects. If he weren’t handicapped, he had every advantage of winning. Though, that’s mostly because Yoongi wouldn’t be fighting. If Yoongi were to step up and fight Namjoon in prime condition it would’ve been a little more entertaining.

They’d given him a rundown of every subject before they’d stuffed a cloth doused with chloroform over his face and knocked him out. Each subject and their backstories were fairly easy (and rather fascinating, if you take out the drugging and kidnapping) to follow. Jimin’s the classic case of a foster-home bouncer baby that had one too many touchy foster fathers, Taehyung is the deadbeat slave to his mental illness that has everything to lose, Jeongguk is the broken doll and product of a corrupt industry, and Namjoon’s was bullied so badly it messed with his self-esteem. The only two subjects the recruiters were very hush-hush over were Seokjin and Yoongi. The most they gave about Yoongi was that he’s a university drop-out that did drug-dealing on the side, and used to be a national taekwondo champion from ages 16-18. Never judge a book by its cover is the most
applicable to this situation, because when he first saw Yoongi, he thought Yoongi was Namjoon.

Compared to every other subject, the rundown on Seokjin was the briefest. He’s a businessman who works in Seocho—that’s it. That’s all that was said about him. Hoseok didn’t ask questions.

“It w-won’t,” Jeongguk cries softly. “I have the worst feeling something’s going to go wrong. I can feel it. You have to trust me on this. Omegas have a good sense for these kinds of things.”

“What are you afraid of?” the alpha asks, just as softly.

The question is met with stubborn silence.

“Who are you afraid of?”

“He’s going to take me away from you. He wants to, I can see it—I can see it in his eyes. He wants you to suffer, hyung. He wants to see us both suffer.”

“I don’t understand. Who? Who are you so afraid of?”

Hoseok holds his breath. Has Jeongguk found out something? Is he suspicious of him? He’s been purposely avoiding the youngest omega because they’d warned him. They said he’s more perceptible than he seems. Understandably. Since he was a child he’s been hurt by others. Probably developed the nose for danger. Like a bloodhound. But he’s been so careful this far. He waits hours before going to talk to the male alpha scientist. He hisses their names to make sure they’re actually asleep, tiptoes instead of walks—he even goes through Zone 2 and 3 to get to Zone 4, just in case someone is still awake and assumes he’s just gone to the toilet.

He can feel his heart racing. Blood spiking.

They said if any of the subjects even so much as suspect him they’ll ruin his fucking life. Oh please God don’t tell him the omega knows.

“I shouldn’t say…”
“Little one, if there’s a threat I need to know about it.”

What exactly does Namjoon intend to do if he’s made aware of a threat, though? He has become infinitely less intimidating now that his ankle is broken. He can’t even go to the bathroom or take a shower without having to hobble on his good leg. The alpha no longer poses any sort of danger to them anymore.

“What can I do to make it better?” Namjoon continues when Jeongguk refuses to speak. It’s likely the omega is thinking along the same lines as he is, but refuses to say anything that might hurt the alpha’s ego.

“There’s…there’s one thing we could do.” The omega sounds so quiet, so hesitant—more so than usual, like he’s about to say something blasphemous and doesn’t want to be heard.

“What is it? I’m up for anything at this point.”

“We could…we could claim ea-each other,” Jeongguk whispers so softly that Hoseok almost doesn’t catch it.

He slaps a hand over his mouth to stifle a gasp.

“Gguk,” Namjoon sighs disappointedly, upset that he even suggested such a thing. “There are so many reasons why we can’t do that. First off—it’s illegal, and it’s illegal for good reasons.”

Claiming a person with a mating mark has been outlawed for over sixty years in South Korea. There are still some obscure cultures in isolated parts of the world that practice the ritual, but in most modern cultures there are strict laws governing its use. Back before marriage and divorce were more acceptable means of validating bonds between two people in love, claiming was a much more prevalent concept. It involves two people biting into the flesh of each other’s necks where their scent markers are, and has to be done simultaneously for it work effectively. Once claimed, their pheromones cease to be alluring to outsiders and they become all but de-sexualised and undesirable (scent-wise, physically they remain the same except for the scars). The appeal of claiming a partner was due to hyper-romanticisation in mainstream media. Claimed partners essentially have to live off each other’s energies, and can’t be apart for long periods of time without feeling drained or anxious. If one is in pain, the other feels it too, no matter where they are in the world. The downsides to this are obvious. You can still fall out of love with the person you are bonded with. You can still be abusive to them, even if it’s a detriment to yourself. But unlike
marriage, a mating mark is irreversible.

If your bonded partner dies, you die, too.

Many cases started to spring up about omegas stuck in destructive relationships with their alphas, or of omegas using their pheromones to make alphas do things—like pay for expensive vacations or clothes or cars. In some extreme cases, people would kill themselves in a final act of “love”, preferring that they die together than for their relationship to fall apart.

Mating marks have all the makings of a disaster.

Which is why it shouldn’t come as much of a surprise that Jeongguk suggested it in the first place.

“Illegal?” Jeongguk echoes sadly. “What does it matter, hyung? It’s illegal to drug and kidnap people, but our captors did it anyway. It’s illegal to force people to have sex, but they’ll do it anyway. How can anything illegal even apply to our circumstances, hyung? We’re screwed either way.”

“Gguk, if we ever get out of here, we’ll have to be with each other for the rest of our lives.”

There’s a pause, and then Jeongguk murmurs, a little hurt, “Is that really so bad?”

“We’ve only known each other for four days.”

“And every day feels like a lifetime—why does time have any say over what we have? I can’t remember the last time an alpha ever made me feel the way you make me feel. I can’t maintain normal relationships with alphas because I’m so fucked up—so, so fucked up in the head. I’m not normal hyung, I’m sick. But you don’t care. You don’t care because you’re like me—you’ve been hurt before—burned before. And if—” Jeongguk attempts to muffle a sob “—if someone takes me away from you, I don’t know what I’ll do. I don’t want anyone else in here or out there, no one but you.”

“Jeongguk—”
“Tell me you don’t feel the same. Tell me and I won’t mention mating marks or anything ever again I promise—I’ll accept whoever chooses me—Hoseok or Seokjin or Yoongi—I don’t care. But first I need you to tell me—”

Abruptly, Jeongguk’s emotional confession is cut off, and from the sounds of it—Namjoon must be kissing him. Quiet whimpers and heated moans fill the void of space and oh fuck he hopes they don’t start fucking right next to him. He’s supposed to talk to the male alpha scientist before he goes to sleep. If they start having sex right here and now Hoseok may not be able to sneak away at all.

Then, he hears the distinct smack of their lips separating, and Namjoon says, “Okay. Fuck it—let’s do it. I’m not letting anyone take you. It’s better to be safe than sorry.”

“Not here,” the omega gasps, “Zone 4. No one will hear us in there. Here—lemme help you up.”

“No, I’m fine—I can manage—”

“Alpha, just let me help you.”

Hoseok can hear Namjoon gulping they’re so close. “Okay…”

Stunned that the two are even going through with this, he doesn’t so much as breathe before Namjoon and Jeongguk have hobbled out of the room—going through the bathroom door. It really shouldn’t come as a surprise, and yet it does. He expected this kind of irrationality from Jeongguk, but Namjoon, too? Claiming someone is a serious matter. What the hell are they even thinking, going off to seal their eternities away? They’re strangers to each other. They’ve never even crossed paths before—ever. Namjoon grew up in Ilsan. Jeongguk grew up in Busan. Namjoon was studying at Seoul National University. After Jeongguk ran away to live with his grandparents he never set foot back in Seoul ever again. This is insanity it’s—it’s—

Exactly what two people who’ve lost their grips on reality might do.

This box—this prison, it’s driving them to do irrational things. This is exactly what the scientists want out of this experiment—results. They encourage this sort of dumb behaviour.

When it’s quiet again, and there’s nothing but gentle breathing and snores to fill the silence,
Hoseok slips away. Seeing as he can’t go through Zone 3 now, he has to risk going directly to Zone 4, slinking through a small crack in the door and shutting it soundlessly. It’s impossible to hear what’s happening in Zone 3, the entire room is soundproof. Mostly so that the rest of them can eat, shit and sleep without awkwardly having to go about their day listening to other people fuck like animals. He navigates his way towards the farthest shoot to the right—where they take the stack of dirty trays, utensils and bowls when they’re done using them. It just so happens to be where he eats every day. He doesn’t think this design choice was a coincidence.

Calmly, he kneels down on his pillow, reaches out to feel where the cool, stainless steel shoot is, and then lightly taps his knuckles against it. Two taps—pause—three taps—pause—two taps.

The door opens very suddenly, flooding him with blinding light. Always blinding light. Hoseok was never told the name of the person he’s supposed to report to, he’s only ever referred to him as the ‘male alpha scientist’, because that’s all he knows about him. His voice is masculine, his scent is alpha, and he knows he must be a scientist of some sort because he notes down all his observations. He can’t see the man’s face. It’s behind a screen. All he can see is a silhouette of a face and body holding something—a clipboard, perhaps?

“Name.” The voice intones flatly, professionally. He hears the click of a pen.

“Jung Hoseok.”

“International age.”

“24.”

“Mother’s name.”

“Jung Minah.”

“Father’s name.”

“Jung Beomjun.”
“What do you have to report on Thursday, April 25th.”

“Subject Omega 2 is starting to slowly lose his grip on his sanity, night terrors are becoming more frequent and profound.” Hoseok pauses, waiting for the man to stop writing, before he continues, “Subject Alpha 1 has fractured his ankle and may need a brace or some bandages.”

“Can the subject put pressure on their foot?”

“No.”

The pen clicks again. More writing. “How are you feeling at this moment? Have you noticed any changes to your mood or mannerisms?”

“Not from what I can tell, no.”

“Appetite?”

“Less so, no thanks to you.”

“Sleeping habits?”

“I’d be sleeping just fine if I didn’t have to stay up to talk to you every night.”

“Anything else?”

Hoseok hesitates, and then swallows down his fear. “As we speak, Subject Alpha 1 and Subject Omega 3 are going to try and claim each other.”

The man pauses. “I see.”

More writing.
“Subject Omega 1 and Subject Alpha 2 also made bets during blackjack—”

“We know. Anything else?”

“About Seokjin—”

“What about Subject Beta 1?”

“I was just wondering—”

“You do not have permission to inquire anything to do with Subject Beta 1. Do you have anything else to report?”

“Well, no—” the door slides shut and he is once again shrouded in darkness.

He sighs. This happens every time. He has to prove to them that his memory is still in check—that he knows his age, his name, and the names of his parents, and then he reports briefly on what’s been happening, if there have been any changes to his behaviour, and if there have been any dramatic shifts in the group dynamic. So far, there hasn’t been much going on. But from what he can gauge, they’re expecting something of significance to happen—perhaps when the time finally comes for them to fight.

Personally, the event doesn’t loom over him as much as it does everybody else. He isn’t a fighter—he knows this, and he came to terms with this fact a long time ago. Whatever happens he’ll likely be stuck with whoever is left, and that’s that.

A tiny part of him does hope it will be Jimin, though.

It’s been a bit of a dirty secret of his—to get sexually turned on by dominatrix omegas with attitudes as sharp as steel and tongues to match. It isn’t something he’s exactly proud of, because people keep telling him that alphas shouldn’t like that in omegas, but he just can’t help himself. Every time something filthy leaves that omega’s mouth a thrill goes down his spine. It makes him think of what he’s like in the bedroom. Supposedly, from what he’s been told, he’s prominent in the underground BDSM scene—specifically a sub-community of alphas and omegas that enjoy
extreme role-reversals. They didn’t go into any more details than just that, but sometimes, while he’s waiting for everyone to fall asleep, he likes to ponder the specifics. Does Jimin like to choke alphas? Tie them up? Spank them?

Hoseok licks his lips. Second guessing at the door to Zone 1, the need to be naughty tickles just a little bit. He imagines walking over to the door to Zone 3 and opening it just a little—just to hear them panting and moaning. Namjoon and Jeongguk are very attractive people. It wouldn’t be so hard to beat himself off to them. In fact, it’d be only too easy. He could clean himself up while they’re recovering from their mating marks and they’d be none the wiser.

But no—no it’s too wrong. He should get some sleep. It’ll only be a few hours before the lights come back on. It isn’t worth these last few hours of precious darkness.

So he goes back to Zone 1, slides into underneath his blanket, and falls asleep to the sickening fantasy of Jimin riding his knot and calling him a filthy whore.

The next time Hoseok wakes up, it’s to a cacophony of madness. Granted, as the days wear on he’s becoming increasingly used to the light emitting from every surface of Zone 1, but it still surprises him that he’s awakened by panicked voices as opposed to the usual disturbance.

“Three people—three people just—gone—disappeared into thin air and you’re saying you didn’t see or hear anything?” comes Jimin’s high-pitched shrill from somewhere in the room. It’s hard to tell when it bounces off all four corners.

“Why the fuck do you think I had anything to do with their disappearance? Where the fuck do think I’m hiding them, in my ass? We looked everywhere and they’re not here. They were probably taken because you wanted to raise the stakes for your stupid card game,” Yoongi snaps with less volume and more bite.

Jimin gasps. “How dare you put all the blame on me! You’re the one who agreed to gamble!”

“Guys, guys—quit fighting. Yelling at each other isn’t going to achieve anything,” the beta butts in.
It’s at this time Hoseok decides to fully wake up and find out what’s going on. He sits up, skin still a little sensitive and sore, and leans against the wall. Jimin, Yoongi and Seokjin are all out of bed, the former two looking about ready to tear each other’s faces off, and the beta is standing in between them to stop it from happening.

“What’s…what’s wrong, guys?” he finally garners the courage to speak up, even with the tension lingering heavily in the air.

Under Jimin’s intense gaze all Hoseok wants to do is coil up. A warmth pools in his gut just from a simple look from the omega, and it’s a little pathetic how easily he’s swayed by him. “Have you seen them?”

The omega strides forward, nostrils flared. Hoseok blinks tiredly. “Seen who?”

“Oh you know, one’s about yea high, always jacking off all over the damn place because the sound of his own name makes him horny—”


“Other two are omegas—one’s a basket case and the other is so thirsty for knots he probably keeps a silicone version under his bed—”

“What Jimin is trying to say is that as of this morning, Taehyung, Jeongguk and Namjoon are missing.” Yoongi steps forward, having slipped back into a mask of composure. “None of us saw or heard anything last night, but there’s a substantial amount of blood that we found in Zone 4—in Jeongguk’s nest. You wouldn’t happen to know anything about that, would you?”

Eyes flickering nervously from face to face, all staring down at him, wanting answers. Hoseok gulps and shakes his head. “N-No, nothing.”

“Hoseok,” Yoongi steps closer, looking a little deadlier. “If there’s something you’re not telling us —”

“He said he didn’t see anything,” Jimin jumps to his defence with a roll of his eyes. “Do you have
to be so fucking serious all the time? It’s not a big deal. Wherever they are they’ll be back in a day at the most—that’s how long Hoseok was gone.”

“This is a very big deal,” Seokjin speaks up. “If we are to assume these punishments are psychological—which I have reason to believe they are—then whatever plans they have for them could have lasting consequences. Taehyung’s mental state has been slipping since the moment he awoke. Whatever they do to him could rapidly deteriorate his grasp on reality.”

“Well, what can we do about it?” the omega throws his hands up in the air to emphasise their situation. “Riot? Go on a food strike? Break every single rule? What the fuck do you wanna do, Mr. Self-Righteous? We have no power here. No means of escape. We don’t even know what our captors look like. The most we can do is wait for them to return—which they will, and we know they’ll be back before the week is up because how can you tough, rugged alphas fight over us dainty little baby factories if you’re missing an alpha and two omegas?”

“It still doesn’t make sense why they would take three instead of two. We were the only ones who gambled so therefore two people should’ve been punished—right?” Yoongi crosses his arms over his chest, expression contemplative. “Maybe it’s determined by the amount of rules broken.”

Snorting, Jimin says, “Then only one person would’ve been taken, idiot.”

“Not unless we inadvertently broke more than one rule.”

“Maybe there isn’t logic to it at all,” Seokjin suggests. “They never said one broken rule equals one person punished. Maybe if a rule is broken, they determine how many get to be punished at a time. It could be just out of convenience to further their own agendas, and trying to apply logic is useless.”

Pacing, Yoongi thinks aloud, “Why the blood in Zone 3... Was there a struggle? But then—why would any of them be in Zone 3 to begin with. Unless we were wrong and the access point isn’t in Zone 2? That wouldn’t make sense—they wouldn’t have left Hoseok there otherwise. Maybe something happened last night while we were all sleeping.”

“I bet Romeo and Juliet were fucking.”

“Jimin-ssi,” Seokjin chides.
“They could’ve been,” Yoongi agrees. “Maybe Taehyung walked in on them and they had an argument—or a fight.”

“Maybe Taehyung was watching them do it and got caught,” the omega says excitedly. “Haven’t you noticed how weirdly obsessive he is over Jeongguk? I bet he wanted to watch his idol getting fucked and when he got caught Namjoon tried to kill him. That’s when they were taken. ‘Cuz you know…they obviously don’t want us killing each other.”

“The blood was found inside the nest, though,” Yoongi points out. “Not anywhere else.”

Hoseok keeps his lips sealed the entire time, not wanting to give away the fact that he knew exactly what happened—or at least has a better understanding of what happened than the rest of them. Namjoon and Jeongguk mated and claimed each other before it could be determined at the end of the week, directly violating the original plan. Taehyung was likely taken to have individual experiments conducted on him, to assess his current mental state and to see what triggers could enhance or slow the progression. Hoseok doesn’t know exactly what they’d do with Jeongguk and Namjoon, but whatever it is, it’s not going to be pretty.

The gambling may also be an ample excuse, but Hoseok knows that the ‘random selection’ isn’t as random as it may appear. The scientists will take whoever they damn well please for whatever reason. To conduct more thorough analysis on them, to torture them, to break them down completely until they’re completely reliant. Train them to be less like wolves and more like dogs.

“Maybe Namjoon-ssi was hurting Jeongguk-ssi,” Seokjin says with morbid concern. “It’s possible Namjoon-ssi couldn’t stand the thought of someone else taking Jeongguk-ssi from him, so he decided to act before it was time to fight. Jeongguk-ssi didn’t want anyone to get punished and Namjoon-ssi was so enraged at being rejected that he raped Jeongguk-ssi anyway. Taehyung might’ve tried to intervene and that’s when they were all taken.”

This surprises Hoseok so much that he’s speechless. How could Seokjin even suggest something so abhorrent and unforgivable? Admittedly, he doesn’t know much about Namjoon and what he is truly capable of, but to suggest that he’d rape Jeongguk—someone he has shown clear affection for, is just absurd!

“I’m not going to suggest the alpha is above doing that,” Jimin pipes in. “But for whatever reason I bet it was consensual. I mean, have you not seen how that knot-slut is all over Namjoon all hours of the day? Probably bent over and took it and maybe Namjoon got rough and Taehyung thought it was rape.”
“A little bold of you to jump to the conclusion of rape, Seokjin,” says Yoongi, side-eying the beta. “As we all know, Namjoon hasn’t given us any reason to believe he is a rapist, or that he’d ever take advantage of Jeongguk.”

Seokjin smiles thinly. “Don’t assume to know anybody here, Yoongi-ssi. We’re all still strangers, after all.”

“Are we?” Yoongi cocks his head to the side. “Almost been five days. All we’ve done is talk and interact to fill our time. Tell me, how long does it take until you consider someone more than a stranger?”

“More than five days, certainly.”

Yoongi doesn’t look even slightly convinced. Eyes jumping from the alpha to the beta, Hoseok picks up a strange tension between the two of them that he hadn’t even noticed initially. Before anything more can be said, the Mystery Box’s light flashes on. Jimin marches over to it. Inside are their vitamins—as always—and to Jimin’s disgust and everyone’s surprise, porn magazines. Oldish ones, from the looks of it, straight out of the 80’s. The omega immediately drops them on the floor.

Given Jimin’s sexually-depraved background, Hoseok is a little surprised at his disgust. Well, that is, until he takes a closer look at the magazines.

On the front of the first magazine is a skinny young man with a lace scrunchy wrapped around his wrists and his tiny dick bulging from beneath his fluffy underwear, and the captions reads: “Progressive Omegas: How to Put Them in Their Place!”, “Naughty Omegas Deserve a Spanking” and “Ball gags—Because No One Wants to Hear Omegas Talk!”

It’s funny how aggressively demeaning the first magazine is. Hoseok wasn’t born in the 80’s, so he doesn’t exactly have personal experience on the topic of porn in that era, but it’s as if the front cover of the magazine is directly mocking Jimin and his sexuality. As if reminding him of the omnipresent burden of his second-sex. They aren’t all targeted at omegas, though. Sifting through them, there is one specifically about betas, three about alphas (one portraying alphas as hyper-masculine, one showcasing female alphas and one portraying alphas as submissive) and the last two are again, sexualising omegas. Hoseok takes the one about submissive alphas and hands the pile over to Seokjin. The eldest looks at the magazine in Hoseok’s hand, then looks at him with a raised eyebrow.

He has the decency to blush before tucking it under his arm. It’s easier to hide his sexuality in the comfort of his own apartment, but here, sharing a space with all these people, he just has to come
to terms with the fact that privacy is a thing of the past.

Seokjin just rolls his eyes and takes one of the omega porn magazines and shoves it in Yoongi’s direction. Without breaking eye-contact with Seokjin, Yoongi removes the beta porn from the pile, as if to tell the other something. Is Yoongi attracted to Seokjin? Is he getting that right? God, he’s so fucking confused.

“So this is really what you’re into, huh?” His heart almost leaps out of his throat when Jimin squats down next to him. Without any time to react, the omega snatches the magazine from his arms and gives it a serious look. “You like being dominated by omegas?”

Hoseok’s audible gulp seems to confirm it.

“What kind of things are you into, specifically?”

“J-Jimin, this is hardly the time—”

“Hoseok,” Jimin says sharply, lacking any use of honorifics whatsoever (but this is normal for him). “There’s a very real chance we won’t make it out of here before the week is up. We might have to fuck. We might have to breed. I need to know I’m making the right decision in choosing you.”

“But, aren’t alphas supposed to choose?” he asks dumbly.

Smirking, Jimin pinches his cheek. Hoseok grimaces. “It’s cute that you think that, but no. I’m not just going to sit around and let some dumb alpha make life-altering decisions on my behalf. I’ll choose who I damn well please.”

“Oh.” Okay then.

Why is he surprised again?

“Now, what are you into. Don’t spare any details, because if I find out you have some dirty-ass kink like golden shower I swear to fucking Satan—”
“No, no, nothing like that,” he waves his hands around. “I swear it’s nothing like that. I—I’m into asphyxiation, and being called names, a-and being pinned down.”

“Uh-huh. Never tried choking someone before, but I could get behind that—anything else?”

Hoseok’s mouth goes dry. “Flogging, having things in my mouth…”

Smiling, Jimin says, “I think we’re pretty compatible then. Though it is kinda weird how kinky you are, considering you’re a social worker that works with kids.”

He splutters, face going red. “I—I keep my work and my personal life separate thank you very much!”

Jimin smirks. “Well I’d fucking hope so—oh, lose the pout. I was only joking.”

“It wasn’t funny.”

“Jesus, does no one have a sense of humour around here? Anyways, come on—lose the magazine for now. You can go beat off later. I wanna play a game.” Jimin tugs at his hand and Hoseok snatches it away.

“I’m not gambling with you,” he says firmly.

“I wasn’t going to suggest blackjack. Let’s just play a game of Go-Fish. Is that PG enough for you? Or would you rather we played Old Maid?”

“Go-Fish is fine,” he sighs.

“Good, good.”

Just as Jimin picks up the deck of cards the alarm goes off to indicate breakfast is ready. Jimin gets
so startled he ends up spilling the cards all over the floor.

“Oh for fuck’s sake.” He kicks some cards under a futon and marches away. “We’ll play after breakfast, then.”

Breakfast is a little strange when they’re missing three of their members. Yoongi, once he receives his tray, politely asks if they can switch seats. Unwilling to piss the alpha off, he agrees, and then Jimin, finding his lonely corner at the other end of the hall distasteful, picks up his tray and settles himself down in Namjoon’s place. It’s a change that Hoseok doesn’t entirely mind.

“So, what’s it like being a social worker? Not really a common job for an alpha to have,” Jimin brings up casually. Hoseok can feel his ears turn hot.

“I love working with children. There’s nothing more rewarding than finding a loving home for an orphan who’s convinced the world has turned its back on them.”

There’s also the corruption and the lies and the conspiracies his agency have a penchant for delving their feet into, but he feels it best to neglect this detail.

“Do you want children someday?” Jimin asks before shovelling a spoonful of cereal into his mouth.

“Of course! I don’t think I could ever imagine a future without kids in my life, though I always thought I’d maybe adopt children. There are so many children in need of loving parents, it just wouldn’t be right of me to do things the conventional way.” Despite all the love and energy his agency had sucked straight from his soul, Hoseok is still filled with so much passion when talking about the kids.

“Yes, I can tell you’re an alpha who doesn’t walk on the conventional side of things,” Jimin says slyly. “Shame these monsters are taking away your right to choose, I think you would’ve been a good foster father.”

Hoseok smiles weakly. Yes, these people did take away their rights to choose. It cuts him to the bone how he’s forced to go behind their backs to further the agenda of their captors. If he had it his way he would be just as oblivious and as in the dark as the rest of them, but sadly things didn’t exactly pan out that way.
“You know, you never did tell us about what happened when they took you,” Jimin continues. “You came to after the sleeping gas wore off and then what? What did you see? Who did you see?”

“I’d rather not talk about it,” he avoids quickly.

“I think you should,” Yoongi joins the conversation. “It’ll give us an idea of what we might face if we ever get punished—it might give us an idea of what may be happening to the others as we speak. You owe it to us to share your experience.”

“I don’t owe you anything,” he retorts in a rather pathetic voice.

“Hoseok,” Yoongi says in that voice again, and he immediately crumbles.

“Okay, okay—I woke up strapped to a chair, okay? They had me blindfolded and I couldn’t see anything, but they kept shoving food in my facing and forcing me to eat. If I ever stopped or refused they’d shock me. Pretty soon my jaw hurt so much I couldn’t chew anymore—so they…” he makes a face, looking down at his breakfast as though it’s to blame for his hardships. “They shoved a tube down my throat and funnelled processed food and liquid through it.”

Jimin’s expression crumples in disgust. “That’s fucking vulgar.”

“I felt like I was going to die,” he confesses honestly. “There was nothing I could say to dissuade them. I thought they weren’t going to stop. That they were just going to continue until my stomach burst.”

Seokjin shifts in his seat, and says, “We need to stop giving our kidnappers excuses to punish us. When the other three return we’re going to have a serious talk about the rules.”

“Do you seriously think that being obedient is going to change anything?” Jimin growls. “It’s like you said, the people who took us may not need a fucking reason. They can do whatever the hell they please with us, whether we follow the rules or not.”

“I’m simply purposing we minimize the risks. I can’t guarantee it will work, but the ‘punishment by random selection’ part leads me to believe they’re trying to turn us against each other. It’s easy to point the finger at someone else instead of focusing on the main perpetrator. We aren’t the enemies, they are.”
Hoseok frowns down at his bowl of cereal. For someone who supposedly has no insight on what’s going on outside this prison, Seokjin jumps to pretty accurate assumptions and conclusion. Maybe it’s just Seokjin’s academic background that’s doing most of the talking. It’s clear he’s a very cultured and intelligent beta, with a lot of fortunate prospects lined up in his future. Why he was chosen is still a mystery to him, though. If what the beta says is to be believed, then he must be a very prominent, well-respected figure at his father’s law firm. The money he’s receiving annually is an easy seven-figure salary. So why would the agency target Seokjin specifically? While everyone else has loved ones that’ll notice their absence, Seokjin’s disappearance could have the potential to make national headlines across the country. Why risk it? If his father has private investigators sniffing out every crevice of the capital, why would he be worth the effort at all? There’s nothing distinct about him other than his family name.

Namjoon, Jeongguk and Taehyung don’t return that night.

Jimin tucks his pillow under his arm and whips his blanket over his shoulder and tells Seokjin that they’re swapping futons. The beta doesn’t seem pleased with the idea, until Jimin mentions that he’ll be sleeping next to Taehyung.

“That’s what you’d prefer anyway, right? I’m sure Taehyung’ll feel a lot safer with you sleeping next to him.”

Making no further protests, they swap beds. While Hoseok doesn’t announce it to anyone, he’s secretly pleased with this arrangement, too. He likes how self-assured and confident Jimin is in his decision-making. He never seems to hesitate or falter, a steady presence, a boulder keeping things grounded. Hoseok lies on his back with his blanket tucked underneath his armpits, and Jimin lies on his side facing him, propped up on an elbow. Yoongi remains in his little corner, a book relaxed in one hand. The alpha makes no attempts to occupy the spaces of their two missing brethren.

“You know, since we met you haven’t asked any questions about me,” Jimin observes curiously.

Sniffing, he gazes up at the ceiling. “Really? Well then, tell me a little about yourself.”

Jimin smacks him in the arm and he flinches. “What?”

“You’re supposed to ask me questions. It makes the conversation more interesting.”
He chuckles. The omega jabs him in the ribs and he squeaks. “Okay, okay. Sorry. What were your parents like?”

“I never met my parents,” Jimin fluffs his pillow to get more comfortable, “they died when I was a few years old. My aunts didn’t want me and my grandparents were dead, so I was raised by foster families.”

“I’m sorry.”

The beautiful omega waves it away with a shake of his head. “Don’t be. It’s sadder to lose parents you knew than parents you didn’t. You know, I find it pretty cool that you’re a social worker. From memory they were the only people who ever showed me any kindness. Except—no offense—they were all omegas and betas.”

Chuckles, Hoseok murmurs, “None taken. I’m the only alpha social worker in my agency. They usually sent me to handle children in the care of bitter divorcees. They thought the alpha fathers would be less likely to get violent towards a fellow alpha.”

“And did it work?” Jimin asks doubtfully.

“No,” Hoseok chuckles softly, “it didn’t. I’d keep coming home with bruises and my parents kept telling me to go back to university to get a better job. But I couldn’t.”

“Because you love your job?”

“Yeah. I wouldn’t be able to sleep at night knowing there’s a kid out there that needs a home. What about you? Do you have a job?”

Jimin makes a face. “No, not really. Didn’t even finish high school. I ran away from my last foster home because the father…” He watches as icy hatred clouds over the omega’s eyes. “Was a fucking perv. He played with some of my foster siblings, and when he tried to play with me, I kicking him in the face and ran as fast as I could out of that house.”

“Where did you go after that?”
“Homeless shelters, then after that I earned money in exchange for sex ‘cuz… I dunno, I had no privacy at the homeless shelters and I got tired of being a burden to society.” Jimin sighs. “I wish we could’ve talked about this shit over drinks or a cigarette. Doesn’t seem right to talk about my past here in this place.”

“Especially since you aren’t even trying to whisper,” Yoongi mumbles from across the room, making an avid attempt to concentrate on his book.

“Oh boo—like I give a shit what you guys think of me. You think your judgement is any different from the amount of judgement I’ve gotten over the years? Ya’ll can go fucking right ahead and stick your noses up at the omega prostitute, but I bet you’ve never been turned down for a job interview or by a university because of your second-gender.”

“Were you turned down for job interviews?” Hoseok asks, baffled.

Jimin smirks, reaching out to trace a finger over the curve of his jaw. “Don’t look so shocked, darling. It’s something all omegas have to put up with. Can’t tell you how often I’ve had alphas laugh in my face and tell me to go get married.”

“That must be awful.”

“It was,” Jimin agrees bitterly, “but it’s our reality. Prostitution did lead me somewhere, eventually. Found an underground BDSM community that focused on dom omegas and sub alphas. You’d be surprised how many alphas wanna be stepped on. I guess deep inside they know they’re all garbage.”

“Am I garbage?”

Leaning forward, Jimin tilts his head and smiles. It’s the single sexiest thing he’s ever seen. “Absolutely filthy, darling.”

Hoseok shivers, allowing the smooth pitch of Jimin’s voice sink into his pores. “Why do you think that—that you like to dominate alphas so much?”

“If I told you the truth of it, the BDSM community would shun me and I’d never be allowed back in their little club again. Which would be a terrible blow to my situation. I get paid, you see, to be a
dominatrix. It’s not the best money, but it keeps me out of the rain.”

“Is it because you hate alphas?”

For a while, neither of them speaks. Jimin stares at him, and Hoseok stares right back, searching for truth behind his sharp gaze.

Then slowly, Jimin asks, “Do you like to be flogged because you hate yourself?”

They stare at each other for a little while longer before Hoseok can’t handle the intensity any longer and turns away. In all honesty, he doesn’t want to know the answer to that question, nor does he truly want to know whether Jimin genuinely hates alphas.

These are questions that are simply meant to be left unanswered.

Chapter End Notes

My New Year's Gift to you <3
Warning(s): UMM A FEW. There's some social parallels to be made between "classes" in this world and gender in our world, there's a scene with an excessive use of the word "fag" (it's used in a derogatory way, so please be conscious of that). There's also mentions of past sexual assault, and arguably self-harm as well.

Just approach this chapter with caution. It's not nearly as intense as some of the future chapters I have planned, but I feel you need to be prepared.

Also, if this chapter makes you uncomfortable (like, to the point where you can't read it... it's supposed to make you uncomfortable but--you know what I mean), I don't think you should continue with this story. Because it's only going to get worse from here, and I don't intend to hold back.

Standing at the front of the class, facing all the people he’s known since elementary school, has to be up there in his top five scariest moments in his entire life. He hates this. Hates presenting, hates speeches and hates debates. The teacher makes him do them anyway, even though he’s insisted on many occasions that he’d prefer to just hand in his research in essay-form. It appeals much more to his style of academia, he doesn’t have to tremble beneath the scrutiny of his unforgiving peers, and he always gets top marks for it. But doing things his way would make things too easy. His teachers—science, English, Mandarin, history—doesn’t matter, they all say the same thing: "You won’t get anywhere in life if you don’t challenge yourself."

This would imply that Namjoon doesn’t challenge himself. He does. Learning something new, absorbing all the information printed on the cool surface of a textbook, writing thousands upon thousands of words until his face turns blue and his eyes threaten to fall out of his eye-sockets—he loves challenging himself, and perhaps if he were to stand in front of a group of people who didn’t know him, or weren’t viciously judgemental, he’d do just fine in presentations. That is not the case, unfortunately for him. Namjoon wonders if any of his teachers could be in his position and not see it for the heinous mistreatment that it is. The education system truly fails the students when they are forced to participate in things that make them cripplingly uncomfortable. Does his Korean teacher not see the snickers that pitter-patter through the classroom? Does she not see the sneers on their faces, as he straightens the speech he’d painstakingly written and re-written at least ten times over before regarding it with some pride and satisfaction? It wouldn’t matter if his speech were on a level with famous liberators of the One-Party tyrants in Malaysia or revolutionaries from the Alpha Worker’s Party in Poland. The result would be the same.
“Tell us what your presentation is about, Namjoon,” their teacher smiles at him from where she leans against her desk in the corner.

Mrs. Yang is a good teacher, for the most part. Namjoon wouldn’t say it’s far-fetched that he’s one of her favourite students—if not her favourite, if the stickers and smiley faces she slaps on his returned essays have anything to say about it. Whenever Namjoon approaches her after class with pointers on how he can improve his essays or inquiries about homework, she always puts in the effort to be helpful and informative. Nothing is brief or vague, which he appreciates a lot. However, her control over the students isn’t what he would describe as “iron-clad”. She’s rather terrible when it comes to discipline.

“My presentation is about—”

“Is it about your alpha boyfriend?” someone calls out, and its followed by snickers.

Mrs. Yang looks upon the class with disapproval.

“—the benefits of same-class parents.”

This, for whatever reason, ignites real laughter from his peers, as though it is the single most hilarious thing they’ve ever heard in their entire lives. The blood rushes to his cheeks and ears. God, he fucking hates his classmates. Every single one of them. They’re in middle school for crying out loud!

“Be quiet,” Mrs. Yang snaps, and the rest of the students quieten down, but they still look thoroughly amused.

Namjoon makes the mistake of locking eyes with Lee Jeongmin, one of the more prolific bullies in their year-level. He isn’t the tallest or the most handsome alpha in their class, as a matter of fact he’s rather average looking, but the asshole still feels the need to make the easier targets in their cohort feel miserable every day they spend at school. The girl sitting at the desk to his left isn’t any better. Noh Minhwa is by far the nastiest omega he’s ever had the misfortune of meeting. She’s snobby, rude, and has a horde of her own demon omega females following her around during recess and lunchtime, as if she needs them to be there to validate her own snide comments. Something truly egregious must’ve happened in Namjoon’s past life for him to end up in the same class as not one, but two of their year-levels cruellest offenders.
Clearing his throat, he looks down at his paper. He refuses to acknowledge that his hands a slightly shaking. “As someone who has been raised by two alpha fathers, I can say from personal experience that the benefits of having same-class parents far outweigh any of the negatives that’ve been most notably investigated by psychologist K. M. Eldar of Oxford University, and social anthropologist Peter J. Benette of Harvard University. Today, I’m going to attempt to debunk some of their research by drawing on my personal experiences with same-class parents, and hopefully extinguish some of the common misconceptions surrounding same-class couples, too.”

Someone throws a scrunched-up piece of paper at his head and he flinches, looking up for a brief moment to find that his peers no longer look amused. They look disgusted.

“What the fuck are you saying? That same-class parents are better? Because that’s fucking stupid,” one of his classmates hisses at him.

“Bet he chose this topic to make himself feel better,” Jeongmin chortles. “Faggot fathers make faggot children.”

The tendon in his jaw twitches as he grits his teeth. He’s lashed out before and it didn’t get him anywhere. In fact, it made things a lot worse, because then people started saying the aggression came from being raised by two alphas—which is very untrue. His fathers are the least aggressive people he knows.

“According to Eldar’s ‘Theory of Alpha Dynamics’, alphas are prone to—” but he’s cut off by another ball of paper flying at his face. This time he has the foresight to duck before it hits him. The class laughs anyway.

“That’s enough, Minhwa. If I see you throw another piece of paper, I’ll have you sent to the principal’s office.”

Pressing his lips together, he concentrates all his attention on the speech in front of him, even though his hands are shaking harder and his eyes are filling with tears. “The theory purposes—”

“Look! The fag is going to cry!” Minhwa shrieks so loudly that it echoes in Namjoon’s ears.

“Noh Minhwa—” Mrs. Yang starts, but doesn’t get to finish before her voice is drowned out by the holler of other students.
“Oh my god, that’s fucking pathetic!” another female voice yells, one of Minhwa’s little tramps.

“Go ahead, Joonie-baby! Cry like the bitch your boyfriend makes you in the bedroom!” Another yells.

Namjoon can hear his heart, pounding in his ears.

“I heard alpha couples are all bottoms in the bedroom—”

“My mum says they all act like omegas—”

“My grandma says they’re paedophiles—”

“You call yourself a fucking alpha? Look at you. Fucking pathetic piece of shit—”

“Die, faggot! Burn in Hell with the rest of your faggot family—”

Just as the rush of emotions hit him all at once—anger, humiliation, hatred, pain—something sharp and acid-like hits his body and he’s shocked out of the dream like a bolt of electricity. Gulping for air and shaking violently, he tries to figure out why he can’t seem to open his eyes. It takes him a moment to realise that he’s wearing a blindfold, and that a bucket of ice-cold water had just been dumped over his naked torso. His first response it to remove the cloth—but then he realises that he can’t. His wrists and ankles are bound to what he has to assume is a chair. Then—another rush comes, much like when the first bucket was thrown on him, only this time it’s from the body behind him.

Jeongguk awakens with a scream, and Namjoon feels every emotion that wires through his system —shock, fear, curiosity, everything. The mating mark on the left side of his neck still throbs, and he knows for a fact that it’s still hurting Jeongguk on the right side of his neck, too. It’d been painful. More painful than either of them could comprehend. It isn’t on the same level as just any bitemark. No, a mating mark is the equivalent to dabbing gasoline all around your throat and then setting it ablaze. It was the single most exhilarating thing Namjoon had ever experienced. To suddenly go from being an individual to becoming half of one whole is something nearly impossible to describe (and when they’d asked him how it felt, he couldn’t give them a satisfying answer). It was when they were lying there, Jeongguk in his arms, stiff with shock, that they’d snatched them from the dark. They’d been completely powerless to do anything to stop them. Namjoon couldn’t feel his arms and legs, let alone fight off the shadows dragging them away.
That’s what he hated the most—not being able to do anything about it. If the bite hadn’t temporarily paralysed them, he would’ve fought them off easily.

It was clear from yesterday that they were conducting small experiments on them to observe the modifications that this new development had given birth to. What made all the experiments similar to each other was their intentions. Everything was conducted to evaluate physical changes.

They’d started with a regular muscle-reflex test. They sat them on benches, too sedated to do much other than be positioned like mannequins, and people in white coats and black surgical masks came in to evaluate them. When Jeongguk’s knee was hit with a reflex hammer, it would kick out. Namjoon’s wouldn’t kick out, but he’d feel a tingling in the same spot where they’d hit Jeongguk’s knee. They then rotated his hurt ankle to see if it did anything, and they did it until Jeongguk cried from the pain. It hurt to see the tears cascade down the sides of his omega’s face more than it hurt to have his ankle handled so roughly. It was only after poking, prodding and torturing them that they finally put his ankle in a brace and left it alone.

“Hyung—hyung where—?”

“I’m here,” Namjoon forces himself to sound calm despite himself. “I’m here, little one. Don’t panic.”

The blindfold is torn from his face and he squints to adjust to the lightening. It isn’t strong. Quite the opposite, actually. A dim light is directly on him, but nothing else illuminates the dark room other than a static TV screen that’s held up on a trolley in front of him. He can hear Jeongguk’s heartbeat accelerate. Namjoon closes his eyes and focuses on conveying calm, even emotions the omega’s way, to let him know that he’s there and he won’t let anything bad happen to him.

Even if he’s not so sure he can do much about it.

Figures come out of the shadows and something is righted over his ears—headphones. They must’ve done the same thing to Jeongguk, because the omega is struggling to breathe.

*Jeongguk, calm down. I’m here. There’s nothing to worry about.*

There’s plenty to worry about, but he doesn’t want Jeongguk to lose his cool.
One of the silhouettes presses a button on the TV and the screen goes from static to a still image of what looks like footage from an police interrogation. An older man sits in one chair opposite a young man—a boy, who has his shoulders hunched over to make him look smaller. The posture is strikingly familiar, but the footage is too grainy and far away for him to get a clear visual on the boy’s face. The only thing he can make out is a dark bruise on his left cheek. There’s a light that hangs overhead, haloing them in a circular spotlight. Behind the boy is a large, wall-length mirror that reflects what the boy sees. A faceless person presses a button and the footage starts to play.

“You have no reason to be afraid, young man,” the older one says, tapping his pen against a notepad. “We have camera footage of the attack and DNA evidence taken from the rape-kit. It’s more than enough to present before a jury, I just need you to tell me what happened.”

“Nothing happened,” the boy says softly, and it hits Namjoon like a wall of bricks.

The boy is Jeongguk. Only younger. Like he’s fresh out of high school.

“Weren’t you listening?” the person—who he’s convince is a cop—asks with mild frustration. “We have the entire incident on CCTV. I watched it with my own eyes. The man clearly raped you.”

“It wasn’t rape,” Jeongguk denies immediately. “I wanted it. It was consensual.”

“From what I could gauge from the supermarket footage, you went there alone to get milk. The man saw you in the refrigerated section and followed you out of the supermarket. Not once did you make any acknowledgement or indication that you knew the perpetrator. There’s no reason for you to protect this alpha, Jeongguk-ssi. The evidence is as plain as day. If you tell me exactly what happened we’ll press charges and we can get him off the streets. You’ll be safe.”

“I wanted it,” the boy echoes, eyes glazed over, voice hollow. “I don’t want to press charges against him.”

It hurts. It hurts to see Jeongguk look so utterly dead inside, like the world could crumble around him and he wouldn’t bat a lash. He doesn’t understand. Why wouldn’t Jeongguk want to press charges against a rapist—his rapist? Why would he say he wanted it from a complete stranger? The omega must be lying—has to be lying.

A shift in Jeongguk’s emotions has his heart hurting a little more. He wonders what the omega is
looking at—what these faceless people are showing him to make him feel so sad.

The footage falters and changes to a completely different setting. Everything about the room screams comfort. There’s an ornamental wooden clock on a nightstand ticking away softly. There’s a coffee table with fabric coasters and glasses of cold water collecting condensation. Natural light filters through a window off-camera, bathing the focal point in a serene glow. The camera is situated behind a man’s shoulder, legs crossed, pointed directly at a boy. This time Namjoon can immediately identify the boy as Jeongguk. The footage is much better quality, and he can now see all the subtle nuances in Jeongguk’s young face. Those hauntingly big, doe-like eyes regard the person sitting opposite him. The omega looks more like a child who’s expecting a scolding than a person about to spill all their darkest secrets.

“It happened again, did it?” the man with his back to the camera asks. The corner of a clipboard comes into frame, pen at the ready.

“It was in a grocery parking lot, this time,” Jeongguk confesses quietly, rubbing at the bruise underneath his eye with a sleeve-clad hand. Namjoon puts two-and-two together and knows they’re referring to the rape incident implicated in the first video. “He was a lot rougher than the last one. Pinned me over the hood of my car and tore off my stockings.”

“Are you okay?”

“It’s fine. The stockings were on their last legs anyway. I was going to throw them out.”

“I meant the rape,” the man says in a soothing, non-judgement voice. He starts writing. It’s so messy Namjoon can’t decipher it.

“It wasn’t rape, I told you that already, hyung. I was asking for it. I wanted it to happen. Saw him follow me out of the supermarket and I got so excited that I was already wet by the time he got to me.” By the look on Jeongguk’s face, he meant it, too. Namjoon feels his stomach turn.

“Why do you think you wanted it, Jeongguk-ssi?” The fact that the person (who he assumes must be a therapist) doesn’t falter is enough to let him know this isn’t the first time they’ve had this conversation.

“Why do you think I decided to leave to go get milk so late at night? Why do you think I was wearing a short skirt and no panties in minus 5-degree weather? I even took scent-enhancers
before leaving the house. It wasn’t rape because I wanted it. I wanted to be thrown down and taken because it feels good. I want to feel an alpha’s knot stretch me open and pump me full of cum because it’s the only thing that makes me feel anything anymore.”

“This can’t keep happening.” There isn’t a single edge of judgement in the therapist’s voice, only pure, unadulterated concern. “You have to stop this destructive behaviour, Jeongguk-ssi, or soon something terrible might happen to you. The people who hurt you are complete strangers. You don’t know anything about them. You might contract something, you might fall pregnant or— heaven forbid—someone kills you someday.”

“What does it matter?” for the first time since the television was turned on, Namjoon sees emotion pass through Jeongguk’s hopeless expression. Tears fall, and he looks so utterly shattered. Like someone had gotten a sledge hammer and bashed him to pieces. “What does it matter if they’re strangers? I’d be willing to trust a complete stranger over my own mother so please do not assume it is your duty to lecture me on the dangers of strangers. It’s blood you have to worry about. Family will act like they have ownership over you, because they’re the ones that gave you life. But no one ever stopped to ask if I even wanted to be alive in the first place.”

Not once does Jeongguk raise his voice or get angry. It’s as soft as everything else that leaves his lips. Quiet misery.

For the first time in what must be years, Namjoon feels himself choke up. Tears well in his eyes and he tries to look away, only for a shock of electricity to go pulsing through him.

He yells, “Turn it off! Fucking turn it off for fuck’s sake!”

They shock him again and he writhes in his chair. Jeongguk must feel it too, because even through the headphones he can still hear him screaming. It’s too much. It’s all too much. Seeing Jeongguk act and talk like that is punishment in itself, but then to hear his screams—he can’t take. He just can’t.

Then, as though they could somehow read his mind, the pain and the screaming stop all at once. Through his blurry vision he watches the TV turn to static again. The headphones are pulled from his head and he can hear Jeongguk panting behind him. They’re left there in the dark. He’d say it’s so they can gather their bearings but he’d be giving these people too much credit.

“Alpha,” Jeongguk has taken to calling him that since the other night, and Namjoon would be lying if he said it didn’t do strange things to him, “You were bullied?”
He feels his face burn from the shame of it all. Of course they’d show Jeongguk him at his lowest point, when he was weak and allowed others to push him around. Jeongguk shouldn’t have to see him like that, to see his alpha so pathetically ridiculed by a bunch of brats.

“It was a long time ago,” he says firmly. “I’m not that person anymore. The boy you saw is nothing but an echo of the alpha I am now. I’m sorry you had to witness any of that.”

“None of it was your fault,” the omega reassures him sweetly. “You were just a boy. You can’t blame yourself for the cruelty of others.”

“And what of the blame you put on yourself?” A droplet of water falls from his chin and hits his thigh. “Jeongguk, you—” he shakes his head, eyes stinging. He releases a shuddering breath. “The things I saw…at the police station and at the therapist’s office…”

He hears Jeongguk gasp.

“Did you want to die…?”

The sound of Jeongguk’s heartbeat stuttering hurts his lungs.

Whether Jeongguk wants to lie or not, he knows there’s no use. They can feel one another’s emotions now. Lying would be a hopeless endeavour.

“I—I don’t know, hyung. I just don’t know.”

He’s telling the truth.

“Then,” Namjoon gulps, trying to school his wavering voice, “when we get out of here, you’re going back to see a therapist—we’ll go together. I don’t know how we’re going to get out this, little one, but I promise you we will. We—” he chokes “—we’ll get our own apartment in Suwon, and stay there ‘til you finish your degree, and then we’ll leave this fucking country and never come back. I don’t care where we go. Just—anywhere but here.”
Jeongguk laughs, but it’s gentle and sad. “Can we get a dog?”

Namjoon smiles. A tear gets caught in his dimple. “I’m more of a cat person.”

“We can get a cat and a dog, then.”

“We should get a farm,” he gulps and closes his eyes, trying to visualise it in his head. “Out in a rural area. Away from the city. Where no one can find us.”

“Yeah—and we can have chickens, and cows and horses—and r-rabbits…” Jeongguk starts sobbing. He can feel the omega’s heart breaking and his heart starts to break, too.

“Don’t cry, little one,” he coos softly. “We’ll get out of here.”

“I miss my b-brother.”

“Where is your brother?” He hopes if he can get Jeongguk to keep talking he might eventually calm down.

“I don’t know,” the omega answers sadly. “Last I heard he was at university doing his Masters in Business. I—I never asked my grandparents too many questions about my brother or parents. It’s too painful to remember them most of the time.”

“Did your brother know?”

“Know what?”

“Any of it? What was happening to you, what your mother was doing…” It’s still sometimes hard to comprehend what Jeongguk’s parents did to him, and what Jeongguk did to himself. It was only a day or two ago when Jeongguk had confessed everything that went on during his acting career. That was a hard pill to swallow.

How an omega mother could prostitute their own omega son and still live with themselves…
The bitch never went to jail, her and her child-beating husband.

“I never asked,” Jeongguk said. “I wasn’t thinking of him when I ran off to live with my grandparents. My brother was older and an alpha, a different story printed on the same paper.”

Namjoon doesn’t know what to say to this. Yes, alphas and omegas have completely different anatomies, and they are different in so many ways, but a child is still a child. Throughout school people always jeered and shamed him for having two alpha fathers. Namjoon can’t pinpoint when the class of his parents became public knowledge to the student cohort, but they found out somehow. If there were others with same-class parents, they never spoke up or tried to defend him. An alpha father is meant to guide and support the family, an omega mother is meant to nurture and love the family, and that’s that.

But not once did Namjoon ever feel he was missing something in his life. His parents were both supportive and nurturing. While Jeongguk’s parents, which on paper were the ‘ideal’, corrupted the sanctity of parenthood with their greed and deception.

The irony upsets him more than it gives him any form of comfort.

The first omega he ever liked—back in high school—rejected him because she insisted he was into alphas. But he’s never been into alphas. Everyone just likes to assume things based on upbringing.

All he’s ever wanted was for an omega to look at him like he’s the anchor that anchors the world, that he’s special and valid and strong—the alpha he’s always believed himself to be.

Now that he finally has an omega that looks at him that way he can’t do anything, as his alpha, to protect him.

“Do you have a brother or sister?” Jeongguk ask once the silence has stretched on long enough.

“A sister.”

“Do you miss her?”
Fuck the world. “So much. She’s meant to graduate at the end of this year. I promised I’d take her to an amusement park for a day—just the two of us, to make up for all the times I couldn’t see her.”

“Oh. I didn’t know…”

“It’s fine.”

“You should tell me these things.”

“What things?”

“Just…things. About you. I want to learn more about you.”

Namjoon chuckles brokenly. “We’re claimed, little one. We’ve got our whole lives to learn more about each other.”

“I hope so—”

The sound of a door opening cuts through their conversation, followed my pairs of footsteps coming towards them. A hand fists the hair at the back of his head and a cloth is pressed to his lips. His first instinct it to hold his breath. Glaring up at the towering figure above him, he tries to discern any identifiable features about his face, but just like the others, his face is covered by a black surgical mask. He makes a point of looking the man in the eyes as he’s forced to take a breath and chemicals rush up his nostrils and down his throat. There isn’t anything interesting about the man’s eyes, though. Generic, forgettable, just like everything else in this godforsaken place.
Namjoon doesn’t know how much time has passed since they knocked him out, but he finds himself facedown on a cool surface. It might just be the chloroform talking, but it feels as though the more they knock him out the easier it is to wake up. This time, he’s a little more prepared for whatever they’re going to throw at him. He has to keep reminding himself that everything is done for a reason. From what he knows, experiments conducted on a claimed pair have never been taken to such an extent. Legal experiments involving human participants need to jump through all sorts of hoops to get approval and funding, and these rules and regulations have been around for well over a century. Legally, people haven’t been allowed to claim each other for sixty years, and there were about forty to thirty years prior to illegalisation where the practice was stigmatised, so it’s very likely that he and Jeongguk had inadvertently handed research material to these psychopaths on a silver platter when they claimed each other. Whether their captors planned for this to happen, however, Namjoon can’t say for certain.

The surroundings have drastically changed. This time, he’s in a well-lit room, and before him are walls of concrete that stretch all the way to the ceiling. There’s something on his face. He can’t see what it is, exactly, but when he touches it, he deduces that it’s made out of leathery material. The mask stretches over his mouth and nose. Breathing doesn’t seem to be a difficulty at all, but when he inhales through his nose, he realises that he can’t smell anything but the interior of the mask. Which means he can’t sense pheromones.

And Jeongguk isn’t anywhere to be seen.

He’s about to panic when he notices a box in front of him. He quickly flips it open, and inside is a needle and a note.

*Explore the maze to try and find Omega 3. Plunge the needle into Omega 3’s heart to revive them. Failure to complete the task in time will result in Omega 3’s death.*

Fuck.

Snatching the needle, he gets up quickly, only to almost fall over when he’s reminded of his fractured ankle. Gritting his teeth through the pain, he limps his way into the maze. The mask definitely makes more sense now. Without his sense of smell he can’t pick up Jeongguk’s pheromones. He’s also receiving very little reception from the omega. Either he’s sleeping, or he’s slipping away. The foreboding note seems to indicate the latter.

Struggling to keep himself steady, he places his head on the wall of the maze, only for his hand to
slip right through it and a bolt of electricity to go shooting through his body. He collapses to the floor, yells of pain muffled by the leather. The maze isn’t made of solid material. The entire thing is one giant hologram. This raises a whole new set of struggles for him to overcome. Not only can he not walk properly, but he can’t lean against the walls for support either. There isn’t any time to dwell on it, though. He has to keep going—he has to find Jeongguk before it’s too late.

Every crevice of the maze is undistinguishable from one another. When he hits a dead end, he almost can’t even tell it’s a dead end until he touches solid material. And even if he so much as brushes his shoulder against the hologram he gets brutally electrocuted.

For a short while he feels as though it’s hopeless, that he won’t be able to find Jeongguk in the time constraints forced upon him.

But then—he hears it.

Jeongguk’s heartbeat.

It’s slow—and getting slower still, but it’s there, beating faintly in the distance. Namjoon heads in that direction, listening closely. It’s alarming how muted the sound is—he hadn’t even noticed it when he first awoke. From what he’s been able to tell, when they’re both completely calm, their hearts beat in sync. It’s mostly a theory and he can’t back it up with any physical evidence, but it’s a certain feeling he gets whenever they’re near one another. It’s only under distressing or drug-influenced circumstances that their heartbeats seem to fall out of sync. Like now. Namjoon’s heart is roaring in his ears, so loud and hyperactive that it seems to have no rhythm to it. Jeongguk’s is calm. So calm it feels as if he’s on the verge of disappearing at any moment.

Focusing on the sound of Jeongguk’s heartbeat seems to be what was intended for the experiment, because it only takes him a few more turns to finally find the boy paralysed on the floor. He drops to his knees and immediately tears off his nightgown. The omega is ghostly pale. Lips turning blue. Eyes wide open and glassy. His heartbeat—oh god his heartbeat—

He stabs the needle into the boy’s chest and whatever was in the injection jumpstarts his whole system, like a cyborg rebooting. His chest lifts and his mouth opens in a dramatic gasp. Colour floods back to his features and Namjoon is filled with relief. He takes out the needle and brings Jeongguk into a hug. The omega hugs him back, albeit weakly.

“You came,” Jeongguk’s voice trembles. “I thought…I thought…”
But Jeongguk can’t find the right words to express what he’s feeling. It occurs to Namjoon that maybe Jeongguk had been conscious the entire time. That he’d been forced to lay there, unable to move or speak, as the life slowly drained away from his body. The horror has him nearly brought to tears all over again. He won’t cry. He refuses to. Jeongguk deserves an alpha that’s able to keep it together.

“Are you alright, little one?” he asks after a moment. “They didn’t hurt you, did they?”

“They injected me with something,” the omega slurs against his shoulder. “I don’t know what it was, but I lost feeling in my arms and legs and then…”

The boy shudders. Namjoon uses his imagination to fill in the blanks.

Around them the holographic maze melts away to leave nothing but the bare bones of a room. In the distance, Namjoon can see the box on the ground where he’d procured the needle.

They’re left in suspense, wondering if anyone is going to come marching in to drag them off to some other room to do something different to them, but after sitting there for five minutes Namjoon deduces that they may not come get them for some time. This could be interpreted as a good thing or a bad thing. Either, they’ve left them alone because they don’t have anything else prepared, or they could be setting up the next experiment. The former doesn’t even seem plausible. Why waste a perfectly good opportunity to cover all bases on a topic that has limited research? They could make ground-breaking discoveries never before documented. As a researcher himself, it just doesn’t seem rational for them to hold back. Not when they have so little restrictions put in place. If they’re willing to drug and kidnap them, it’s telling what lengths these people are willing to go to get results. Even if it means committing serious crimes.

A hand gently cradles the side of his face and he looks down at the omega in his arms. A silly omega—a foolish omega, but so, so lovely. As fucked up as the circumstances are, it’s as if God plucked this angel from the heavens just for him.

“Why don’t you despise me?”

Namjoon snaps out of his revere. “Despise you?”

“My body…it’s been used by so many people…doesn’t that disgust you? Don’t I disgust you?” Whatever is in Jeongguk’s system appears to have made him lethargic and unobservant. “I’m not a
good person, hyung. You deserve so much more than me—a good omega from a good family, who’s saved themselves for the right alpha. I’m just a slut. I don’t deserve any of it—the loving alpha or the farm or the family—none of it. Whatever life has in store for me…it’s not a happy ending, hyung.”

“Jeongguk…” his hands graze over the indents of his bite, slightly obscured by the choker he’d pulled away before clamping his jaws down on him. “I claimed you, remember? All those thoughts you have, it doesn’t matter anymore. We’re in this until the very end.”

The omega’s expression contorts. “I know I just—I’m worried you’ll regret it. That you won’t want me after everything that’s come out. You’re this amazing, intelligent, handsome alpha that any omega would be lucky to have, and I’m—I’ve got nothing to offer you.”

“To say you have nothing to offer me is absurd,” he shuts down quickly. “You have the sweetest voice I’ve ever heard, you’re kind and obedient and loving—not to mention beautiful. You think your past defines who you are and perhaps it does, in some ways, but it can only define you as much as you allow it to. You’re so much more than the ragdoll you think you are.”

“Careful, alpha. Keep talking like that and I might go into heat prematurely.” Namjoon throws his head back and laughs. It isn’t often Jeongguk shows this playful side to him, but when he does it’s quite enjoyable.

Finding the strength to sit up properly, Jeongguk kisses him on the mouth. His grips the omega by his slim waist. The fierce intensity reminds him of their first time together. There’d been no actual sex—only because they’d gotten a little too eager and marked each other before anything else could happen. There’s something so magnetising about Jeongguk, though, so completely gorgeous that Namjoon has, on many occasions, had to remind his penis to calm down. Who could blame him? No red-blooded alpha that’s attracted to omegas would look at Jeongguk and shrug. He has the face of a starlet and the body of a god.

Jeongguk moans into his mouth and presses his bare chest against him, wanting more. He can practically smell the boy’s panties dampen with want and well—they say there’s a time and a place for these kinds of things, but Namjoon would refute that vehemently.

Just as his hand gives Jeongguk’s buttocks a squeeze, a door opens, and Jeongguk’s mewl cuts short as he peers over his shoulder at the people filing in. They’re big men. Alphas. They’re wearing the same masks as the scientists but no lab coats—just black shirts, gloves, jeans and combat boots. Jeongguk clings to Namjoon as they get closer, and he can feel the fear thrum distinctly through his lithe body. They snatch Jeongguk out of Namjoon’s arms and he snarls, trying to get up but reminded of the fact that he’s handicapped. As one of the alphas effortless carry Jeongguk, limp and willing, two alphas pick Namjoon up. He tries to strangle one of them
and gets shocked for it.

The rest of the way he continues to struggle and fight, despite it being a massive detriment to his injury.

They follow behind the first alpha carrying Jeongguk, and the omega’s quiet protests go echoing down the sterile corridor. Eventually, Jeongguk is taken through one door, and Namjoon is escorted into another. They place him in the middle of what looks like a big, glass box—save for the wall of the corridor, and the wall-length door to the far right that’s completely stainless steel. There’s another box to the left, mirroring his. That’s where the alpha places Jeongguk. He can see Jeongguk, but he can’t hear his voice anymore. He can only hear the omega’s erratic heartbeat.

The two alphas that’d brought him in leave, but the other one stays with Jeongguk, lingering, fingers pressed to his ear. Someone must be giving him orders, from the looks of it. The alpha then takes off his leather gloves and reaches for Jeongguk. Namjoon feels pain shoot up his bicep like someone just threw acid on him, and he watches, body tense, as the alpha lifts Jeongguk by the arm and tear off his underwear with his other hand. He lifts himself up and limps his way over to the glass separating them, banging his fists against it. The alpha looks him in the eye with no emotion at all, and then drops Jeongguk on the floor. The pain immediately ceases in his bicep. He watches, confused, as the alpha walks away, leaving Jeongguk along in the glass box.

Before he can comprehend why the alpha did what he did, the wall-length, stainless steel door behind Jeongguk slides open at a snail’s pace. Namjoon looks over his shoulder, as if expecting his door to mimic Jeongguk’s, but it doesn’t. It remains closed.

For now.

Jeongguk lifts himself up on his hands and knees facing the massive door, looking tiny in comparison. When the door is about halfway open, they get a good look at what’s on the other side. It turns his blood cold.

A gargantuan wolf—the biggest he’s ever seen—skitters around the opening door like it’s been waiting impatiently for something to happen. It’s unlike anything Namjoon has ever seen before. Normal wolves, at least the ones found today, are just a little bigger than most dogs. This one looks about the size of a small apartment. It has white, grey and dark brown fur around the torso, and light brown fur around the face. The legs are long and gangly, and its snout is long, almost pointed like a beak. What’s most striking is its big, golden yellow eyes. The fur around its mane is wild and unruly, and its great bushy tail sweeps behind its body, the length of a bus. When it sees Jeongguk, its jaws pull in a snarl and he can see the rows and rows of teeth. Normal wolves don’t have teeth like that.
However alien the wolf seems, it does strike a cord of familiarity with him. It looks sort of similar to the illustrations and descriptions given by palaeontologists about their wolf ancestors. The ones that supposedly haven’t been alive for millions of years.

Namjoon feels a rush of fear from Jeongguk even before the door is fully open. He, in turn, feels fear for Jeongguk, and starts banging his fists harder against the glass. No matter how fiercely he hits the glass though, it remains unfazed. It only proves to hurt his joints.

Once the door is fully open, the wolf makes a slow and cautious approach towards Jeongguk, who sits there, completely frozen in fear. Realising that banging his fists against the glass isn’t going to do them any favours, Namjoon slowly sits down and tries focusing all his energy into slowing Jeongguk’s heart rate. If he can’t physically fight his way to Jeongguk then the most he can do is try and influence Jeongguk’s fears and emotions. At least then he might not make any sudden movements.

Once the wolf has reached Jeongguk, it doesn’t seem particularly interested in harming him. It just sticks its nose at the omega and sniffs him curiously.

*Roll onto your back, roll onto your back, roll onto your back*—

Very carefully, Jeongguk drops to the floor and rolls over onto his back, and Namjoon almost can’t believe Jeongguk just read his mind. This seems to please the wolf, somewhat, because it’s tail sways. The wolf continues to sniff all over Jeongguk’s body, as if searching for something, and Namjoon wonders if it’s looking for pheromones. It would explain why the animal seems so perplexed.

The wolf’s large snout then noses between Jeongguk’s legs and Namjoon has to stop himself from losing his composure again. Jeongguk bites down on his hand to stop from making any noises, its big, wet nose sniffing him somewhere unspeakable.

*Don’t make any sudden movements. Close your eyes. Breathe.*

Jeongguk mimics exactly what Namjoon thinks in his mind, and to their relief the wolf drags its nose up to where Namjoon claimed him. When the wolf acknowledges the mark, it quickly loses interest in Jeongguk and is bated back to the other side of the room from whence it came. The door closes again, separating human from wolf, and Namjoon releases bated breath he hadn’t know he’d been holding. The omega crawls over to where he sits, face clammy from sweat, bottom lip
trembling. Without needing to be told what Jeongguk is thinking, he presses a hand against the glass, and Jeongguk meets him there, their hands overlapping but not touching one another.

No words are spoken. But somehow, he knows the omega is thanking him.
Lights that stretch to all four corners of the room expel the crushing blackness. Fuck the damns lights. If he could make any direct, formal complaints to the contractors that built this place he’d let them know that the choice to put lights not only in the ceiling, but the walls and floors too is a bit dramatic, even for him. Being more involved in the design process would’ve been ideal, only, his father had neglected to make any mention of the project until the construction process was well and truly in motion. It’s not his father’s fault, he supposes. Even if he is one of the biggest cunts in South Korea—and Seokjin can confirm the man is in great company. The opportunity to jump on such a project had only been too tempting. Anything to skip out on mind-numbing contract negotiations and attending stuffy fund-raisers for senators he has no love for. Serious changes would’ve been made to this place if he’d dipped his fingers in sooner, but he supposes the blinding light is meant to unsettle the other subjects.

It’s the glorious morning on the seventh day of confinement. Bodies squirm and groan from other areas of the room. Seokjin lies on his back, hands neatly folded over his stomach, unwilling to open his eyes just yet. It’s taking him a lot longer to wake up, recently. It probably has something to do with the fact that he likes to stay awake until well into the night. There isn’t anything particular that he does during those hours, other than fake sleep. No, he just lies there quietly, listening.

The peaceful ambience is sliced through with a piercing scream. It echoes from the bathroom and shakes away what remnants of sleep the others may have had. Seokjin’s eyes snap open. Ever a man of action, Jimin springs to his feet and makes his way towards the bathroom door. The other two alphas are hot in pursuit. Hm, their missing members have finally been returned to them, it would seem. Wonderful. There hadn’t been a doubt in his mind that they’d be back in time for what’s to happen on this fine day, but he’d be lying if he said he didn’t get a tad bit anxious when they hadn’t returned yesterday. Two days away. A record so far. It makes him wonder if the “punishments” will only grow longer as the days drag on. Oh, the possibilities.

Well, lying here is too suspicious. Might as well see what the commotion is all about.
Stretching like a cat, he approaches the blockade Yoongi, Hoseok and Jimin have made in the doorway to the bathroom. They’re all stock still. Being the tallest of the them, he’s able to easily see the chaos unfolding over their heads. Apart from being dazed and a little fearful, Namjoon and Jeongguk appear to be in good condition. The alpha’s ankle is even patched up and in a brace. The bitemark on Namjoon’s neck does not go unnoticed. He files this information away in his mind for later. Turning his attention, he sees the source of the commotion. Taehyung is on the ground, gripping his head as though he intends to pluck it straight from his shoulders. The omega’s big, bulging eyes are bloodshot, like he hasn’t had a decent night’s sleep since he vanished, and bubbles and globs of saliva dribble down from his gritted teeth as he makes the most unhuman-like noises he’s ever heard. How curious. Seokjin suspected when they took Taehyung that they’d be doing some experimentation to do with his illness, he just wasn’t sure how far they were willing to take it.

But they certainly didn’t disappoint.

Pushing past the rest of them who continue to stand dumbly in the doorway, Seokjin immediately drops to the floor beside the trembling omega in green. A sheen of sweat glistens over the surface of his naked flesh, his eyes wide and completely glazed over, utterly disconnected to his surroundings. It’s as if he’s transcended to another plain of existence. His mind is no longer with them, but elsewhere, in another time and place. When he places his hand firmly on Taehyung’s shoulder, the younger man flinches. Movement in his body language suggests that he’s about to jerk away from him, but Seokjin makes sure to pour as much of his pheromones Taehyung’s way. The dilation in his eyes lessens, as if snapping out of his manic state, and the omega looks up at him, for the first time acknowledging that there is someone physically there beside him.

“H-hyung,” Taehyung whispers, eyes welling with tears.

Seokjin pulls a smile. Something nice and soft, to make him feel safe. Pulling the omega into his arms, he tucks him under his chin and allows Taehyung to bury his nose in his scent gland, as he’d allowed many times before. The younger man breathes in greedily, drowning in the drug of his beta pheromones until his body almost slackens from the intense intake. All the while, Seokjin pets the top of his head and rocks him gently from side to side. That’s a good omega. Drink it all in now. Like the filthy addict you are.

When Taehyung has calmed down enough that he isn’t screaming his lungs out, the others approach. They look apprehensive and comical.

“Are—Are you guys okay?” Hoseok kneels next to Jeongguk, reaching out to feel the omega’s forehead.

The minute his knuckles graze his skin, Jeongguk cries and backs away from him like an injured
“Shit—are you hurt? What did they do—” but Hoseok’s voice cuts off, his face contorted in a thoughtful frown, as though something just dawned on him.

“You didn’t,” Yoongi says bluntly, looking between Namjoon and Jeongguk like they’re the dumbest people on Earth.

Jimin stands after checking that Taehyung is okay—and he’s not really, but he’s calmed down enough to no longer cause immediate panic. The omega takes one look at Namjoon—who’s mark is a lot easier to spot—and throws his head back in dry cackle. “Oh, you fucking piece of human garbage. What—so you injure your fucking ankle and the thought of not knotting Jeongguk affects you so badly that you just had to piss away the last bit of freedom that either of you had? Am I the only one here that hasn’t completely lost my fucking mind?”

“Shut up, Jimin,” Yoongi says. He looks curiously confused more than angry.

Slowly, Yoongi reaches a hand out to touch Jeongguk, and Namjoon pulls the omega away with a snarl. The two alphas glare at one another—as dumb alphas do when they get territorial.


I wouldn’t be so sure of that, Joonie-boy.

Like the thirsty little whore Jeongguk is, the omegacurls up and nuzzles against Namjoon’s gland, right where his teeth had scarred him. The pointless display of possessiveness seems to have made the omega’s panties wet. He can smell the sweet scent from here.

“What Namjoon-ssi means is that making direct, skin-to-skin contact with Jeongguk-ssi will hurt him,” Seokjin provides helpfully. While Hoseok and Jimin look confused by this information, Yoongi, most notably, does not. Probably knows a handful of knowledge already from the books he reads. “Claimed omegas feel excruciating pain when touched by alphas who are not their alpha. The same applies to alphas who are touched by omegas who aren’t their omega.”

“Well that just makes no fucking sense. What if it’s two betas who claim each other?” Jimin asks, immediately snappish and defensive. The very concept of two individuals branding one another
likely disgusts the forward-thinking, progressive omega. Claiming used to be, after all, a staple of oppression.

“Same rules apply,” Yoongi provides quietly. “The mating mark is only designed to ward off the same second-gender as their partner. If two betas claimed each other, they wouldn’t be able to make physical contact with other betas.”

“Never—in my entire life—have I ever heard of something so unbelievably toxic to a relationship! It’s no wonder this shit was made illegal. And you dumb-asses did it anyway! Did Namjoon force you to do it, Jeongguk? Say the word and I’ll break his other ankle—”

“No!” Jeongguk cries. “Alpha never forced me to do anything—I’m the one who wanted it—”

“‘Alpha’?! Who the fuck calls their partner ‘alpha’ these days? Did those assholes throw you two into a time portal and sent you back five-hundred years?”

“I dunno, I think it’s kind of sweet,” Hoseok says in a brazenly teasing tone. “Would it hurt for you to call me ‘alpha’ from time to time?”

“It’d literally give me cancer.”

“Are you okay?” he murmurs into the crown of Taehyung’s head as the others continue to bicker and squabble. “I was so worried when they took you.”

A little misleading, considering he was more worried that those idiots might try and spoil all his fun, because you really can’t trust people to do as they’re told. It seems their fear of his wrath overpowered any need to try and improve Taehyung’s condition.

“Now I am,” Taehyung’s breathing slows to normal. “I don’t know what I’d do if you weren’t here. They—they put me in some sort of chamber and I—I can barely remember what happened. I was so fucking scared. I thought they were going to kill me.”

“What matters is that you’re safe now,” he coos softly, rubbing circles into the omega’s back. It’s like bribing a child with candy. The younger man seems to melt beneath his touch. He doesn’t even have to try. Just a few sweet words and a few gentle touches and now he has the omega eating straight out of his hand.
One has to wonder if it has anything to do with biology. Whether they’re aware of it or not, Taehyung and Jeongguk jumped at the opportunity to attach themselves to stronger classes. Jimin would be the exception to this rule, in some respects, but he made no efforts to hide his obvious attraction towards Hoseok. There’s a touch of hypocrisy to be had, explaining away the behaviour of a single class when he himself had been ridiculed for such assumptions. He doesn’t care, though. Betas have stronger relations to alphas than they do omegas. Seokjin would argue that the treatment of betas is far more problematic than anything omegas have had to suffer. Betas are just as capable as alphas, strong like alphas, smart like alphas, the only real difference is the function of their pheromones. While alphas are born to conquer and dominate the hierarchy, betas are designed to take more tactical approaches. Somewhere along the line this somehow deemed them “lesser alphas” in the eyes of society, leading most of them to settle for moderate wages and a pattern of rejection from both omegas and alphas.

The alarm for breakfast goes off, ceasing the banter and coaxing them to Zone 4.

“Jeongguk-ssi,” a churn of sick satisfaction boils his blood seeing the omega tense beneath his gaze. The maknae in question is the last to enter, helping along Namjoon, who’s still having difficulties walking by himself. Jeongguk looks up to meet his stare, looking like a scared little bunny. “You wouldn’t mind swapped seats, just for today, would you? I think Taehyung would appreciate my presence, and I’m sure you wouldn’t object to sitting next to your new—” he glances at the wound on the boy’s neck “—mate.”

Like the good omega he knows Jeongguk to be, the youngest nods his head and helps Namjoon over to his pillow. Seokjin settles down in the maknae’s usual spot, mimicking the smile Taehyung sends his way.

Throughout breakfast, he makes sure to increase the excretion of pheromones, reaching out like feelers to overwhelm any other scent in the room. For mealtime, the room is eerily heavy and quiet. Reality seems to have hit everyone all at once. That today is the day that will determine their immediate futures. Everyone seems to regard their meals with varying levels of enthusiasm. Jimin seems to be at odds with his own bowl of cereal, devouring every flake as if it contained precious amounts of energy, but at the same time, he seems to be battling against his own lack of appetite. The pheromones have done its job in lulling Taehyung into a false sense of security. He appears to be the only person eating at a casual pace. The couple next to him haven’t said a word to each other, but it’s quite interesting to witness the conversation happening through subtle glances and body language. The employees must’ve had a blast experimenting on them. There were always plans to have them breed, but never would they have imagined a couple going to that extent for the sake of security. Jeongguk and Namjoon seem desperate to reassure one another. Everything will be OK. They’re claimed. No one will touch them.

So foolish.
Hoseok eats messily, agitated and nervous, getting milk on his chin or on his tray. Maybe it’s because he’s well aware Hoseok is an informant, but he has become quite good at picking when Hoseok is acting like a nervous wreck, and when he is a nervous wreck. Right now, the panic is genuine. The unconventional alpha has built an alliance with the unconventional omega of the group over the last few days. Most notably, since Taehyung, Jeongguk and Namjoon were taken away. While Jimin has done his very best to reassure Hoseok that things will go as planned, the alpha seems to have very little confidence in the situation. For a moment, Seokjin humours the thought of Hoseok ending up with one of the other omegas. With Taehyung, Hoseok would likely be on the verge of a panic attack because of his temperamental illness. Jeongguk—well, there’d be no sexual gratification in that relationship. Hoseok would have to pretend to be the alpha he’s not, and even then, there’s no telling whether he’d be able to get it up at all, not with a submissive pup lying so willingly beneath him.

At the far end of the room, Yoongi eats his berries quietly. Ever the epitome of silent composure. In many respects, Yoongi reminds Seokjin of his father. The air of superiority he carries. The quick-wit and thunderous power he holds beneath his fingertips. What’s different about them is that Seokjin absolutely hates his father. Yoongi just fascinates him. For an alpha, he’s relatively small. But Seokjin knows of the power he has hidden beneath the surface. There’s something dark and twisted inside of him that just wants to take it all from Yoongi. To let him know that the beta is not someone to be overlooked. He can barely hold his spoon steadily at the thought of Yoongi on his knees with mercy in his eyes.

As they’re finishing up and stacking the trays by the furthest shoot to the right, a familiar grating noise echoes from Zone 1. Seokjin makes sure to be one of the first to re-enter the recreational area, just behind Yoongi, who leads from the front. While they’d been eating, employees had snuck in to make some rearrangements to the place. He very nearly let out a laugh at their blatant audacity. The futons had been stacked neatly off to one corner and the space had been cleared. On the floor are three long, wooden sticks, presumably weapons for the fight. The Mystery Box light is on, which explains the noise they heard earlier. To the average person, the way their “captors” can seamlessly enter and exit the prison without being seen or detected might be unsettling. But he’s rather impressed.

Seokjin strides past Yoongi, brushing shoulders with the alpha as he goes, and heads for the Mystery Box.

“What the fuck? They were just here?” Jimin says from somewhere behind them.

“I didn’t hear anything,” Hoseok adds anxiously.

Aside from the regular bottles of vitamin supplements they’ve been taking each day, there’s a red
envelope nestled at the very back of the box. Seokjin brings it over to the rest of the group, who’ve
crowded in the centre of the room. He’d intended to read it to the rest of them, but Yoongi snatches
it out of his hand and tears the envelope open. They share a glance, Yoongi leering at him with
suspicion—which is nothing new.

Straightening the piece of paper, it appears to be a set of instructions concerning the events taking
place today. Yoongi clears his throat, “Ground rules for today’s mating selection: All omegas are
fair game—claimed or otherwise”— Jeongguk sucks in a sharp breath and Namjoon tenses “—
alphas must each take turns fighting each other until there is a clear victor. A victor is determined
when all other opponents are unable to fight. Killing is not allowed. The first victor can have an
omega of their choosing, and will be deemed the leader of the pack”— Jimin snorts “—The
position of the leader gives them the power to make decisions on behalf of other subjects, and has
permission to punish whoever they see fit, so long as it does not put the subject’s life in danger.
Every omega must be partnered before lunch. Failure to complete this task before then will result
in drastic measures being taken to ensure each omega has a suitable breeding partner.”

The silence that follows is almost deafening. Before it hadn’t really sank in for some of them that
this would be their reality. Hoseok and Jimin had spoken casually about it, more as a hypothetical
scenario rather than something likely to happen. Yoongi and Taehyung seem disturbed, as though
the weight of the situation has finally hit them. The only people who took this seriously were
Jeongguk and Namjoon, and they’re still getting screwed over. Lovely.

“Well, I guess we better get this over with. Jimin, Taehyung, Jeongguk—stand against the wall, I
want to take a good look at you before I make my decision.” The others seem startled by his
bluntness. All except Taehyung, of course, who’s so consumed by his pheromones at this point that
he just walks to the other side of the room and stands with his back to the wall. Like a good omega.

Seokjin kneels down and picks a wooden stick, weighing it in his hand.

“You can’t just fucking tell us what to do, Seokjin,” Jimin snaps, cheeks flushed from humiliation.
The omega crosses his arms over his chest petulantly. Hm, that won’t do at all. “You aren’t even
relevant in this situation. It says every alpha has to fight. And you’re not an alpha.”

Standing, he jabs Jimin in the hip and jerks his head to where Taehyung is standing. “Be a good
omega and do as I say. Wouldn’t want to hurt that pretty face of yours, now would we?”

Rage overcomes the omega. The bitch even has the gull to step forward to strike him, but Seokjin
is faster, and grips the omega by the throat. Pheromones go pouring up Jimin’s nostrils and into his
mouth and he makes the stupid thing take it until he’s limp. “Go stand next to Taehyung, Jimin.”
Like a drunk, the omega rolls his head in a lethargic nod. Jimin’s movements are zombie-like as he shuffles to the other side of the room, eyes half-lidded and glazed, as though he’s been hypnotised. He supposes he has been hypnotised, in a sense.

“Seokjin-hyung, please,” Jeongguk begs gently, appealing to his heartstrings. Silly little thing. “Namjoon-hyung and I are meant to be together. We—”

“Rules are rules, Gguk. Every omega is fair game. Now go stand by your fellow omegas,” he orders coldly.

Pulling Jeongguk behind him, Namjoon steps—no, hobbles—forward. Not nearly as intimidating now, are you, Namjoon? “I won’t let you have him,” the alpha snarls. Spit gets on his face, which he doesn’t appreciate.

With a burst of anger, he strikes Namjoon square in the stomach. The alpha goes stumbling, and Seokjin hits him across the face. Namjoon hits the floor and Jeongguk yells, falling to his knees by the alpha’s side and helping him sit up. A shaky hand touches his own cheek before touching his alpha’s, a subtle hint to the fact that he feels the pain blossom on his own body. Seokjin watches, with deep satisfaction, as a red mark starts to take form on the side of Namjoon’s cheek. Hoseok flinches back in fear, and Yoongi regards Seokjin with a touch of caution.

“Gguk, wall, now.” Hovering the end of his stick over Namjoon’s good foot, he adds, “Or I’ll break his other ankle.”

He’s never seen the omega move so quickly. Meeting Namjoon’s glare with a smile, he says, “Stay put, dog. Any sudden movements and your ankle will be the least of your worries.”

“So that’s it, huh? You were faking shit all along?” the alpha says hoarsely.

“I wasn’t faking anything, Namjoon,” he scoffs. The alpha tries to get up again and he smacks him in the chest. This time he hits his head against the floor. Seokjin presses the end of his stick against Namjoon’s forehead, still smiling. “You were just too arrogant to look past what was in front of you the whole time.”

That’s where he leaves the alpha, on his back struggling to breathe. Neither Hoseok nor Yoongi make any moves to stop him as he approaches the omegas, not that he expected them too, anyway. The coward and the pacifist pose no threat to him.
The pheromones are already wearing off Jimin when he reaches him. Confusion clouds his judgement for just a moment before he realises what Seokjin did to him. Of course, Jimin’s first instinct is to lash out, but the omega is so painfully naïve. Seokjin may be a beta, but he’s built like an alpha, bigger, stronger, faster than anything Jimin could ever hope to be. The omega’s face is ugly as it contorts, wrath corrupting his beauty. He strikes out a fist to hit him. Seokjin catches his wrist and twists it until the omega is on his knees screaming into the palm of his hand.

Sure, he could’ve just used his pheromones to manipulate the situation, but there’s just something so satisfying about using his strength to overpower someone else. This is how alphas must feel all the time.

“Get up,” he orders calmly.

Jemin looks up at his with hatred in his eyes. “Fuck you.”

“Hyung, you’re hurting him,” Taehyung places a hand on his shoulder, using his useless omega pheromones to try and incite sympathy from him.

“Stay out of this, Taehyung. I’ll be with you in a second.” The hand flinches away from him as if it’d been burned.

With some effort, he heaves Jimin back up to his feet and uses the hold he has on his wrist to turn him over and press him against the wall. The omega makes an attempt to kick him and he gets a knee between his legs for it. Jimin grows still after that. There’s nowhere for him to run. Leaning over, he buries his nose against the omega’s neck, drinking in his sweet scent. All omegas are sweet. Like sugar cane, honey suckle and fairy floss. To Seokjin, personally, it’s a little nauseating, but the pheromones are biologically designed to get him rock hard. Jimin smells like grapefruit.

“Hm,” he hums in approval. The omega trembles as he gropes his tight little buttocks. “Speechless, are we? That’s not like you at all, Jimin-ssi.”

“Fuck you,” Jimin spits, struggling again—but freezes when his balls drag against Seokjin’s knee. “Fucking perverted piece of shit. This is what you intended all along, wasn’t it?”

“To fondle you?” Seokjin asks, voice even and casual. Jimin does have a very nice behind.
“To betray us!” he hisses spitefully.

Seokjin has to hand it to Jimin. Even with him pressed against the wall, fondling his voluptuous globes, the omega doesn’t seem to be even slightly aroused. Guess the omega really doesn’t get a kick out of being dominated after all. Disappointing. He was hoping for some form of contradictory to exploit. Oh well.

He shoves Jimin to the ground. He’s had enough of him.

“Be good and stay on the floor. We don’t want you getting in the way of things.”

Hoseok hesitantly approaches Jimin, kneeling down beside him. “Are you—”

“Don’t fucking touch me!” the omega shoves the flustered alpha away. “Just fuck off Hoseok—I don’t wanna look at you right now.”

A smirk finds its way onto his lips without him even intending to. He takes great pleasure in watching things break down around him—even better knowing he’s the cause of it. Seokjin makes a grab for Taehyung and the omega looks up at him, eyes round and fearful. He glides his knuckles gently along the omega’s soft cheek, grip on his waist tight and possessive.

“This—This isn’t you, hyung. Why are you doing this?” the pathetic young man whispers. It’s as if the reality he knows is crumbling all around him. Pretty soon the omega won’t be able to distinguish reality at all. When that happens, Taehyung will have no one else to turn to but him.

“Taehyung, I’m only doing this so I can make the right decision. You want me to be with the right omega, don’t you?” he asks, voice less severe than before.

The omega shudders. “Not like this—you said you’d fight for my freedom. That you’d choose me to protect me.”

“And I meant every word of it, doll face. But I also have to look after my own interests, too.”
Before Taehyung has the chance to respond, he fists the back of Taehyung’s red locks and yanks his head back. A pretty whimper leaves the omega’s lips as he shoves his nose against his throat. Out of all the omegas, he finds Taehyung’s scent to be the most pleasing. It’s the least intense. A nice blend of vanilla, chocolate and cherries. It reminds him of a sundae. He places a wet kiss to his Adam’s apple and runs his hands up and down the curve of his graceful spine. Taehyung is the leanest of the omegas. Bones jut out here and there where they really shouldn’t, whispers of previous malnourishment taking away some of the appeal. A skinny omega does not make for a good breeding partner. It isn’t a deal breaker, though.

Unlike Jimin, the touches do have some physical effect on Taehyung. “S-Stop it, hyung. Please. I have a girlfriend.”

“You’re more trouble than you’re worth, pup,” he croons. “You think she didn’t jump for joy when she found out you’d gone missing? She’s probably moved on with a different omega already—maybe one she’s been seeing behind your back this whole time.”

Pressing his hands against Seokjin’s chest, he tries and fails to create some space between them. “Don’t say that! We’re in love—we were talking about getting married!”

Seokjin sighs. “Think about it logically for a second. You’re an omega, Taehyung, but you aren’t that stupid. What does Soomin have to gain from being with you? You can’t hold down a job, half her pay check probably goes towards your medical expenses, and I doubt children were even on the table, were they? Wouldn’t want to risk that craziness to be passed down, would we?”

“Shut up—you can’t—” but he doesn’t let the omega finish, he just shoves his face against his scent gland. Taehyung yells get muffled by this skin. He only hits him in the chest a few times before a shudder runs up his spine. The pheromones win him over, just like they have every other time.

Leaving Taehyung boneless and spaced out against the wall, he has every intention of tormenting the maknae, but is interrupted by Namjoon charging (limping) at him with one of the sticks. Using his foot, he kicks his own stick up and catches it with his hand. Namjoon goes to strike him and Seokjin ducks. He ends up smacking Jimin in the face instead. The omega slaps a hand over his right eye where Namjoon had hit him, cursing up a storm of insults. The brief moment of remorse for his actions is all Seokjin needs to lash out and hit him in the chest as hard as he possibly can. Before Namjoon has even hit the floor Jeongguk is moving towards him, but with his free arm Seokjin grabs the omega by the waist and presses him hard against his front. Jeongguk flails in his grip, still trying to get to his alpha, who’s flat on his back winded and in pain, but Jeongguk is a lot easier to handle than the rest of the omegas.

Making sure Namjoon watches, stunned and helpless from the floor, he drops his stick and uses his
free hand to shove it up Jeongguk’s nightgown to grab his breast. The omega stiffens, petrified, as if every single assault he’s endured has come violently stampeding back into memories. While the boy is pliant, he noses at his mating mark, curious to get a whiff of him. There was a time, before he was claimed, that Seokjin thought Jeongguk’s scent was the most sickening. Jeongguk smelt like candy canes dipped in caster sugar. Felt like he was getting violated by diabetes every time the omega sat down to his left during meals. Now he smells like Namjoon, with his former scent being toned down significantly. Like a minor after taste. Leather, rain and musk. A nice improvement. Seokjin drags a tongue over the crescent of teeth marks sticking out from the choker. Jeongguk is completely still. Always such a good boy.

Namjoon looks furious.

He drops Jeongguk and the boy is a crumpled mess on the floor. Somehow, Namjoon finds it in himself to crawl towards the omega. How sweet. Seokjin wonders if he can smell the dampness between Jeongguk legs. Even in fear his body wants it.

“That was fun,” he says casually. He picks up his sticks and twirls it around playfully as he steps to avoid Namjoon and Jeongguk on the floor. The only one that hasn’t crossed the room is Yoongi, who stands there, attentively analysing his movements. “I think I’ve made my decision. What about you, Yoongi?” he points the stick in his direction. “Changed your mind on any of the omegas? Surely their smells make you hot and bothered?”

“I don’t know how many times I have to repeat myself,” Yoongi sighs. “I’m not getting involved.”

Seokjin shrugs. “Not a hero, I guess. Though you never pegged me as one, either.”

“I want to fight.” Seokjin looks over his shoulder to find Jimin stepping forth, murder in his eyes. “I want to choose my own partner.”

Smirking, he says, “That’s against the rules, Jimin. Wouldn’t want to give them another excuse to punish us, do you?”

“You’re one to talk. The rules clearly state that alphas are supposed to fight. You aren’t a fucking alpha, you cunt.”

Seokjin cannot contain the laughter that bursts from his lips. “You know what, Jimin? You’re right. I’m not an alpha. But I reckon you have the right idea—I say we fuck the rules and make this
a little more *interesting*, wouldn’t you agree, Yoongi?"

The angry eyebrows on the alpha’s face knit together. Whether the alpha will admit it or not, his attention has certainly been piqued. “What are you thinking?”

“I’ve decided that this ‘one omega, one alpha’ is a tired cliché. It doesn’t matter who fucks them during heat. As long as they get knocked up the captors will be happy.”

“You don’t know that.”

*Oh, but I do, Yoongi.*

“Call it a hunch,” he smiles. “Time will prove me wrong. For now, though, I’m going to throw my hat into the ring and say I’m fighting for claim on all *three* omegas. If I get my way, they’ll be my concubines and the rest of you pussy alphas can sleep in the Eating Hall.”

As expected, his words bring a cacophony of outrage from all the other subjects.

“You can’t just fucking do that!” Jimin screeches at the top of his lungs—but he does detect a hint of fear somewhere there, amongst the rage. “You have no right to any of us!”

“But I do,” Seokjin turns to fully face Jimin. The omega looks as if he’s constipated. “According to the rules, whoever’s the victor gets to be leader. If I become leader, I get to make decisions on behalf of everyone. If you think this is a democracy you are sorely mistaken.”

Jimin snatches up Namjoon’s stick and points it at Seokjin. “You asked for a fight, you’ve fucking got one. If I win, I get to choose who I want and you can fucking drop this leader talk, ‘cuz you’ll never be my fucking leader.”

“Jimin, the *rules*—” Hoseok tugs at Jimin’s nightgown, nervously glancing between the omega and beta.

“This isn’t just about eating the same goddamn meals everyday and swallowing vitamins anymore, Hoseok—I’ll willing do *that*. This is about my body. My ability to make decisions that might
change my life forever. I won’t stand by and let this beta fuck do what he wants to me—or any of us, for that matter. If no one’s gonna stand the fuck up, I’ll just do it myself,” Jimin snaps, pushing Hoseok away from him. “Make sure Taehyung and Jeongguk are out of harm’s way—and Namjoon too, I guess.”

Like an obedient lapdog, Hoseok does as the omega orders and starts ushering everyone into a corner. He’s so amusingly pathetic. When he wins, he just might use the alpha as a foot stool.

Twirling the stick around, Jimin backs them into the centre of the room, determination flaring in his gaze. “No funny business, Seokjin. You win this, you win it fair and square.”

Inclining his head to the side, he replies, “Now where’s the fun in that?”

Jimin lunges, predictably, letting anger be the primary dictation to his actions, and Seokjin sidesteps out of the way. The omega stumbles. It’s obvious he’s had no combat training. Not that he’s surprised. Omegas are exempt from military service in South Korea.

The omega turns around and thrusts the stick, aiming for his head. But his hands are gripping the other end of the stick, instead of in the centre where they should be. It makes it easy for him to tap the weapon out of the way and take a step forward, hitting Jimin right in the abdomen. The omega goes stumbling backwards, and he has an opening to do more damage, but he doesn’t act on it. Instead, he waits for Jimin to find his bearings. It’d be no fun to end it so soon.

Wrath seems to rejuvenate the omega’s motivation to win, because he comes at Seokjin with everything he’s got. Seokjin dodges the onslaught of hefty stabs by tilting and side-stepping. From an outward perspective, it must look as though they’re dancing. He humours the boy for just a few more paces—just enough room not to back into the wall behind them—and then catches his stick. Jimin doesn’t anticipate the blow until he’s on his knees clutching his throat. Now with one stick in each hand, he delivers a double blow from both sides—one to Jimin’s head and the other to his hipbone.

Jimin falls to his side, clutching his head as bells ring in his ears. Seokjin approaches, kicking him onto his back and pressing his foot against the omega’s stomach. “Dominating all the alphas in the world won’t change the fact that you were born a weak, pathetic omega. It’s time to come back to reality, Jimin. Your place will always be beneath me.”

“That’s—That’s enough, Seokjin.” Hoseok steps up. Who would’ve predicted such a thing? “I’ll challenge you.”
Seokjin looks down at Jimin and smirks. “Why don’t you go wait for me in your nest, Jiminnie? I’ll be happy to breed you once I’m done beating your boyfriend to a pulp.”

“Why don’t you go fuck yourself,” Jimin snaps, still nursing his head.

“Get out of the way, the real men are going to fight.” Kicking Jimin in the side for good measure, he tosses a stick at Hoseok. The alpha catches it easily, looking queasy.

“Guess you completed your military service, did you?” Seokjin asks conversationally, spinning his stick around.

Hoseok nods tentatively.

“Where were you stationed?”

“Gokseong.”

“Gokseong.” he echoes, cocking an eyebrow. “I don’t recall there being any military bases near there.”

“There aren’t. I was commissioned to do community service during my conscription.”

That makes a lot more sense. He chuckles. “What were you doing? Taking care of veterans?”

“I was involved in elderly care, yes,” he says through a tense jaw.

“Must’ve gotten a lot out of bathing their wrinkly, old bodies.”

Hoseok wets his lips nervously. It’s funny watching him try to be the righteous, courageous person he’s not. “Wouldn’t expect someone like you to understand. What would a cold bastard like you know what it’s like to care for anybody but yourself?”
Opening his arms, Seokjin says, “Well? Show me how ‘caring for others’ benefits you.”

There’s no reason to take the alpha as seriously as he might the others. While Jimin is an omega, under the right circumstances his pheromones could pose a potential threat. Hoseok, on the other hand, wouldn’t know how to tap into the powers his biology is capable of even if he were given step by step instructions on how to do it. Not that he would have any expectations for a mere social worker, anyway. An alpha with no ambition is about as good as any beta. An alpha who’s weak and cowardice is as good as an omega. That’s what his father used to say.

There’s likely some truth to his words, but his son is living, breathing proof that betas have the potential to be just as determined as alphas if given the opportunity. That’s the problem he’s always had with his father. Whatever comes spewing from his mouth can be refuted by hard evidence.

His father, ironically, wasn’t a fan of evidence.

Skirting around, Hoseok tries and fails to pinpoint where to make his move. There’s an abundance of different ways the alpha could approach this, but given that he has next to no training his inexperience is becoming more apparent.

So, because Seokjin is a gentleman, he decides to make this easier by making the first move. Striking head on catches Hoseok off guard. It’s as though he were expecting a subtler approach. With a swing he smacks Hoseok square in the mouth, splitting the flesh of his lip and knocking teeth. As his head tilts back from the force, Seokjin delivers a triple blow to the head and torso, hard enough to bruise bone. The swift and sound defeat rings at the collapse of Hoseok’s body hitting the floor. As the man whimpers and coils into a fetal position like a newborn pup, Seokjin waits a moment, hoping he’ll give him an excuse to humiliate him a little more.

As expected, Hoseok does no such thing.

Instead he lies there, embracing the defeat as if he’d anticipated the outcome all along. It’s quite pathetic how he doesn’t try to fight with every lasting breath like a true hero would. It would seem expectations never accurately emulate reality.

“Anyone else?” he looks around to see the others scattered.
Yoongi is hovering over Jimin checking to see if there’s any serious damage (which there isn’t, he made sure of it), and Namjoon is whispering things in Jeongguk’s ear while the omega fights off an emotional breakdown. Seokjin regards both Namjoon and Yoongi specifically. Out of everybody, surely they would have some objections…?

Namjoon, the hero of his own narrative, the epitome of alpha masculinity and idealism, makes a move to stand up. The omega hanging off him immediately protests.

“No, alpha—you’re injured. The odds are stacked against you—”

“What would you have me do then?” Namjoon speaks firmly, eyes glued to Seokjin. Barely even acknowledging that Jeongguk is there. All he seems to see is him. Like a raging bull eying a red flag. “Just let him win? Let him separate us and let him fill you with his pups like some fucking cuck—”

Jeongguk cups his hand over the alpha’s ear, clearly not wanting Seokjin to overhear, but he could take a guess as to what he might be advising. But Namjoon shakes him off anyway.

“Any number of things could happen by then! The time to act is now, my ankle be damned—”

“I’ll fight.” The omega is getting desperate, anchoring his weight on Namjoon’s arm to keep him from standing up. “I’ll fight in your place, I’ll do anything but please—please don’t fight him.”

Namjoon squares his jaw. Still, he does not look at Jeongguk. “Sit, Jeongguk. You have no place in this fight.”

The hurt in Jeongguk’s eyes is subtle, like he’s heard it all before and it no longer warrants any notable reactions from him. Grip slipping, the reality seems to only then set in for Jeongguk. He’s come to realise that it wouldn’t matter what he did or said in this situation, there was no dissuading the oaf from his most basic impulses. Jeongguk lets go of Namjoon and sinks quietly next to Taehyung, who has been watching everything play out with an absent look in his eyes.

Seokjin watches in amusement as Namjoon hobbles his way over and seizes Hoseok’s weapon. Shame, really, maybe in his best condition Namjoon would’ve been a fun opponent, but the impact of his untimely injury has made things all too easy for Seokjin. If he weren’t so hopelessly clumsy and unobservant, maybe he wouldn’t have gotten himself into this mess in the first place.
“Must’ve thought it was a stroke of genius, to try and one-up the competition by claiming Jeongguk prematurely. I’ll give you points for the audacity, but after I beat you within an inch of your life, I’m afraid the effort isn’t going to make much of a difference. The result will be the same.”

The predictability of these idiots is almost comical. Namjoon rises to the bait, making the irrational decision to try and strike him first—which is the exact opposite of what someone handicapped should do. Seokjin eases into his fighting stance, ready to finally unleash all the insanity he’d been saving just for Namjoon, but a blur moves between them. Wood meets wood, and Seokjin is surprised to discover Yoongi standing before him, blocking his attack. The other alpha had been shoved out of the way at the last minute, on his bottom on the floor.

Yoongi’s sharp, cat-like leer meets his fearlessly, and despite himself, he smirks. Finally, something interesting. Their weapons separate and Yoongi takes a step back to create a safe distance, but still protects Namjoon from any sudden attacks.

“Stay out of this, Yoongi,” Namjoon growls, trying and failing to lift himself back to his feet. “This is my fight.”

Without his gaze straying from Seokjin, Yoongi chides the younger alpha, “Don’t be a fool. Have you already forgotten what you’ve done? Every injury you sustain will be felt by Jeongguk. Is your pride really worth the pain you’ll be causing to your own omega? You claimed him, Namjoon. You no longer have the luxury of only thinking of yourself.”

“I was hoping you’d interfere.” Seokjin speaks up when it’s clear Namjoon has nothing of value to retort. “You’re the only person here who could provide me with any form of entertainment. Though, I have to admit, I didn’t think it’d take beating an omega and someone who’s arguably an omega for you to finally step up.”

“I was watching you,” Yoongi explains simply. “Needed to know if you had any weak points.”

“Hm, I guess you got what you needed, did you?”

To this, Yoongi says nothing. Instead he sweeps his feet into a defensive position, just like he’d been trained to do. Seokjin twirls his stick around teasingly.

“Want to make things interesting?”
Yoongi’s eyes narrow.

“If I defeat you, my first offer still stands—but, when the omegas are fat and ripe with my pups, I get to have you as my little cock-warmer. Doesn’t that sound nice?”

The alpha doesn’t so much as bat a lash. It’ll have to take a lot more to shake him. “And if I win?”

“Whatever you like,” he offers easily. “You become leader. Any cock and any hole are yours for the taking, and I’ll comply with whatever you demand.”

Yoongi turns his weapon over in his hands. “Somehow I doubt that very much.”

“Try me. I can be quite unpredictable.”

“So you say.”

Seokjin is confident that he knows Yoongi well enough to make the first strike. Being apart of the scouting process, Yoongi’d been quite the special find. A lost soul that’d piqued in high school and, after that, floundered through university before getting involved with drug smuggling between provinces. What he’d found from his research, Yoongi’s techniques rely more on speed and momentum. The alpha’s opponents were predominantly bigger than him, so Yoongi had to find other ways to gain the upper-hand other than using brute strength.

Instead of aiming for the face or chest, like Yoongi may have anticipated based on what he’s observed, he goes straight for the legs. Wouldn’t want to break something so pretty, now would we? The alpha knocks the stick away before it can touch him and turns around to gain more speed for his blow to Seokjin’s neck. But he’s faster. He ducks and backs away, looking for an opening. Yoongi eases back into his defensive position, knees slightly turned inward and front leg settled on the ball of his foot.

Using his strength might just be the only way to win this. While Seokjin understands his techniques, Yoongi is slightly faster than him. Lunging, he throws himself back into offensive mode, striking Yoongi at all angles, forcing him backwards. Yoongi blocks every move, having to reverse in a different direction to avoid Namjoon, Hoseok and the omegas who watch defenceless behind him. There’s only so many places he can go, though, and eventually, Seokjin has him pinned against the wall, wooden stick pressed against his chest. Yoongi’s arms tremble as he
pushes back against him, nose scrunched and eyes fierce. He likes how Yoongi looks pinned against a wall.

Then Yoongi kicks him in the stomach so hard he goes staggering backwards, and the alpha lunges, going straight for his knees. Seokjin blocks and swings a kick to Yoongi’s side, but Yoongi’s forearm takes the brunt of the impact his shin delivers.

Every blow is met with a block, every punch and kick caught or dodged. It isn’t long before the temperature-controlled room becomes stifling. Pheromones crackle like electricity in the air, causing alphas to hunch over and omegas to cower. Neither of them even has time to let it get to them. As he tries to think three steps ahead, a fist comes flying his way. Perspiration treks down the side of his face and his lungs burn. It’s only been a week since they’ve been locked away in the box and already the lack of exercise has taken its toll.

For what feels like ten minutes, they’re at it. Even sweaty and exhausted, Yoongi never once lets his composure slip. Doesn’t so much as reveal a wisp of fear. It’s agitating. The others are so easy to toy with, so pathetic and insecure and stupid. All it takes is a few well-placed words and they’re uncomfortable or paranoid.

Not Yoongi, though.

Namjoon may think he’s the model alpha, but Seokjin would toss his ballot into Yoongi’s hat for that title.

Getting fed up with their fight, he snaps his stick over his knee, separating it into two smaller pieces. Yoongi assesses him critically, chest heaving up and down. There’s a small pause, but not long enough to properly catch their breaths before they’re lunging at each other. This way he’s able to strike from both sides at a much quickly rate, and perhaps Yoongi would’ve been able to easily keep up, if not for the fact that his movements are getting sluggish.

The smallest opening is exposured as Yoongi moves to block a strike to his chest, and Seokjin knees Yoongi in the crotch as hard as he can. The alpha buckles in shock, and he raises the splintered stick in his right hand, pointed directly as his foot. If causing serious injury isn’t an option, maiming the alpha is the next best thing.

But then a hand comes out of nowhere and snatches his wrist. Before he can even understand what’s happening, his arm is being brutally twisted behind his back and a massive weight slams against his back, knocking the oxygen from his lungs. Ribs crack when his body collides with the floor. He’s shocked. He’d been so wrapped up in fighting Yoongi that he’d completely forgotten
his surroundings.

With his cheek squished against the floor, he does he best to look over his shoulder at the weight that pins him down.

Unbridled rage flares like an inferno in his lungs. “You cheated,” he snarls.

“Shut up, Seokjin. Nobody likes a hypocrite,” Namjoon growls with a hint of self-awareness that definitely hadn’t been there before.

How unexpectedly refreshing.
It occurred to me that this entire chapter is just one long conversation and I’m so sorry for that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It feels as though the lights in Zone 1 have been on for a while when he finally comes to. He’s welcomed by the familiar, dry-mouthed discomfort brought on by the nasty-ass sleeping gas that came filtering through the vents straight after Seokjin’s sound defeat. ‘Surprise’ isn’t exactly the word he would use to describe how he felt when the rapid drowsiness set in. The other inmates started dropping around him like flies. The bastards didn’t even give them time to lavish in their victory over the resident psychopath that is Kim Seokjin.

What a fucking betrayal that was.

This whole fucking time he’d obsessed over the idea that one of the alphas were going to be the first to lose their minds. This is mostly because he’s had firsthand experience with dumb alphas and their unrealistic power fantasies, and this situation would have been the perfect catalyst for them to act upon it. But a beta—a fucking beta, a class Jimin would usually regard with some level of respect, had to turn around and flip everything on its head (not that shit wasn’t already that way, but things had been on a course to stabilising). Now as he stares up at the blinding ceiling, he’s not sure what to think. If Seokjin isn’t trustworthy, who’s to say Hoseok or Taehyung (people he’d consider reasonable people) aren’t hiding something fucked up, too? Yoongi could be a serial killer. Jeongguk might be an alien from another planet. God forbid—Namjoon might turn out to be normal!

Jimin would have assumed someone had been taken for punishment, if not for the fact that he was semi-conscious when a handful of boots marched through the bathroom door into Zone 1. There was no energy to move or even talk, but from what he could tell through blurred vision, they were checking them for injuries. One of them had pried his eyelids open and flashed a light in his eye. He couldn’t have made out the face of the person appraising him, even if he tried. At some point he’d completely lost consciousness, though, and it frustrates him that he can’t even tell how long he’s been out. No clocks. No calendars. Just speculation. It could be sometime in the afternoon, or half a day and night could’ve flown by and Jimin would be none the wiser.
There mustn’t be any serious damage inflicted on his body if they were just going to leave him there on the floor. Whatever he’d sustained may not have been life-threatening, but as the numbing-effect of the gas wears off, the pain comes back tenfold. A throbbing beats the side of his skull where Seokjin had hit him, tenderness aching in the throat, abdomen and hip. Even swallowing his own spit hurts. God, when this headache goes away he’s going to tear Seokjin’s trachea from his throat and stuff it in his pillowcase.

What a fucking snake.

“Jimin,” comes a whisper, and Jimin wants to scream because moving is a massive pain in the ass. “You awake?”

“Awake and breathing, unfortunately,” he croaks miserably. He decides he isn’t going to move. Whoever’s talking to him is just going to have to come to him.

Crawling into his peripheral, he’s almost surprised to see Taehyung in what appears to be a semi-functional state of mind. There’s no desire to be petty towards a mentally-ill person, but he’d be lying if he said he wasn’t expecting to find Taehyung curled up in a corner somewhere rocking back and forth. Don’t get him wrong, the other omega still looks like shit. There are bags under his eyes darker than the pits of hell. There’s also piss-yellow discolouring and pinprick red dots on his inner elbows that’ve been there since he was returned to them. Taehyung also looks gaunter, somehow. Not that he had much fat to begin with.

Jimin isn’t really one to feel sympathy for people. You reach a certain point in your life where you’ve had to deal with so much, that everyone’s problems just seem to pale in comparison. But he does feel for Taehyung. Deep down somewhere.

The omega hovers over him, concern laced into his frown. “Can you move?”

“I don’t want to.”

“How are you feeling?”

“Like shit.”
Taehyung nods as if knowing all too well what that feels like. “Lunch was served about an hour ago, but only a bunch of us were awake by then. You were still asleep so I didn’t disturb you.”

“I’m not hungry, anyway,” he lies, even though he kind of is. Wouldn’t seem right to make Taehyung feel guilty. Not after what he’s been through. “Where’re the others now?”

It’s pretty quiet, all things considered. He’d expect at least some conversation, for Namjoon to be exaggerating his epic victory in the fight or maybe Hoseok having another mental because he isn’t there to tell him to get a hold of himself.

“Still in Zone 4,” Taehyung’s voice lowers, looking over his shoulder at something. “They’re still figuring out what to do with Seokjin.”

Hm, seems like an awfully important discussion. “Fine. Help me up. Can’t have those dumb alphas making important decisions on behalf of all of us—because if you’re here, that means Jeongguk is the only person representing us in this discussion. You and I both know he’s the last person who should be making decisions on behalf of anybody.”

“Actually, as far as I could tell, Jeongguk had very little to say on the subject.”

“Exactly.”

Sitting up is the single most regrettable decision he’s made in his entire life. The world tilts, his head pounds with a vengeance, and any movement irritates the bruise he has on his abdomen. Oh, he has quite a few things to say about what is to be done about a certain someone. It wouldn’t be too much of a punishment to dismember the beta and have him served in next meal’s stew. That’s a broth he’d thoroughly enjoy.

Getting to his feet, he slowly shuffles his way over to Zone 4, where the voices can be heard humming conversely behind the door. The group has moved their seat pillows into a circle in the centre of the room, though—it looks more like a clumsy square, seeing as there’s only four of them. Three-quarters of the square are alphas. That simply won’t do.

His heart nearly drops out of his ass when something catches in his peripheral. It’s Seokjin, sitting calmly with his legs folded one over the other. His hands are tied behind his back by a towel. There are bandages wrapped around his torso and there are bruises littered here and there from his fight with Yoongi. Apart from that, though, he seems in perfect condition. That won’t do, either.
“How’s your head feel, Jimin-ssi?” Seokjin has unnervingly reverted back to using honorific expression.

“Better knowing you got your ass handed to you, cunt.” Jimin breezes past the beta and makes himself comfortable in the gap between Namjoon and Hoseok, who nurses a few ugly bruises on his body and face. His poor, poor baby. “Heard you’re talking about what to do with the beta. I’d like to put homicide on the table.”

Yoongi rolls his eyes. That attitude is going to come back to bite him, mark his words. “This isn’t a joke. We have no way of getting rid of Seokjin and killing him might just be the stupidest suggestion yet.”

“I doubt the rest of you have thought up anything better,” Jimin scoffs. Taehyung quietly sits down in the space between Yoongi and Hoseok.

“We were discussing sleeping arrangements before you rudely interrupted,” Namjoon drawls, Jeongguk snuggled underneath his arm. His fingers toy at the omega’s hip. Juliet looks distracted than usual today, as though he shut off from the conversation a while ago. Not that it’s surprising. The maknae probably thinks this is an alpha’s matter, or whatever. “Seokjin is too dangerous to sleep in Zone 1 with the rest of us. Hoseok suggested Zone 3, but the rules clearly state that those areas aren’t for sleeping. We’d also have to remove Seokjin once one of us goes into a rut or heat.”

“Let him sleep in the bathroom,” he answers bluntly. “I’m sure he’ll be in good company with the toilets.”

“Well, that’s the problem…” Hoseok tentatively speaks up. “There’s no stopping Seokjin from moving between the zones, and if he’s uncomfortable he’ll likely just go back to Zone 1 when we’re all asleep.”

Even the very notion of that creep walking around while they’re sleeping has the hairs on his arms standing on end. The situation is a lot more dangerous that he previous thought. They all have to sleep eventually.

“We could take it in turns to check up on him every hour or so…” he purporses weakly, because even to his ears it doesn’t sound all that appealing.
“We don’t have access to alarm clocks, and if Seokjin really wanted to go back to Zone 1 there’s nothing we could really do to stop him,” Yoongi sighs. “There’s no locks on the doors and we have don’t have access to anything heavy enough that could barricade him.”

Jimin purses his lips. “If he’s tied up, I don’t really see what the big deal is. Sure, he can walk, but he’s not much of a threat with his arms tied behind his back.”

“We’ll have to untie him at some point, Jimin,” Namjoon says grimly.

“Why the hell would you? Just keep him tied up. Who cares if it hurts him.”

“And who exactly is going to hold his dick while he takes a piss, huh? Are you going to do it?” the alpha deadpans. “We can try our best to keep an eye on him but other than that I don’t see what more we can do about it.”

“You know, you could always ask what I think.”

Oh, right, Seokjin’s still in the room. “Why are we talking about this in front of the beta, anyway?”

“Would you have preferred we left him in Zone 1 where you were sleeping?” Yoongi cocks an eyebrow at him. No, that would have been a sight most unwelcome. “Besides. We had to feed him. If he doesn’t eat, we get punished.”

Jimin cocks his head to the side, smirking at the alpha. “And who had the pleasure of spoon-feeding him?”

“No comment,” Yoongi answers flatly. A tiny pink tint creeps up the side of the alpha’s neck. It makes him wonder whether Yoongi volunteered or if he’d been forced to do it under a unanimous vote.

“What about the leader of our group?”

Namjoon frowns. “What about it?”
Jimin sighs, sitting up straight and stretching his limbs. His body then politely reminds him that moving in such a way hurts like a bitch, and that he should refrain from doing so in the future. “What I mean is have you made a decision about it?”

“What’s there to make a decision about?” Yoongi drawls. “Namjoon won the fight. Therefore he’s the leader.”

“Well Namjoon never would’ve been able to gain the upper hand if you hadn’t fought Seokjin. I say the title is just as much yours at it is Namjoon’s,” he argues with conviction. That classist ratbag won’t be his leader if he has anything to say about it.

“It doesn’t matter anyway. I don’t want to be leader,” Yoongi inadvertently goes ahead and condemns them all. Thanks Yoongi. A true hero you turned out to be.

Then, out of nowhere, Taehyung decides it’s time to speak up, “So you’re just going to step aside and let a classist asshole, who has no respect for omega rights, take over and make decisions on behalf of all of us, are you? You may as well have just let Seokjin win, then.”

“Finally, someone speaks some sense around here,” he mutters under his breath.

Angry Big Dick Alpha immediately jumps to defend himself. Because of course he does. Everyone’s wrong but him. “I would never make any of you do something you aren’t comfortable with. The fact that you would even compare me to Seokjin—who might I remind you, fully intended to rape half the group—is absurd. I have no interest in telling you what to do.”

“No, we all know you only have interest in telling Jeongguk what to do,” Taehyung claps back savagely.

Jeongguk groans, hiding his face against Namjoon’s chest, “Please, don’t bring me into this.”

“Look,” Yoongi says. “It doesn’t matter. I don’t want to be leader, end of story. The role itself plays exactly into what our captors want and I’ll have nothing to do with it.”

“You’d make a good leader,” Taehyung turns to him. There’s clear respect in his eyes that hadn’t
been there before. It might have arisen from Yoongi’s clear display of strength yesterday. Although from memory, Taehyung had been out of it for majority of the fight. The omega leans forward, touching the alpha’s arm in an intimate manner. Jimin is not the only one surprised by this. “If you’d just consider—”

Yoongi jerks his arm away, glaring at Taehyung. “I said no. How many times do I have to repeat myself?”

“I say we vote,” Jimin asserts. “All in favour of Namjoon being leader say ‘I’.”

Namjoon, Yoongi and Jeongguk (of course) put their hands in the air, and Jimin sighs in frustration, because that means the vote is a tie.

“I think Namjoon would make a great leader,” comes a voice from behind them, and Jimin whirls around to glare at Seokjin.

“Nobody fucking asked you, asshole.”

“Guys, maybe…maybe we should just…” Jeongguk goes pink under the sudden attention drawn to him. For fuck’s sake, just speak you moron. “…focus on Seokjin, for now? We can decide on a leader later, can’t we?”

“Jeongguk’s right, we’re not going to get anywhere if we fight amongst each other,” it’s funny how Namjoon only ever agrees with his own omega, but never he or Taehyung. This is why you shouldn’t be leader, asshat. “We’ll figure out Seokjin’s sleeping arrangements and then—”

The sound of metal scraping has them all fall silent. It’s a sound they know well by now. The Mystery Box.

Jeongguk stands up, “I’ll go get it.”

His alpha opens his mouth to protest but Jeongguk is already out of the room before a word can leave his fish mouth. It occurs to Jimin then that Jeongguk volunteered because everyone else has an injury. He’d feel grateful, if it weren’t for the fact that it reminded him that he’d cowered in the corner why the rest of them fought for their freedom. Expecting much from the maknae is a pointless endeavour, and yet it still brings his blood to boil. So weak, so compromising and willing.
Even if Seokjin had won, they would’ve fought at every possible turn, resisted every slimy touch because that’s what you’re supposed to do. But it goes without saying that Jeongguk wouldn’t have done a damn thing. The bitch would’ve spread his legs regardless.

It takes longer than necessary for Jeongguk to return. So long that Jimin starts to genuinely think the idiot had gotten lost on his way back.

“Maybe they put something dangerous in it this time,” Namjoon stresses, looking at the door every other second. “Maybe Jeongguk is hurt—”

“If Jeongguk were hurt, you would’ve felt it,” Yoongi reminds him flatly.

“Oh. Right.” The alpha blinks. Even after days they’re still adjusting to the new lifestyle brought on by their mating mark.

In truth, Jimin had been really mad that they’d gone and done something so stupid. When claiming was banned sixty years ago it’d been a real triumph for omega rights in countries all over the world. A mating mark creates such a devastating power imbalance in the relationship, particularly between alphas and omegas. As if alphas didn’t yield enough power over omegas, claiming was a practice used to control every aspect of omegas and their biology. After being claimed, it was standard for omegas to sever all contact with the alphas in their lives. This included their brothers, sisters and fathers. Alphas tended not to hurt their omegas physically, because it’d hurt them too, but that didn’t stop alphas from gaslighting and isolating their partners at every turn until they literally had no one else in their lives to turn to for help. When claiming was officially made illegal in South Korea there were celebrations in the fucking streets. Omegas came out of their homes and waved banners of pink and white, the colours of their freedom movement. Songs were played in the streets. Even betas and alphas rejoiced. At least, that’s what an elderly woman told him when their class went and visited an old folks’ home in the sixth grade.

Jimin ran away from his eighth foster home not long after that.

But for Jeongguk to go as far to suggest such a thing to Namjoon, and Namjoon to go along with it…

It’s something he could never hope to understand.

Just as Namjoon is about to try and stand up and see what’s taking the omega so long, Jeongguk
re-enters the room holding a velvet box. It’s rectangular, and a deep blue colour. The maknae sinks to his knees, eyes never leaving what’s in his hands. On the box there’s a note stuck to it: “For the Omegas”.

It could be anything but good news for them.

It doesn’t seem to bode well for the others, either, because Namjoon offers his hand and Jeongguk obediently hands it over. This would’ve naturally made him angry, because it isn’t even addressed to the alpha, but he also has no desire to open the box. Better to let someone else do it, anyway.

Without a wisp of hesitation, Namjoon opens the box. Inside, cradled in a mould of Styrofoam, is a long, nasty-looking syringe with strange, dark yellow liquid inside it. Snuggled into the foam beside it is a small, silicone ball with a button on it. A folded-up piece of paper falls out of it. Quicker than the rest of them, Yoongi seizes the paper. The paper crackles as it’s unfurled. Jimin leers at the piece of paper so hard he’s dissatisfied when it doesn’t spontaneously combust. His eyes jump to Yoongi’s expression. There isn’t any emotion, no slight twitch or wrinkle to indicate what he’s seeing. It’s extremely vexing.

“Well? What does it say?” Taehyung asks, leaning to try and catch a glimpse. Then the omega’s face drops, and he’s quietly leaning away. He perplexingly no longer finds any interest in what’s written on the paper. This does little to settle the butterflies in his stomach.

The seconds drag on and Jimin finally snaps. “For fuck’s sake—” He snatches the paper from Yoongi’s hands. “As punishment for the misconduct exercised by Subject Omega 1 and Subject Beta 1 yesterday, plans for breeding have been pushed forward to today. The syringe contained within this box is a heat-stimulate…” Well, now we know why the others were acting weird. Jimin makes a popping sound with his lips. He’s torn between continuing or biting his tongue off. “The ball must be passed from omega to omega, clicking the button on each pass. If an omega clicks the ball and the ball vibrates, that omega must be injected with the heat-stimulate and proceed to Zone 3 for—” Jimin sighs in frustration “—for breeding… Once the stimulate has been administered the used syringe, ball and box must be returned back to the Mystery Box…”

“How come we don’t get to choose who takes it?” Jeongguk frowns. There isn’t any sign of fear on his expression, as if this was an inevitable they’d have to face eventually. “Or better yet, put the responsibility on the leader? What’s the point of having a leader if they can’t make decisions?”

“Because the point of instating a leader gives the false impression that we have power,” Yoongi scratches his chin, frowning thoughtfully. “They want us to buy into the illusion that we have control where we don’t.”
Scrunching the paper into a ball and throwing it, Jimin says, “This is ridiculous. We haven’t even discussed who claimed who—they didn’t even give us time to establish anything before gassing us. How’re we even expected to function under these circumstances?”

An awkward pause follows. The members share looks with one another. Jeongguk squirms uncomfortably. Jimin stares at each of them, confusion building. The only ones who don’t look somewhat guilty are Yoongi and Namjoon.

“What?” Jimin snaps. “Why are you all doing that?”

“We already decided on partners while you were sleeping,” Namjoon informs him matter-of-factly. “It was kind of a no-brainer on who would be paired with who, so we didn’t think you needed to be present.”

“Like hell I didn’t need to be present! It’s only about who I have to have sex with!” Jimin throws his hands up in the air. Unbelievable. These people are goddamn unbelievable.

“We—we thought you already made your decision—that you were going to choose Hoseok anyway, so—” Taehyung looks down at his hands. The omega, at the very least, has the decency to be ashamed. Too bad Jimin isn’t in such a forgiving mood.

“So everything’s already been decided then, has it?” He gestures aggressively in Namjoon and Jeongguk’s direction. “Asshole 1 and Sexdoll 3 get have their happy little ending even though they fucked the rules and put everyone in danger—and what? You two are gonna fuck, are you?” He looks between Yoongi and Taehyung expectantly.

Taehyung blushes, glancing at Yoongi from beneath the flutter of his lashes, and Yoongi looks straight ahead, hilariously disinterested. “Officially, as acknowledged by our captors, we are mates. Unofficially, we agreed upon a mutual companionship that doesn’t involve any physical or romantic obligations. Taehyung is free to do what he pleases and my job is to make sure no one—” his eyes flicker in Seokjin’s direction “—exploits him.”

The slight disappointment written on Taehyung’s face speaks volumes on how this arrangement went down. For the entire week, Taehyung thought he’d found a solid support system in Seokjin. Then out of fucking nowhere, Seokjin does a complete one eighty and reveals to the rest of them that he’s a psycho, and suddenly Taehyung has no one else to turn to. Never mind the fact that Jimin is literally right here, fully willing to be his support. It probably has to do with his class, though. Someone like Taehyung has probably relied on alphas and betas his entire life, which is why he’s now showing an interest in Yoongi—the only alpha that seems to have his sh** relatively
together. It’d be easy for him to roll his eyes at this pathetic display of dependency, like he does all the time with Jeongguk, but Taehyung has confided quite a bit of information to him over the past week about his mental health and how terribly it dictates every aspect of his life. In a small way, he can at least understand where Taehyung is coming from.

“Whatever. Give me the ball—I’ll fucking start.”

Taehyung sighs. “I don’t understand why we have to do this. We’re not on heat-suppressants. It said in my results that my heat was going to occur naturally in a week anyway.”

“Yeah, well, rules are rules,” Jimin grumbles, tossing the ball between his hands. On the outside it’s rubbery, but there’s obviously something weighty inside it that’ll set off the vibrations. “Personally, I say we just end any suspense now and make Jeongguk take it.”

“Me? Why?” the maknae’s voice goes comically high-pitched like a teenage boy going through puberty. Which is fitting to his appearance.

Jimin shrugs. “Pregnancy, babies, motherhood—all that traditional shit, it’s what you’re into, isn’t it?”

“I don’t want to give birth in a place like this,” Jeongguk bristles, mildly upset. “There’s a high chance they’ll take the babies away from us.”

Snorting, he retorts, “Now you’re just being dramatic. What’d they do with a bunch of squawking, stinky babies? You can’t honestly believe these scientists went through years of study just to play nanny for children that aren’t even their own.”

Jeongguk looks as though he wants to argue, but quietens when Namjoon places a hand over his own. They share a look. The rigidness drains from Jeongguk’s shoulders like a balloon deflating, and the omega lets it go. As easy as that. Jimin doesn’t know where on Earth Jeongguk got it in his head that their children would be taken from them, but it just doesn’t make sense. What would be the point of making them go through this process in the first place then? Honestly, Jeongguk never thinks anything through. He has a one-track mind, just like Namjoon. Guess that’s why they go so well together.

Without further ado, Jimin presses the button on the ball. The white silicone base turns into a green colour, which he takes to mean that the thing inside it has been activated it. Jimin tosses it over to
Taehyung, who closes his eyes in reluctant anticipation and presses the button. The ball changes to pink, but doesn’t vibrate. Releasing the air from his lung in premature relief, he throws it to Jeongguk. Unwilling to participate, Jeongguk simply places the ball in Namjoon’s hand before turning to burrow his face into the alpha’s side. Namjoon wraps an arm around him pulls him onto his lap. He plants a kiss to the top of Jeongguk’s head. The alpha presses the button. It turns yellow. It doesn’t vibrate. Jimin catches it.

Rinse and repeat.

They do this for quite some time. He doesn’t know why, but he was under the impression that they would toss it a few times between the three of them before it’d eventually vibrate. But no, that would be too logical to assume. Instead, it goes on for what feels like nearly an hour. Jimin’s arms begins to hurt after a while. They do it for so long that Yoongi gets bored and fucks off to go read his book. Asshole. Like there’s anything that could be more important right now. Jeongguk falls asleep in Namjoon’s arms, and Hoseok goes from sitting in nail-biting anticipation to lying on his back, staring blankly at the ceiling.

“Maybe it’s broken?” Taehyung suggests, growing sick of the stale activity.

“It’s not broken,” Namjoon says just as he catches the ball with his free hand, the other up Jeongguk’s nightgown rubbing circles into his spine. “They would’ve tested it a few times before adding it to the experiment.”

“You’re an ‘educated man’, Namjoon. Tell us, why the fuck is this even in the experiment, huh? What purpose does this set out to achieve?” Jimin asks with no restrain on aggression.

“There could be a number of reasons, all of which I doubt someone like you could properly understand,” the alpha responds plainly.

“You fucking—”

The ball vibrates. Jimin snaps his head to the side. Taehyung looks down at the ball in his hands, his expression of nonchalance morphing into that of unrestrained horror. “Oh god—oh god, oh god, oh god. I can’t—I can’t—Yoongi!”

Looking over his shoulder, Jimin finds Yoongi sitting next to Seokjin with his book splayed out on his lap. Why the alpha would deign to sit so close to the beta like that is beyond him, but Yoongi is
pointedly looking at the ball with some level of irritation. As if it had planned for this to happen all along.

Slowly shutting his book, he makes his way over to Taehyung’s side—but not before sending a withering look at Seokjin for sniggering. “Calm down. It’s not a big deal. Who here has any experience with needles?”

They all sit in silence.

“I do.”

Jimin rolls his eyes. “Can someone please drag his ass to another room? There’s no reason for the beta to be here in the first place.”

Yoongi turns back towards Seokjin. The curiosity is unnecessary. The alpha should take everything Seokjin says at this point with a grain of salt. “You know how to administer needles?”

“My aunt used to work as a nurse at a blood bank.” The absolute glee in Seokjin’s voice is enough for Jimin to distrust every word coming out of his mouth. Seokjin knows that none of them have any experience with needles—the closest Jimin has ever gotten to a needle in recent memory, is when a client shot up heroin between sex-acts and his heart nearly fucking stopped while Jimin was choking him with a leather leash. Suffice to say, Jimin never accepted any payment from that client ever again.

“That’s really fucking convenient,” he says sharply. “Especially since you’re tied up. Gee, I wonder what would happen if we were to take away the only restraint you have, and put a fucking syringe in your hand. Hm. Any guesses?”

“I may be your only safe option,” Seokjin calmly explains. “One of you can certainly try giving Taehyung the needle, but do any of you even know how to feel for a vein? Or where you need to put pressure on the arm to make the vein more visible? Listen—I know we’ve gotten off on the wrong foot—”

“Oh, spare me!” Jimin jumps to his feet, hands balled into fists. “Don’t you even try to convince us to take you out of those restraints! You’re a filthy liar who’ll do whatever it takes to get what you want.”
“You guys said it yourself. You can’t keep me restrained forever. What do I possibly have to gain by hurting any of you? I’m out numbered one to six, well—” he looks pointedly at Jeongguk and smirks “—one to five, really.”

Jimin looks at Yoongi, who—judging by the look on his face—seems to actually be considering what Seokjin is saying. He takes a step towards the alpha, leering intensely at him. “You don’t seriously believe what he’s saying, do you?”

“He has a point.”

Thrusting a finger in Seokjin’s direction, he yells, “He’s lying to you—to all of us. He’s done it before and he’ll do it again. Don’t play into his game.”

“Who’s going to administer the syringe then, you?” Yoongi looks at him then, frustrated. The alpha seems to perfectly understand the dilemma but is going about it the wrong way. “You’re the one who was adamant about making me the leader—well I’m making my first stand as leader. Seokjin administers the needle and we keep heavy surveillance on him until we find a way out of this mess.”

“You can’t do that! I take back my vote,” he says petulantly.

“Fine. Namjoon—” he turns to the alpha still marinating in the conflict “—you’re leader. Make a decision.”

Namjoon gapes at Yoongi stupidly. So does Jimin, but significantly less stupidly. He stamps his foot. “Fuck you, Yoongi! You’ve just doomed us all to oblivion! When you get to hell know that I’ll be down there ready to throw you in a pit of lava!”

“What’s it gonna be, Namjoon?” Yoongi flat out ignores him. The prick. “Let Seokjin do it or someone else? Whatever the fuck you want—I’m not making any of the decisions.”

“Well, I—um—” Namjoon fumbles for words, caught off guard by the sudden responsibility thrown at his face. He doesn’t deserve shit, but here we are anyway. Thanks Yoongi. “I guess—we have to let Seokjin do it, right? I don’t want Taehyung to go through more pain than he has to—”

“God—it’s fine, right, Taehyung?” he turns to the omega, who has fallen suspiciously silent since
the argument started.

The omega shifts, avoiding eye-contact with him. “Actually, I don’t have a problem with it. Seokjin’s right in that he gains nothing from harming us. He’ll likely get punished for it.”

Whipping around, he looks at Hoseok, who immediately backs away from his glare. “Hoseok, you agree with me, don’t you?”

“I agree with you,” Hoseok says immediately, but it sounds as though he says it more out of fear than actual conviction.

“Fuck—Jeongguk?” Oh god, he’s getting desperate if he’s turning to Jeongguk, of all people, for some semblance of sanity.

“I’ll respect and support my alpha’s decisions—”

“I don’t know why I even bothered.”

Namjoon gets up and nods his head in Seokjin’s direction. “Yoongi, take off the restraint. There’s no point standing around quarreling amongst ourselves. It’ll get us nowhere. Jimin, Jeongguk—you shouldn’t be anywhere near Taehyung during his heat. Close proximity will trigger your heats early, and the less variables we have to take into consideration the better.”

The flicker of anxiety that seeps into Taehyung’s expression, just at the very notion of being forced to take a heat-stimulator surrounded by alphas, has Jimin putting his foot down for real this time. “No. I’m not going anywhere. I’ll—I’ll be with Taehyung during his heat. I’ll help him through it.”

Hoseok looks at him, alarmed. “But Jimin, your heat—”

“I don’t care. We’ll help each other through it. Taehyung shouldn’t have to spend his heat alone in a place like this, alright?” Jimin turns to Namjoon, daring the alpha to contradict him. The man has his arms crossed over his chest, appraising him critically, but to his surprise the alpha doesn’t seem keen on protesting his way of logic.
“If that’s what you think is best for Taehyung, then I’m not going to stop you.”

“We might get punished,” Jimin reminds him quietly. “It might be interpreted as a violation of the rules. I can’t get Taehyung pregnant, after all…”

“We’ll just have to take that chance,” Namjoon sighs.

They stare intently at each other. Jimin looks for any sign that the alpha is bluffing—any semblance of doubt at all. To his surprise, Namjoon appears completely serious. The alpha isn’t going to stop them from breaking the rules. He isn’t going to try and control what they do with their bodies.

He doesn’t know how to feel about this.

Hesitating, he goes to Taehyung, kneeling down beside the other omega. They share a look. Taehyung smiles at him, relieved and grateful that Jimin wasn’t just going to roll over and do what he’s told.

“I—” Taehyung pauses, squeezing his eyes shut and keeling over, as though suddenly hit with a sharp pain.

“Tae—?”

“It’s fine,” the younger omega forces out. “It’s fine. I’m fine. Just hurry up and get it over with.”

Jemin takes his hand and laces their fingers together. Taehyung has surprisingly large hands. Had he noticed that before? Because he doesn’t remember noticing that before. The way his fingers look so puny in comparison makes him feel slightly insecure. Perhaps in some alternative universe where Taehyung is a dominatrix, he would’ve been massively popular for dishing out spanking punishments to needy alpha cucks that’ve been very, very bad.

Wow, that thought was wildly inappropriate.

Yoongi unwraps the towel from around the beta’s wrists and takes a measured step back, just in
case Seokjin decides to immediately pull him into a choke hold. The beta seems to have very little interest in attacking him, though. Instead, he brings his hands slowly to his front, flexing his fingers and turning his wrists to get the blood pumping back into them.

“Get up,” Yoongi snaps. “We don’t have all day.”

“But Yoongi, my sweet, we definitely do have all day. What else do you possibly have planned, a dentist appointment?”

“Shut up.” The alpha goes pink. “Don’t call me that.”

“Call you what?”

The alpha hooks an arm under the beta’s armpit and yanks him to his feet. Seokjin makes absolutely no effort whatsoever to hide his amusement. Dragging the beta over to the rest of them, Yoongi forces Seokjin onto his knees in front of he and Taehyung while Namjoon brings over the box with the syringe.

“Don’t do anything stupid,” Yoongi warns firmly in Seokjin’s ear. “Any sudden movements and I’ll snap your neck.”

To emphasize this, Yoongi places both hands on the junction where Seokjin’s neck meets his broad shoulders.

“Wouldn’t that, now would we?” Seokjin retorts in a teasing voice. He doesn’t seem to be taking them very seriously. It irks Jimin greatly.

Seokjin uses the towel that’d restrained him as a vice around Taehyung’s upper-bicep. His hand lingers just a moment too long for comfort when he asks the omega if it’s too tight.

“No, it isn’t,” Taehyung replies softly. The omega is trying and failing to avoid Seokjin’s handsome stare. Whoever gave this psychopath the right to look so attractive? God is an asshole.

Very suddenly, Seokjin’s hand shoots out for the syringe and everyone simultaneously flinches.
Taehyung gasps, Jimin squeezes the omega’s hand, and Namjoon nearly drops the box. With a hand relaxed on the handle of the syringe, Seokjin throws his head back and laughs. “That’s never going to get old.”

Heart still pumping in his ears, Jimin reaches out and slaps Seokjin across the face. “Never do that again you bitch!”

The maniac only clutches his stomach and laughs harder. “You slap like a bitch.”

“That’s it—Yoongi move. I’ll kill him myself.”

“Jimin, shut up. Seokjin—get it over with for fuck’s sake,” Yoongi grumbles like he’s too old for this shit.

It’s with a heavy heart that Jimin watches Seokjin take the syringe, his movements more graceful than any omega he’s ever met. Taking Taehyung’s wrist gently into his hand, Seokjin’s stare levels with the omega and gives him a wink. Taehyung blushes and looks away. This bitch better not be hung up on two dickheads or Jimin’s going to be nursing a headache for the rest of eternity here. Like having romantic interest in one of them isn’t bad enough. Jesus, Taehyung, get a hold of yourself.

Then Seokjin leans over and pecks a tender kiss to the palm of Taehyung’s hand. Namjoon catches his wrist before he can smack the beta again, and then almost immediately releases him when it burns him. “Stop fucking around!”

“I’m being a gentleman,” Seokjin says smoothly. “You should try doing it sometime.”

“Alpha,” Jeongguk leans over Namjoon’s shoulder to murmur softly in his ear. “I’m going to go wait in Zone 1. I hope it won’t be too painful for you, Taehyung-hyung.”

The older omega looks up and smiles weakly. “Thanks, Gguk.”

Seokjin injects the needle and Taehyung twists his head to bury it in Jimin’s neck. There’s nothing much he can do but clutch him in his arms.
“That’s a good omega,” Seokjin murmurs. “You’re doing so well, sweet-pea.”

He has to bite his tongue to stop himself from saying: “Don’t fucking call him that.”

Watching the yellowy liquid in the syringe disappear into Taehyung’s vein is morbidly fascinating. Heat-stimulants aren’t very common to encounter because—well, heats can be dangerous and no omega wants to go through them more times than their biology dictates. There have been stories, though, about heat-stimulates being used for illegal purposes. Omegas that are snatched by human-traffickers would be injected with them on Tuesdays and they’d burn out by Sunday, which fittingly gave way to the term “Tuesday tripping”. It’s often jokingly used on single alphas that take time off work to deal with their ruts, and their first leave of absence would commonly begin (uncoincidentally) on a Tuesday, so they’d be “Tuesday tripping”. It’s disgusting. At least he can proudly say that he worked only for himself and not for some entitled alpha pimp that snatches innocent omegas from the streets.

“How long before the stimulate kicks in?” Hoseok asks nervously, glancing at the door to Zone 1 as if Taehyung is a ticking time bomb ready to blow.

“Fairly soon,” Seokjin shrugs, pushing the last of the remaining liquid into Taehyung’s blood stream. A tiny dot of blood wells at the centre of the omega’s wrist when the needle is removed. “You did so well, Taehyung. It’s very brave of you to take it without complaint.”

“Alright, alright—that’s enough talk from you, asshole. I want him as far away from Taehyung as possible, thanks.” Grabbing the other omega’s arm, he lifts him to his feet. “Come on, Tae. Let’s get you to Zone 3 before your pheromones go haywire and fuck up the place.”

“You’re just going to let Jimin take care of Taehyung during his heat, are you, Namjoon?” Seokjin drawls, unaffected by the near bruising grip Yoongi has on his shoulders.

Jimin falters halfway to the door. Namjoon looks at the beta in confusion. “What do you mean?”

“Well, I wouldn’t expect you to know, you weren’t here when Jimin announced it after all,” Seokjin picks at his fingernails with feigned nonchalance. You piece of shit motherfucker—

“When Jimin announced what?” Namjoon takes a step closer to Seokjin.
Why is anyone giving this prick the time of day? Did he slip through a time portal where yesterday never happened? The fuck is wrong with these people? “It doesn’t fucking matter, Namjoon. Stop giving Seokjin attention.”

Turning, he places his hand on the doorknob, and it’s then Seokjin reveals the information he’d teased, “Jimin is an omega of the night. We don’t know how many STDs he might be carrying. You wouldn’t want him infecting Taehyung too, would you Namjoon? A leader is supposed to look out for the safety of all the pack’s members.”

“What—” but Jimin doesn’t let Namjoon finish before spinning around to face them. Anger heats his veins. Seokjin has his head cocked arrogantly, lips coiled subtly in that stupid smirk of his.

“How dare you. I am completely clean—not that its any of your fucking business to begin with you fucking beta bitch. The fact that you’d even suggest that I’d willing pass on an STDs just shows what a manipulative asshole you are!”

“Who’s to say you even know you have one?” Seokjin turns to their ‘leader’, if you could even fucking consider him that, and whatever smugness is shrouded in a serious façade. “We don’t know when the last time Jimin got tested. The omega’s promiscuous lifestyle is a toxic catalyst for infectious diseases. He has slept with dozens, if not hundreds of people—and we don’t know if he used protection for all of them. An omega who didn’t even finish his secondary education probably has little to no knowledge on safe sex. You know we can’t risk him infecting one of the other omegas. They’re too valuable.”

Not for the first time, Namjoon’s response catches Jimin off guard. The alpha scoffs at Seokjin. “It wouldn’t make any sense for our captors to recruit an omega carrying an STD. Or have you already forgotten the tests they ran on us while we were unconscious?”

Wow, Namjoon is actually using his head for once. Who would’ve thought?

“There is medication omegas can take so their offspring can’t be born with the diseases. It’s likely a variable our kidnappers already took into consideration before we were taken. Even if Jimin isn’t infected, you have a right as a leader to do what is best for everyone.”

“Jeongguk has had sex with many alphas,” Namjoon says darkly, standing over Seokjin’s kneeling form with an air of deadliness Jimin hasn’t seen from him before. If Jeongguk were in the room he’d probably spontaneously burst into heat. “Are you saying I shouldn’t mate with my own omega based on the seeds of doubt you’re trying to plant in our minds? I’ll hear no more of it—Jimin, get Taehyung out of here. I can already smell his pheromones spiking and I don’t want either of you
around to witness what I’m about to do.”

Jimin takes the time to grin victoriously in Seokjin’s way before pulling Taehyung into Zone 3 and slamming the door behind them. He brushes his hands together to clean himself of that dumb fiasco before turning to Taehyung, who eyes the nests warily.

“Look, Taehyung, you know I’m not going to make you do anything you don’t want me to. If you want I could just—I dunno, hold your hand through it? Whatever you want, I’m not fussed.”

The tendon in Taehyung’s jaw twitches as he looks to the ceiling, eyes welling with emotional tears. Uh-oh. Jimin doesn’t know how to deal with crying omegas. Crying alphas begging for more—well, that’s a different story. Emotions aren’t really his thing. Should he reach out and um—hug him? Put a hand on his shoulder? Aw man, if he’d known this would happen he should’ve just volunteered Jeongguk to deal with it.

“I don’t want to cheat on my girlfriend,” the omega whispers fearfully.

“I know—I know. You don’t have to. We can just tough through it or whatever. I’ve personally never gone through heat without sex but you know—first time for everything, I guess,” he shrugs, trying to make it seem like it isn’t a big deal.

But it kind of is.

During heat sex is all you can think about. It’s ten times worse than a rut, where alpha’s just pop a knot that won’t go down and only causes them mild discomfort. Heat is not just an inconvenience to omegas. It’s an involuntary drug trip. Senses take over, lust becomes insatiable, and all that’s pumping through your body is breed, breed, breed! Jimin can’t even begin to fathom how he’d describe it. The extent of vulnerability heats take an omega to are so fundamentally fucked up that God himself has to—has to be a sadist. The amount of times an omega has been taken advantage of is a prevalent theme in today’s media. He can’t remember a time where he’s turned on the news and hasn’t seen a story about a breaking and entering rape case. And almost every time the alpha will spin a lie about how the omega wanted it, even though it’s abundantly clear that omegas can’t give consent past pre-heat stages. They’ll say they want it because their bodies are literally telling them they do.

“At some point I might ask you to fuck me.”
“My dick’s so small I’m not even sure that’s possible.”

“Jimin, I mean it.”

“Taehyung, it’s fine. I won’t fuck you.”

And Jimin kept to that promise.

Right up until his heat got triggered by Taehyung’s and they ended up coiled against each other in all their naked glory.

Guess he isn’t too good at keeping his promises.

Chapter End Notes

Before you get out your pitchforks to crucify Jimin, Vmin's situation will be explained in more detail next chapter.
Chapter Notes

Warning(s): ambiguous consent? The waters are so muddied it's hard to tell but, just a heads up. Some smut elements, a very weird dream sequence, and deteriorating mental health.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day 9

Sweaty fingers grip at the perimeter of the nest where the velvet cushion meets with the plastic cradle. The air in his lungs escapes him as Jimin gyrates down harder, the friction of their cocks grinding together so beautifully the pleasure it incites is near poetic. Warmth coils in his stomach. Jimin’s mouth is everywhere. Sucking, licking, biting him in the places where he’s most sensitive. A clammy hand flicks at his nipple, another putting pressure on the curve of his back. The darkness in Jimin’s eyes as he looks him. It’s something Taehyung has never seen from an omega before. Predatory, hypnotic, and painfully gorgeous. If he were to breathe through his mouth instead of his nose, if he were to shut his eyes for a moment, he could imagine Jimin as an alpha. Taehyung hates himself. Hates that he’s attracted to alphas, even though he loves Soomin dearly. Hates that his body screams at him to submit.

But somehow, doing this with Jimin alleviates some of that guilt—even if it breeds a different kind of guilt within him.

Eyes rolling back, he fists the hairs at the nape of Jimin’s neck and thrusts up to meet the omega’s agile hips. The smell of grapefruit permeates the air. Suffocates him. It isn’t arousing—not like the scent of an alpha or beta. It isn’t designed to arouse his kind. But it doesn’t matter. At that moment his body is relieved to feel the touch of anyone, regardless of their second-gender. The room must be sealed tight, because not even a whiff of the others can be smelt. It’s all just Jimin, Jimin, Jimin. Taehyung is fine with this. Prefers this. Better Jimin than any of the others.

Grabbing Taehyung’s wrists, Jimin pins them above his head and grinds down even harder, growling into the side of his neck. Taehyung whimpers, toes curling. So much slick has leaked out of him that a wet patch has formed beneath his lower-back.

Through the haze and incomprehension, Taehyung wills himself to close his eyes and imagine Soomin on top of him. The brush of her long hair tickling his collarbone, her nipples brushing
against his own as she thrusts into him. Taehyung is a slave to Soomin. She never takes advantage of him, never uses her power as an alpha to hurt him, but he’d do anything for her. Break the law, bury a dead body, commit terrorism—all Soomin has to do is give the word and Taehyung would do it in a heartbeat. He once told her this in the dead of night, when he was still adjusting to his new medication. Her arms had been around him, fingers drawing circles on his shoulder. The smile she’d given him had been illuminated by the moonlight.

Chuckling lovingly, she’d called him a fool.

The slope of her nose and her smiling eyes, her small, cherub lips, the omegian fragrance she spritzes on herself because she’s always hated the smell of her own scent. Her deep, lustrous bar-singer’s voice. The cigarette she toys between her elegant fingers when she’s pondering something. The way she jokes with her father, the way she brushes her mother’s ramblings over tradition with care-free laughter. Her body. Her smell. Ocean and sand. Summer and wind.

The image of her is so vivid in his mind. More vivid than the blank walls of Zone 1 or the taste of bran cereal in his mouth in the morning. He pictures her throwing her head back as Taehyung squeezes around her cock and small breasts bounce with every thrust. She pins Taehyung down because she’s like that in the bedroom. Taehyung wouldn’t have it any other way. She’s always tender and loving with him. Tells him he’s beautiful as she nibbles on his earlobe. It’s only ever in the throes of heat that Taehyung ever entertains the thought of being bred. Of carrying her brood. Of giving her a child. It’s the only time he can have an excuse for that indulgence. Because it isn’t right in any other situation. It hurt so much when Seokjin mentioned his illness being passed down, mostly because it’s an insecurity he’s been bearing for a very long time—ever since his mental health got the better of him. The fear of producing an unworthy brood. Just like his mother.

Any child less than fully healthy used to bring great shame to omegas back in the day. Even now, there’s some stigma towards it, even if no one makes any direct comments about it.

The orgasm strikes swiftly and suddenly. He arches off the nest, crying out Soomin’s name (not for the first time) into the dimly-lit room. Jimin ruts against him a few more times before coming too, splattering his milky release all over Taehyung’s stomach.

Ecstasy rises and falls, the numbing pleasure between his legs gradually reducing until he’s reminded of how uncomfortable he is. Omegas are messy during heat. Especially male omegas. Discharge comes out of their asses and their dicks, which—as one could imagine—requires quite the clean-up after a day or two of heat. Never mind two omegas in heat. So much filth still lingers from the night before they’d been forced to drag their way over to Jimin’s nest at some point. The room reeks of sex. Sex, sweat and pheromones. The stimulate is strong. It brought on a heat so severe Taehyung can’t remember the last time it left him so utterly helpless. At the same time, the orgasms have been more intense. Jimin’s dick is so small Taehyung couldn’t feel it inside him, so they’d taken to just grinding against each other. Even then it still felt amazing.
Jimin falls to the wayside, panting to catch his breath. He doesn’t seem to mind that Taehyung has yelled Soomin’s name about a dozen times since they started. If he were an alpha, he probably would’ve punched his teeth in.

They lie there quietly as the post-orgasm tingles wash over them. The heat simmers, for now, temporarily satiated, giving them time to rest a little. Then, Jimin’s slow breathing seems to fade. The image of Soomin vanishes. A hushed cry is heard from far away. But it doesn’t make any sense—the room isn’t that big, and the room is soundproof, so it couldn’t be coming from the other zones. Quiet comes again—and then—

More howling. Louder this time.

Taehyung snaps his eyes open. He glances at Jimin, hoping that he isn’t the only one who’s hearing it, but the omega gives no indication that he heard anything at all. He has his eyes closed. He seems fully intent on sleeping before another wave of lust comes charging down the hill.

Climbing out of the nest, Taehyung runs his hands along the tufted velvet walls, dipping where the buttons indent the fabric. There must be a microphone hidden somewhere. The scientists in black and white want to hear them. They get off to it. But—the howling. A wolf, is it? He’s heard it many times before, but not with such clarity. It’s as if it’s coming through some sort of speaker. It’s crisp. The call of a lost pack member crying to the full moon. Taehyung starts biting at his fingers again. The scars only just healed, but he breaks them open. His other hand stops at a button. The howling is getting progressively louder. It must mean he’s close.

Using his nails, he picks at the button, tears at it. It’s fixed on fairly tightly. But he keeps at it. Even if it hurts. Even if it breaks his fingernails.

The button pops.

It leaves nothing in its wake but some string and cotton.

So Taehyung moves on to another button. Then another.

“Tae?”
The button gives way and falls to join the others at his feet. Again, no microphone or speaker. Just string and fluff. Maybe he’s looking in the wrong area…?

“Taehyung, what are you doing?”

Crossing to the other side of the room, he picks at another button. Blood wells at his broken nails but he doesn’t feel it. The howling is loud here, too—doesn’t quieten. It only gains.

It has to be somewhere here. He has to find it. If he doesn’t then they’ll know—they’ll show what he’s been doing to Soomin—they’ll tell her everything he’s done. Soomin can’t know—won’t know. It isn’t fair. Taehyung didn’t mean to. Didn’t want to. His body wanted it. Surely Soomin won’t fault him—she’ll understand but—but still, they can’t show her. It’ll only do them harm. He doesn’t want that. Doesn’t want her to see or hear him that way. She has to know she’s the only alpha for him. No one takes care of him like she does.

But if she hears him—

The howling. Oh god, the *howling*. It gets so loud he drops to his knees and screams, clutching his head. Make it stop—*make it stop!*

“Taehyung!” A hand touches him and he rolls away.

*Don’t touch me—don’t touch me—*

“J…Jin—” he chokes, bloody nails digging into the gaps in his ribs. “Jin—get Seokjin!”

“But—”

“Seokjin!” he wails so vehemently his throat burns. “Now!”

“Fuck!”

The noise won’t stop. It’s like a thousand wolves have bent their necks back and cried out in
sorrow. It’s loud and discordant. Like the sound of violin strings snapping all at once. Wire on a chalkboard. A boombox crackling and breaking. Breaks of a train. A bird dying. He can’t move. He can’t breathe. It feels as though the noise is pinning him to the floor, rendering him paralysed. It’s just like back in that chamber—that filthy metal box they put him in. Something leaked through pipe lines and he could see paws clawing at the doorframe. Taehyung heard it then, too. The howls. The cries. The sorrow. It’s the closest he’s ever felt to being an animal. The emotion of a pack member taken astray, the need for blood in his mouth and a leader to follow. Those were the subtle nuances he’d picked up through the blinding pain. So distant he questions if he’d even experienced it at all. The feeling is back though—somewhere inside him. Clawing.

Then hands grab him and his face is smothered against a scent gland. Pineapple. Tropic. An island. A tide rolling up the shore. It’s room-temperature, but he still feels the summer on his skin as the pheromones come galloping into his lungs. The noise vanishes in a muted echo. He thinks of himself lying on a hammock in the shade of a palm tree, a hat tilted over his eyes and a foot dragging lazily against the sand.

Reality coaxes him back. He nuzzles into Seokjin’s neck and the tension slips away from him. A hand rubs gently into his back. He’s being rocked back and forth like a child. And Taehyung feels like a child. Lost and scared and so alone in the world. Slipping his arms around Seokjin’s neck he sobs against the beta’s gland. Inhalng and inhaling as much as his lungs can possibly take. It’s all run away from him and he’s never been so relieved. For a moment there he thought the howling would never end. That it had finally trapped him in a place where he couldn’t escape. But Seokjin is here now. He’ll keep the wolves away.

“Had another episode, did you, my sweet one?” Seokjin croons into his ear. Taehyung shivers.

“They wouldn’t s-stop,” he hiccups. His body trembles violently.

“Is it the wolves, again, is it?” the beta asks softly, gently—but.

But Taehyung doesn’t remember telling Seokjin about the wolves.

“Y-Yes,” he admits in a state of confusion. It must be his augmented imagination playing tricks on him again. He likely told Seokjin at some point and just forgot about it. “They were back and they wouldn’t stop howling—”

Seokjin hushes him, rocking him back and forth. “I know, my little sweetling. You’re a mess.”
“What the fuck, Jimin—get Seokjin away from him!” comes Namjoon’s voice, a clap of thunder striking the calm. Taehyung tenses. An alpha’s voice, a leader’s voice, trying to tear them apart. No—no, Seokjin can’t leave him. Not now.

Hands come from all sides to try and pry them away from each other, but Taehyung only clings harder to Seokjin.

“Don’t—Don’t take him away from me!” he yells. Can’t they see that he needs him? Don’t they understand at all?

“I’m sorry—I panicked. Taehyung was on the floor screaming for Seokjin so I just—what the fuck did you want me to do, exactly, Namjoon? Beat the demons out of him?” Jimin squawks from somewhere behind Seokjin.

“Yeah, no, you’re right, Jimin. Leaving the nest and going straight to the rapist is definitely the only thing you could’ve done in this situation,” Yoongi snaps sarcastically from somewhere. He can feel the weight of the alpha’s hands on his shoulders, but Taehyung won’t budge. He refuses to let go of the only lick of sanity he has left in this horrible place.

“Yoongi, you shouldn’t touch him—it might trigger a rut,” Hoseok calls out from an unknown location.

“That’s not really important right now.”

Seokjin buries his nose in his neck and a shiver runs up Taehyung’s smile. The beta hums happily. “You smell delicious. What a shame they’ve been keeping you cooped up here without a nice cock to keep you plugged.”

Fingers roughly bury themselves in his sopping wet entrance and he gasps, pleasure shooting up through his veins. They’re much longer than Jimin’s. He’d be lying if he said it didn’t feel amazing.

Then the fingers are taken out of him.

“Fucking stop it,” Yoongi growls, wrapping his arms around Taehyung’s middle and trying to yank him away.
“Yoongi-hyung, stop,” he cries brokenly. “Just leave, all of you! I want to be alone with him.”

“Taehyung, you’re not thinking straight,” Namjoon tries and reasons. Taehyung keeps his eyes closed. The alpha doesn’t smell nearly as good as he used to. “Seokjin is just using you for his own personal gain. You’re vulnerable and you need to be taken care of by Jimin. Let go of him.”

“Seokjin is the only person who can take care of me—just, go away.”

“Namjoon, what do we do?” Hoseok inquires nervously. “He’s not letting go and—I—I’m not sure how much longer I can take.”

“Me neither,” Jimin groans, fighting a losing battle against his own biology as another wave of heat hits him. “Fuck—Seokjin, can’t you just—be a dickhead another time? You’re not making this easy for us.”

“And where’s the fun in making it easy for you?” Seokjin sounds over the moon, like he can’t even feel the hands that are bruising him.

Jimin groans and Taehyung looks up in time to see the omega fall to his knees beside them. “Oh god—it’s here, I—I can’t stop it. What the fuck do we do—”

Namjoon is the only one keeping his distance, probably because he knows one touch of either Taehyung or Jimin will have him in crippling pain. There’s a battle that rages within the alpha’s eyes. Decisions on what to do. It doesn’t matter what Namjoon wants, though. He won’t let go. The moment he lets go that deafening sound will come rushing back to him with a vengeance, and Taehyung can’t stand it. He refuses to go through the rest of his heat like that. He couldn’t think of a more damning punishment. The scientists can siphon their gas and torture him all they like. It won’t compare to the prison that is his own mind.

“Hoseok, take Jimin to his nest and take care of him, Yoongi—” Namjoon pauses, as though he can’t believe what he’s about to say “—leave before your rut triggers. You won’t have an omega to help you though it.”

The other alpha looks at him as though he’s just grown two heads, grip slipping from Taehyung’s shoulders. “How can you condemn Taehyung like that? He can’t give consent—look at him! You’re being complicit in a rape.”
Taehyung snuggles further into Seokjin’s embrace. It feels nice to have his strong, capable arms wrapped around him. The smell of his scent brings him so much solace.

“You think I want this? You think if there was any other way I would’ve considered it?” Namjoon growls. “We can’t pry them apart, and even if we did who knows what will happen then. Taehyung isn’t stable and he might breakdown again—then what? We keep him trapped in his own head until the heat subsides? What if it doesn’t go away after his heat? What then? I don’t have all the answers, Yoongi, and I’m not going to pretend to. If you have any better ideas I’m all ears.”

Looking at Taehyung and Seokjin, then back at Namjoon, Yoongi says, “Use your pheromones, your voice—whatever it takes to get those two apart.”

“You want me to abuse my authority on a vulnerable omega in heat? Are you really suggesting that?” Namjoon scoffs, baffled.

“If it means getting Taehyung out of this situation, then yes, I do.”

“You use it.”

“I’m not the leader.”

The fingers slip back inside him and he welcomes it with a soft mewl. “Touch me, hyung. Please touch me. I’ll be good. All the other omegas won’t be good to you, not like me. I promise I’ll be the best you’ve ever had—”

“Namjoon—”

“You need to leave, Yoongi. I sure as hell aren’t going to pump your knot if you go into a rut,” Namjoon continues to argue. But Taehyung can barely hear them over the sound of Seokjin breathing in his ear.

Light-headed, he reaches between their bodies and into Seokjin’s sweatpants. “I haven’t had a cock inside me—it’s been hell. I need to feel it. I need to feel you inside me.”
Leaning back, he finally gets a good look at Seokjin’s face. There’s dark bruising around his right eye, and the white around his iris is a bloody red. There’s also a cut healing on his bottom lip. Before he can process the damage, he’s tackled, a solid torso crashing into him from the side. Taehyung screams, legs kicking out. Arms lock around him and he struggles. He reaches out for Seokjin, who moves to snatch him back, but Yoongi kicks him to the ground and presses his knee against the beta’s throat. The beta winces at the sudden pressure to his bandaged ribcage. Which would mean—

Namjoon is yelling. The skin contact is hurting him but no matter how hard Taehyung struggles, the alpha refuses to let go of him. He can hear screams in the distance—Jeongguk is hurting, too.

“Oh my god—do you guys need help?” Hoseok is standing by the lip of Jimin’s nest, anxiously watching the scene unfold. Jimin has his hands wrapped around the alpha’s middle, his plump lips sucking a hickey into his shoulder.

“Just—fuck—stay where you are,” Namjoon grits out painfully. “Protect Jimin.”

Yoongi gets a fistful of Seokjin’s hair and the beta groans—but not in a manner that would suggest he’s in pain. They both get to their feet, Yoongi in total control. Taehyung continues to claw and kick and scream, but Namjoon is much stronger than him, even in excruciating agony.

“What do you want me to do with Seokjin?” the older alpha asks Namjoon.

Grunting through his teeth, he commands, “Take him back to Zone 1 and keep a close eye on him.”

“And Jeongguk?”

There’s a pause. It’s obviously Namjoon is trying to think of what to do while he’s at odds with so many other distractions. But Taehyung refuses to make it easier for the alpha. The man has no right—no right to take away the one thing that brings him any solace. Namjoon doesn’t understand. He probably doesn’t give a shit. Taehyung didn’t vote for him to be leader and he won’t acknowledge his position no matter what the others think.

“T—Tell him to come here.”
Without another word, Yoongi leaves, shoving Seokjin in front of him. Taehyung writhes and whines, hand outstretched in the beta’s direction. No—no. It’s not fair! How could they do this to him?

“Let me go!” he yells elbowing Namjoon in the ribs hoping to hurt him. “I want Seokjin back—bring him back!”

Groaning in immense pain, the alpha doesn’t let him go. He simply says, “I can’t. You know I can’t. S—Seokjin isn’t a good man, Taehyung. Being with him c—could put you in danger.”

“Fuck danger—”

The door opens and closes and Jeongguk is there, leaning against the wall with his face crumpled in pain. It’s then that Namjoon finally releases him. Jeongguk goes sliding down the wall and hits the floor with a weighty thud.

“Jeongguk…” the alpha whines.

While Namjoon is momentarily distracted he shoots up to his feet and makes a break for the door. Something snags his ankle and he falls, hitting his chin on the floor. Blood seeps from the cut in his cheek, tears well in his eyes as the pain of the impact washes over him. Turning over onto his side, he clutches his bloody mouth and sobs heavily into his hand. For a short moment he allows himself just to wallow in his own self-pity, to know that he isn’t going to get any short-term relief from the heat boiling in his veins, isn’t going to have pheromones lulling him into a blanket of security, and he’s certainly not going to have anyone hold him throughout this harrowing experience.

He hates being a beta, hates his illness and how weak it makes him. What would Soomin think if she were to see him this way? Naked on the floor of a room that looks like something out of a BDSM room décor magazine with someone else’s cum drying on his stomach as he thirsts for another man. What a pathetic worm he’s become. He was pathetic before, but at least he could say he never cheated on his girlfriend.

Now, he can’t even say that much.

A hand touches his shoulder and he flinches.
“Don’t fucking touch me!” he screams, smacking the hand away. He doesn’t even bother to look at who is attempting to comfort him. They can all go to hell for all he cares.

“Taehyungie-hyung,” comes the soft voice of the youngest omega. It’s so sweet that his heart squeezes with mild regret. Oh Jeongguk. “It’s me. I’m here. I can help you.”

“Get out of here, Gguk,” he says hollowly. “If you stay for too long you’ll be in heat too, just like the rest of us.”

“It’s fine,” but the tremble in the omega’s voice says otherwise. “You need me here. I can help.”

The omega’s pheromones reach out to him, an invisible voice crooning at him to relax and to take it easy. It isn’t like beta pheromones. Those of the same class tend to not have a greater influence over each other. It’s subtler, like a quiet evening breeze. Omegas have a greater influence over alphas. The function of their pheromones is generally seductive, to tear down the walls of guarded alphas and to convince them do to things for them. It’s very similar to how alphas can use their voices to manipulate omegas, but the approach is entirely different.

But that’s not the only function of omega pheromones.

They’re first and foremost, nurturing. They can use their pheromones to calm down crying babies and to let them know they’re loved and safe. A child knows the scent of their omega mother better than they know their own. Even with their eyes closed they can smell when their mother is close. Because omegas incite the strongest emotion of all: love.

That’s exactly what Jeongguk is trying to put across to him now. That Taehyung is safe, that he is loved, that hope is not all lost.

Turning onto his back, he opens his eyes, and he sees both Namjoon and Jeongguk. Jeongguk is kneeling while Namjoon is standing over the omega, concern in his gaze. It’s strange. Taehyung can barely smell them. It’s like their scents are muted. Stale. But their pheromones work just fine.

“You aren’t alone, hyung,” Jeongguk smiles. “We’re here for you.”

At those words, the flood gates burst and Taehyung cries like a child.
The three of them lie in Taehyung’s nest, breathing in the darkness. The lights went out about an hour ago (at least he thinks so, time has become an abstract concept without clocks to validate it), but no one—not even Jimin and Hoseok, who’ve been at it for a while, can hope for a peaceful night of sleep tonight. His heat isn’t as intense as it used to be, but Jeongguk’s heat has stuck with a passionate fury. His scent and pheromones permeate every crevice of the room in a whirlwind of conflicting flavours—there’s Namjoon natural earthy scent that can be immediately picked up, and then an after taste of Jeongguk’s smell, sugar and candy cane. Even as an omega, Taehyung can tell it isn’t as appealing as Jimin’s scent. It’s hard to explain, but it’s as if there are chemicals in his brain that can identify that Jeongguk’s a claimed omega and as such, repel any other alpha or beta from trying to breed him.

Jeongguk has been a champ about it so far. Nestled between Taehyung and Namjoon, the most he has done is rut against Namjoon’s thigh. He’s been crying quite a bit, though.

“I’ve never been through a heat before,” the omega confessed through a snuffle about a half an hour into his pre-heat stage. “I should’ve told you earlier, alpha—I’m so sorry. I was scared I wouldn’t be fertile.”

But Namjoon had been nothing but tender in response. And Taehyung lay there on his back, aching everywhere, and missing Soomin more than ever. Because Soomin treats him similarly to how Namjoon treats Jeongguk. Sweetly, gently, like he’s the most precious thing to ever exist on planet Earth. She isn’t here to help him through it, though. Not like Namjoon is for Jeongguk. What are the chances of two soulmates meeting under these circumstances?

Both Namjoon and Jeongguk have toughed it out for hours, and all for Taehyung’s sake. Despite both of them being in heat and rut, the most they’ve done is touch each other. Taehyung knows he shouldn’t be selfish. He can’t keep them from each other forever.

“You guys should move to Jeongguk’s nest for a while,” Taehyung suggests quietly, speaking out into the blackness. He can hear Jimin panting and Hoseok whimpering from their nest. “I think I’m going to try and get some shut-eye.”

“Are you sure?” Jeongguk whispers faintly, as if he’s dying from heat. “We can stay here if you feel lonely—we don’t mind.”
“No—you need time together. I’m fine. Really. Just go.” Taehyung isn’t fine and he really doesn’t want to be left alone in his nest, but he knows that it isn’t what’s best for them. Jeongguk seems to be in genuine pain and he can’t prolong that pain forever, even if a selfish part of him wants to. It amazes him how well Jeongguk’s pheromones had worked on him. Jimin’s pheromones hadn’t done that at all.

It’s hard to think about Jeongguk as a mother. After all he’s been through, after what the world has done to corrupt his mind, but if Taehyung squints—he can see it. Seeing Jeongguk and Namjoon standing over him, worried out of their minds for him, reminded him of his parents before his mother’s health took a turn.

He can’t see a damn thing, but he can imagine Namjoon’s helping Jeongguk out of the nest. It can get hard to walk during strong heats and Jeongguk—well, he’s practically incapacitated at this stage.

“Thank you,” Namjoon whispers to him, and Taehyung smiles weakly.

“It’s no problem.”

There’s no desire to stay awake, even if his body is telling him that he should. He doesn’t want to listen to both couples fucking. So he concentrates instead on something that brings him happiness. A distant memory from a life he no longer has.

In the kitchen his mother is preparing dinner. She has her back to him, her work clothes covered by the embrace of a green and yellow apron. The sound of the knife slicing into the carrot rings with clarity in his ears. He tries concentrating on his mother’s face. She used to be beautiful. For work, she’d wear a little more makeup than she usually does, because her boss said she looks better that way. More presentable. His father had been furious and told her that her boss is an asshole. He was right, of course. But they needed the extra money. The work she did as a receptionist helped put him and his siblings through school. People always told him that he looked like his mother. They had the same smiley eyes and box-shaped grin. She was a prankster in her prime. Always played tricks on he and his brother and sister.

One time, when he was quite young, she’d left a plastic spider under his blanket and when he’d pulled it back to get into bed, he’d screamed so loud the neighbours called the police. Taehyung didn’t sleep in his bed that night, and his mum and dad let him sleep in their bed instead. His father had lovingly chided her, and she’d laughed as she carded her fingers through Taehyung’s hair…
The dreams start to blend and become less coherent. He falls deeper, and then deeper still, until he’s floating.

The scene of his old classroom brings back a mirage of blurred nostalgia. Large, open windows looked out on the baseball pitch. During lunch some of the alphas would play a game there and he and his friend—another omega named Yoonwoo—would lean against the windowsill and watch them play. School wasn’t for everybody, but those were some of his happiest memories. He wasn’t popular, by any means, but he had a solid group of friends he could rely on, even in the darkest of times. Birds hover, stationary, in the air. A boy named Minho is crouching, ball in hand, ready to throw it, and Seojoon holds his steel bat behind him ready to swing. But nothing is moving. Yoonwoo is still. His face is frozen in laughter. Looking around, there isn’t anyone else there. Just rows upon rows of empty desks, and a blackboard that seems to stretch on for eternity.

The grey overcast outside bleeds into an eclipsing orange. It gets brighter and brighter until its blinding. He holds his hand over his eyes as the fiery wrath consumes him. His body arches at the sudden pleasure that strikes him. It’s laced with a touch of pain.

Hitting carpeted floor, he soon discovers he is somewhere else. It’s his uncle’s house. Another place of fond memories. Of birthdays, Chuseoks and Seolnals shared with his extended family, and back when his father used to wrap his arm around his mother and smile genuinely. Stumbling to his feet, he sees the stairs that beckon him. His uncle was a rich man. As a kid, he used to think his house was a mansion because it had two stories. Taehyung follows the steps. He’s wearing the ducky socks he wore every other day during one winter break. The wooden banister turns to scales and he snatches his hand back in fright. It moves and ripples like a snake, but there’s no head and no tail. He hears a cry from upstairs—his mother. She must be in trouble!

He takes the stairs two at a time, nearly falling more than once on his way up. Reaching the landing, he sprints down the hall—his mother’s voice is coming from his cousin Jihan’s room. Without hesitation, he throws open the door—

He finds himself back in his old room in Daegu. Soomin is in nothing but her underwear with a pen between her teeth, hammering through some emails at the last minute before bedtime. The lingerie is white lace. She loves white. She says it reminds her of him. He reaches out for her, and suddenly she’s hovering above him, a teasing smile caressed by the dim glow of their cheap, inefficient desk lamp. The smells are what he can draw upon the most. There must’ve been water damage in the roof because their room always smells damp. It’s just a little bit cold. Goose pebbles spread out across his naked flesh as she drags her manicured fingers down the expanse of his torso. She bites her lips, staring down at him like he’s a snack. She always knows how to get him hot and bothered.

“Such a pretty thing,” she croons at him, but it leaves him in a state of confusion, because that isn’t her voice. She’d never say something like that to him.
The hands that rest on his hips turn to black metallic, spikes grotesquely sprouting from knuckle and bone. Warm, brown eyes turn to piercing yellow. Whatever resemblance the person had to Soomin vanishes and is replaced by some sort of demon-like creature. It should scare him, but it doesn’t. His brain is telling him there’s nothing to fear while his heart screams for him to run. The presence of something solid between his legs wins over whatever panic is there. He whimpers quietly, thrusting up against the horned figure. It roughly turns him onto his stomach. Something warm and hard penetrates him and the feeling is so visceral, so vivid. Something is over his mouth. It muffles his mewls as the creature fucks him slowly. It isn’t enough. Taehyung wants it to be fast and rapid and filthy, but whatever’s inside him is taking its time. It’s methodical and deliberate. He doesn’t like it at all.

It occurs to him that he might try and tell the demon to go faster, but when he does, fingers force their way into his mouth to silence him.

Taehyung isn’t used to being denied what he wants in the bedroom. Whenever he and Soomin made love, she was always attentive to his needs. He’d even go as far to argue that he was the greedy one in the relationship, always taking but never giving in return. Soomin never minded. Never complained. This entity, though, this ravaging being of the night, doesn’t strike him as the kind of person that could be swayed or influenced in any way.

It drives his body to near insanity.

Then it stops.

As suddenly as the creature appeared it vanishes, leaving his rim cold and twitching. Falling onto his side he shivers through an orgasm. Lying there in the dark and quiet, he basks in a single moment of peace. Then—his stomach brushes his elbow. He looks down. The flat plains of his tummy have now given way to a swollen bump. He gasps, wrapping his arms around his belly trying to prevent it from getting any larger. It inflates like a balloon and he presses down against it desperately. It’s going to pop. It’s going to tear him apart! The outline of an animal’s paw claws at his skin from the inside and he screams.

“Mr. Kim, you need to take big breaths,” Taehyung looks at the doctor standing between his legs with a head lamp strapped to his forehead. Even though he’s wearing a surgical mask, the doctor holds a striking resemblance to Namjoon—only, the man is wearing large, square-framed glasses. “You’ve dilated eight centimetres. It’s almost time to start pushing.”

Then out of thin air, Jeongguk steps up next to Namjoon. A white nurse’s hat with a black cross sits perched atop his pink hair and lemonade-shade lip gloss glitters of his small mouth. The omega
isn’t wearing anything else but a lacy, baby-rose thong. Taehyung doesn’t have time to gape before Jeongguk drapes himself over Namjoon’s shoulder and presses a kiss to his jaw, leaving behind a perfect, glistening outline of his lips.

“Doctor Kim, with the help of your knot I could dilate to eight centimetres, too,” Jeongguk says in a sultry, seductive voice that doesn’t sound anything like the real Jeongguk. The omega hooks a knee to Namjoon’s hip and Namjoon—Namjoon is smoking a cigar and looking between Taehyung’s open legs.

“On my count, Mr. Kim, start pushing,” the alpha orders.

“Oh my god, we’re going to be parents!” Jimin cries to his left, clutching onto Taehyung’s hand tightly.

“Congratulations, Mr. Kim, it’s a baby omega boy!” Namjoon announces as sexy nurse Jeongguk thrusts the bundle in his arms and claps like a woman on a game show. The doctor then turns the nurse around and proceeds to ravish him over a desk that Taehyung wasn’t sure was there before—

“Oh, he’s gorgeous!” comes Hoseok’s voice, but looking around, Hoseok is nowhere to be found.

Taehyung looks down at the baby in his arms and sees Seokjin’s face grinning back at him. He screams.

He screams so loud that he wakes himself up.

The lights haven’t come back on yet, but the heat that’d torn through his body has now quelled to a quiet warmth in his abdomen. The transition into post-heat glow must be starting. Post-heat is when an omega gets to bask in a peaceful, numbing state. The body still gently burns like a candle stick but it’s nice. It’s usually in this stage that omegas allow themselves to finally rest. Pretty soon his body is going to flush out the unfertilised eggs. It’s the most disgusting part of heats. The natural lubricant the body excretes makes way for bloody discharge.

Guilt of what he’d done with Jimin is more muted than he expected, like sex with the other omega was all just been apart of his strange, surreal dream. It’s a silly thought, because no matter how he tries to work his way around it, it still happened. Hope is the only thing keeping the guilt at bay. A hope that once this is all done and dusted and they’ve finally returned to their real lives, he could convince himself enough to say that it never happened in the first place. Soomin will never have to
What he allowed Seokjin to do is a little more debateable.

It goes without saying that they never breathe a word of this to anybody. Whoever is keeping them here has access to an immense amount of resources. Jimin might try to go to the media, try and kick up enough of a fuss to open a police investigation, but he’ll somehow have to convince the omega against it. Taehyung will have no involvement in any of this once they leave. There’s a bed waiting for him in a sleepy town in Daegu, and a girlfriend that misses him dearly. He’ll have to spin some sort of lie about his disappearance—anything is better than the truth, really. An alien abduction. A family emergency. Whatever it takes to convince her that his absence at the airport was beyond his control.

Whenever Soomin is upset with him, she disappointedly sighs and flicks her long hair over her shoulder. The image of her doing this strikes him as he tries to think up a respectable excuse.

It’s relatively quiet. Jimin’s snoring can be heard from his nest, and Jeongguk’s pheromones continue to crackle and overwhelm the atmosphere. Feeling around, he grasps the lip of his nest and crawls out, standing up on shaky legs and stretching his arms high above his head. Cramping is common after heat. After sex or masturbating for hours it equates to a massive loss of fluids and energy, so days afterwards omegas partake in a ritual of self-care. Partners tend to participate as well, showering their omegas with attention and love. Soomin loved to pamper him after heats. She’d bake him her special peanut butter and choc-chip cookies and prepare bubble baths for him. Time strains their relationship occasionally, because so much of Soomin’s time is occupied by work, but she still takes a day or two off to look after him during heat. It’d usually trigger her rut as well, so it was killing two birds with one stone.

As he slips into Zone 2 for a much needed shower, Taehyung contemplates what the hell he’s going to do when his body starts bleeding. It doesn’t last long—a few hours at most—but they usually have special pads to catch that stuff so their underwear and clothes can be spared. Are their captors going to give them pads? He doubts it. There’s a likelihood that he might have to just sit on the toilet until it’s all been flushed out. What a nuisance.

It’s a relief to finally have some light. Taehyung hasn’t had a chance to properly look at himself since his heat started. Perhaps it’s out of morbid fascination, but before he hits the showers he shuffles in front of the mirror above the sinks. As expected he looks like a mess. There’s a nest on the back of his head, eyebags have come out full-force, his skin is clammy and gross—he isn’t even going to mention the dried cum on his stomach. There’s a trail of white drying along the side of his inner thigh but he thinks nothing of it. So many fluids come out of his body during heat that he’s stopped questioning the functions of his biology a long time ago.
A noise echoes somewhere.

Taehyung turns around. No one else is in the room. He’s completely alone. Heart hammering, he turns back to his reflection—only to hear it again. His eyes fall to the drain in the middle of the room.

He refuses to give the sound any sort of attention at all. Hastily, he snatches bottles from the cabinet underneath the sink and marches straight over to one of the showerheads. A bar of soap has been left neglected on the floor by his feet. A quiet crooning noise beckons from the drain. Taehyung turns on the shower hastily, and allows the roar of the pipes to drown out the symphony in his ears.

Chapter End Notes

It's late so I'll be replying to the comments from last chapter tomorrow :)}
“Have you given any thought as to where you wanna go?” Jeongguk murmurs quietly as they rest their tired bones in the slope of rhythmic heat. Idly, he traces his fingers along the dips and curves of Namjoon’s sculpted chest. “You know, if we ever get out of here?”

The alpha’s breaths are heavy and slow. Sweat dots the plains of his forehead and his eyes are closed. Pretty soon Jeongguk’s heat will rise again like a burning phoenix from the ashes, coherent thought and pleasant exchanges of conversation an impossibility. For now, though, they savour this brief moment of blissful peace. Namjoon readjusts his position and pulls Jeongguk’s body closer until the omega is almost draped on top of him. Their trembling naked bodies slide together like two perfect, handcrafted moulds made especially for each other. There was a time in Jeongguk’s life where he thought he could never feel this kind of happiness with an alpha. As gratifying as it was to be with them, a part of him couldn’t feel, couldn’t fathom how classes so different could ever find love and comfort within each other. To him it only meant security. Never freedom or romance. Not a flutter of the heart nor a twist of the stomach.

Yet, here he exists, alive and breathing, a heartbeat thumping beneath his eardrum.

“A little bit,” Namjoon admits. His voice deep and languid, like his mind is faraway. “I see us going to France or Norway, huddled around a fireplace in the dead of winter. Somewhere far from here. Somewhere they can’t reach us.”

Jeongguk smiles, lifting his head. His heart leaps when Namjoon’s cracks open one eye to look at him. “Us? You see me with you, in your future?”
“I see many things in my future, but if you think for a second that I’d leave this country without you…that, little one, is complete absurdity.”

“Some might say the opposite.”

“Some might not understand.”

A large hand smooths the curve of his back and he arches up quietly against the touch, like a cat starved of affection. Cupping Namjoon’s round cheeks in his hands, Jeongguk plants a small kiss to his lips. As Namjoon looks at him with his half-lidded gaze, there’s a little voice that whispers in the back of his mind that says that maybe, maybe this is more than just shallow attraction. There are so many things about the alpha that Jeongguk admires. His intelligence, his ability to take control and make level-headed decisions, how unafraid and unapologetic he is. Everything that Jeongguk is not. When Namjoon is close he feels safe, like all the silhouetted claws can’t touch him. Not anymore.

Brushing his thumb along the bone of Jeongguk’s cheek, Namjoon murmurs, “There’s another place I’ve always wanted to visit, probably not to stay but—it’d be pretty spectacular if I ever got the chance to go there.”

Tilting his head to the side, Jeongguk smiles, “Oh yeah? Where’s that?”

The hand on his back continues to slide up and down, teasing his skin sweetly. Eventually it comes to rest on the globe of his cheek. “You ever learn about how Korea became segregated?”

“Of course,” he says, idly tracing his fingers over the healing scar on Namjoon’s scent glad. “We learnt it in school. Three hundred years ago, an earthquake tore through Suncheon city and four nuclear reactors were destabilised, releasing radioactivity into the atmosphere. The contamination was so massive the entire north was forced to evacuate south or—in many cases, cross the border into China. In an effort to contain the radiation they erected a massive wall. China did the same.”

The walls were supposedly laced with advanced material that could decay radioisotopes at such a speed that it could break down plutonium at eighty times the rate of natural decay. It was enough to keep the citizens of South Korea safe, but unfortunately for those that’d fled from the north, they were already contaminated. Jeongguk distinctly remembers his history teacher, Mr Jeong, brushing over the fate of those who made it over the border before the wall was built. Intrigued by his reluctance, Jeongguk had done his own research, and discovered that those who were exposed to the radiation were forced into settlement reservations in the countryside. Those who were still fertile were forbidden from procreating by the government, and those that tried to leave were shot.
by armed guards that circled the perimeter of these settlements day and night.

These places no longer exist today. As far as Jeongguk knows, survivors died from radiation exposure or cancer.

“They say ever since the tragedy; the Korean and Chinese government have been working together to alleviate some of the radiation. They’ve been sending in experts to spray the area with remesirium in the hopes that one day, the north will be inhabitable again.”

This, Jeongguk didn’t know. Remesirium was still a fairly new element added to the periodic table and scientists, at the time, still hadn’t explored the element to its fullest potential. They knew it had properties to decay nuclear matter, and that was about as far as the knowledge went. There was no telling whether exposure to the element would cause damage to the human body, or if it was just as harmful and unstable as plutonium. South Korea and China took a gamble. It’s a miracle that remesirium would later be confirmed to be non-threatening.

“Why are you mentioning the north? You want to go there someday?” It wouldn’t be his first choice for a vacation. Personally, he’s more inclined to go to a tropical island that hasn’t had previous exposure to nuclear radiation.

Namjoon chuckles. “The north has virtually been untouched for over three-hundred years. I’ve been keeping track of the reports being released by the border, and from the people who’ve been over the other side. They say a massive forest has taken half the country, spanning from the border all the way passed Pyeongyang. Apparently, the trees are the tallest in recorded history, and that scientists have observed other forms of life never seen before. At night, they say, the forest bursts with light and colour.”

“Are there pictures?” Jeongguk asks, enraptured by what Namjoon is telling him.

Shaking his head, the alpha answers, “Remesirium corrupts electronic devices, including batteries. According to accounts, the people who spread it have to use glowsticks and fire when the sun goes down.”

“Does the forest have a name?”

“Not officially,” Namjoon circles his thumb against Jeongguk’s skin. He can feel his heat prick with interest. “The people who’ve seen it only refer to it as ‘The Forest of Ruin’.”
Jeongguk gulps. “Why do they call it that?”

“Cities, towns and villages—the forest has consumed whatever humanity left behind. Supposedly they call it that because there are hundreds of abandoned places that the foliage has grown around. I once read a diary entry from a scientist whose crew took shelter in an old ramyeon shop for a night. It’s super interesting to read about. The detail some of the accounts go into remind me of fairy tales a little bit, actually. But—I mean,” Namjoon scratches his chin sheepishly. “You don’t like to read, so I guess it’s not all that interesting to you, huh?”

Swooping down, he captures Namjoon’s lips in a gentle kiss. Their lips part, and then Jeongguk says, “I’d find it interesting if it was you reading it to me.”

“I can promise that,” Namjoon smirks, lifting his head to kiss Jeongguk again, this time with a little less chaste and a little more tongue.

Shivering, Jeongguk can feel the coil inside him begin to unfurl once again. There’s a ball and chain that’s enough to keep the beast at bay for a moment—a precious, civilised moment—before the chain rusts and wears from lust, and the ball ceases to weigh it down.

Before Jeongguk relinquishes control, he breathes against Namjoon’s lips, “If we ever get the chance, let’s go there together.”

Growling, Namjoon flips their positions to have the omega trapped beneath alpha’s superior weight. Grazing his pearly whites along the mating mark marring Jeongguk’s flesh, Namjoon responds, “I’d never take you to such a dangerous place.”

“Then where would you take me?” Jeongguk fingers coil to fists, nails digging into the cushy flesh of his palms. “Where would you have me?”

Their noses knock together, breath mingling, hearts beating as one. Namjoon’s eyes are closed, but Jeongguk’s are wide open, counting the pretty lashes that tickle his cheeks. “Somewhere the monsters can’t find you.”

There are so many creatures in his closet it’s hard to tell which one Namjoon is referring to. It could be all of them. Either way, it’s one of the sweetest things anyone has ever said to him. A ticklish feeling flutters in his tummy as Namjoon kisses him, this time with much more fervour.
than before. Chills go climbing up his spine and have his toes curling with delight. More slick slides out from his entrance and his body is so ready to take it, so ready to feel it filling him to the brim. The sex before it has felt like child’s play, Namjoon’s knot taking shape against his wet rim just before Namjoon pulls out altogether and jerks them to a steady release. Satisfying, though it is, there’s a simmer of quiet anger deep in his gut at the denial of a knot. Of being bred. Of satisfying the itch his biology yearns for.

“Knot me, please?” Jeongguk whimpers as Namjoon nibles at his earlobe. The alpha pulls back to look at him, the effects of his rut making him look more predatory than usual. “It’ll feel nice, I promise. It’s not the first time I’ve been knotted but—I’ll be tight enough. I know—I know you probably prefer virgins. I wish I were a virgin. That way you’d see me as special, right? As only yours—”

“Don’t speak that way,” Namjoon hushes, ducking to brush his lips against one of Jeongguk’s nipples. “I never said I prefer virgins, and I don’t care if this isn’t your first time. That mark on your neck says it all. You’re mine now, and that all that matters.”

“Won’t you knot me then?” Jeongguk twists, face scrunching in frustration. “You haven’t knotted me. I want to feel it. I want to feel your knot inside me—ah!”

A cry is drawn from him when Namjoon bites down on the areola. “It’s what you want then? To give those filthy people what they want? For me to fuck you and breed you ‘til you’re full of my seed?”

“They’re probably watching right now,” Jeongguk says faintly. “We should give them a show.”

Chuckling, Namjoon rubs the wet, abused nipple between his thumb and forefinger until it has the omega writhing beneath his weight. The alpha had discovered early on in their exploration of each other’s bodies that Jeongguk’s nipples are particularly sensitive. It’s a piece of knowledge that the cunning man had no qualms using to his advantage.

Apart from actually having his dick inside Jeongguk, he noticed that Namjoon enjoys watching him fall to pieces almost as much. The way he toys with him, touches him, his devilish experience in the anatomy of omegas has paid off a way his imagination has never conceived before. It has Jeongguk weak. So devastatingly, unequivocally at his mercy. Their strange way of knowing what the other wants without needing to say it makes things all more pleasurable. No need for conversations of the do’s and don’t’s of the hanky-panky, because if Jeongguk ever feels uncomfortable, Namjoon knows immediately and stops. Instead of questions of: “Is this okay?” “Are you okay?” conversation plays out more through casual commentary: “Oh, you like that, do you?” “You’re sensitive here? That’s cute.”
It’s probably the most bizarre yet best sex he’s ever had.

“You can hit me, if you want,” Jeongguk murmurs quietly. “Choke me. I won’t mind.”

It’s not the first time Jeongguk has given Namjoon permission to hurt him, but the clear sadness in his lover’s eyes makes it clear his mind hasn’t changed. Cradling Jeongguk’s jaw, he smooths his thumb over the omega’s bottom lip. Namjoon is good at hiding his emotions. If he only looked at the alpha’s face, and disregarded everything else, he’d think the alpha is completely aloof. That, fortunately, is not the case. Jeongguk can feel how upset the alpha is at the proposal.

“I could pin you down and call you my precious little baby boy,” Namjoon speaks in a whisper, but his tone is heavy with volume. His mouth goes dry. “I could hold you over my knee and spank you ’til your dripping for my knot, I could litter you with kisses and make sure the whole world knew about it, but don’t think for a second that I’d ever dream of hurting you the way you ask me to. Never ask that of me. Ever.”

The pain and tenderness in his alpha’s voice cuts him in such a way that he loses all oxygen in his lungs. His bottom lip quivers beneath Namjoon’s thumb, misty-eyed and hopelessly emotional. Jeongguk has never known an alpha that didn’t want to hurt him. At least, no alpha he knew to the existent that he now knows Namjoon. The students that took his classes at university didn’t count. None of them ever gave him attention outside of class discussion. Lecturers are relatively neutral. That’s not to say a lecturer hasn’t propositioned him in the past for a favourable grade on his final paper, but it was one of the only times he turned down an offer. A stronger part of him wanted to earn his degree fair and square. Otherwise, what would await him at the end of his course is nothing but a piece of paper tainted with mendacity. Sex and violence have corrupted every cell of his being, but his education, his passion for fine arts and music, that’s something he’d like to keep for himself. A thread of solace in a sea of debilitating chaos.

It’s too good to be true. It has to be too good to be true. Fate has screwed him over at every single turn. Played with his hopes and dreams and then snatched them away. Why would the universe see fit to reward him so abruptly, and in such an unlikely situation? They couldn’t have crossed paths like normal couples do, like accidentally bumping into each other at a coffee shop or flirting at a bar. No, it had to be here, in his place, this nightmare.

Pain hits him in the stomach and he coils.

“Little one?”
The alpha releases him and he cries, reaching out to him with heated tears cascading down his cheeks. Cooing, he cups Jeongguk’s face in his big hands and peppers his face with kisses. “Does my little Bambi need a cock to take the pain away?”

With a pout that could melt titanium, Jeongguk nods, failing to search for his voice through the mess of hormones raging within.

Effortlessly, Namjoon flips Jeongguk onto his stomach just the way he likes it. The omega doesn’t need to be told to lift his ass in the air for him. One hand smooths over his tailbone while two fingers slot their way into his sopping hole without resistance. The alpha is on his knees behind him. In one, precise coil of his digits they press directly against the bundle of nerves inside of him. Jeongguk spine arches in a crescent moon shape and he mewls, blessing the heavens for how well-versed Namjoon is with omega bodies.

His imagination gets the better of him, and his mind jumps to them in a lab. Namjoon is in a long, white coat with pens slotted onto his breast pocket. A pair of black-rimmed glasses sit intelligently on his nose as he examines Jeongguk on his hands and knees on the table before him. He imagines Namjoon’s snapping disposable gloves onto his large hands before examining his needy specimen.

Now that’s an experiment Jeongguk could get behind.

Drool seeps into the cushions of the nest as he comes undone, spiriting mess all over his stomach and the back of his thighs. But Namjoon doesn’t stop fondling him. The tips of his fingers wiggle, poke and prod at his prostate until it spirals his body into oversensitivity.

“Ah, ah, ah.”

“Look at you leak,” Namjoon says in a frustratingly collected voice. There’s isn’t an alpha Jeongguk knows who could have fingers up an omega in heat, battle the discomfort of a rut, and still maintain such a level of composure. It didn’t seem feasible. The fingers are removed from his twitching body. The alpha’s lips make a popping sound as he tastes Jeongguk’s juices. “Sweet, inside and out. How could humanity have spawned such a precious creature?”

“Da—alpha,” he moans, stuffing his fist into his mouth. Don’t you dare go there you filthy animal —

“Tell me what you want,” Namjoon says disinterestedly, rolling the flat of his thumb lazily against
Embarrassment flushes his cheeks. Jeongguk has had a lot of sex. Weird sex, dull sex and—other things, but dirty talk is probably one of his more glaring shortcomings. Mostly because, well—he hasn’t had many alphas ask for what he wants. It just never seemed to be in the conversation. It’s always about what they want, what’s important to them, and Jeongguk just…went along with it because saying anything otherwise might lead to conflict. And Jeongguk’s skills at dealing with conflict are almost as abysmal as his inability to talk sextily.

“I…” Closing his eyes, he thinks about it for a moment. Namjoon already knows what he wants, can sense it through their bond, but Namjoon wants to hear it. Wants to hear the filth spill from his lips. So, Jeongguk focuses on what his body is telling him. Gulping, he says, “I want you to fill me. I want you to stretch every inch of me until I can feel you pressing into my cervix… A—And for you to—to breed me and tell me I’ve been good. That I belong to you and nobody else.”

“It’s like you’ve read my mind, little one,” there’s a hint of mirth in Namjoon’s voice as he says this.

The finger at his entrance is gone, and replaced instead by the mushroom head of Namjoon’s massive cock. Jeongguk bows and curves his body in heightened anticipation. Just when he expects the alpha to enter him, he’s being turned over onto his back, legs falling open on either side of Namjoon’s waist. The whine that nearly escapes him is captured by the lips that press a bruising kiss to his own. Eyes fluttering shut, his complaint melts into a moan. Jeongguk tosses his arms around the alpha’s neck. It is with firm determination that Namjoon pulls and folds Jeongguk in such a way as to have his legs dangling over his shoulders.

That’s when he thrusts into him.

His walls hug at the intrusion as though embracing an old friend, and Jeongguk has to break apart their kiss to gasp. There’s already swelling at the base of Namjoon’s penis. He can feel it opening up his rim.

It doesn’t hurt at all.

The pleasure tingles up his spine and his little cock kicks back to life. With two hands planted on either side of Jeongguk’s face, Namjoon pistons into him fast and dirty. The sliver of baby fat around his belly and thighs jiggle with the vigorous motion. Jeongguk lies there and takes it. Takes it like he was born to. His insides squeeze around Namjoon and he growls. Teeth clamp down on his mating mark and another burst of euphoria hits him in the stomach and chest. Legs and arms
turn to mush, fingers and toes numb.

It gets bigger. Jeongguk can feel it hitting his entrance. His alpha is already large, but the thought of having his colossal knot filling out his insides is both a terrifying and pleasant thought.

Hot, moist breath fans his neck. Strong hands are clamped around his hips, pulling his body in to meet every surge of penetration. The tip of Namjoon’s dick pulverises his prostate so unrepentantly that Jeongguk comes again, misty white discharge hitting his chest and a torrent of slick oozing out of his puffy entrance.

“I’m going to breed you nicely,” Namjoon tells him between pants, a rivulet of sweat mapping the side of his temple. Their gazes meet, and the way Namjoon looks at him is the single sexiest thing Jeongguk as ever seen. “Your body is going to take every ounce of my seed until you’re swollen with it, until it gives you a taste of what it’ll be like carrying my brood.”

“Yes—yes, Daddy please—”

It just came tumbling out of his mouth before he could stop it. Jeongguk isn’t even sure Namjoon heard it—or whether he’d only imagined himself shouting the pet name—but with his remaining strength Namjoon fucks the knot into the pressure of his walls. He screams in ecstasy as his rim catches on the pulsing flesh. Cum goes pouring into his cervix. Feet kicks out and twitch, white exploding beneath his eyelids. Namjoon bites down into his bottom lip—

And the illusion is shatter by another dry orgasm that tears through his body.

Jeongguk sobs behind the metal guard shoved into his mouth, his tears bleeding through the cracks in his steel blindfold. The incense is held under his nose again and he tries jerking away, but the braces on his face and neck secure him firmly to the table. Metal digs into the skin around his biceps, wrists, torso and ankles. They’ve had him for what feels like days. They haven’t allowed him to sleep. Haven’t allowed him to see or speak. A cock rings is around his erect penis, denying him any sort of pleasure the potent aphrodisiac pulls from him. They have heart monitor leads stuck to his chest. Swabs have been taken from his rectum but he doesn’t know what for. He thinks someone might’ve mentioned something about comparing chemicals—but it was hard to tell over his own cries for mercy.

They’ve been holding up different scents in front of his nose for the past couple of hours. The grate in his mouth stops him from being able to breathe, so he has no choice by to inhale through his nose.
This is the first one that has gotten a visceral reaction from his body. Jeongguk was so scared that his mind must’ve taken him to his happy place—to a memory that gave him comfort. It’s gone now, though, and no matter how hard he tries the memory slips away from the moment like sand in the wind.

“Report,” one of the scientists says.

A voice from what sound like a walkie-talkie echo back in the sterile room, “Subject Alpha 1 is exhibiting strong signs of sexual arousal, as indicated by the subject’s erect penis and increase of pheromones excretion.”

Namjoon.

They haven’t seen each other since they were taken. Jeongguk can’t even remember the reason why the gas started coming through the vents this time. Yoongi and Seokjin were fighting again. Always fighting. But this time it turned more violent than usual and Yoongi used the end of a toothbrush he’d sharpened to try and stab Seokjin in the throat. Maybe that’s why they are being punished. It didn’t seem fair, that they had to suffer for the actions of others. It’s been days since he’s seen Namjoon. The distance, the lack of contact and intimacy, has started to take a toll on him. The exhaustion is poisoning him, slowly but surely.

“Is that—is Jeongguk there?”

His body writhes at the sound of Namjoon’s voice through the walkie-talkie. He tries to speak, to say something, but all that comes out are muffle whimpers.

“Jeongguk!”

“Heart rate?”

“80 BPM.”

“That’s twenty less than before,” one of the scientists mutter.
“Let me see him youfuckers—you can’t keep us apart forever!”

“Subject has been showing increased signs of stress over the last twenty-four hours. Effects of separation have increased significantly.”

“Do you think it’s time—”

“Jeongguk, can you hear me?”

“—to move on to temperature?”

“Yes. We’ll move Alpha 1 to the cool room. Give us half an hour.”

“Copy that.”

The audio cuts off and Jeongguk can’t hear Namjoon struggling or calling out to him anymore. A sob tears from his chest and the tears come back full-force. He’s so tired. For some reason he can’t sleep, though. Jeongguk can only guess as to why that might be. All the experiments so far have been to do with their bond. If he were to assume anything, it’d be that they’re purposely keeping Namjoon awake and it’s messing with their connection.

The sound of a door opening and closing bounces off the walls. There’s a sharp intake of air from one of the scientists, and the sound of feet clambering.

“Mr Kim!” one of them exclaims. They seem surprised.

“At ease, gentlemen, I’m only here for a brief visit.” Jeongguk can feel his heart sinking. He knows that inflection of smugness. “You wouldn’t mind if I conduct a brief evaluation of Omega 3’s condition, would you? Dr Oh Donghee kindly informed me that you’re observing the effects of separation. It’s the third day, is it?”

“Ye-yes, Mr Kim. Of course. Please—sit down, make yourself comfortable.”
“Fetch me a clipboard and a pen, would you?” Shoes go clapping out the room before returning. Jeongguk can hear the sound of the plastic wheels of a chair being rolled across tile. “Very good. You may leave us for now. No need for supervision between old friends.”

The sounds of foot steps and a door closing have his stomach churning uncomfortably. Somehow Seokjin having involvement doesn’t surprise him as much as it really should. As far as the others are concerned, the beta is just a bit of a narcissistic psychopath that enjoys watching chaos unfold before his eyes—specifically, chaos he had a hand in creating. Yet, a part of him had always suspected that this might be the case, that Seokjin was in on everything the entire time. It just wouldn’t make sense for him to be here otherwise. The rest of them are relatively obscure figures of society, at least compared to the beta. Why steal a rich man’s son when they could’ve gotten any average beta joe or jane off the street? It just didn’t make much sense logically.

That is, unless of course, Seokjin had something to do with the experiment. Which is now plainly evident.

A hand touches his shoulder and he violently jerks, screaming into the metal grate. Seokjin hushes him. “Don’t be so dramatic, little doll. I’m only here to have a conversation with you.”

Jeongguk doesn’t want this creep anywhere near him or his baby. But the pheromones work their magic into his muscles and he relaxes. The guard is unclasped from his jaw and he can finally speak. He runs his tongue along his cracked, dry lips and swallows the excess saliva that’d built up around his gums.

“Namjoon,” is the first thing he says. “I want to see Namjoon-hyung.”

“You will, cupcake, don’t you worry your little head over that. My employees know they can’t keep you away for an extensive period of time without potentially causing harm to the baby.” A hand is placed lightly on his belly and he squirms. There’s only a tiny bump, barely noticeable. “Wouldn’t want any unexpected miscarriages, now would we?”

“Where is he? What are you going to do to him?” The ‘cool room’ is still poignant in his mind.

The hand on his stomach is gone. There’s a click of a pen. “Nothing serious. Just a small test to observe the effects of temperature. Your alpha will be cold but unharmed, I can assure you.”
It definitely did not give him any reassurance.

“Have there been any significant changes in your mood since you last saw Namjoon?” Seokjin asks in a smooth tone of professionalism, as though Jeongguk isn’t lying strapped to a table completely naked. He’s almost thankful that he can’t see. He doesn’t know if he could stand to look at Seokjin without feeling intense hatred.

“Yes,” he answers quietly.

“What changes have you noticed?”

“Agitation. Anxiety. Stress. It might be because Namjoon isn’t with me, or it might have to do with the fact that you gassed me and took me to an unfamiliar place while pregnant.” There isn’t much malice to his voice, because no matter how much Seokjin disturbs him, he could never bring himself to be openly spiteful. He ran out of spite a long time ago.

“Do you feel tired?”

“Exhausted.”

“Have you had any sleep?”

“No.”

“Hm. Namjoon hasn’t either. That’s very interesting.” The pen clicks. Words are written on paper. Jeongguk’s fingers twitch.

“What about the morning sickness? Worse or better since you last saw Namjoon? You were rather ill the last time we saw each other. You had your face in a toilet.”

Jeongguk doesn’t appreciate the amusement in Seokjin’s voice.

“It comes and goes. You can go ahead and ask one of your employees. I ruined one of their coats.”
“Did you?” More writing. “I suppose separation doesn’t enhance the symptoms of pregnancy, or perhaps it could be conditional to the couple. It’s a real shame there aren’t any other claimed couples we can compare to. I encouraged Jimin to go for it but he attacked me with his spoon.”

The image of Jimin attempting to stab Seokjin in the eye with a rubber spoon brings him minimal satisfaction. If only the spoon were metal.

It’s infuriating the amount of times the others have tried to take Seokjin down over the past weeks. There’s been attempts to break his limbs so he cannot walk, blind him so he cannot see, choke him so he cannot speak, but every single time there’s something that thwarts their efforts. Conveniently-timed interference from their captors, or Seokjin fighting dirty to gain the upper hand. Either way, every attempt has been rendered a waste of energy. They’ve taken cautionary measures to ensure Seokjin doesn’t act on his sickly twisted promises. Yoongi, Namjoon and Jimin take it in turns to stay awake during the night—and sometimes Taehyung, too, when he can’t sleep. When they shower, they go in two’s or three’s so that someone is always left watching over Seokjin. In hindsight, these little moments of convenience on Seokjin’s part look less coincidental and more suspicious. It’d make sense for the scientists to step in whenever Seokjin is in danger.

“What about cravings? Do you feel hungrier than usual?”

“A little.”

They started giving the omegas extra food after Jeongguk’s pregnancy test results were slotted into the Mystery Box about two weeks ago. He understands that he needs to eat more, but the extra food for Taehyung and Jimin confuse him a little. There has been no confirmation that the other two omegas are pregnant, and Jimin even mentioned that he hasn’t noticed anything different about himself. Taehyung, on the other hand, has been strangely tight-lipped on the subject. It wouldn’t make sense for Taehyung to be concerned over the issue. The only person he had sex with during his last heat was Jimin, so there’d be no unexpected surprises waiting for him in the near future.

“Do you know what Namjoon is thinking at this very moment?”

Jeongguk doesn’t like it when Seokjin talks about Namjoon. “No, but I know what he’s feeling.”

“What’s he feeling?”
Focusing on his connection, he imagines a string sprouting from the centre of his chest. He grasps and tugs at it. The bond is amplified. The confusion, the anger, the worry, Jeongguk can feel all of it. It hurts. It hurts to be so close to his alpha yet, at the same time, feel so far away. It’s as if they’re submerged in an ocean, sinking gradually into the darkness. He can see the outline of Namjoon’s silhouette in the distance, but he can’t get to him, no matter how hard he tries.

Their bond, he learnt, is a very intimate balancing act that hinges on their ability to trust one another. It’s almost insulting, for Seokjin to ask what Namjoon is feeling right now. That information is for Jeongguk to know. Nobody else.

“Nothing. He feels nothing.”

The chuckle that echoes off the walls is haunting.

“Oh, Jeongguk, baby.” Seokjin cups his jaw and Jeongguk strains against the metal binding him to the table. “You’d think a former actor would be a better liar. You had to lie about a lot of things in your childhood, after all. But do you honestly think you’re fooling anyone? I can always tell when you’re lying. Right from the day we met, you told your little white lies.”

Jeongguk bites the inside of his cheek, refusing to respond. The beta is baiting him.

Pheromones assault him in waves, sinking into the pours of his skin and rushing up his nostrils. A choking sound escapes him as the effects force him into a semi-languid state of naivety. Why was he so distressed again? Ah, the cool steel of the table feels nice and chilly against his back. Seokjin’s scent is a nice change from the sterile, copper scents of the other scientists. It’s also nice of them to put this cover over his eyes. The lights might sting.

“That’s a good omega,” Seokjin croons, fingertips dancing along Jeongguk’s collarbones. “Tell me something, Jeongguk. Why did you tell that little white lie the first day of our confinement, hm? The one where you said you were at a bar with that beta boy.”

It’s strange. Every fibre of his being is telling him to trust Seokjin with body and soul, yet something feels off-kilter. It’s as if his heart is trying to convey something to him, but he doesn’t know what that might be.

“Because I was afraid,” he slurs. The voice is a little louder now, yelling at him mutedly to keep his
“What were you afraid of?”

“The person…the person who drugged me.”

“You know who took you, don’t you?” Seokjin sounds pleased—excited, even. “I know who took you, too. They’ve been keeping a very watchful eye on you.”

Jeongguk whimpers. He nods his head as best as he can with the braces keeping his head in place.

“You weren’t in Suwon the day they took you.” Oh god, Seokjin knows. He knows everything. Even through the fog his hairs stand on end. “You went back to visit your grandparents for the weekend. Then at some point, you had an appointment with your old therapist, isn’t that right?”

Chest rising, limbs tensing, he makes a sad attempt to break from his restraints. “Hng—no! How do you know all this?”

“Baby, I know everything. The two therapists you were seeing—the one in Suwon and the one in Cheojiwon were all too eager to cooperate with our plans, when properly persuaded, of course. Where do you think we got those tapes of your sessions? We have hundreds of them, dating all the way back to your first appointment. I’ve watched every single one of them, and I have to admit, you were quite the little darling. No wonder those alphas couldn’t keep their hands to themselves —”

“Stop it.”

“Oh?” Seokjin’s voice drips with delight. “Do I detect just a hint of aggression? That’s not like you at all, baby.”

“Please…” he feels the walls inside him begin to crumble. Humiliation spreads all over his body, sickened at the thought of Seokjin having access to those tapes. “I trusted Dr Han and Dr Seon. The only reason I kept going back to them was because they made me feel safe.”
“Funny. They said something similar when we first asked for their cooperation, but every man or woman has their price, Gguk. Never forget that.” The sound of wheels indicates Seokjin has rolled further from his face and closer to the lower half of his body. With his hand, the beta rubs deceptively affectionate circles over his tiny baby bump. “Dr Han gave you up when I told him a detailed allegory about what I’d do to his wife and son if he were to refuse, and also how I’d get away with it. Dr. Seon, well, she was a little less easy to sway. The closest thing she has to family is a poodle. It was only after we took three of her fingers that she finally gave in. A commendable effort.”

Dr Seon told him she’d lost the fingers to frostbite when she was on leave for a week in Canada. Which was a year and a half ago. Jeongguk had only been seeing her for six months at that point.

Which means—“You didn’t pick us at random, did you?”

“Clever omega,” Seokjin patronises. “For one of the omegas, I had an omega that’s promiscuous but with little self-esteem in mind. Some of my employees on the recruitment team suggested a prostitute but where’s the fun in that? No, I needed someone special—someone so fundamentally broken they’d let anybody breed them. Scandals and controversies were running rampant through the Korean film industry so I thought I’d do a little digging on the victims to see if anything might catch my interest. At the bottom of one of the articles about Lee Dongho’s victims, there was a brief, superfluous mention of you.”

His stomach sinks.

“Jeon Jeongguk, a former actor who worked with Lee Dongho, has made no public accusations against the producer. We tried reaching out to Mr Jeon, now twenty-one years of age, but he neglected to respond.” With two fingers, he walks them down the slope of Jeongguk’s stomach and along his hip bone. “Jeon Jeongguk, I thought, that name rings a bell. So I found your movies and watched every single one of them. Then I had my alphas follow you around for a few months, gathering information, taking photos, listening in on your calls. There was even one instance where I groped you to see what you’d do. You never saw my face, you didn’t seem to care. I could’ve taken you then and there, but I didn’t. Aren’t I a nice guy?”

A monster is what you are.

The fingers walk up his thigh. “You weren’t mine to have, though. No, I had someone else in mind for you—someone bold and arrogant and the complete opposite of you in every way possible. I needed an alpha so far up his own ass that he wouldn’t think to suspect me. I visited his lab for months, chatting up the busty lab assistant that worked alongside him and still, he never even spared me a glance. Oh, he was so perfect for you. Jeon Jeongguk and Kim Namjoon, my impactable little success story.”
The new information was like a punch to the gut. Seokjin had planned for he and Namjoon to get together all along. They’d been chosen for each other based off of personality and behaviour. How had he not known that people were following him this entire time? That his therapists were in compliance with this psychopath, waiting for when everything was in place for them to make their move.

Jeongguk had been sitting in Dr Han’s office, taking in the familiar surroundings. His eyes had lingered at a shelf of children’s books, the script and colours had evoked memories of nostalgia. The last thing he remembers of his appointment was being offered a glass of banana milk. Dr Han had been treating him for years, ever since he was a pre-teen, so it didn’t surprise him that he remembered his favourite drink. On the contrary, he remembers feeling touched that the man had bought it for him prior to the session. It’s twisted now. He’d slipped something into the drink. At the time, Jeongguk didn’t want to tell the others about his final moments of freedom. Too many things were going through his mind. What if Dr Han is watching them? What if he kills him if he tells the truth? There was also the threat of questions. Why was he seeing a therapist? What’s wrong with him? Oh god, he’s crazy, isn’t he?

No. He didn’t want to be the outcast. He didn’t want to be shunned by the only human connections he had.

“What do you want from us?” he whispers.

“What you were trained to do, cupcake. I want you to entertain me.”

Is it not enough? They’ve been here for god knows how long—he suspects it’s been well over a month, because the test results he’d gotten weeks ago informed him that he was, in fact, three weeks pregnant. How long does Seokjin intend to keep them here? How long before Seokjin grows bored of them? What then?

“Thought of a name yet?” Seokjin asks. His hands are back at his stomach like a mad scientist admiring the seeds of his work. “If it’s an alpha, rest assured your oaf of a mate would want something strong, Dong-something-or-other. If it’s a beta he might be generous enough to let you choose, though I wouldn’t get too attached if it’s an omega. Namjoon wouldn’t be too happy. He might ask you to dispose of it.”

Jeongguk grits his teeth. He’s lying—he’s lying! Namjoon would never suggest such a thing. He’d be a kind, sweet father to any of their children, no matter the class.
“You’re—” he’s about to tell Seokjin something he’s been wanting to say to him for a very long time now, but the moment is lost with the sound of the door screeching open.

“Mr Kim, preparations for the next experiment are all in place.”

“Good. You may proceed. I’ll stay and observe.” No, Seokjin. Please leave. Please—

“Sir, it isn’t my place to say but, isn’t it risky to reveal sensitive information to Subject Omega 3? Won’t he tell the others of your involvement?”

Goose bumps pebble his flesh and his knees bend at the sudden drop in temperature. Namjoon must be in the cool room now. It’s a strange feeling. His body is cold, but the air surrounding him feels warm in comparison. It does little to influence what Jeongguk is feeling.

“I wouldn’t be concerned,” Seokjin brushes off the scientist. Fingers pinch his hardened nipple and he squeals.

“No!” he cries, jerking away.

The beta chuckles. “No? Pregnancy has changed you, baby. You’d never say no to a friendly fondle in the past.”

“I’ll—I’ll tell Namjoon. He’ll hurt you!” he exclaims in a state of panic. He’ll say anything to get Seokjin to stop touching him.

Seokjin must be leaning over him, because his breath hits Jeongguk’s cheek. He freezes, terrified. “You wanna know why I’m willingly telling you all this classified information?”

Jeongguk stays quiet, his heart stuck in his throat.

“Because I know you won’t say shit. You’re too scared of what I might do if you open your cock-sucking mouth. It’s uncharacteristically wise for someone like you. But if stalking you for over a year has taught me anything, it’s that you know what you have to do to survive.”
The beta twists his nipple so harshly that Jeongguk screams in pain. “Be a good omega, and I won’t have to tear that child out through your cunt.”

The grate is fitted back between his teeth. Jeongguk doesn’t resist. He just lays there, sobbing violently.

Chapter End Notes

So, there's been a time skip. You mad?

I finally got a Curious Cat so feel free to ask me anything~

You can also ask me questions through Tumblr. (lemme know if this URL works, cuz for some reason on my computer it won't let me access my own tumblr page, but I can still answer questions in my inbox, reblog/like posts so... idk what's happening there)

OH ALSO, some of you keep telling me you keep refreshing the page to know when I've updated, but I'm more than happy to announce updates either on twitter or tumblr, so lemme know if that's something you guys would prefer! (I know you get email notifications, but there's an hour to two hour delay)
The silence is so palpable, so stifling, that when the alarm goes off for lunch Yoongi nearly buckles from fright. At the time he’d been comfortably curled up in his little corner in Zone 1, with only the three books gifted to them for company. He’d finished William G. Whitaker’s *A History of the Class Dynamic* fairly early on in their confinement. It’d taken him about a week or so to get through it in its entirety. Then he’d tried to reread Harold Pettergan’s *The Nature of Alphas and the Nurture of Omegas* again, to see if there was anything he could get out of it that he didn’t in his initial reading. This one took a lot longer for him to get through than he anticipated. So much has happened over the past few months that any moment of peace they could indulge in were thrust out the window. Those first twenty days of confinement were the tamest. At least back then, Yoongi could sit down between meals and read, converse with his other packmates or watch Hoseok lose another card game to Jimin for what could’ve been the thousandth time.

It all went to shit when Jeongguk was confirmed to be pregnant. It’d only been a month. Then Namjoon started to get distressed and paranoid that something bad was going to happen to his omega. New rules were established. Seokjin ate his meals separate from everyone else, Jeongguk was forbidden from going near any other alpha that wasn’t Namjoon because he was scared accidental contact could lead to a sudden miscarriage, and their leader had banned gambling in case it resulted in another punishment.

As one could imagine, these rules didn’t sit well with Jimin.

Yoongi sets aside Becky Abraham’s *The Feral Within Us*, something he’d finally gotten around to reading. He hasn’t ventured too far into the book as of yet, but he can already tell he’ll enjoy it much more than he did the other two. It’s abundantly clear that either Becky Abraham is a self-aware alpha or, perhaps a beta or omega. There has yet to be any random comments on the inferiority of one class over another, or how biology is something that dictates the actions of an individual as opposed to personality or upbringing. From what he can gauge by the blurb and summary, it appears to be an in-depth analysis of our animalistic origins and how social interactions have evolved overtime to adapt to modernised behavioural values. Instead of stating that omegas are weak because they are biologically built to be that way, Abraham proposes
alternative theories that could explain the physical and social differences between classes by tracking their genes as far back as prehistoric times.

Entering Zone 4, Yoongi sees his tray sitting alone at one end of the long table. They still insist on maintaining the sitting order even though, thanks to shifting relationships, it has changed quite a bit. Settling down on his pillow, he looks to his right where Hoseok should be, and then to his left, where the rest of his pack should be. It’s so quiet.

Taking his spoon, he digs a straight line into the stainless-steel surface of the table. One-hundred and one days they’ve been here. He started etching the days into the table around the fifteen day, because he realised that he was losing track of time. Losing track of the days completely could lead him into a spiralling state of confusion and delirium. He found that it didn’t matter, anyway. The fever is there, simmering beneath the surface as reality gradually slips away from him—away from all of them.

It’s been two weeks since he last had human contact.

They took Jeongguk and Namjoon first, on day seventy-two. Seokjin went next, on day seventy-three. Then Taehyung, day eighty-one. Jimin was taken one day eighty-three. Hoseok was taken last. It was only when they were all gone that it dawned on Yoongi how much he’d relied on their presence to keep him grounded. Even Seokjin, who he hated to his very core, still kept him anchored to the floor in some way. Now, though, it feels like he’s about to float away at any moment. He finally has the quiet and peace to sit down and appreciate a good read, and yet in the back of his mind he’s thinking about the rest of his pack. About whether Jeongguk and the baby are okay, if Namjoon is there to comfort him, if Jimin is as fiery and sharp-tongued as ever, or if Taehyung and Hoseok are holding it together. What about Seokjin? What are they going to do to him? There doesn’t seem to be a thing that exists that could genuinely hurt Seokjin. Not a soul on this Earth to torment the unpredictable madman.

Somehow, he doubts they’re doing anything to Seokjin. The scientists aren’t subtle in their favouritism and it’s clear they’re willing to step in whenever things get ugly. Just when Yoongi is close to crushing Seokjin’s windpipe, the mist comes rolling in through the vents and he has no choice but to relinquish his grip. Even the look in Seokjin’s eyes as he attempts to break the light inside him says that he has nothing to fear.

Could it be that Seokjin has something to do with this experiment? Is he in on the whole thing? A small part of him hopes that he isn’t, because if he is, the rest of them have their work cut out for them. But since life gets a kick out of punishing people for existing, it could very well be the case.

It isn’t clear why his pack were taken. Namjoon and Jeongguk might’ve been taken because he’d attempted to kill Seokjin for the forth time, but the others—they were taken in the night, and
seemingly at random and without cause. They’d wake up to find one of them missing in the morning, and they had no choice but to go about their business as though a looming threat wasn’t waiting for them around the corner. The morning Jimin was taken, about eighteen days ago, Hoseok cried all day, scared and worried out of his mind. It’d only be four days later that they’d take Hoseok, too.

Yoongi eats his meal quietly.

For the following days after Hoseok’s disappearance, Yoongi had woken himself up during the dead of night, expecting to be somewhere else. But every morning, the lights came on, and he was still in their prison, completely alone. Some part of him eventually started to hope they’d take him. That they’d spare him from this isolation and loneliness. Yoongi isn’t a social guy. He’s an introvert, through and through, but that doesn’t make the emptiness any less unnerving to him. Even when he was living alone in his rundown, mouldy apartment, he could still go outside for a walk, still talk to the elder woman at his local kimbap joint, see children racing on their bikes around the neighbourhood. Maybe the loneliness was easier to live with because it was all he really knew up until they were taken. Then, out of nowhere, he’d been thrust into a foreign environment with a bunch of other, fucked-up lonely people.

Somewhere along the line, he must’ve gotten used to their antics, because now their absence is palpable.

Sitting back down in his spot after finishing lunch, he opens *The Feral Within Us*, hoping the words on the page will somehow drown out the deafening silence.

He opens to a chapter entitled: *Gender, Biology and Class*.

*The social constructs of modern-day gender values originated from the primitive concepts of the “feminine” and the “masculine”, both of which are a set of ideas that dictate the social expectations of men and women. Humankind has gone through a set of evolutionary stages dating all the way back to prehistoric times. Five hundred years ago, ancient texts excavated by Dr H. Mah and his team of archaeologists (which were discovered deep in the African savannah by an anti-poaching organisation) gave us insight into our genetic history. There was once a time, before wolf could shift into human, that there existed only two second-genders: alpha and omega. The Feminine comes from inherent social values established towards omegas who, a long time ago, were exclusively female, and The Masculine for alpha males. This discovery would later support the Orenstein Theory: Women were meant to bear children, which explains why alpha and beta women still have breasts despite being unable to carry children, and men were meant to impregnate, which explains why omega men still have penises.*

*At some point in our history, there was a significant shift in our biology. Certain female ‘omegas’*
could no longer procreate, and male alphas could no longer produce knots. This group of individuals started to smell different. They no longer bore the sugary sweetness of an omega scent nor the musky, earthy scent of an alpha. Instead, their scents developed citrus or spicy undertones. Their pheromones mutated to give reason rather than lust, to quell conflict rather than invigorate it. This new class would what we now refer to as betas.

It was around the time betas started to develop, that we also saw a shift in omega and alpha gender variety. Males were being born omegas, and females were being born alphas. They maintain all the outward characteristics of men and women. Omega men still have penises, but they’re smaller and only produce discharge instead of sperm. Alpha women still have breasts, but they’re smaller than omega females and cannot produce milk. The biggest changes are to their sex organs.

Splitting off from the rectum of an omega male is a vaginal canal leading to the cervix. This is also where the body self-lubricates. Much like the female omega vagina, the male omega anus is also designed to stretch to accommodate for alpha knots and childbirth. Male omegas produce milk internally, instead of externally, like female omegas do. Female alphas, on the other hand, have penises where the clitoris should be, and no vaginal entrance. Many scientists have set out to prove significant differences between female and male omegas, or male and female alphas, but none have succeeded. There is no conclusive evidence to support that male omegas are more at risk of miscarriages than females, or that a female alpha’s sperm has slower mobility than that of a male. Whatever biological differences that may exist, it is clear that we as a species have evolved to overcome reproductive difficulties that could have arisen. There is, however, lingering social constructs.

Certain alpha women will still maintain their femininity despite playing masculine roles in their relationships and family lives, and there are some omega men who still maintain their masculinity, too. However, our ideas of femininity and masculinity have been translated into words that we identify with more easily in a modern-day: omegian and alphinian. As it stands, no word in any language has thought of an adjective to reflect the social and political values of betas, but it is clear where the origins of omegian and alphinian standards came from. Omegas are The Feminine. Alphas are The Masculine.

Some contemporary philosophers and academics believe that biology is what distinguishes class. Alphas are leaders because they are physically and mentally superior, betas are mediators and diplomats because they are agreeable and level-headed, and omegas are child-bearers because they are nurturing and gentle.

I would like to propose another theory, which I will dub “The Pack Theory”. It is no secret that, due to our canis lupus ancestry, we didn’t coexist as families, but rather packs. Groups of people who had no biological relation to one another, but found comfort and security in company and numbers. These packs were often formed by those with mutual understandings, beliefs and/or circumstances. My theory is that our differences lie in our innate need to coexist in these groups. Countless studies have been conducted on families with varying second-gendered parents and
children, to see how modern-day households behave under these dynamics.

Alphas in a conventional household are providers. They provide income, safety and love. Omegas are the emotional centre of a household. They empathize, understand and love. Betas are the balance of a household. They listen, are pragmatic and ensure that the intricately knitted relationships remain reinforced and strong. It is no coincidence that the roles our classes play in family households correlates to the roles we played in packs long ago.

The very core of my theory is that our limitations are not dictated by biology, but by the relationships we have, both inside and outside the family unit, and our instinctive survival skills. If we were to put a handful of individuals, with no biological relation to one another, into a room together, I predict that they would all naturally fall in line with their respective class roles and would be compelled to form intimacy and connections with one another in order to survive.

It’s as if the feeling has seeped out of his fingers and toes, and the roar of his blood is all that he can hear. Did he just stumble across the aim of the experiment? Is that why they were given these books? To put the clues together themselves? If that were the case, why would they throw in a dozen other variables to fuck things up? Why the Mystery Box? Why the rules and regulations and punishments? No, this can’t be the case—it simply couldn’t. Putting a group of individuals into one room and allowing their instincts to dictate the outcome of the experiment seems so tame in comparison to the crap they’ve had to endure. Such a thing could’ve easily been passed through regulations with the right precautions and protocols put in place. There wouldn’t be any reason for them to go kidnapping people off the street. There’s also Seokjin. He doesn’t fit the bill of a stable beta at all. If his role was to play the mediator perhaps they got more than what they bargained for when they chose Seokjin as a candidate—if their disappearances were thought out at all.

Yoongi can’t tell if they were taken because it was opportunistic or if it was planned. On the one hand, they broke into his apartment while he was home alone, so they knew where he lived and they knew he didn’t have company. On the other hand, why would they take people like Taehyung, who have a known mental illness and whose instability could be an inconvenient variable to their main goal?

Or was it to get them breeding…?

His eyes fall to the small stack of books to his right, most notably on The Nature of Alphas and the Nurture of Omegas. The book is all about nature versus nurture, and every single one of them have something that’s wrong with them. Jimin’s anger issues, Hoseok’s skittish nature, Jeongguk’s vulnerability, Taehyung’s schizophrenia, Namjoon’s blinding arrogance, his… weird connection to alcoholism and beta daddy issues. It could be that they want them breeding, then maybe giving their children to stable, loving parents to gauge their growth and development. It seems more plausible. Couples aren’t just willing to breed and birth children for the sake of science. In that respect committing a federal crime makes just a little more sense. But it still seems a bit of a
stretch. Pettergan’s research relied on medical records and interviews with both the biological parents of adopted children, and the adopted parents. Infamously, he’d had to jump through all sorts of obstacles to ensure all the research he gathered was obtained through ethical means. It must’ve been a pain in the ass to get signed permission from all the parents and guardians, then having to interview the children about consent and if they had a good enough understanding of the concept before he could proceed. Still, as flawed as Pettergan’s research is, he was still able to pull it off without needing to kidnap people and hold them against their will. If their aim is to make new discoveries on the nature versus nurture front, difficult as it may be, it’s still achievable.

None of it makes any sense.

Yoongi isn’t even attracted to omegas. He doesn’t want children. Why would they pick him, of all people?

From somewhere in the bathroom, he hears a faint sliding noise. Putting his book aside, he slinks quietly over to the door, pressing himself flat against the wall in case something bursts out and attacks him. Whatever it is, he’s confident he can take it. Standing beside the closed door leading to Zone 2 for a moment or so, it’s clear that whatever has entered isn’t moving—or if they are, they aren’t making any discernible noises.

Taking a quiet, deep breath through his nose, he slowly turns the knob and pushes the door open. It doesn’t make a sound. Not a creak nor a whistle. Peeking through the crack, he expects to maybe see a body lying unconscious on the floor, like he has seen so many times previously. Nothing is there. The walls where the showers are lined up are bare, and the sink is empty. Pushing his way inside, he notices a square cut-out of a doorframe carved from the tiled wall opposite him. It’s the very same wall he’d catch himself staring at some nights when he can’t sleep, or when he’s sitting on the toilet or washing his hands. Something always told him an entrance had to be there, but there was no confirmation that there actually was until now. Whenever they came for them, they were never seen entering or leaving, just appearing with the fog that comes billowing through the vents.

There is no light on. It’s just darkness passed the doorframe. Yoongi looks to his left, then to his right, as if expecting attackers to come lunging out of random crevices in the walls. No such thing happens, of course. Confinement has made him paranoid.

It’s clear what they want him to do. Does he dare to do what’s expected of him…? Is this some sort of trap?

Probably.
He’s the last man standing. It only makes sense for them to start fucking with him, too. If he were sitting at a monitor watching someone eat, sleep and shit all day he’d probably get bored, too.

Well, he supposes there’s really no point for him to sit around here and continue wallowing in his own solitude. If it really is a trap, maybe he can take a few guys down with him before they inevitably take him.

Cautiously approaching the dark hallway, he checks to see if anyone is there. In the distance, a quiet hum of machinery can be heard. Other than that, there doesn’t seem to be a soul in sight. A square window of light shines through the darkness, and he makes an executive decision to approach it. It looks directly into the bathroom. Yoongi stands before the light that filters in through the other room, contemplating how they could possibly look through it without it being blatantly obvious. Then he realises it’s the mirror above their sink. Disgust coils in his stomach. For months, scientists have been walking up and down this hallway, walking past them showering, brushing their teeth, using the toilets. He can’t determine which is worse, the fact that they’ve been spying on them through cameras or spying on them through a large window in their bathroom.

He keeps moving. Lingering only proves to anger him further.

A little way down the hallway there’s a room that splinters off to the left, a door-less entrance with a light hanging overhead. It’s dim and reminds him of old American noire films. The room isn’t big by any means. It could fit maybe ten, eleven people in total. Backed up against the wall opposite the door is a large corkboard. What he sees on the corkboard shouldn’t shock him, but strangely it does anyway. Photos taken from a distance of their pack out in public. Taehyung walking into a pharmacy, Namjoon talking to someone older than him—a professor, perhaps. They were all taken indiscriminately and without their permission. The picture of him is slightly off-centre. He’s standing at a newsstand looking at something. Yoongi remembers that day. Housing prices had shot through the roof and he’d been contemplating how he was going to pay his rent for that month.

That was about a year ago, just before he started selling drugs.

Underneath the photos are bits of information. Addresses, daily routines, relationships, interests, there’s even a small sticky-note underneath Jimin’s picture that says his favourite food is japchae. There are smaller pictures of other people. One under Taehyung’s picture is of a young woman who looks in her mid-twenties. Under Jeongguk’s, there are pictures of a man and a woman. They both look older, so they could be his parents but—neither of them look like him. Under his own picture is his half-sister and his mother, both of whom he hasn’t spoken to in quite a while (even before he was taken), and a picture of a man he’d dated for two weeks.

At the bottom of the corkboard are pictures of couples. He doesn’t recognise any of them. Each has
a set of information about them, like what they do for a living, how much they earn, their addresses, phone numbers, classes…

On the table are manila folders. In place of his name, instead they have: Alpha 3. His fingers twitch. The urge to read and the urge to run at odds with one another. He didn’t realise how scary it would be to leave the comforting abode of their prison, to have the autonomy to move where he pleased and to read what he wanted. Such a luxury wouldn’t have prompted a second-guess from him before they kidnapped him. Now it’s near alien. This right to choose.

Flicking open the folder before he can convince himself otherwise, he starts sifting through the information. Medical records, dental records, appointments, bills, receipts, entries of his whereabouts, the kind of coffee he gets from his local café, blueprints to his apartment, background information on the people in his life and how frequently he calls them, a copy of lease forms, a copy of his certificate and passport, his university degree—his entire life, entire existence has all been collected into this single folder.

The sweat on his palms is slick when he rubs them together. The receipts date back to almost two years ago, so he has to assume that’s when they started following him.

Amongst the stack of documents is a report written by a therapist he saw not longer after his parents divorced. He only went the one time, at the insistence of his mother, but he didn’t get much out of it.

“The patient appears to have serious, psychological issues towards his beta father, whose actions against his mother may have been responsible for the patient’s clear expression of distrust towards strangers and, most especially, strangers who are betas.”

Well, could anyone really blame him?

Further in, the documents turn into more reports. These ones were written as recently as a few days ago. They’re progression reports. Each of them detail his behavioural development. A five-page report is entirely about the shifts in his disposition after the other “subjects” were removed from the main room of confinement. Did they really think isolation wouldn’t prompt any significant changes in his mood? Are these psychologists amateurs or did they skip undergrad altogether?

Quite embarrassingly, there’s one drafted about his sexuality.
“Subject Alpha 3 has expressed little to no sexual attraction towards any of the three omegas. There was hope that Alpha 3 would show signs of interest in Omega 2, but the assumption was a miscalculation. Despite prior knowledge that Subject Alpha 3 has exclusively chosen beta partners in the past, there was hope that Omega 2’s pheromones would hold some influence over the alpha. However, this was not the case. Omega 2’s genetic mutation compelled the subject to develop an over-reliance on the natural sedative chemicals in Beta 1’s pheromones, drawing his attention away from Alpha 3.

On the other hand, Alpha 3 too, has expressed interest in Beta 1—”

“What a load of bullshit,” he snaps and closes the files in outrage.

Expressed interest in Beta 1—right. Just because the maniac happens to be the walking, breathing personification of his ideal type and is also a beta—

Just to be petty he knocks the file off the table and watches as all that hard word and research goes spilling out onto the floor. Let some dumb intern clean it up. The other files are all there, neatly lined and just begging for a read. While morality is telling him that reading the most intimate details of someone’s life without their permission is undeniably wrong, the psychologist in him itches to dive into the minds of his pack, to uncover the hidden secrets that might be kept underneath the crown of their skulls.

Well he never pretended to be a saint.

Snatching Hoseok’s, he lets the folder to split open naturally in his hands to a random page. Yoongi likes Hoseok. Well, sometimes. At first, not so much. His anxiety makes Yoongi anxious, which he doesn’t appreciate at all, and there have been moments over these past three months where he’s just wanted to grasp him by the shoulders and shake him until he gets his shit together. But Hoseok isn’t a bad person. And those few days they spent together, just the two of them, changed his initial impression of him. Hoseok is just a guy who wants to do good in a world that doesn’t. It’s still pretty obvious that he’s hiding something, though. There was some attempt to coax the secrets from him, but the other alpha is more tight-lipped than he gave him credit for. He’s no snitch, he’ll give him that.

The first few pages are just standard information. Blood type, family history, job applications, bank records—he stops at the first report written by one of the scientists. April 15th.

That’s strange.
Yoongi was taken on the 22nd of April, which was a Wednesday, and if he recalls correctly, Hoseok said he was taken on a Monday—if he is to assume it was the Monday the same week the rest of them were taken, he would’ve been taken on the 20th of April. If he was taken a week earlier… he would’ve been taken on the 13th...

Shrugging this information off, he starts to skim through the report:

“Subject Alpha 3 was selected from the subjects of Group 9A to report directly to the supervisors of the experiment every night. These reports will give observers inside input into the mind of someone who is confined, and whether or not there are any lapses in memory or behaviour that may develop over the subject’s time in confinement. It is also a test to see how the subject’s alliances may shift once stronger bonds are established between the subjects, and whether guilt may factor into their decision making. The hope is that, eventually, Subject Alpha 3 might develop enough guilt that he may sympathise with his fellow subjects, and perhaps begin to lie to observers.”

Okay, he takes back what he said. Hoseok is a dirty snitch.

Somehow this doesn’t anger him as much as he thought it would. Maybe if he’d found out earlier, he would’ve cared, but so many aspects of their lives have been violated, adding another violation to the stinking pile of corrupt morality hardly makes a difference anymore.

“The subject was reluctant at first to cooperate. After bringing up Alpha 3’s history working at Angels of the Light Foster Services (ALFS), however, the subject’s willingness to cooperate with our plans changed...”

Yoongi frowns. The report says nothing further on what happened at Hoseok’s work, but whatever he did must’ve been condemnable enough to be used a blackmail material. He flicks through more pages, looking for anything that might reference Hoseok’s work. There’s a photocopy of a missing child’s report which has Hoseok’s signature down the bottom. According to his statement one of the children in their care had run away. The next page was another missing child. This one was again, signed by Hoseok. He reported that the child had run away.

A heavy feeling weighs against him.

The next page is another missing child—and then another, and another. Five in total. Hoseok had given statements on every single one of them. There were also statements from other ALFS employees that could account for the childrens’ troubled behaviours and how they all came from
rough homes.

Yoongi flips over a page. This one’s a newspaper clipping. *Former CEO of Angels of the Light Foster Services: Convicted for Child Pornography.*

Oh no. What the fuck did you get yourself into, Hoseok…?

Yoongi puts the file down. He’s read enough.

He reaches for Namjoon’s folder next, purposely avoiding Jeongguk’s like it’s the plague. He has a distinct feeling that whatever he finds in Jeongguk’s file would turn his stomach worse than anything else.

Namjoon’s documents, for the most part, contain pretty much everything he’d expected to find there. The alpha was surprisingly transparent for someone who seems the type to make shit up to get praise and attention. Education is impressive, photos of family seem happy and loving, and there are a few references to a string of failed relationships. They appear to have gone out of their way to reach out to Namjoon’s past boyfriends and girlfriends for dirt on him. The statements varied from bitter to pity. The standard for most ex-lovers. Most of it were to do with how Namjoon wasn’t very good at compromise, and tended to view things with his tunnel-vision traditionalist values instead of seeing the bigger picture. From what is written down, none of the relationships lasted longer than a few months, and came to swift, anti-climactic ends.

A medical report sits between a birth certificate and a bank statement. Yoongi very nearly disregarded this, as he’d disregarded most of the medical information, but the word ‘suicide’ jumped off the page like a smack to the face.

Namjoon had tried to commit suicide.

The date at the top of the report shows that it was about three years ago.

The next page was an article from a news publisher he recognised that was largely based in Seoul. It was about a student suing Yonsei University over the misconduct of an experiment that went terribly wrong. There’s mentions of trauma, assault, a miscarriage… Yoongi doesn’t think it was a coincidence the suicide report and the news article were one after the other. They’re definitely related. According to the article a student volunteered to take part in an experiment that was conducted by a research team of about ten Honour and PhD students. The details of the experiment
are vague, but apparently they underlined in their requirements that they weren’t accepting pregnant candidates, and at the time of the experiment, the student hadn’t know she was pregnant. Whatever happened resulted in the omega’s miscarriage, and when she found out she told authorities they assaulted her. Down the bottom there is mention of the omega having symptoms of bi-polar disorder, which the researchers were not made aware of.

Mulling this information over, he places down the file and picks up another without reading who it belonged to. To his mild astonishment, he came face to face with a criminal record. For a moment he thinks that maybe he accidently picked up his own folder again, but then the name Park Jimin catches his eye and settles that confusing on the spot.

It isn’t everyday an omega has a criminal record. According the criminal record, which actually appears to be the original copy instead of a photocopy like majority of the other documents, Jimin has been accused on three different occasions of assaulting alphas. One had multiple deep incisions to his ribcage and arms, another was battered with a baseball bat, and the last had hot water poured onto her bare feet. In the last one, Jimin claims it was an accident, while the victim of the assault states that he tipped the boiling water over her feet after she complained that omegas don’t get taxed for pads or birth control. Knowing Jimin it definitely wasn’t an accident, but every single charge against Jimin was eventually dropped—it would seem.

Again, not surprising.

Omegas very rarely make it to court for breaking the law, because in the law’s eyes they aren’t even capable of committing serious crimes. They get fined or penalised here and there, but so few omegas are sentenced in court that there’s only a single omega correctional facility in the entire country, which is further up north near the border. It’s about half the size of the smallest correctional facility that houses betas, and about a third of the size of the smallest correctional facility that houses alphas. Even to this day, there is debate in the senate about whether or not its time to close the omega prison because the funding to keep it open is not, in the eyes of social institutions, worth it. Never mind that they’ve killed their partners, smothered babies in their cribs or coerced school children into having sex with them. It’s probably one of the only “perks” of being an omega, if you could even call it that. More of a backhanded advantage if anyone asked him. The law is essentially saying that omegas are so feeble-minded that their inferiority somehow excuses their behaviour.

Yoongi doesn’t know the truth behind these assaults Jimin has committed, but he has to wonder if the omega did any of them in self-defence. There isn’t any statement from the omega that does say he acted in self-defence.

The revelation doesn’t change his opinion much about Jimin, really. He isn’t going to excuse these things, obviously, but knowing he used to be a prostitute Jimin has probably done a lot of questionable things in the name of self-preservation. Yoongi’s never sold himself for sex, but he
can at least understand the need to survive in such a fucked up situation.

As he picks up Taehyung’s folder, he realises he’s reached the end of the line of manila folders. This entire time he hadn’t even noticed a folder was missing from the line-up. He doesn’t see this as any calls for concern as he opens Taehyung’s file. They probably needed to review Seokjin’s file or something, which is why it isn’t here.

Taehyung’s documents are...strange, to put it lightly. There is a lot of extra information about genetic strains and scientific terminology that he doesn’t quite understand. There’s a very good reason he chose psychology and rejected any other science courses for extra credit. Psychology speaks a language he can understand. When things start getting broken down into numbers and letters he starts developing a headache. The statistics classes he couldn’t avoid, but physics and bio-tech he somehow got out of by filling up his electives with criminology and omeganist same-class poetry (his hipster friend who wears a nose ring roped him into that, but he has no regrets [though people did give him a few weird looks for the first week of semester, since he was the only alpha in his class]).

There’s mentions of epigenetics, something that does ring familiar, and then it goes on to explain a rare gene that can be found in some people who show signs of having schizophrenia and are wrongfully diagnosed.

“Most who are wrongfully diagnosed with schizophrenia do not respond to the medication prescribed to them. Omega 2, in this case, is an exception to the rule. There is reason to believe that the subject responded positively to the medication due to a phenomenon known as the Placebo Effect. It is likely Subject Omega 2 believed the medication would keep his symptoms at bay, and it seemed to work. We know through blood samples and DNA testing that Taehyung does, in fact, carry the cluP- gene mutation, and that his auditory hallucination is a byproduct of the gene mutation rather than an indication of a mental disorder such as schizophrenia."

The rest of the report is mostly about how the vitamin supplements were for Taehyung were meant to encourage the Placebo Effect for a prolonged period of time, but was proven a failure. They’d speculated that the pills were vitamins and Taehyung probably accepted this as the truth and believed he wasn’t being given the right medication to treat his illness.

Flipping through a few more pages, near the end are lab results from a pregnancy test. For a moment, he thinks that perhaps this was misfiled under the wrong name, and that it should be in Jeongguk’s file. Omega 2 could have been a misspelling of 3, which is why this was accidently put here. Just to make sure that this is the case, he opens Jeongguk’s folder on the table and goes flipping through it, searching for missing pregnancy test results. He only gets as far as Jeongguk’s birth certificate before stopping. Jeongguk is blood type A, but on the report in Taehyung’s file it says the subject is blood type AB. Backtracking to Taehyung’s birth certificate, there, as sure as the sky is blue, is Taehyung’s blood type: AB.
Okay, so they did a pregnancy test on Taehyung. They probably did conducted tests on all three of the omegas just to be thorough and Jeongguk was the only one who came back positive.

Going back to the pregnancy test results, the word ‘POSITIVE’ hits like a bag of ice.

The blood type of the father is written down too. O Type.

Yoongi scrambles back through the files, looking at everyone’s birth certificates to try and find who it could’ve been—what monster could’ve done this. Jimin and Jeongguk’s files go tumbling to the floor. Namjoon and Hoseok’s blood types are A, which means…

“Fucking cocksucker!” he yells, shoving the folders to the floor and flipping over the table. The cork board goes falling down along with it and he makes sure to put his fist straight through it.

Storming out the room, he marches further down the hallway hoping to come across something he can strangle. At the very end of the dark corridor, there’s a red light above a door that reads: “Control Room”. Yoongi kicks it open, hands raised ready for a fight. One could imagine his disappoint when he enters the room to find no one there. There is a massive board of mini televisions that stack up to the ceiling. Closer to the control board are larger screens with VHS slots—some even with VHS tapes sitting inside them. Nothing else illuminates the room but the eerie static of the televisions. Slowly, he closes the door behind him and approaches the control board.

There are about forty different mini-screens. Some of which show people in similar situations to his pack, but he doesn’t recognise any of them. Midway up his heart skips a beat at the sight of two men, one with brown hair and the other black. He reaches up to touch the cool surface of the screen. Even though Hoseok and Jimin aren’t here, he’s glad that they’re at least together.

Sitting down at one of the chairs, his eyes immediately fall upon a VHS tape waiting to be pushed in and played. There are others, too. All of them labelled. “Carnivore,” “Paranoia,” and “Sensory Deprivation.” Why such a technologically advanced super facility would see fit to use such archaic technology, as opposed to the standard chips used by everyone on planet earth, he wouldn’t know. The one in front of him has a white strip of tape labelled “Reunion” on it. He pushes it in, and without having to press any buttons, the video plays on the larger television screen beneath it.

The lack of audio makes him look around, and he quickly locates a wireless headset. It was a long shot to assume it was already connected to the audio, but it is. Almost as if it was all set up waiting for him… He turns around suddenly, so fast his neck almost snaps. There’s nothing there. Nothing
there but darkness.

Feeling uneasy, he turns back to the video which flashes from static to image. On the top, left-hand corner of the screen it gives him a date that means nothing to him.

The first thing he sees is a figure with their back to the camera. They seem to be confined in a room (not dissimilar from the one he saw Jimin and Hoseok in), with what looks like a cheaper version of the nests in Zone 3 in one corner, and a toilet and sink in another. The person is wearing a set of flannel pyjamas. They tilt their head up, looking for something, turning slowly around, eyes directed at the corners of the room. It isn’t long before he realises the person is Jeongguk. He doesn’t seem hurt. The way the boy clutches his stomach with sleeve-clad hands is enough for him to know he’s gotten heavier. There are bags under his eyes and his hair is a mess, like he’s been tossing and turning in his sleep. Those big, black eyes stop when they catch the camera, and its as if Jeongguk is trying to convey every emotion of hurt and pain in one swift, unrestrained look. It sends chills down his spine.

A banging comes from somewhere, and Jeongguk’s eyes are drawn away, head moving towards a blank wall to his left. A door fabricates out of seemingly nowhere, and Jeongguk backs away at the brandishing of a gun, arms over his stomach protectively.

“Stay where you are. Don’t move.”

Behind the man, who looks dressed like a police officer in a combat uniform and a bullet-proof vest, comes two other men, dragging a limp figure between them. Jeongguk audibly gasps and takes a sudden step forward, which prompts the man to cock his gun at him. The omega flinches back and dares not get any closer, but he does look nervously at the gun to the person being dragged in. It doesn’t take a genius to figure out who it is.

As quick as they appeared, the muscle left, and it isn’t until the door is shut completely that Jeongguk bursts into tears and goes running over to Namjoon.

“Bambi, why’re you cryin’?” Namjoon asks sluggishly, like he’s been hit with enough tranquilizer to take down a stampede of elephants. He places a languid hand on Jeongguk’s stomach. “I’m here. Daddy’s here.”

But Jeongguk continues to sob over Namjoon’s limp frame. The footage is a little too grainy to make out, but there appears to be a dozen cuts and bruises all over Namjoon’s body, and unlike Jeongguk, who wears pyjamas that cover him throat to ankle, Namjoon is still wearing only the underwear the alphas were all given.
Then, abruptly, Jeongguk collapses on top of Namjoon’s chest, and they both go completely still. For one, heart-stopping moment, he thinks they’re dead.

“I wouldn’t be too worried,” a voice says from somewhere, and he throws the headphones off his and spins around, coming face-to-face with none other than Seokjin. He’s smiling, inclining his head towards the screen. “They’re sleeping. We discovered that prolonged separation causes insomnia in claimed partners. One cannot sleep while the other is in distress.”

In a split decision that he did not even stop to calculate, he lunges at Seokjin, plunging them both into the darkness that festers at the back of the control room. “You raped Taehyung you fucking asshole!”

He throws a punch even though he can’t see Seokjin’s face and it meets with hard bone. The knuckles in his fist throb and the beta makes a winded noise before they go stumbling to the floor. Yoongi is just barely able to catch himself from going face-first into the carpet, but isn’t given a chance to recover before Seokjin tackles him. They go rolling back into the poor lighting of the TV screens, grunting and struggling all the way. Eventually Seokjin has him on his back, and the beta swoops down to smash their lips together. Yoongi groans and bites down on Seokjin’s bottom lip until blood wells and mixes with the saliva on his teeth.

The beta pulls back, grinning. Panting, Yoongi watches as Seokjin slowly reaches up to wipe the blood off his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Miss me?” he asks cockily, tone saturated with sickening mirth. Yoongi hates him. He hates him so fucking much.

“You were behind this the entire time.”

“Guilty as charged,” Seokjin throws his hands up smugly. “You’re probably one of the last to put two and two together, I’m afraid. How’s it feel to be the one kept out of the loop the longest? Feeling dumb?”

Yoongi turns and lifts his leg, folding it around Seokjin’s waist and using the momentum to have Seokjin beneath his knee. The beta groans lewdly. “You want to top tonight, sunshine? You know I’m gonna need more than just saliva to take that nasty knot of yours.”
“Shut up. You fucking impregnated Taehyung, you sick fuck,” he growls, gripping the back of Seokjin’s neck and pressing his face into the dirty carpet.

“Baby, don’t be jealous, there’s plenty of me to go around. You know I’ve never been one for monogamy.”

“Does Taehyung know he’s pregnant?” Yoongi brushes the comment aside.

“At this stage Taehyung doesn’t know much about anything,” he chuckles. “Take a look for yourself—I labelled it under ‘Carnivore.’”

Glancing at the VHS tape that’s to the right of the one he’d just watched, he considers giving into curiosity. But only for a second before deciding against it. “Why the fuck did you do it? Why’d you have to go and attack the most vulnerable member of our pack? Do we really mean so little to you? After all this time?”

Seokjin tuts chidingly, “Don’t get soft on me now, Yoongi-doll. You know I was never part of your little pack to begin with. How could I when the lot of you became so disappointingly domesticated, like a bunch of cats. Without me this whole masquerade of pseudo-science observational experimental bullshit would have been extremely boring. When Jeongguk’s pregnancy was confirmed it’s like you all collectively decided to bond and grow and develop relationships without any prompting. Like a hive mind.”

“How long have you been stalking us?”

Unexpectedly, he’s thrown off balanced by a well-timed twist, and Seokjin is on top again. Seokjin forces his tongue past his lips and Yoongi fists the back of the older man’s head. Surges of beta pheromones clap back against his own and he fucking hates Seokjin. If he could compare his spite for the man on top of him to any degree of heat it’d be molten hot lava. He’s stuck between enjoying the kiss, because Seokjin is a better kisser than he’ll ever admit aloud, and tearing Seokjin’s eyes out of their sockets. A hasty hand grabs the waistband of his underwear and pulls it down his thighs. He bites Seokjin again. The beta slaps him hard on the ass. Yoongi is ashamed at the noise of arousal he makes.

Blood drips down Seokjin’s chin as he pulls away. There isn’t any indication that he’s in pain. Only amusement can be found in his heated gaze. “Long enough to know you prefer to bottom.”
Seokjin reaches between Yoongi’s thighs, the pads of his dry fingers grazing his rim, and he gets the feeling the beta is going to try and scissor him dry, so he shoves the beta onto his back. A question is on the tip of the man’s lips before Yoongi turns around and sits on Seokjin’s face. The beta laughs against his anus.

“Get licking fuckface, you ain’t putting it in dry,” he tells the beta plainly.

All too eagerly, hands spread his cheeks open and a tongue laps at his puckering entrance. As Seokjin gets busy, Yoongi leans over to fiddle with the drawstrings of his black sweatpants—a notably different colour from the ones he usually sees him wearing. This isn’t the first time Yoongi has fucked Seokjin, or seen him naked for that matter, so he isn’t surprised when he shoves his hand past the waistband to find that the beta is already rock hard. Spitting on both hands, he starts giving Seokjin the roughest hand job he can muster. A hiss comes from somewhere behind him but he’s too busy treating Seokjin’s dick like a child might treat their pet hamster. That is, sadistically mercilessly.

He doesn’t care if it hurts Seokjin. He hopes it does.

A slippery, hot tongue shoves into him and he nearly falls forward at the sudden pleasure. He choke back any sounds of arousal, because to give Seokjin the satisfaction is—well, giving Seokjin satisfaction, which he’d very much like to keep to a minimum.

He takes the precum tip to his lips and soaks it with an obnoxious amount of saliva. Lube doesn’t appear to be an available option at the moment, so he’ll have to make due with a shit load of saliva as compensation. A finger is inserted alongside the tongue without warning and his teeth graze the slit of Seokjin’s penis.


“Don’t fucking tell me what to do. You—”
Seokjin slides a second finger in and crooks them both. The burn amalgamates at his tailbone and he cries out. With gritted teeth he plunge his elbow into Seokjin’s stomach and he hears a nice “oof” from the beta as air rushes from his lungs. Oh he hopes it leaves a pretty bruise.

The older man isn’t having it. He scissors him open quickly and painfully and he wants to shout out and say that he doesn’t like it, but what’s fucked is that he does. The curve of his penis stands arched against his stomach. Heat blossoms from hip to hip. Seokjin continues to fuck him with his tongue and digits until Yoongi’s thighs tremble precarious and he’s at near loss for words. It’s so fucked. So fucked up. The others don’t know. It’s their dirty little secret and he hates that he’s keeping this from them. He has to though. He has to because none of them would understand. They’d all tell him he’s a psycho for liking Seokjin.

But that’s just it.

He doesn’t like Seokjin. He hates Seokjin. Hates him like he hates his father. Hates him for being a manipulative bastard like his father. She never called after she divorced his mother. Never gave an explanation for her egregious actions. Never even gave her own son the chance to tell her what she really is: a slimy, despicable little bitch.

If he can’t hurt his father, he can hurt Seokjin instead. Treat him like the monster he is—

Seokjin shoves him off and pushes him onto his stomach. Yoongi rolls over and kicks Seokjin right where he’d elbowed him before. Coiling over, hands on the tender area, Seokjin gives Yoongi the opening he needs to force him onto his back. Mounting either side of the beta’s hips, Yoongi grabs onto Seokjin’s cock and guides himself down onto it. Male beta penises are generally a nice size. Not intimidatingly big like some alpha cocks, but not small and useless like male omega cocks. It’s manageable—something he can take without too much preparation. If the roles had been reversed and Seokjin had asked for a knot they’d have to prepare him for hours. Otherwise Seokjin could very well get his rectum ruptured and he could die.

And wouldn’t that be a tragedy?

The beta must think he isn’t adjusting fast enough to his dick, so the asshole takes it upon himself to thrust up the rest of the way inside him. Again, it hurts like a fucker. Yoongi reaches over and twists Seokjin’s nipples roughly. He moans, liking it too much. It’s the exact opposite of what Yoongi had wanted out of him.

Yoongi sets the pace. He keeps his calloused hands on Seokjin’s slim waist to keep the maniac pinned to the floor. The beta enjoys taking a backseat. The older man skims his hands all over
Yoongi’s body, touching and pinching and caressing him in a manner that’s deceptively gentle.

With a half-lidded gaze, Seokjin moans, “You look so sexy with my cock inside you.”

He slaps Seokjin square in the face.

For a moment, the beta is still, clutching his cheek in shock. Then he punches Yoongi in the jaw. His teeth clink together and feel tingly after, but he’s lucky enough that he doesn’t cut his cheek or tongue. Continuing to gyrates his hips to have the penis inside him rub against his prostate, Yoongi leans forward, hands wrapping fittingly around Seokjin’s throat.

The beta smirks. His teeth are stained a blood wine red. “Would you kill me right here, if I let you, my little vixen? You could, you know. Strangle the life out of me, free your pack and escape this place together. One big, happy family. You’d have to help raise the child I sired, of course. The least you could do is that. Oh, and take care of Taehyung, who is in no position to take care of himself, and get Hoseok some counselling before he considers suicide, maybe sign Jimin up for anger management lessons—you have a full plate on your hands. You think Namjoon’ll give you the time of day once Jeongguk has given birth? You think he’s going to give a shit about any of you once he has a family of his own?”

He leans, applying just enough pressure that it hurts him, that is bruises him.

“My people will hunt you down. They’ll drag you kicking and screaming back to your four-room prison. You’ll be left there to rot, ‘til you’ve turned into cannibals and start eating each other.”

Yoongi tightens his grip on Seokjin’s neck until words can’t come out of his stupid mouth. Seokjin’s lips gape, eyes welling and face turning a light shade of pink. As the man kicks out his legs and struggles, Yoongi imagines his father under him, imagines the look in her eyes as he smothers the life out of her.

Seokjin’s face turns red, then purple.

He can do it.

He can end it.
Right here.

Right now.

Chapter End Notes

DUN DUN DUUUUUUUUUUUN

Curious Cat
Two Days Past the 3rd of October

They’re back in the chairs again. The one with the metal bands that bind their hands and feet. It’s almost like being at a dentist appointment, only without the bruising restraints and the cutting steel shoved between his teeth. Hoseok is positioned in front of the same massive television screen they’ve been placing him in front of for the better half of two days now. On the other side is another television of equal size, facing where Jimin sits in an equally uncomfortable chair. Unfortunately, he can’t see Jimin. But he knows that he is there. He cannot talk with the grate in his mouth, and he cannot hear with the headphones cancelling out all other noises apart from what is being shown to him on the television, but he can smell Jimin’s pheromones. Pheromones that crackle with anger. Lashing like a whip, ready to take off the heads of those who have taken them.

It’s more arousing than he’ll ever willingly admit.

Their handlers, people in masks and military-esque uniforms, come to turn on the televisions. Off centre, just in his periphery, are scientists with clipboards and pens, murmuring amongst one another as they cast them looks of speculation and wonder. Hoseok feels like a circus animal.

No mention or reference was given to how long their punishment would last. They’d started off by taking them for a day or two before returning them to their main area of confinement, but then something must have happened. It’s as if their abductors became impatient with them and decided to take matters into their own hands. Now here they are, separated from the rest of their pack. It’s been so long since they’ve seen them. For months it’s just been he and Jimin, hidden in a tiny cell with no one but one another for company. They like each other a lot, of course, but the need for contact outside their relationship has only grown as time stretches on.

A beeping noise hums in his ear, once—twice—three times, and then a professional, female voice speaks into the headphones: “A friendly reminder that you are required to keep your eyes on the screen at all times. Closing your eyes for more than five seconds, or looking away for extended periods of time, will result in electrical pulses being sent from your microchip into your central...
The television goes from black to colour. It’s the exact same thing they’d shown him yesterday. A woman, dressed in a business suit, is in the setting of an empty school classroom. With red lips, she reveals a set of perfect straight teeth as she directly addresses the audience. Based on the quality of the video it must’ve been made a hundred years ago.

“Hello, my name is Lee Junhwa, I am a sociologist professor at Seoul National University. Today, I’m going to talk about the place and dynamics of class in our society, and the crucial significance it has in maintaining social order and cultural values.” She starts to walk slowly down the row of desks, hands laced and relaxed in front of her. “In recent years, we’ve been seeing more and more omegas enrol in tertiary education to help further broaden their minds and expand their general knowledge. Criticisms and backlash have understandably arisen from our older generations, as smarter, more educated omegas upset the carefully constructed status quo that has had a place in our society for centuries. However, as an alpha and a father myself, I would like to propose that this is not a detriment to our society, but a benefit.”

The camera pans out to reveal an actor (who looks a little too old to be there) sitting at a desk pretending to take notes from the board. Lee Junhwa places a hand on the actor’s shoulder, and he looks up and smiles at her.

“This is Seon Hyunmin, an omega and student at Korea University. He studies Medicine, Health and Nutrition. Tell them why you have elected to study past your high school diploma, Hyunmin-ssi.”

‘Hyunmin’ looks at the camera with a cheesy grin. It’s hard to even tell if the actor is an actual omega. “For the future of my offspring, it is paramount that I educate myself, so that I may help educate the future generations that will one day run our planet. My goal at university is to learn how to ensure my children will be at optimal health, and to also find a suitable partner. My decision to educate myself in no way intends to harm the structures of our society, and I do not intend to take the skills and knowledge I acquire at university to propel my position in the corporate world. An omega’s duty is to their partner and their children.”
Cocking her head in a manner that is extremely patronising, Junhwa smiles. It’s faker than the plastic plant sitting in the corner of the classroom. “As you can see, further educating our omegas in no way harms our moral fibre. It is important for omegas to learn so that they may teach their young.” She continues walking past Hyunmin until he’s out of frame. The camera keeps her as the focal point at all times. “Omegas are biologically designed to have children. An omega without a child should not be scorned, but pitied. A healthy reminder to all omegas that you must listen to what your bodies are telling you, and that is to settle down with a good match and to start breeding. You are central to the development of our world. You will birth future leaders, scientists, and law makers, and because of that your duty to society is paramount. Being childless omega should not be for one’s own personal gain, but for the benefit and advancement of others. I’m Lee Junhwa, and I advocate for the tertiary education of omegas all over the world.”

The video buffers, and then starts over.

They make Hoseok sit there for hours, watching the same goddamn video until Lee Junhwa’s voice is ingrained into his very soul. If not for the steel biting into his jaw he would’ve been able to recite the video line for line. It’s sickening and cruel, how many times they make him watch it—and no doubt Jimin, too. The clip isn’t all that long to begin with, just a dumb PSA video that was likely churned out after the social backlash in the wake of universities opening their doors to omega students. Prior to that, the most omegas could do to further educate themselves would be to attend motherhood academies. According to his junior year history book, these academies largely involved training omegas to be devoted partners and mothers.

There is no mystery as to why they’re being shown this video. While their captors have, on the occasion, been subtler with their intentions. This on the other hand, is less so. Jimin’s third heat had come and gone. Three weeks later they took him away for half an hour of testing and discovered that Jimin still hadn’t conceived. It wouldn’t have come as much as a surprise to them if Jimin say, had complications of conceiving or was perhaps infertile, but due to the thorough measures conducted to ensure that none of them would have trouble conceiving, they turned sour. Jimin said it’s because they’ve been fooling them for so long.

Not once, in the many months that he has acted as a companion and lover, has Hoseok ever actually knotted Jimin. While he can’t say he has the best control over the situation (it’s common during sex for knots to catch on the rim unintentionally), Jimin miraculously does. It could be driven by the necessity not to fall pregnant at all costs, but the omega has been soundly resistant in wanting and begging for knots. Just when he’s about to fall head-strong into lust, he somehow manages to hold his tongue through it, and at most would tell him he’s a good fuck and—well—has a nice cock. Majority of omegas are more on the incomprehensible, I’m-going-to-lie-here-while-you-fuck-me spectrum, whereas Jimin sluggishly insists on riding him because even tripped out on an influx of hormones and pheromones he’s still got pride. Then, when the knot forms at the
base and begins to swell, Jimin languidly falls off his dick and pumps his knot to completion.

He tried fingering Jimin once, as a helping hand, but Jimin had lazily slapped his hand away and told him, “No one fingers Jimin but Jimin.”

For anybody else, Hoseok may have taken offense, but with Jimin it’s a strange turn on.

Doing this had acted as a “fuck you” to the people trying to get them to conceive, especially for Jimin, who looks for any excuse to spit in the faces of those that oppress him. Hoseok can’t say that he really regretted not being able to knot Jimin, although the thought is nice to ponder on some nights when Jimin has his ass against his crotch, but he’ll admit that the rebelliousness, however small and meagre it may seem, was actually quite exciting. Every time Jimin pulled out just as the climax began to take shape would send a spike of adrenaline to go rushing through his veins. It’s as if at any moment, their captors were going to storm their cell and punish them for it. For being bad. Very, very bad.

They got sick of waiting though, clearly.

Whatever reason they have for trying to get them to mate, (something that was not disclosed to him) every day that passes with Jimin still not pregnant is a day pissing away their precious finances and resources. They’ve found other ways to entertain themselves, though, whenever Jimin isn’t in heat.

The punishments so far have not been the kind of punishments that have blood flooding to his cock, sad to say.

So, because of their blatant disobedience, they’re forced to sit in uncomfortable chairs and watch the same clip over and over again. A relic of the past. A reminder to omegas everywhere that they are lesser than their class counterparts.

Two days ago, they overheard one of the handlers mention that it was the 3rd of October. This may have had some significance to them if they could remember when they were taken, but when they were discussing the matter the night before, they couldn’t come to a sound conclusion. Jimin insists that they were taken around January or February. Hoseok thinks it was around late May.

Classism is an issue that blatantly exists, but is never really acknowledged. Omega Rights Activists make noises, and Class Conservatives huff and puff, but in the everyday lives of working citizens
it’s a topic firmly avoided. It isn’t something he’s proud of, but Hoseok is guilty of passivism in the face of this problem. He doesn’t enjoy confrontation. He doesn’t try to hide that, but in doing so he has been complicit in a system that does serious harm to an entire class of people. There are values that operate to oppress betas and alphas in certain ways too, but not nearly to the extent that it is applied to omegas. Sitting here though, it’s forcing him to face the rotting roots that gave birth to their society. Social injustice at its ugliest.

It makes him wonder if their society is still as classist as it was a hundred years ago, or even five-hundred years, and that classism has only just grown more insidious in its approach.

Instead of locking omegas inside at night because they are omegas, instead we warn them that if they leave at night and get raped, they only have themselves to blame.

These thoughts plague him as they’re being guided (or rather, forced at gunpoint) back to their cell. The hallway leading to their prison, at face value, looks like a plain white hallway without any doors. Since the doors meld seamlessly into the walls themselves so that the will to escape is soundly discouraged, instead there are small, steel plaques lined above the doors to indicate where they are. Both he and Jimin have their hands cuffed behind their backs by standard issue elastic wrist binds. It’s the same kind the police use when apprehending criminals.

Next to him, Jimin is uncharacteristically silent. Hoseok doesn’t dare to look at him, not yet. Despite being the alpha of the relationship, Jimin is the core of strength keeping them both afloat. Some part of him is afraid that if he looks at the defeat and sadness in Jimin’s eyes, he too may crumble where he walks.

Eventually they’re stopped before a cell, Den 24B. One handler removes their glove to place their bare hand on a keypad, and the disappearing door slides to reveal itself. Their cuffs are removed, and they’re shoved into room. Being clumsy, he almost takes a nose-dive to the hard floor, but Jimin is quick to catch his arm and yank him back to even ground. The door behind them closes. Unlike in their original prison, where everything is soundproof, in Den 24B they can hear the heavy footsteps of the handlers walking away.

Jimin drags his feet over to the sink to wash his face.

“You know…” Hoseok’s breath hitches from the nerves. “If you want to talk about it…”

The omega splashes his face a few times with cold water before he tilts his head to look at Hoseok through the reflection of the mirror. Rivulets of water cling to the hairs of his growing fringe. Not for the first time Hoseok is caught by how gorgeous Jimin truly is.
“There’s nothing to talk about,” Jimin says coldly. He uses the chiffon of his nightgown to dry his face before pacing back across the room towards the nest. “I’d prefer it if we didn’t talk about it.”

“Not talk about it?” Hoseok echoes, shocked. It isn’t like Jimin to brush classism atrocities aside, no matter how far in the past they were. Times have changed and society has evolved, but there’s no denying the history that remains. “You had quite a few words to say about that video yesterday. Doesn’t it anger you anymore?”

“Of course it angers me,” Jimin mumbles, settling down on the dip of the nest. The slope of his shoulders make him seem smaller than he usually presents himself, even though in terms of height and weight he’s tiny already. “I just—it’s fucked.”

Making his way over to Jimin, he kneels down before the omega, taking his hands into his own. Hoseok makes an attempt to meet the omega’s eyes, but Jimin’s glazed, distant look seems to have wondered into the darkness of his own mind. “Talk to me. Tell me what’s going through your mind.”

Snatching his hands away, Jimin turns to lie down on the nest, back facing Hoseok. “It doesn’t matter, hyung. I already said I don’t want to talk about it.”

Hoseok sighs, frustrated. “You always sit and listen to my worries and troubles. Why won’t you rely on me the way I rely on you? Am I not trustworthy to you? Do you think I’m like all those other alphas that seek to ruin you?”

“You are untrustworthy,” Jimin says plainly, without even sending him a cursory glance over his shoulder. Hoseok’s stomach turns to stone. “You say you’ve opened up to me, but have you really? You think I haven’t noticed when you go slinking off in the middle of the night?”

Immediately, he rises to his feet. “How long have you known?”

“Noticed it about a week before I was taken from our main prison.” It’s unnerving that he can’t see the omega’s expression when he says this. “You got up and went to Zone 4, then you came back about ten minutes later. You did it again the night after that, and the night after that. I was tempted to follow you to see what you were up to, but instead I chose to wait it out and see if you’d eventually tell me on your own terms. You didn’t, though. So don’t stand there like you are a beacon of honesty when I know for a fact you’ve been doing something behind our backs this entire time.”
Eyes welling, his lungs constricting, he knows that he’s been caught. Despite everything Jimin didn’t give any indication that he knew up until this point. In his mind he always imagined the omega’s reaction to be grand, dramatic and roiling with hatred. Instead it’s only quiet, cold disappointment.

Somehow this hurts so much worse than any violent outburst.

“I—I—” he swallows bitterly, tears cascading down his cheeks. There’s a need to confess everything he has done, but the grip of his anxiety holds him hostage. “J-Jimin, honey—”

“Don’t honey me,” Jimin turns over, eyes narrowed with anger. “You know I don’t like it when you call me that when cuddling, why the fuck would you think I’d like it now?”

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry,” he chokes, collapsing onto the edge of the nest. “If you were to know the truth about me… Jimin, you’d loathe me. You’d hate me more than any other person in this facility. I’ve done things. Terrible things. Things that I cannot forgive myself for.”

“So essentially what you’re saying is that I should just accept that and move on? For all I know you could be the reason I’m in this mess to begin with.”

“No—no that’s not it. I swear, I have nothing to do with you being here.”

“Then what, Hoseok? Why the fuck have you been sneaking off in the middle of the night like you’ve got something to hide?”

Well, because he does have something to hide.

“I can’t tell you!” he cries, pulling at the roots of his hair.

Small fingers card the hair at the back of his tassels before they get a good grip. An ache blooms at the back of his neck when Jimin yanks his head back. The clenched jaw and dark look in the omega’s eyes has blood rushing to his loins, even though he’s fully aware this is neither the time nor the place to be feeling such things.
“Are you disobeying me? Hm?” Hoseok shudders at the sudden tonal shift in Jimin’s voice. It can go from smooth and airy and sweet, to heavy and dangerous at the drop of a dime. “You being a naughty boy to your master?”

“Jimin—” his voice hitches with emotion, “I can’t. I’m sorry.”

“No, you’re not sorry. Not yet,” the omega croons. “But I can make you sorry. Sorry for even considering holding your tongue when I ask you questions. Sorry for being the pathetic little alpha that you are. Sorry for existing, if it pleases me. Now are you going to tell what you’ve been doing, or do I have to resort to more extreme measures?”

The heat burns like a furnace within his belly. It’d only take one more threat to have him fully erect in his underwear, not that it isn’t already painfully obvious already in his not-so-modest pair of underwear.

“I—” the confession is there, on the tip of his tongue, but before he can say anymore the door opens.

The words die in his throat.

A scientist in scrubs enters, surgical mask in place and eyes hidden behind a pair of goggles. Behind the scientist are two other handlers that, despite the scientist being of superior height to both Jimin and Hoseok, are a head taller. One of the handlers, Hoseok cannot help but notice, has an eye that is in the process of swelling shut. The scientist is marking things down, uninterested in the wide-eyed subjects that gaze upon her with fear and disdain.

Then, she points are both of them and says, “We have orders to take these subjects to Chamber 4. Make sure you tie them up properly this time. I don’t want a repeat of your mistakes handling Alpha 1.”

Jimin and Hoseok exchange a look.

They’re told to do what they always do before they are taken somewhere—hands on the wall, legs spread, head down. Jimin makes a point of glaring at him as they’re restraining his wrists behind his back, as if he is the root cause of all his problems. Hoseok desperately wants to tell him that most of what is happening isn’t his fault, that he has no power or say over what’s happening to
them. Even if he were to proclaim this though, he has a feeling it wouldn’t make much difference at this stage. Jimin has a habit of covering his ears whenever he tries to reason with him.

Pushed out into the hallway, they walk between the scientist who leads from the front, and urged by the handlers that stalk from behind.

The facility is built in such a way that walking from A to B reveals very little to the odd observer. It’s just plain, forgettable hallways that are marked by colour tags or words that don’t mean anything to him. It must mean something to someone, because every scientist and every handler seems to know where they are and where they’re going at any given time. They’ve never once been taken down the wrong hallway, or shoved into a room they weren’t supposed to be in. The place is methodical and sterile. Almost like a hospital, but without the doctors and nurses that actually look like they want to help people. It is infinitely more difficult to tell what their captors are thinking when nearly their entire faces are covered by surgical masks. They look ready to slaughter more than heal.

The walk to ‘Chamber 4’, as the beta scientist called it, turns out to be surprisingly far away. Much further than any other place they’d been taken to against their will.

Try as he does to gather intel on their surroundings, very little information is provided to them. While he is more informed than some of the other people trapped here—namely Jimin and the rest of their pack—Hoseok has access to vague knowledge. Mostly to do with the other members of said pack. As time drags on this information seems to become less and less valuable. For the most part, after some time bonding and getting to know one another, he found that the others willingly forfeited private and intimate details of their life without needing much prompting from him. In fact, he found that they wanted to talk about their lives, which is a stark contrast to how closed off and guarded they all were in the beginning.

By the time they get to Chamber 4, the hallways have widened and more and more employees that work in the facility pass by them. They seem unaffected by their presence in the hallway. None spare them any glances. They all appear to either be ignoring them on purpose, or are so consumed by their duties that two subjects, cuffed at the wrists and desperate for escape, seem a distant concern.

Chamber 4’s door is larger than that of their tiny little cell, as indicated by the sheer size of the plaque sitting overhead on the spotless, white wall. The scientist steps aside, pulling off one of her scrubs to place her hand on the keypad. Above the keypad, a small screen identifies her as Dr Noh Wonhee.

Doors come apart to create a wide space. Jimin and Hoseok aren’t even given time to respond before they’re being roughly shoved forward. This time, it’s Jimin who almost stumbles and falls,
but when Hoseok steps in to help him, the omega shoves him away, as if his help is not wanted.

Further in to the spacious room are two familiar figures who sit closer to the window of complete blackness. One is leaning back against the support of one hand, while the other rests on the bulge of his stomach. The slightly larger figure has one of his companion’s feet in his lap, massaging it tenderly. Their voices carry across the room. Neither seem to notice that they’re even there.

“—while modern depictions of Hades portray him as an Alpha, like his other two brothers, in the original Greek texts Hades was an omega. ‘The two alpha brothers and one omega brother’ wasn’t as marketable as the ‘three alpha brothers,’ so the American film industry and contemporary texts of fiction altered history for the sake of profitability,” the deeper, baritone voice explains with gentle enthusiasm.

“I’ve heard second-genders being changed for broader appeal,” comes a sweeter tenor. “In Japanese folklore the Jorogumo were exclusively female alphas that preyed upon alpha men, but a production company in China adapted the famous folktale into a film, but changed the second-gender of the Jorogumo to be female omegas, because films with same-class couples as the main focus tend to underperform financially.”

“Jeongguk…? Namjoon…?” Jimin calls out to them. The two snap their heads in their direction. “Oh my god—it is them.”

Jimin jogs across the vast expanse of the room, and Hoseok swiftly follows. As they make their rapid approach, Namjoon helps Jeongguk to his feet. Up close, their hair has noticeably grown, and Jeongguk appears to have gained a little more weight around his cheeks, hips and thighs. Both are stunned, as though they can’t quite believe that it’s them. Hoseok feels much the same. It’s been a long time since they’ve seen each other. Without thinking much about it, he pulls Namjoon into an embrace, laughing into his shoulder.

“You’re okay!” he exclaims with a broad grin. As they pull back, Namjoon blinks in bewilderment.

“You—” Jimin seems at odds with himself. He seems to want to hug Jeongguk, but at the same time looks upon his baby bump with mixture of awe and horror. His hands twitch and hesitate, as if he wants to reach out and place them on Jeongguk’s stomach. Then, his hands drop and his face twists into a snarl. “Of course they put you in nice, fluffy warm pyjamas. All it takes is a baby in your belly and they’re more inclined to treat you with basic human decency.”

“Nice to see you too, Jimin,” Namjoon rolls his eyes.
“Long hair doesn’t suit you, asshole,” Jimin quips sharply. “Makes your face fatter.”

“Jeongguk says I look quite pretty.” Their leader cards a hand through his hair as if to emphasize this.

“Jeongguk will say anything to please you.”

The omega in question clears his throat and smiles. “I’m glad the two of you are okay—”

“We’re not okay,” Jimin says shortly. “They’ve been torturing us for months, trying to get me like you. Unlike Namjoon, Hoseok has some semblance of self-control and so far we’ve avoided any—” he glances at Jeongguk’s stomach “—unwanted visitors. But, I suppose the both of you have been living in luxury, anything for their golden couple, eh? Put you in something nice and comfortable and warm and look—they even put you in sweat pants, Namjoon! That was awfully generous of them! Bet they haven’t denied you any meals or shocked you or threatened you in any way shape or form—because god forbid there’s any distress put upon the mother and baby!”

In that moment, Jeongguk’s face drops. It’s obvious he’s hurt by Jimin’s biting, sarcastic tone, and the sudden upset might be contributed by his pregnancy hormones. Namjoon senses this shift immediately, and slides to stand between his pregnant mate and the spiteful omega.

“That’s enough, Jimin,” Namjoon says quietly, the undertone of his voice simmering with repressed anger.

Hoseok reaches out to place a hand on Jimin’s shoulder, “Jimin, I don’t think—”

“Here comes Macho Big-Dick Alpha Man, here to save the damsel, as usual. I see nothing has changed.” The omega levels with Namjoon’s stare, arms crossed over his chest with petulance. He doesn’t even faulter at the immense height difference.

“Wallow in your own internalised self-hatred all you like, but I will not stand by and let you take out your frustrations on my pregnant mate.”

“Internalised—internalised self-hatred!” he hisses resentfully. “Don’t even try and push that shit
on me! I’m perfectly happy with who I am. It’s you I have a problem with, you classist, self-centred asshole. Tell me, how many times have you reminded Jeongguk in the past month—no week—that he’s nothing but a silly omega with no amount of substance in his brain to make a goddamn sandwich?"

At this, a part of Namjoon’s composure slips. The hardened lines of his face soften to—what Hoseok thinks—is regret. “I—whoever you think I was, I’m not that man anymore, Jimin. I’ve said some—” his eyes meet with Jeongguk’s encouraging ones “—really dumb, misguided things. Being on this journey with Jeongguk, feeling his pain and what he’s had to endure has made me see things differently. I’m…” Namjoon hesitates at the sheer animosity radiating from Jimin. Jeongguk wraps his arms around the alpha from behind and rests his chin on his shoulder. Warm. Supportive. Hoseok is hit with an unexpected twinge of envy. Namjoon takes a deep breath. “I’m sorry, Jimin, for the vile things I have said to offend you. This separation has made me miss you—and our pack—very dearly. Our solidarity is more crucial now than it has ever been.”

“If you honestly think I’d believe you’ve changed then you—” but the large, black wall behind them is suddenly ignited in light. They all turn to find that there’s another room on the other side, separated by a glass wall.

The air in his lungs escapes him.

The pristine walls are tainted in a gruesome, bloody mess. The floor is covered in pools of red. On the floor lies two bodies. One of the bodies is missing a throat, with the only thing keeping the head attached to the body is the spine. The other has their stomach and entrails draped over their legs. Beside the bodies is a figure crouching over the carcass of what looks to be a dead animal. The body is so bloodied and torn Hoseok can’t tell what it was originally, only that it had four legs.

Whoever it is, they’re completely naked. The tan skin is discoloured from a lack of sun exposure. The hair is a vibrant ruby hue, grown to about halfway down the nape of their neck. None of them move or dare to breathe. Lined along the walls of the room are black, dome-shaped devices that Hoseok can’t easily recognise. The only aspect of interest is that they all seem to be pointing in the figure’s direction.

Abruptly, the glass separating their rooms begins to vanish into the floor. It’s then they hurry as far from the danger as physically possible, ending up right at the place where they’d initially entered. Jimin immediately starts banging his fists against the door (at least where the door should be), appearing more exasperated than fearful.

“Open the door you fuckers!” Jimin yells. The voice carries across the room, catching the attention of the stranger. They lift their head and turn towards them. They’re human, but their eyes are wild with inhumanity. “OPEN THE FUCKING DOOR!”
The moment the separating glass has disappeared completely into the floor, the figure turns towards them, revealing the sheer amount of blood that stains their body from their mouth all the way down to their swollen stomach. Namjoon cages Jeongguk’s against the wall facing the threat, making himself look bigger to affectively shield his mate.

It’s only when the terrifying stranger sprints in their direction that Hoseok snaps out of his fearful stupor and joins Jimin in slamming his fists against the wall. “IT’S GOING TO KILL US WHAT DO WE DO? JIMIN WHAT THE FUCK DO WE DO?”

“Hoseok—*shut up!* I told you your bird-voice gives me a fucking headache—”

“THIS IS NOT THE TIME NOR THE PLACE TO BE COMPLAINING ABOUT MY BIRD-VOICE!” he screeches so loud that it hurts his vocal chords.

“Shut up I’m thinking—I’m—holy shit it’s so fucking close—” Jimin pulls at his hair, eyes filling with tears of frustration. Then suddenly, Jimin steps _towards_ the danger and says, “Wait—is that—is that Taehyung…?”

As soon as the words leave his lips the creature is upon him and Hoseok shrieks, expecting Jimin’s jugular to be torn out. No such thing occurs. There’s a tense quiet that suddenly banishes away the shrieking panic that had possessed them before. Jimin stands extremely still, shoulders tense and expression taught with the urge to push it away from him. It breathes heavily into Jimin’s scent gland, rubbing and nuzzling there as a gesture of scenting. Scenting used to be a common practice amongst those in packs thousands of years ago, but today is it only seen as a cutesy display of affection between couples. Then, the creature _whines_.


Slowly, it pulls back and for the first time Hoseok gets a proper look at its face—_his_ face. Taehyung is nearly a stranger of the person they once knew him to be. His cheeks are gaunt and ghost-like, a corpse risen from the deep, his eyes sunken, large and crazed. Lips have been gnawed to the point where welts, sores and dry dead skin matter the flesh of his mouth. Hair that used to shine a vivid, cool red now mattered and flat with malnourishment. The omega’s arms are thin, flesh taught over bone, and his skin stretches grotesquely over a cage of ribs. Below is his bloated, swollen stomach. The mass itself seems to compel Taehyung to hunch over to bare the immense weight.
All four of them look upon Taehyung with barely-restrained terror.

“What…what have they done to you…?” Taehyung answers Jimin’s question by licking his face.

“I’m gonna be sick,” Hoseok slaps his hand over his mouth and turns away, only for a sudden force sending him careening against the wall. He gasps, choking on a scream, as Taehyung sniffs him aggressively.

“Hoseok—don’t move. He won’t hurt you,” Jimin orders him hastily, still visibly shaken.

Scared stiff, he watches as the omega examines the bruises he sustained from being strapped to a chair. “Jimin, this—Taehyung—killed two people and what looks to be an animal. What the fuck do you mean he won’t hurt me?”

“He recognises us,” the raven-haired man’s voice quivers. Taehyung shoves his nose against his scent gland and Hoseok whimpers. “There’s clearly something wrong with him but—I think he remembers us, remembers our scents.”

When Taehyung pulls back, after what feels like an excruciating minute or two, he smiles up at him. It’s oddly sweet for someone who has blood all of them.

Mercifully, Taehyung turns his attention over to Namjoon and Jeongguk, who seems to be having a quiet discussion.

“Hyung, please move aside.”

“The baby—”

“Will be fine—”

“If you get hurt I’ll never forgive myself—”

“If Taehyung touches you I’ll get hurt anyway—”
“He’s dangerous—”

“Hyung,” with one hand he grabs Namjoon’s jaw and turns his head towards Taehyung, who is stalking cautiously towards them. With his other hand, he points. “Look. See those lasers? They’re following Taehyung for a reason.”

Hoseok hadn’t noticed it before, but now that Jeongguk has mentioned it, there are a bunch of tiny, red dots focused on different parts of the omega’s body. He glances at the black devices on the walls. They’re all still pointing in Taehyung’s direction.

“If Taehyung tries to hurt me, I’ll bet they’ll interfere before it goes too far. Please, hyung, trust me. Trust me the way I trust you.” The resolve visibly slips from Namjoon’s shoulders and the alpha steps aside, allowing Jeongguk to trade places with him. He still has his hands behind him, clutching Namjoon’s arms. Protecting him.

“Why is he so bloated?” Jimin murmurs as they watch Taehyung size Jeongguk up.

The older omega dives for Jeongguk’s neck, but their stomachs gently knock one another, willing Taehyung to pause. He looks down, perplexed, then back at Jeongguk like he isn’t quite sure what to make of him. Slowly, hands trembling precariously, Jeongguk takes the hem and lifts his pyjama shirt to expose his bare stomach. Something akin to recognition blossoms in Taehyung’s gaze as he reaches down to place his bloody hands on Jeongguk’s pale smooth stomach. Then, Taehyung touches his own stomach, and despite the humanity lost his face crumples with anguish. Tears falls down both of the omegas faces. It’s a scene that feels intruding to look upon. In place of scenting Jeongguk like he did to he and Jimin, the red-head pulls their maknae into a hug. Taehyung wails. The haunting sound sends unbridled chills up Hoseok’s spine and down his arms.

“He’s not bloated,” Hoseok whispers sadly.

The two omegas fall to their knees, wrapped in one another’s arms, devastated by the responsibility forced on them. Tears cascade down Namjoon’s face too, but he makes no move to disturb whatever transpires between the omegas.

It is a pain perhaps even empathy cannot fully comprehend.

Chapter End Notes
Hello~

So, a few people have reached out to me saying that they relate to Jeongguk's personality or the suffering he has been through, and I would just like to remind some of you that people read your comments and are affected by what you say about Jeongguk. Yes, they're all fictional characters, but they're grounded and shaped by elements from our reality, and for you to call Jeongguk pathetic or damaged is doing more harm to real people than it is to a fictional character, so you know, just keep this in mind please. I don't want anyone to be hurt.

Curious Cat
The Third Trimester

Returning back to their quarters after a routine check-up came as an immense relief to the both of them. While it’d been a couple of months since they’d initially reunited with the rest of their pack and reintegrated back into their larger domain, every time they are taken, whether it be as a punishment (which was a rarer occurrence than it’d been many months ago) or check-ups conducted on Jeongguk to ensure that his pregnancy is going smoothly, was cause for anxiety. These examinations, however, did often come hand in hand with the seemingly superfluous poking and prodding they have grown so accustom to. Truthfully, Namjoon is thankful that he is brought along with Jeongguk at all. An uneasiness has taken shape over the past couple of months, with Jeongguk growing larger by the week, that they will one day take Jeongguk and leave him behind to suffer the separation. The last time they were torn from each other it’d been for the better half of a week. It’d been many months ago, a distant memory to most, but that distinct feeling of pain and emptiness still haunts him in his sleep. A taste of paranoia that may at some point become a reality.

Instead of the usual gassing or chloroform, as is standard, they were led by two handlers, one manned in front of Jeongguk, the other urging from behind Namjoon. They were told to keep their eyes firmly fixed on their feet. Any inclination to look elsewhere would result in a shock from their microchips. It isn’t exactly a mystery as to why they’ve changed up their methods of transportation. Back in the early stages of their captivity, treating them like sacks of potatoes to be thrown and tossed around as they pleased was an easy solution. None of them are particularly big—although Namjoon can admit with some pride that he is taller than the occasional handler.
Now, it is not quite so simple. Carrying a pregnant omega so far into their development is a risk they clearly aren’t willing to take. Better to just make them walk than to attempt to pick up an omega in their third trimester and risk dropping them.

He hears Jeongguk sniffle as they shuffle their feet down the dark hallway. It’s so dark he can barely see his own feet.

For this check-up, which mostly involved the both of them keeping their mouths shut while a doctor conducted an ultrasound and took blood samples, Jeongguk had chalked up the courage to ask the doctor a question.

“Can I hear their heartbeat?”

The ballpoint of the doctor’s pen paused on the notes she’d been taking. Doctors are commonly alphas, and nurses are commonly betas. This doctor, however, was a beta. Betas were—generally speaking—more empathetic to a person’s situation. It’s just their luck that this particular beta had the kindness to smile and remove the stethoscope from her neck. Both of them were allowed to take turns listening to the beating little thump of life that existed inside Jeongguk’s stomach. It was tiny and erratic, like the heartbeat of a rabbit.

It does not wound him to admit that he’d shed the first few tears.

“Pregnant at twenty-one,” Jeongguk had smiled sadly as he pressed the diaphragm of the stethoscope to the side of his stomach. “Never thought I’d have a child this young—if at all.”

“Twenty-two.”

Jeongguk blinked. “Hm?”

Wiping the tears away with his naked wrist he says quietly, “Your birthday was in September, Gguk. Judging by how far along you are, you’d be twenty-two now.”

“Oh.”
The very notion that his birthday had been and gone without so much as a thought must’ve been too much for him to handle (on top of listening to the heartbeat of their unborn child), because he broke down sobbing. It was then that one of the handlers, who’d been tasked to stand intimidatingly in a corner scrutinising their every move, came forward and asked the doctor if she was done. Wistfully, she’d nodded. They’d had to pry the stethoscope from Jeongguk’s fingers.

“Just one more minute—please!”

Namjoon wonders now if it was really worth listening to their child’s heartbeat. It seems to have done more harm than good. Their emotional connection doesn’t have to tell him. Namjoon knows Jeongguk is still affected by it. If they’d had it their way they would’ve sat, listening to their child’s heartbeat all day. Jeongguk has never outright stated whether or not he was looking forward to having a child. It hardly seemed appropriate, under the circumstances, but when Jeongguk heard the heartbeat, their connection bloomed with a gentle warmth he could only describe as love.

Whether the omega is willing to admit it or not, he loves their child.

Eventually the dark fades as they’re ushered into a dimly lit, tiled room. The cold metal of a gun brushes the curve of his back as their restraints are removed. Namjoon concentrates obsessively on his feet. Refusing to move, refusing to breathe.

“Close your eyes,” orders a rough, uncaring voice. “Count to ten. Don’t open them until you’ve finished counting.”

It pains him to be obedient, to be submissive to the very people who dare to cock a gun at his pregnant mate. He wishes he could tear them to pieces. Break off their hands and rip their eyes from their sockets. Outside of the world of academia Namjoon never really took kindly to following orders (and even in the realm of academia, he still questioned and challenged his superiors at every turn, giving birth to much resentful and hostility), and perhaps if he were an outlier that only had himself to look out for, rebellion would’ve been a daily battle against the oppressors. He’s not, though. Any physical abuse he endures will, by extension, be felt by Jeongguk. It is his responsibility to be that better person, to no longer look at the world through a lens of self-importance and self-gratification. Namjoon would do it all over again the exact same way, if it meant that he could be by Jeongguk’s side.

Jeongguk reaches out to lace their fingers together as they count.

They hear the whisper of a door closing behind them, and he’s knows they’ve been left alone.
“Eight… Nine… Ten…” the moment the final number leaves Jeongguk’s lips, the lights suddenly turn on and they flinch. They look up to find themselves in the bathroom. It seems they were returned just in time to start their routine day.

Groans of protest filter through the closed door leading to Zone 3.

Ever since their return, both Taehyung and Jeongguk had assumed their nesting areas in Zone 3, as omegas that are expecting often do. Nests are a matter of territory for omegas. They will spend most of their time, particularly in the final months leading up to the birth, resting in the comfort of nests along with their partners. Fathers tend to work most days of the week, but any expecting parent is legally allowed maternity leave of up to four weeks in South Korea. Most will start their leave two weeks before the due date. In this time, when they are not sharing their omega’s nest, assume household duties and cater to their omega’s needs.

While Namjoon can’t do much in the household’s department, he does bring Jeongguk’s food tray to his nest and, whenever he feels a twinge in his back, shoulders or feet, offers the omega massages. It’s a crime, really, that he can’t offer more for Jeongguk.

Tugging him by the hand, Jeongguk leads him into Zone 3. On the velvet floor of the room are scatters of pillows and blankets. Jimin and Hoseok didn’t like staying in Zone 1 alone.

“Makes Hoseok scared,” Jimin had said, as he’d fluffed up his pillow and settled his blanket next to Taehyung’s nest. Arguably, while Hoseok is a bit of a scaredy-cat, Namjoon couldn’t help but think the excuses were a little more nuanced than what Jimin was leading them to believe.

On the floor, Jimin and Hoseok are tiredly rubbing their eyes and coming to grips with consciousness. Someone is kneeling beside Taehyung’s nest. It takes Namjoon a moment to recognise who it is.

“Yoongi?” the person looks up, and sure enough, it is Yoongi. It’s been so long that they’ve seen him. His hair is nearly down to his shoulders.

To his surprise, the serious expression often carved into Yoongi’s features softens at the sight of them. Even his lips seem to pull from their usual grimace to reveal a gummy smile. Springing to his feet, the alpha saunters over them with his signature swagger, as if they’d only seen each other yesterday.
“Namjoon,” Yoongi greets as they embrace firmly. The man nuzzles against his scent gland and Namjoon takes in the salty ocean aroma that soothingly washes over him, a unique fragrance that could only belong to the smaller alpha. “They must’ve taken you just before I’d returned. Hoseok said it couldn’t have been more than an hour.”

As they break away, Namjoon can’t help but crack a smile. “They’ve been keeping you busy, I assume? Are you in good health?”

Yoongi shrugs. The alpha has always been on the skinnier side, but he doesn’t appear to have lost weight, which he could only interpret as a good thing. “I’ve seen better days.”

He then turns to Jeongguk, and Namjoon can almost smell the fondness in the alpha’s pheromones, let alone read it all over his expression. “Jeongguk, you’re—” eyes drop to Jeongguk’s tummy and he fears the man might say something stupid, but “—glowing. Pregnancy agrees with you.”

Something very ugly snarls with jealousy as Jeongguk blushes and smiles. Instead of acting upon this, though, Namjoon stamps it down like he would a sudden flame. They’ve been working on his possessiveness. Being confined to a room together, often with long stretches of time where all they had for entertainment was each other, they’d done a lot of talking. They talked about Namjoon. They talked about Jeongguk. They’d laughed at themselves. Pitied themselves. When Jeongguk held his hands, though, change didn’t feel quite so scary. Often, he finds he has a long way to go from being a stranger to the man he was, but he’s getting there.

“Recognition is the first step,” Jeongguk had told him gently, kindly. “It is also the hardest step.”

“I was scared you’d never return to us,” Jeongguk tells Yoongi sweetly, and out of simple—curiosity—Namjoon searches their connection for any signs that Jeongguk is attracted to Yoongi. When all he is met with is the affection of friendship, Namjoon mentally kicks himself. Jeongguk meets his eye with an amused twinkle, as if knowing exactly what he’s doing.

Namjoon has the shame to blush and look away.

“I missed you guys,” Yoongi admits without hesitation or embarrassment. “Life wasn’t quite the same without listening to this old soul harp on about class superiority and the preservation of alpha power in the senate.”
Yoongi knocks him with his elbow and Namjoon gapes at him like a fish.

“I never talked about the preservation of alpha power in the senate!”

“I know,” Yoongi shrugs. “It probably crossed your mind though.”

Yoongi and Jeongguk have a good laugh at Namjoon’s expense. He finds he doesn’t mind it so much. In fact, he has the absurd urge to smile, but pretends to be wounded anyway. Jeongguk pinches his cheek endearingly.

“You haven’t heard from Seokjin, have you?” Jeongguk asks when the laughter dies away.

The grin on Yoongi’s face vanishes immediately at the mention of the beta’s name. “No, I haven’t. Have you?”

Jeongguk glances at Namjoon before he replies, “No.”

Namjoon knows immediately that he is lying. Before he can dwell on the fact that Jeongguk blatantly lied to Yoongi, knowing Namjoon would catch on to it, the omega excuses himself to go and check on Taehyung. Watching his mate kneel over Taehyung with gentleness, he wonders. Jeongguk made no mention of Seokjin in the time they’d spent together. In all honesty, Namjoon had avoided speaking of the man, as if any whisper of him would make him suddenly materialise.

“Funny. Jeongguk is usually a better liar than that,” Yoongi speaks casually, watching as Taehyung sits up, careful of the extra weight he carries, to affectionately scent Jeongguk as a sort of I’m-glad-you’re-back sentiment.

“You’re usually a better liar than that,” Namjoon grunts.

Yoongi gives him an affronted look. “Was I really that obvious?”

“Well Jeongguk could certainly tell you were lying. I couldn’t lie about what I had for breakfast without Jeongguk sniffing it out.”
“And you can tell when Jeongguk is lying too, can you?”

Shrugging he says, “Not really, not without our bond. Our hearts beat as one, but when Jeongguk lies his heart falters for a split second. It’s so subtle that sometimes I doubt if I actually felt it or if I’m just imagining things. Jeongguk—well—he can tell when I’m lying just by looking at my face.”

“I suppose when you’ve been surrounded by liars your entire life it’s easier to spot them.”

“Yeah.” Speaking of liars. “Do you intend to tell me when you last saw Seokjin?”

“I saw him the day before I was returned here.”

“Oh.” So roughly four days ago then. Namjoon can’t tell which surprises him more, the fact that Yoongi had seen Seokjin as recently as four days ago, or the fact that Yoongi relinquished this information to him so easily. “How are they treating him?”

Yoongi frowns. “Treating him?”

“Yeah. Like how is he physically and psychologically? Anything of significance you can report?”

“You don’t know.” Namjoon stares at the older alpha strangely.

“Know what?”

“Never mind.”

“Know what, hyung?” he asks with a little more emphasis.

Yoongi makes a point of avoiding eye-contact with him. “You don’t call Jeongguk by those stupid pet names anymore. What’s up with that?”
He rolls his eyes. “Don’t change the subject.”

“I wasn’t changing the subject.”

“Can you two stop bickering like a bunch of old omegas?” Jimin grumbles. “It’s too early to be exchanging kimchi recipes.”

Namjoon sighs and leaves it alone for now. Maybe after they’ve eaten breakfast he might just pester the alpha for more information, but for now being present for Jeongguk is more important. While Jeongguk may be inclined to give off the illusion that everything is fine, likely out of a subconscious habit, their connection is telling him that he’s still emotionally drained from the check-up.

Instead of intruding upon Taehyung’s nest, Jeongguk politely stays outside the perimeter. His arms may reach to touch and caress the older omega, but it is not enough to be considered threatening upon the other pregnant omega’s territory. In fact, Taehyung appears to be openly inviting the omega to snuggle with him in his nest. It isn’t that nesting omegas don’t invite others into their nests, but it is almost strictly exclusive to mates and—perhaps under circumstances where there isn’t a mate—mothers and close friends. Seokjin is far from being Taehyung’s mate. Other than being the father of the unborn child, he has no business being anywhere near him. So, perhaps because there is a lacking mate figure in Taehyung’s life, he is more open and willing to accept others into his nest.

A Russian poet by the name of Ilia Vikashev once said that the one thing holding humanity back from reaching the plains of a utopian society is the primitive predisposition that exists within us all. Across the empty expanse of Zone 3, as Namjoon gazes upon Jeongguk and Taehyung, he ponders whether this drastic shift in Taehyung’s demeanour was attributed by that very same predisposition that Vikashev was referring to. It’s difficult to say. Since they were all reunited and shepherded back to the very prison they’d all come to know one another, dealing with Taehyung’s temperament has proven a bit of a challenge.

The omega appears to have lost all ability to speak in coherent sentences. Even simple words like “water” and “sleep” are lost on him. Recognition of speech is still there. He can understand what they are saying to him most of the time. It’s just so strange. How is it possible that someone can lose their ability to communicate verbally? Did he hit his head? Was this done intentionally by the scientists or was it a tragic side effect of something they’d given him?

Communication wasn’t the only major change for Taehyung.
In place of the balanced meals the rest of them were fed, Taehyung was given a bloody steak morning, noon and night. Attempts had been made to feed him vegetables from their own trays, but Taehyung aggressively refused to consume them. To compensate for the vitamins lost from a lack of vegetables in his diet, their captors had upped his vitamin supplements substantially, leaving it up to the rest of them to try and convince an unresponsive, uncooperative Taehyung to take them every day. One would think, with the way the omega looks upon the vitamins with such disgust, that he thinks they are actively trying to poison him.

Namjoon is certain that whatever was done to Taehyung was uniquely catered to him and him alone. When they first reunited with Taehyung, he had red pinpricks on the crooks of both his elbows, surrounded by a yellow-tinged antiseptic. At first, Namjoon assumed they had to be injections to keep Taehyung and the baby healthy, as it was clear the omega had sworn off of vegetables and fruits for good. Then one day they took Taehyung away. The omega was gone for only a few hours, but when he returned to them, he had a thick bandage on the underside of his stomach. His cries and whimpers had bounced off the bathroom walls like a wailing phantom. When Jimin had carefully peeled back the bandage, there welled a small spot of blood. They’d injected something directly into his womb. Namjoon may never know what it was exactly, but from the howls that tore from Taehyung’s throat it must’ve been very painful.

“Have a good sleep, Tae?” Namjoon asks the omega upon approach, tone unintentionally laced with pity.

They attempt to speak to Taehyung as if he can respond to them normally, although occasionally they will use hand gestures to get the point across.

The omega straightens, arms outstretched as if to hug the alpha. Fearfully, Namjoon takes a step back to avoid contact and Jeongguk steps between them with an apologetic smile. “Hyung, you can’t touch Namjoonie, remember?” Jeongguk smacks his own harm and flinches dramatically. “Ouchy!”

Taehyung cocks his head to the side and glances between the two of them in confusion. Another thing about Taehyung is that he seems to have large gaps in his memory. The old Taehyung knew about the effects of the mating mark and that touching him would result in a world of pain, but no matter how much they attempt to re-explain the situation, it seems lost on him now. In fact, the omega looks almost hurt that Namjoon won’t touch him.

“Honestly, do I have to do everything around here?” Jimin shoos them away with a sweeping motion of his hands. “Go back to your nest, Breeding Pair Number One, you’re confusing the poor savage.”
Screwing his face up, Namjoon can tell Jeongguk loathes the new name Jimin has given Taehyung, but instead of arguing about it, the omega marches back to his nest and throws a blanket over himself. Namjoon snorts. He ignores the glare shot his way by the prickly omega, and sits down on the lip of Jeongguk’s nest. Jeongguk’s head is hidden beneath his blanket.

Placing a hand on his shoulder, he gives him a reassuring squeeze. “You know better than to let him get to you, Gguk.”

“I’m carrying a human being inside me. The least he could do is cut the sassiness,” the omega bristles. Cute.

“I know.”

“I mean, it’s not like I go out of my way to annoy Jimin-hyung. He seems angry no matter what I do.”

“I know.”

“Why does he hate me so much anyway? I didn’t do anything to him.”

“Hey,” he tugs the blanket from Jeongguk’s head, only to be met with his pouty face. “You’re talking to the person Jimin hates the most. You think I have all the answers?”

“No.”

“Maybe you should try talking to Hoseok. He might be able to give you some pointers,” he suggests, looking over his shoulder to locate the alpha in question.

He’s sitting on the other side of the room. He and Yoongi appear to be in deep conversation about something.

“Jimin only likes Hoseok because Hoseok lets Jimin fuck him.”
“You think so?” he asks contemplatively.

“Yes. Have you ever heard them having a conversation of substance?”

“I see them play a lot of card games?” he offers meekly.

To this, Jeongguk doesn’t respond. He just throws his blanket back over his head, as if banishing the rest of them from his mind.

Dinner was an average affair. Jeongguk didn’t feel much for leaving his nest today, so Namjoon took it upon himself to bring all his meals to him (and fed him, when the omega allowed it). They were certainly glad to be back in the comfort of their own…well, he hesitates to call this place a home, of all things, but it’s about as close to a home any of them have gotten since they were drugged and kidnapped. It is also beginning to gradually feel more like—a home—in some weird way. It has nothing to the recognisability of the interior. Not the showers nor the dining hall or the hard floor of Zone 1, but rather, its occupants. With Seokjin gone, meals felt less like a tragedy waiting to happen and more of a casual, laidback affair that they could all somewhat enjoy.

After dinner, they all came filtering back into Zone 3. Yoongi had taken a page straight out of Jimin and Hoseok’s book and moved his bed to Zone 3 to sleep with the rest of them. But, unlike Jimin and Hoseok, who were positioned closely beside the other nests, Yoongi had christened the very far corner of the room as his own. Jeongguk sits between his legs, pink flannel pyjama shirt neatly folded over the edge of the nest, fiddling with a nail he’d accidently broken after his shower. Namjoon can feel the baby kicking in Jeongguk’s stomach, as if the baby were in his own.

Namjoon runs a hand down the expanse of Jeongguk’s back, feeling for the kinks that tingle at his own back.

“I um—” Namjoon peers over Jeongguk to see Hoseok sitting up on his kneels with a nervous expression. Sitting cross-legged beside him is Yoongi, who pins Hoseok with a stern but encouraging look.

Jimin is lounging with Taehyung in the pale green nest, carding a hand through the man’s long,
flowing red hair. Both the omegas turn their attention to Hoseok. Jeongguk, on the other hand, doesn’t seem to have noticed that the alpha has spoken. With a nail between his teeth, he uses his other to rub his chest.

“My nipples hurt,” he whines, only to realise belatedly the hush that blankets the room. Jeongguk looks up, notices everyone had clearly heard him, and promptly buries his face in his hands. Namjoon continues to put pressure on the sore spot on his right shoulder blade, barely containing his amusement.

Hoseok clears his throat, a little louder this time. “There’s something that Yoongi—” Yoongi elbow him hard in the ribs. Hoseok whimpers. “Something I’d like to confess to all of you.”

“Is this going to turn into a messy confession of your deepest darkest secrets, then leading the rest of us to do the same?” Jimin jokes nervously, sitting up straighter. Taehyung whines at the loss of his fingers in his hair, nudging his nose against the other omega’s shoulder. “Because gross. The last thing we need is another water works show.”

Personally, Namjoon can’t tell if Jimin is being completely serious with them or not. The twitch of his lips suggests that he may be amused, but his tone of voice says otherwise. Hoseok and Jimin lock eyes. The alpha gulps, resolve falling apart at the seams, but Yoongi gives him a hard shove.

“What do you have to tell us?” Namjoon tries to coax encouragingly. It earns him an eyeroll out of his periphery but he pretends he doesn’t see it.

Taking a deep breath, Hoseok digs his nail into the flesh of his palm as he stutters, “I haven’t—I haven’t been completely forthright with all of you, not since the very first day we all met each other. Before I work up here, I woke up somewhere else here in the facility. It was in a dark room, I didn’t see any faces but I heard voices. They told me all about you guys. Some stuff about your histories, your personalities, pre-existing conditions…” He bites his lip. “They asked me to spy on all of you. I was to report to someone every night after you’d all gone to bed. They’d ask me questions about myself, things that I could remember—personal things that only I’d know, and then—then I’d report about any developments involving you guys.”

“Why did they choose you, though?” Namjoon wanders aloud. The fact that Hoseok had been reporting on him didn’t stir him emotionally.

“Forget about why he was chosen—why the fuck did you agree to it?” Jimin snaps, betrayal and accusation raging in his glare.
Hoseok chokes, upset that Jimin, of all people, has the most passionate response. Why would Hoseok even be remotely surprised by Jimin’s reaction? If anyone was going to be outraged by this, it would be Jimin. “I didn’t—I didn’t think it was that bad! They were already spying on us through microphones and hidden cameras, what difference did it make that I gave them a little extra information?”

“What difference?” the omega is very cross now. “It makes all the difference in the whole damn fucking world, Hoseok! While we were laughing over games of poker and sharing intimate details about our personal lives you were sneaking off to go gossip with the very people who keep us caged here like lab rats! It’s not a matter of if you relinquished important information or not, it’s the fact that you lacked the integrity to refuse these fuckers in the first place!”

“It wasn’t to get extra information,” Yoongi deadpans, affectively cutting the heated argument to an abrupt and anticlimactic end. “Blackmailing Hoseok into reporting to them was part of an experiment on its own. It was to track his cognitive state of mind and the deterioration of past memory under stress.”

Jimin’s voice cracks like a whip. “And how do you know all this, hm? Are you about to tell us all that you’ve been conspiring with the enemy, too?”

“Did I fucking stutter? I said Hoseok was being blackmailed,” Yoongi fires back without any intention of playing into Jimin’s diversion tactics.

“It doesn’t matter if he was being blackmailed, whatever he was being blackmailed for he should’ve just bitten the fucking bullet instead of ratting out his own pack!”

“Jimin,” Yoongi sighs frustratedly, as though he were reasoning with a child. “Hoseok hadn’t even met us when they forced him to agree to it. You should be grateful that he’s telling us this at all. It’s at a great risk.”

It’s then that Namjoon decides to finally speak up. “What were you blackmailed for?”

“Child trafficking,” Yoongi replies bluntly, before Hoseok even has the chance to open his mouth.

“I’m going to murder you.”
Jimin doesn’t so much as give Namjoon time to blink before he’s left the nest and across the room. The omega kicks the alpha to the floor and gets on top of him, pressing all his weight onto the knee he digs into Hoseok’s sternum. Hoseok doesn’t even lift a finger to defend himself. Knuckles meet the older man’s nose with a sickening crunch. The spatter of blood has Taehyung coiling further into the protection of his nest.

Jeongguk calls out in shock, “Jimin, don’t!”

Shifting, he’s ready to interfere before it gets any uglier, but Yoongi, being much closer, is able to subdue Jimin before he can raise his fist again. Twisting his wrist, much in the same vein as when he would overpower Seokjin, he shoves him away.

The omega falls back on his elbows and groans, rolling onto his side to nurse them. “Ow, fuck! You fucking cunt, Yoongi!”

Coiling into a ball, Hoseok holds his nose and sobs loudly into his bloody hands. Jeongguk has his arm halfway through his sleeve as he rises to check on Hoseok, but much to both of their surprise, Taehyung meekly crawls out from the safety of his nest and over to Hoseok. The maknae stretches the material of his shirt over his belly before looking over his shoulder at him in utter confusion. Namjoon shrugs. It all spiralled out of control so fast that he barely had time to comprehend it all.

Sliding out of the nest, he tells Jeongguk, “Stay here. I’ll make sure Jimin didn’t just break Hoseok’s nose.”

As he crosses the room, Yoongi lectures Jimin’s with a scathingly cold tone. “For once in your life can you not act like a bully in a primary school playground? If you’d just given Hoseok time to explain himself you’d understand that he wasn’t given much of a choice in the matter.”

“I don’t expect you to know what it’s like to be sold into sex slavery as child! What’s the worst those cards handed you? Some alcoholism and a university degree that went nowhere? Fuck you, Yoongi. At least you went to fucking university!” Jimin spat, as hot-headed and defensive as ever.

“Are you listening? Hoseok wasn’t given a choice!”

“Neither were those children!”
Namjoon finds himself standing between Yoongi and Jimin at one another’s throats, and Taehyung whining over a bleeding, crying Hoseok. The cacophony of noise is starting to give him a headache.

“Will all of you shut up!” A sudden quiet falls over the room, allowing Namjoon time to breathe and gather his thoughts. “Taehyung—” he addresses the omega gently “—go back to your nest. Yoongi, can you go get some towels so we can clear away the blood? We need to be sure his nose isn’t broken. Jimin—” Jimin shoots him a look daring him “—for once in your life sit still and shut up.”

Out of his periphery he sees the omega’s jaw drop at the audacity. At this stage, Namjoon could care less. Taehyung meekly slinks back to his nest, observing from a distance as Namjoon kneels down beside Hoseok, who continues to snifflle into his hands.

“Hoseok? Can you sit up for me? That’s it, there we go.” He pats the alpha on the back and persuades him to take his hands away from his nose. It’s impossible to tell whether it’s broken or not. Blood has stained almost half his face.

Yoongi returns quickly with two small towels. One of them he’d wrung water from to make it cool and damp. As Yoongi gingerly cleans his face, Hoseok grips Namjoon’s arm, tears rolling down his face. “Namjoon—Namjoon I swear, I swear I didn’t want anything to do with it. The foster agency I worked for—”

Hushing him, he murmurs, “Later, Hobi. We have all the time in the world to discuss it—”

“I-I’m not a paedophile!”

“I know you’re not.”

“Hoseok, stop moving,” Yoongi growls softly.

“Sorry.”

The silence that trickles through the room is interrupted by the occasional intervals of Jimin huffing viciously in the background. It is ignored. Once everything has calmed down and they’ve mopped up most of the blood, Yoongi hands Hoseok the damp towel to hold against the swelling
around his nose.

“The good news is, if it is broken, it’s not obvious,” Yoongi provides informatively. “It’s swollen, though, so it may be a little difficult to breathe for a while.”

“It’s fine. I deserve it.”

“You’re damn right you deserve it!” Jimin calls from over the other side of the room, having moved to wallow against the cushioning of Taehyung’s nest.

“Fuck, Jimin, would you just—” Hoseok places a hand on Yoongi’s shoulder.

“No, he needs an explanation. You all do,” the alpha breathes heavily through his nose. His hands are visibly shaking.

Namjoon squeezes Hoseok’s shoulder. “You sure? You look like you’re about to pass out.”

Tentatively, contrary to how he looks physically, Hoseok says, “Yes, I’m sure.”

Namjoon gathers some nearby pillows and Yoongi helps him prop Hoseok comfortably against the wall by the door leading to Zone 4. They sit by him, as the alpha gathers his bearings. “I found out the foster agency I was working for, Angels of the Light, were involved in a child trafficking ring about a year into my employment there. They kept things from me at first. Gave me their poster cases—the ones where the foster child and parents got along well. In hindsight it was probably a manipulation tactic to get to me genuinely grow attached to the cases given to me.”

Hoseok sighs.

“On my desk were two trays: the ‘in-tray’ for new cases or cases where a foster child has been regurgitated back into the system because the parents don’t want them, and then there was the ‘out-tray.’ No one ever told me what the ‘out-tray’ was for. If a foster case ends in adoption, or the child has reached an age where they are no longer supported by the system, their cases are filed in my filing cabinet. Eventually, though, my boss—the CEO of the agency, called me into his office one day to discuss the success rates in my cases. This was standard. He usually spoke to employees every three months to evaluate their case loads and cases where the child has been exceptionally difficult to handle…
“This particular meeting was my first introduction into what was really going on.” Tears well in the man’s eyes as he looks up at the ceiling. “He mentioned a child of mine that wasn’t meshing well with his foster parents. It’d been the third time I’d relocated him to a different home. Mister Seo, my old boss, told me that our agency worked on a ‘three strikes’ system. If the child has been moved three times due to bad behaviour, their file is to be placed in the ‘out-tray’, where he then deals with the matter personally.”

Hoseok’s chest trembles as he breathes in. He reaches out and grips Yoongi’s hand. The older alpha makes no comment over it. “Mister Seo never went into details on what he did to the children. But that child—my child, the system failed him again so I put his case in the ‘out-tray’ like I was told to and then—then next thing I know I’m being told to go down to the police station to give a statement over a missing person’s report. I wanted to take what I was told as truth. That he’d really run away. But then, another employee and dear friend of mine told me everything—that hopeless cases were handed over to child trafficking rings in exchange for funding and pornography.”

“Why didn’t you go straight to the police?” Namjoon asks quietly.

Shaking his head, the brunette continues, “W-Without any evidence? Without any influence or power? If I went to the police the agency would’ve fired me and blacklisted me from working at any other foster agency in the country. I figured if I stayed, I could at the very least save as many children as I possibly could from being put in the out-tray. There were times where I’d even lie on reports, cover for kids that had been failed by the system more than three times. I tried to justify staying there by believing that if I could save one more child…just one more…”

Not even Jimin had anything to say to that.

“It’s over though, right…?” Yoongi speaks up. “Your boss was eventually convicted.”

“For the child porn, yes,” Hoseok speak in a hollow voice. “Not the child trafficking. Investigators somehow didn’t find out about that. Mister Seo was replaced by deputy CEO Miss Chae. I hoped so badly that with Mister Seo gone it would end. It didn’t. It wasn’t just one rotten apple. It was the whole fucking tree.”

“You should’ve left,” Jimin finally says. “You should’ve left and gone somewhere else.”

“How could I sleep then?” Hoseok wipes away a tear. “How could I stand to sleep at night when I
know what that agency is doing to those children? Leaving would’ve been as good as turning my back on every case I’d ever taken.”

Lips pressed into a grim line, Jimin concludes, “So this is what they blackmailed you over? Your involvement with the agency?”

Slowly, Hoseok nods. “They said if I didn’t comply they’d ruin my life. They’d leak it to the press and they’d twist some of the truth if they had to. I couldn’t bare it. My friends, my family…”

“Why now?”

Lifting his head to look at Jimin, Hoseok blinks. “Huh?”

Although the anger and malice has evidently drained from the omega’s face, his jaw is set and his eyes are as guarded as ever. “Why would you tell us now? They’re probably preparing your smear campaign as we speak now that you’ve let the cat out of the bag.”

Hoseok produces a small, pained smile. “You think it really matters? Even if we were to eventually make it back to our homes, do you think we could just resume our old lives like this was all just a terrible nightmare?”

No one has a response to their question, but it is likely they all have the same harrowing answer floating around in the back of their minds.

Jimin’s lips part, ready to say something, but then a sudden groan from Taehyung’s nest has them all tensing. From where Namjoon sits, he cannot see Taehyung. The omega is lying down, blocked by the indented cushion design made to maximize comfort. For a second, no one moves, not until they hear Taehyung moan, this time much louder. Jeongguk climbs carefully out of his nest and waddles over to Taehyung’s. Jimin springs to his feet, and together both omegas lean over to check if the other is okay.

“Oh.”

“What?” Namjoon asks, panicked. “What’s wrong with him?”
“Taehyung’s water broke,” Jimin states more bluntly than he thinks the omega intends. It’s obvious that he’s stunned.

“What!” Namjoon isn’t sure if the exclamation came from his mouth or one of the other alphas, but either way they were all on their feet and across the room in seconds. Curled on his side, Taehyung clutches his stomach, his face contorted in pain. A wet stain has taken shape on the omega’s flannel pants. It is red, not clear, like he expected it to be.

He can feel all the air escape his lungs.

“Namjoon what do we do?” Hoseok asks fearfully.

With the exception of Taehyung, the rest of the pack look at him as if he holds all the answers. Suddenly, Namjoon’s tongue feels as if it were made of lead. Numbness creeps up his fingers and down his legs. The pumping of his heart accelerates to the point where he can barely hear himself breathe. He can’t fully grasp what is happening. Everyone is looking at him. Everyone is expecting him to know what to do. It’s as if he’s back at university again. Pandemonium all around him. Blood between the omega’s legs. Running mascara as she thrusts a finger in his direction, lips pulled back in a disgusted snarl. What do they want him to do? *What can he do to make it better again?*

“I… I…” His mind is racing a mile a minute but his mouth doesn’t seem to want to comply.

“Hoseok, get some pillows,” Jeongguk clears his throat, a sense of duty sparking in his eyes. “I’ll get all the towels we have in the bathroom, Jimin and Yoongi—move Taehyung around so that his bottom half is facing the entrance of the nest. Make him as comfortable as possible, okay? I’ll be right back—hyung?”

A hand is placed delicately on his bicep. He shakes his head, the image of Lee Yeolim’s vengeful face clearing way to show Jeongguk’s. The omega is frowning with concern. Instead of mentioning his freak-out, instead he asks, “Can you go get some water? We don’t have buckets but—maybe clean out one of the bowls from dinner and fill that up.”

“I—of course.”

Somehow, his boneless legs carry him to the dining hall, where he swipes two of the bowls they’d used for soup. He takes them to the bathroom sink to be cleaned, and then drips water from the
filter into the bowls. He gets the sense that he isn’t moving fast enough. Everyone else around him moves at lightening speed. Everyone seems to have a task and they don’t hesitate or falter for even a moment.

So why does he feel so helpless…?

When he returns with the bowls, he’s welcomed by a drastically different scene to the one he’d left. Taehyung’s pyjamas have been removed. Jimin is sitting by Taehyung’s head, pressing a wet towel to his forehead. Hoseok and Yoongi are on either side of the omega keeping his legs open as Jeongguk kneels between them. Blood, shit and piss are all over the floor, but Jeongguk has bypassed the filth somewhat by kneeling on a pillow.

“Is there supposed to be this much blood?” Jimin asks Jeongguk, to which the younger responds with a worried pull of his mouth.

“I—I’m not sure. I’ve only helped deliver farm animals.” The falter in Jeongguk’s voice has Namjoon’s stomach sinking. He can feel Jeongguk’s concern thrumming through his veins.

“Farm animals?” Hoseok echoes.

“His grandfather’s friend,” Namjoon finally finds his voice, making his way over to Jeongguk’s side (trying his best to avoid the mess on the floor), “owned a farm Jeongguk used to visit.”

“You never mentioned that,” Yoongi mutters under his breath.

No, as far as Namjoon knew, Jeongguk hadn’t told anybody but him about it. It was a place he used to visit whenever he felt lonely or worthless. It must’ve been just over a month ago when Jeongguk finally told him. Jeongguk has never held back on the horrors of his past. It’s the happy memories he’s less keen to talk about, as if the very mention of them will somehow compel them out of existence.

Taehyung throws his head back and screams at the top of his lungs. The muscles in his inner thighs indicate that he’s trying desperately to close them, which would explain why Yoongi and Hoseok are fighting to hold them open.

Wordlessly, he offers Jeongguk the bowls. Jeongguk takes one. “Give the other to Jimin-hyung.
Taehyung needs to be kept hydrated. He’ll be losing a lot of fluids.”

After he hands Jimin the other bowl, he leans down to whisper in Jeongguk’s ear, “Gguk, if Taehyung conceived around the time you did…”

“Yeah… I know,” Jeongguk whispers back sadly, quietly. “Maybe it’ll be okay. The baby might be a little underdeveloped but they’ll survive.”

Namjoon feels Jeongguk’s heart falter. He gulps. “What can I do to help?”

“There’s nothing you can do for Taehyung right now.”

“What about you?”

The corners of Jeongguk’s lips twitch up in a smile. “I might be kneeling here for a while. If you could keep me comfortable that’d be great.”

Namjoon nods. “Yes, of course—whatever you need.”

The birth, in short, is brutal. Half the time it seems as though Taehyung doesn’t fully understand what is happening to him, making it all the more gruelling. He keeps trying to close his legs, as if doing so will stop the pain. Jimin does his best to hold Taehyung’s hands, even if the omega constantly attempts to tear at his stomach in confused anger. Throughout it all, Jeongguk is the steadiest. He’s always known his mate to be strong in his own special way. The fact that he’s endured life for this long is a testament itself. But throughout the birth, Jeongguk knows that there isn’t any time for panic or weakness. Taehyung needs him to be in control. To give off the impression that he knows what he’s doing even though he’s doubting himself on the inside.

Namjoon, for the most part, went to and from the rooms. Fetching water, pillows, blankets—whatever Jeongguk asked of him, he went and got it. When he wasn’t doing that, he helped Jeongguk change positions every so often to maintain blood circulation in his legs. Jeongguk shouldn’t have to be the one to deliver the baby. Not when he himself is mere months away from the due date.

At any moment he expects their captors to interfere, to gas them and take Taehyung away to deliver the baby themselves. It’d certainly increase the survival rates of the baby if it were being delivered
by professionals. But they never come.

Jeongguk doesn’t break.

Not until Taehyung has pushed the baby out and Jeongguk holds it in his arms. What came from Taehyung is something Namjoon could only describe as a monster. Half its torso is covered in wet, brown fur. An extra limb, which looks to be an animal paw, sticks out from its tiny ribcage. It’s missing a leg, and the other is so sickeningly deformed that the flesh doesn’t cover bone entirely. The face—the face looks as if it’s been pulled, the skull an odd, grotesque shape.

It does not take a breath.

Whatever spawned from Taehyung and Seokjin’s DNA did not live. Perhaps at some point the child was a perfectly healthy fetus, but their captors had made sure to destroy what essence of normality it had. Though he fails to see how a mutant stillborn benefitted them in any way shape or form.

“T’im so sorry,” Jeongguk whispers brokenly, so devastated that Namjoon can feel the omega’s heart breaking.

The mist eventually comes rolling through the vents. Taehyung doesn’t seem to hear them. He doesn’t even seem to see them.

Chapter End Notes

I promise you this was not done as shock value. There is a purpose to the events in this chapter which will be revealed next chapter.

Also this is the last time Taehyung goes through pain I SWEAR PLEASE DON’T HURT ME

Also to the people on my Curious Cat telling me to have a nice day and that they love and support me (without even pushing for updates) WHO GAVE YOU PERMISSION TO BE THAT ADORABLE?!!??!!
The 25th of January, Day 274

Chapter Notes

Warning(s): It's a chapter in the POV of a psychopath. I don't know how you could mentally prepare yourself for that. There is mentions of non-consensual voyeurism and implied isolation, manipulation and abuse.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The 25th of January,

Day 274

The wake is what Seokjin might describe as stale. A waste of time. Unnecessary. Seokjin makes a point of sitting alone at a table in the far corner of the room, fiddling with the cufflinks of his stuffy black suit. The funeral home where the burial took place host wakes that go hand in hand with the money paid for the service. Across the room, his grandfather is dabbing her eyes as she looks upon a portrait of his late dead mother, her daughter. Amongst the litter, his mother had been the youngest and only omega of the family aside from her mother. The rest were alphas and betas. Two uncles, three aunts, a bigger family than most. While his father is from an esteemed, wealthy Seocho dynasty, his mother came from old Korea, from the villages that stand steady even after hundreds of years, deep into the countryside. She had moved to Seoul hoping to get a job as a secretary, earn some money and independence. It was unfortunate that her future employer would eventually become her disappointment of a husband, who made sure to put an end to any dreams of independence before it could even settle into its crib.

In all honesty, he doubted the intentions of his father—as anyone who knows him as well as he does might. He likely attended as to not cause more bad blood between the families than there already is. Imagine the scandal. Mr Kim of Jeoweon Enterprises didn’t even have the decency to attend the funeral of his dead ex-wife, whom had given him his only heir. It would’ve caused a feeding frenzy in the newspapers. Tabloids dragging the Kim’s good name through the mud. They’ve always been desperate for an excuse to shine an unappealing light on his father. Mostly because he is the biggest dickhead on the face of the Earth, and everyone seems to know it without having any concrete evidence to prove it.

So, he supposes some credit is due.

His father stood beside him as they were lowering her casket into the ground. As his sobbing aunty cast a rose down upon it, his father had leaned over and said, “Crying is for the weak, Seokjin-ah.”
As if his hatred towards his father couldn’t simmer to a greater degree. Throughout the burial ceremony and wake service, he hasn’t so much as shed a tear over the death of his mother. He doesn’t really know how he should feel about it, really. She was the only person he’d felt the slightest bit of affection for. Though, he does still blame her for leaving his father when he was a mere seven years of age. He’s fifteen now, and he has still not forgotten the slight upon his situation. They tore apart the family, the both of them, like a pack of wolves fighting over a piece of meat, driven savage by their own pride. No matter how much he kicked and screamed to try and get his own way, he could not guilt his parents into suffering through the marriage any longer than it had lasted.

All around him are grim, saddened expressions. While his father maintains his stone-faced façade, he knows the man is secretly relieved to be rid of the woman. A divorce is a hideous stain on a person’s reputation, especially in South Korea, especially if the children of the marriage are still young and impressionable.

They think he’s funny. His uncles, aunties and cousins. In his grandparents’ eyes he can do no wrong, a grandchild who is not an omega could never be anything less than perfection. The extended family, however, blame his parents’ divorce for his unconventional personality, though they never dared speak of it in front of him. The manner in which they looked upon his mother was not lost on him. Not that it holds any value now. The second she announced she had terminal cancer the sneers and backstabbing started to sing a different tune. It was fascinating, to watch how drastically they changed. Hardened lines in their faces induced by tainted family honour softened to sadness and grief. As if they had any right to mourn the loss of someone they treated like a pariah for the last eight years.

A chair is pulled out beside him. He inclines his head to the side to see that it is Sooyeon, his father’s latest distraction.

Sooyeon is only five years older than him. As if the age difference didn’t disgust him enough, the day they met she’d giggled and asked him to call her ‘noona.’ Seokjin never deigned to chat with her after that. His mother was wasting away in a hospital bed while his father took a barely-legal omega into his bed. He bought her handbags and jewellery while refusing to pay for his mother’s medical bills. She went to the salon every fortnight while patches of his mother’s hair kept coming off in clumps in the shower. Sooyeon voluntarily starved herself to keep form while his mother struggled to keep down food every day.

He hates his father, but he just might hate Sooyeon just a little more.

“I’m terribly sorry for your loss,” the omega says to him, reaching over to clasp his hand. Seokjin
stares at her hand, and imagines himself snapping her fingers in the wrong directions. “I know that your mother and father have been separated for quite a while, but if it’s any consolation, he really does still love her in his own way.”

The woman is either daft or a liar.

Or both.

“Do you believe my father loves you, noona?” he asks with a forced smile. The term of endearment feels like poison on the tip of his tongue.

The corners of her mouth lift slightly, and she looks away shyly. “Your father has told me so. We’re even discussing marriage in the near future. I’m sure you’ll be needing the support of a step-mom in your life, now that Migyeong has passed.”

He tries to think of why Sooyeon is mentioning this here, of all places, when his mother has only been freshly buried in the earth. Though, he shouldn’t expect logic from someone who prioritises her looks over every other aspect of her life.

“Have you ever wanted a sibling, Seokjin-ah?”

He gives her a curious look.

She smiles excitedly. “A little brother or sister? I’m hoping one day I could give your father an alpha. He often talks about how he always wished you were born an alpha. I can’t change your class of course—but maybe I could give him the next best thing. How does that sound, hm? As an only child I’m sure you’ve always felt a little lonely.”

One cannot help but wonder if this is some sort of thinly veiled threat. Seokjin appraises her, looking for any sign that she may be genuinely trying to ruin his life, but thinks better of it. If the idiot really were that diabolical, she wouldn’t have been stupid enough to confide the details with him in advance.

Sinking into the charming waters of a familiar deception, he moves to take her hands into his own. “Noona, nothing would make me happier than to have a baby brother or sister. I often dream about having a sibling to dote on and care for. If you and my father do decide to have children, you have
“my complete support.”

Sooyeon pulls him into a hug, barely able to contain her enthusiasm surrounded by the sorrow of a grieving family. Seokjin returns the hug. The rate of his heart accelerates somewhat, at the sudden entertaining possibilities laid out before him. Perhaps fate has seen fit to grant him another chance at control. To seize and dictate.

Oh Sooyeon.

You silly, silly fool.

Seokjin breaks from the memory as the elevator doors finally open. It’s such an idle trip from the surface to the bottom floor of the facility. There are an abundance of levels that tunnel thousands of meters below the Earth’s surface, with the levels at the top serving as offices and board rooms where investors are expected to be worshipped and pleased. Further down is where things serve a much more interesting purpose. The bottom floor is where the less conventional, more extreme experiments take place. A few floors above are where the ethical and humane research experiments take place—what their genetic and stem cell research company, Cheongwa Inc., is publicly known for. At least, before it became apart of his father conglomerate. They’ve worked hard to maintain the previous integrity crafted painstakingly by the previous owners, but after the merger was official, Seokjin had certain scientific ambitions. Ambitions which his father only has vague knowledge about.

He takes all but two steps down the hallway towards his second office when Hongmin, his assistant, is upon him. The only reason he’d agreed to hire Hongmin—at the insistence of his father, who said, “No deputy CEO can run a business without at least one assistant!”—was because he’s an alpha. And bossing around alphas is always good fun.

“We are to address him as Omega 3, Hongmin. How many times do I have to repeat myself?” How the alpha cowers pumps a shot of adrenaline into his veins. He has the sudden urge to shake the man violently, just to see if he’d piss himself.

Hongmin squeaks. “So sorry—sir—I’ve just been informed that Omega 3 has gone into labour. Contractions are quite far apart. Doctors predict that it’ll be a lengthy birth.”
His heart skips with glee. Oh, he hopes it is a lengthy birth. “They didn’t give him an epidural, did they?”

“N-no, sir. Your specific orders were to not give Omega 3 any pain relief during the birth.”

“And Alpha 1 has been placed in an observational chamber?”

“Yes, the neuroscientists tasked with observing the bond between Alpha 1 and Omega 3 are watching very closely in Observation Deck A. A number of cameras have been set up to record the birth and the impact it has on both subjects.”

“And Alpha 1 is responding to Omega 3’s contractions?”

“It would seem so, sir.”

“Good. Anything else?” He continues to walk towards his office, which is just a few corridors over from the main chamber where they are keeping his little pack.

Hongmin hesitates, as he always does before bringing up something that displeases him.

Rolling his eyes, he snaps, “Spit it out.”

“Sir, about the control room operators—”

“You mean the ones I had punished for their incompetence?”

“Yes, sir. There was a request by one of the executives to finally have them released. Their families are getting restless as the days drag on, and the board of directors fear that they may go against the nondisclosure agreements they signed if we prolong the punishment any longer.”

The unexpected birth of his child had been poorly handled. After dinner is served to subjects, many of the employees go home, leaving three control room operators that work throughout the night to ensure there are no complications. Scientists would often remain to observe as well, but it
just so happened on that particularly night, there weren’t any. If there are any sudden changes, operators are tasked with alerting the proper authorities (i.e. head handlers, chief scientists and—well—him).

Around the time Taehyung’s water broke, two of the three operators had gone to the surface for a smoke, while one remained. He just so happened to have dozed off, his headset fallen to the wayside. By the time the other operators returned Taehyung had already pushed out his child. A stillborn birth.

Suffice to say their excuses fell on deaf ears.

He made sure to punish them, slowly and painfully. It was at the insistence of other employees that he did not remove any limbs, but amputation was not the only form of torture at his disposal.

“Release them, then. Be sure that they and their families are threatened. I don’t want my father finding out about this in a newspaper tabloid.”

“W-would you like your father informed, sir?” Hongmin takes out a notepad from his back pocket and starts furiously jotting down what he says.

“No, I would not. The less he knows the better.”

“Right.”

“Bring Alpha 2 to my office in about half an hour,” he orders right outside the room in question.

“Blindfolded or unconscious, sir?”

Either one would be enough to excite him, but he does enjoy Yoongi more when he’s conscious and feisty. “Blindfolded.”

Nervously, the assistant gulps, hand shaking as he writes.
“Are we done?”

“I—” he doesn’t give the alpha time to finish before he’s slamming the door in his face.

The word “office” only vaguely describes what the room actually is. He has an official office back in Seoul, on the second highest level of his father’s law firm company with a view looking over the city skyline. Whenever he is attempting to woo investors, or perhaps gather information from an unsuspecting target, he would invite them there just as dusk settles over the skyscrapers. A glass of champagne and a touch of fantasy is usually enough to honey any guarded soul. It is also where he gets most of his work done.

No contracts or mergers are observed in the shadow of his second office. There isn’t even a cup to hold pens and pencils, or paper to write on. In the corner is a mattress he sleeps on when he can’t be bothered taking the two-hour train ride back to his apartment. It takes forty-five minutes to reach the surface alone, going back to an empty shell of a home hardly seems worth the effort when he could just stay here, where the endless entertainment is at his fingertips. Pressed up against the wall to the right is his own little control panel of sorts, not nearly as impressive as the ones found in the control rooms, but it doesn’t need to be. It’s only a shrine to stimulate the voyeur within him. To watch and relive.

As he settles into the armchair he has situated before the television screens, he thinks it is appropriate to get himself warmed up for Yoongi. It has been about a month since they’ve seen one another. Might as well give the man a proper welcome.

All around him are copies of VHS tapes. He really does loathe them. VHS tapes have been off the market for almost two hundred years, but it was at the insistence of their technology experts that they be used in place of the standard slides, as, since they have been in commercial circulation, have trackers inbuilt into their encryptions. Since they started taking people, the executives didn’t feel it wise to use anything that could potentially be tracked by government agencies, even if they had private informants working within the senate.

The tapes have been categorised. Those that involve individuals are organised from oldest to youngest, and those involving two or more individuals are organised alphabetically. Recorded footage of subjects performing sexual acts are in order from his favourite to least favourite.

When the panel switches on, the largest television in the centre asks for his passcode. Once he types it in and presses enter, the television, along with the smaller screens surrounding it, flicker to his most recently viewed videos. The video in the centre automatically starts to play, while the others remain frozen in time. Hoseok lays naked on his stomach in a nest, scratching his scalp, while Jimin sits on the floor, nude and contemplative. Seokjin can identify every one of the videos on the smaller screens, despite their low quality and heavy pixilation. Yoongi masturbating alone in
his one-man cell. Jeongguk and Namjoon’s first and only argument, which ended with sappy, tearful apologies so nauseating even he almost gagged. Taehyung in the hallucinogenic chamber, screaming and crying for his pack to come save him. Hoseok’s semen being extracted for further testing. Jimin attacking a handler that looked at him funny. So many capsules into the growth of his little family. So many moments he can call upon just at the press of a button.

“Have you ever wondered what it’s like to be pregnant?” Jimin asks Hoseok quietly, eyes staring far off into the distance.

He allows the video on the main screen to play out as he sifts through his collection. He keeps his favourites in the draw to his immediate right. Easy access.

Hoseok turns over in the nest that isn’t really theirs. It is but a mere imitation of the one they share in the main chamber. “I don’t like to think about it,” the alpha whines. “Pregnancy is scary and painful.”

The omega snorts. “Figures. I reckon pregnancy is a conspiracy.”

Grin stretched wide and indulgent, the alpha looks down at the omega. “Conspiracy? How did you come up with that conclusion?”

“We could all impregnate and get pregnant at some point in time, maybe things like alphas and betas and omegas didn’t exist up until a certain point. I reckon one group didn’t like another, wanted to control them, wanted to make them pay, so they were only allowed to be impregnated. This practice happened over generations and eventually, only one group could get the other pregnant, and it couldn’t work visa versa.”

“You reckon?”

“Yeah, I reckon.”

“Why though? Seems like a lot of effort to go to just ‘cus you don’t like a certain group.”

Jimin shrugs. “That’s what systemic oppression is, Hobi. A whole lot of effort to keep power on one side and not the other. Pregnancy is just the tip of the iceberg—if omegas are the only ones having children then they’re preoccupied with child rearing, and don’t have the time or energy to
deal with the real issues that keep them from making any difference in the system that subjugates them.”

“You’re really smart for a prostitute, you know,” Hoseok comments, impressed. “You sure you never went to university?”

Seokjin runs his hands over the labels of the tapes.

“Pretty sure I’d remember.”

His least favourite videos are the least explicit ones. The ones where there is very little nudity, and mostly just rutting and sloppy hand jobs. Hoseok and Jimin are actually the biggest offenders of this, as Jimin will do just about anything than be underneath Hoseok. They do have their moments, though.

“I read a lot of books about it. Watched some videos, too. There’ve been so many times where I’ve been faced with classism but I couldn’t articulate why it was problematic or harmful. It was infuriating.”

Seokjin picks one of he and Yoongi. There are many, many videos of the two of them, but this one in particular is special, because they were forced to be creative with when and where they had sex, at least back when they were sharing the main chamber with everybody else. It was actually their first time fucking. Back when Yoongi was naïve enough to believe he was all talk and no action.

Hoseok reaches over to place a hand on Jimin’s shoulder. “Hey, you know I’d never treat you that way, right?”

“Yeah, well, that’s what they all say, Hobi.”

He pops out the tape and replaces it with the one he chose. Just as his finger thumbs over the play button, the anticipation intensifying, there’s an unwelcomed knock at the door.

“Come in,” he calls calmly, as he ponders slowly disembowelling the person disturbing his alone time.
“I—sir?” it’s Hongmin. Funny, he thought he made it perfectly clear that he didn’t want any disruptions when he slammed the door in his face. Maybe next time he’ll have to wait until his assistant is standing in the doorframe. A broken nose might do him some good.

Without turning to look over his shoulder, he asks, “What is it?”

“I’m so sorry for the disturbance—please forgive me—you know I wouldn’t bother you if I didn’t think it was of utmost importance.”

“Carry on,” he drawls, eying the control panel. If he played the video anyway on full volume, would his assistant be so disturbed he would see fit to run off? It might just be worth a try.

“It’s your father. He just arrived—”

“Did he now?” he hums amusedly. “Come to see his dear son, has he?”

“A—Actually, he’s here to look at the progress you and the team have made over the past nine months.”

Seokjin nods. “Be a dear and tell father I’ll be with him in a moment.”

When he realises Hongmin hasn’t left, he finally turns to look at his assistant. The alpha shifts from one foot to the other, casting apprehensive glances over his shoulder, as though expecting a madman wielding a machete to pop out at any moment and attack him. To be fair though, Hongmin always looks like that. It’s just annoying him because instead of leaving, like he should, he continues to be a nuisance.

He sighs. “What is it, Hongmin?”

“H-H-He says you must come now.”

“Right.”
Standing, he regretfully leaves the still images of he and Yoongi in the recreational area to follow his assistant out into the corridor. It is a shame. He was quite looking forward to getting his dick hard to some low-quality porn starring his favourite main character, Yoongi, but while he does loathe his father, disobeying blatantly won’t be doing him any favours.

Expectations led him to believe he’d be escorted to some private room on a different floor, somewhere where his father can release the pin on his grenade and explode without causing a scene. Composure is his specialty. He always used to say those who maintain coolness in the face of stress triumph over others. Only in the presence of those he sees fit to benefit from, it would seem, because he does not stick to this logic whenever it concerns his son. Perhaps over time he has begun to see him more as an outlet of stress than an actual human being. Seokjin never reacts the way a normal person might. He’s never bothered or offended by the theatrics of profanity and humiliation. And why would he? It never made him cry as a child, and it certainly wouldn’t make him cry now.

Instead of heading in the direction of the elevator, they take a few turns in the direction of the observational bay. An escalator takes them up to a stainless-steel double door. Seokjin places his hand on the scanning pad, and the doors open onto an observation deck. It’s a large, rectangular room, with gigantic, towering windows on either side that slant upwards so that the separate rooms on either side may be looked upon more thoroughly.

It isn’t normal to see Observation Deck A bustling with so much activity. It is the largest observation deck in the entire underground facility, and is only ever used when two noteworthy events occur concurrent to one another. Scientists flank either side of the windowed walls, and for those at their desks, look upon both scenes from their computer screens.

Jeongguk and Namjoon’s screams of pain nearly drown out the hum of excited conversation occurring between the employees. Seokjin doesn’t pay them any mind. His eyes immediately fall to the stout man standing alone at the other side of the room, an old, sun-spotted face illuminated by the fluorescent lights that beam through the windows. Hongmin wisely doesn’t follow him all the way to where his father stands. Instead, he nervously lingers by the exit, pointedly avoiding any screens that may showcase what is taking place down below.

“Your ambitions were a failure. I told you not to take it too far, and as always you didn’t listen to me,” his father grunts when Seokjin is mere feet from him.

“Hello, father. That’s awfully brash of you. The experiment wasn’t just a failure, I lost a child that day, too,” he chirps as he turns to see what his father stares so blankly at.

Down below, Jeongguk lies on a birthing table with his legs in stirrups and his hands strapped to the metal bars. Most of the moisture on his contort expression is sweat, but there’s certain to be
tears there, too. The other half must be in the room behind them, also strapped and experiencing terrible pains. The scientists would be having a field day. Namjoon may be the first alpha to experience the agony of birth firsthand in over a hundred years. They’ll want to interview him and dissect his thought process when this is all well and done. Actually, he wouldn’t be the least bit surprised if someone was down there with the alpha asking him questions at this very moment. How responsive he’d be to those responses…

His father snorts in dry amusement. If anyone on God’s green Earth knew of Seokjin’s disregard for others, it is his father. “You’ve barely set foot in the law firm these past nine months. I granted you leave to work solely on the projects we had in their planning stages, and I was only just informed that you completely hijacked one our most sensitive operations.”

“Their aspirations were weak,” he explains simply. “Why would we risk kidnapping individuals for a concept as old and tired as Nature versus Nurture when we can do so much more. An experiment without limitations, an experiment without ethical or moral boundaries holding us back—the opportunities were ripe for the taking. How could I stand by and watch them ruin it all? Any asshole can do a dissertation paper about the environmental and parental influences of a child’s development, my goals—my vision has so much more purpose.”

“Where’s Jeongguk? Where is he? I need to be with him! I need to—augh!” Namjoon’s voice echoes from the monitors.

Turning to finally look at him, his father regards him with his usual stern disapproval. “It ends here, Jin. I’m pulling the whole operation. You’ve sunk too much time and resources into this experiment and the only thing you have to show for it is a stillborn infant.”

“If you could give me more time—”

“You’ve been absent from your duties as deputy CEO of my conglomerate for over nine months,” the older man growls. “The temporary replacement you assigned has suffered severe balding from the stress. Do you think I made you heir to my empire because you were my son? I chose you because I knew you had the spine for it. It ends here, Jin. I’ve grown tired of you playing House with your dolls.”

Seokjin is sure not to allow any emotion at all when he asks, “What will you have me do with them?”

“Whatever you have to do,” he says, looking him straight in the eye. “Keep them quiet. Kill them if you have to. If any of this gets out to the public everything our family has worked so hard to
achieve will come to an end.”

“Please—please, where’s Namjoon? Won’t you bring him to me?”

He tilts his head curiously at him. “You will allow me to do whatever I want with them? What if I wanted to keep them as pets?”

“As long as it isn’t traced back to my funds it isn’t my business. I just want them out of this facility.”

A particularly loud cry pierces the room, and his eyes are cast to the omega below them. “What of the child? What would you have me do with it?”

“We stick to the original plan. There’s still some scientific benefit to be had.”

“As you say, father. I’ll make arrangements to have them out of your hair shortly after the child is born.”

“You will also return to your duties back in Seoul.”

“I shall. Expect me in my office first thing on Monday morning.”

The conversation leaves him slightly hollow inside. It’s odd to feel anything at all, especially when it comes to his father, but he concludes that it must be disappointment. Yes, that’s what it must be. There was an abundance of other things he had planned for his little family. While his initial intention was to break them, it seems the bonds formed between them have proven to be a source of comfort and strength. The chief psychologist was particular thrilled in the behavioural development, as if it held value. Maybe this is how it was always supposed to be, though. This is the spider he isn’t meant to cut the legs off of. It is infinitely less amusing, but there are always other avenues he could take.

“Sir!” his assistant catches up to him. “Your office is the other way.”

He rolls his eyes. “Yes, I’m aware of that.”
“Where are you going? Shall I put your appointment with Alpha 2 on hold?”

Halting mid-step, he thinks. “I’m heading to the north wing to visit Hyunwoo. Take Omega 2 there. As a man of science himself, I’m sure he’ll find it all very intriguing.”

The snivelling alpha gulps, rigidly nodding his head. “Yes, very good, sir. I shall notify the handlers right away.”

“See that you do.”

Seokjin is glad to be rid of the assistant. If not for the fact that he benefitted from having the assistant around to do the idle errands he dislikes, he may have rid himself of him long ago. The north wing is much deeper into the facility, and a lot more difficult to access than the observation decks are. There isn’t even an elevator in the facility that could take you there. The entire bottom level is rigged with explosives, particularly in the main halls that web out from the central elevators. If their secret were to get out, people would evacuate and all evidence would be destroyed. The north wing, in particular, would be buried completely.

Stairs are uncommon. The facility is modern, perhaps as young as sixty years old, so most areas are accessible through elevators and escalators. The north wing is the only place that has a descending staircase.

It’s almost disorientating, how the stairs spiral further and further into the ground. If it weren’t for the superb ventilation the temperature would be uncomfortably frigid. The sound of his shoes against the concrete bounce off the high ceilings. There aren’t as many employees around here. Everyone serves a purpose, and every access point only allows the right kind of people inside. Every person who works here, from the janitor to the chief psychologist, has their hand print recorded into the security system. Control room operators have access to control rooms, but not cells and chambers, while handlers will have access to chambers, but only those high up in command have access to observation decks.

One of the perks of being the heir is that his handprint allows access to all areas of the facility, off-limits or otherwise.

To get to the laboratory, he has to pass through three access points and a disinfectant chamber. Some lab assistants offer him a hair net, gloves and a mask.
“Are you here to feed the wolf, sir?” one of them asks.

At the nod of his head, the assistant scrambles to get a tub full of fresh steaks from the refrigerator. Seokjin steps into the main area. Lined up along the sides are hallucinogenic chambers. The very same ones used on Taehyung in an attempt to trigger the epigenetic strain that lies dormant in his DNA. As he ventures deeper, chambers turn to glass casings of corpses fully submerged in formaldehyde.

In the beginning the casings, for the most part, host bodies of humans, frozen in varying stages of metamorphosis. Those closer to the entrance show humans with crooked spins and limbs twisted grotesquely in the wrong directions. A human with patches of fur sprouting from their back and torso. One of them has their eyes open, round and golden like an animal. However, as he reaches the back of the room, the humans become larger and less grotesque, more fully-formed and healthier. They died, too. In the centre at the very back of the room is a curtain-covered cage. Behind it are two larger glass displays. One is of a human with a wolf’s tail and half the skin of their leg torn to reveal muscle. The other, a wolf with half the face of a human, permanently frozen in a state of pain. Hanging from the ceiling above the cage is a small casing, so tiny that one might not even notice it if they didn’t know where to look. It holds the deformed body of his stillborn child. It was so hideously mutated they couldn’t even tell what it’s first and second gender were.

Something stirs beneath the curtain. Something big. It must smell the bucket of steaks. Seokjin places it down a little away from the cage and checks his phone for any updates on the others. Control operators, Group 9A’s main handlers, and the psychologists and neuroscientists assigned in observing them are obligated to send him any news regarding the six subjects.

According to one of neuroscientists, whom he’d briefly seen in the observation deck, Jeongguk has dilated three centimetres.

There also seems to have been a small rebellion in the main chamber. One of the control operators brief him on how Omega 1, Omega 2 and Alpha 2 attacked a handler as he was escorting Omega 3 and Alpha 1 from the room. As if Seokjin is supposed to feel sympathy for the woman Taehyung took a bite out of. Why should he? An alpha that can’t command omegas is about as useful as an infertile one.

The echo of doors opening catches his attention. Looking up from his phone, he’s pleased to see Yoongi being ushered over to him. His long, silver hair is ruffled and knotted. There’s a bruise that blossoms like ink upon his pale skin. They stop at arm’s reach from him. Seokjin snatches Yoongi’s wrist and pulls him closer, thumbing at the purple blotch. Yoongi remains emotionless.
The handlers turn to leave, but freeze when he commands, “Stop.”

They turn back to him, confusion apparent in the way they look at one another.

“Who hit him? I thought my rules were clear. Their faces aren’t to be harmed.”

“It was another handler, sir,” one of them speaks cautiously. “The one who attempted to restrain the other subjects when Omega 3 went into labour. She’s currently in the medical bay with bite wounds sustained in the struggle.”

“See that she is punished.”

The other one, who hadn’t spoken, steps forward. “Sir, it was an accident—”

“Yes, I’m sure. A suitable punishment will teach her not to make the same mistake again.” When neither of the handlers move, Seokjin smiles. “Am I going to have to repeat myself?”

Both handlers bow. “No, sir. We’ll deliver the message to administration.”

“Leave.”

They hurry out of the laboratory, their footsteps carrying across the vast, cluttered space. Around them are tables and desks, cleared of any hazards but no less cluttered than that of university students’ dorm room. Some of them even are university students. It is surprisingly easy to exploit internships when people are so desperate to have their company’s reputable name on their résumés.

The moment they’re left in sweet solitude Yoongi kicks him in the groin and punches him in the face. His head snaps back painfully from the force and he hits the floor hard. Yoongi kicks him in the stomach over and over again, pretty complexion screwed into a hateful snarl. Despite the pain surging through his body, he manages to grab Yoongi’s foot and twist his ankle. The alpha yells in shock and hits the floor. Yoongi must’ve landed funny, because he nurses his wrist along with his ankle.

“You always go for the fucking ankles,” Yoongi spits, crawling away from him like a wounded
Seokjin struggles to sit up, wiping the blood from the corner of his mouth. “I see you’ve missed me dearly this past month. Although I was hoping our reunion would involve a little more fucking and a little less fighting.”

“I fucking hate you,” he hisses through gritted teeth. “I hate you so fucking much. I didn’t want to believe you did it. That there was some sort of mistake, that you were lying about that shit because you take so much fucking pleasure in lying to me. But when I reunited with them—my pack, my family, I saw what you’d done to all of them. What you did to Taehyung especially. I should’ve killed you. I should’ve killed you when I had the chance.”

Leaning against the leg of a table, he takes a few seconds to catch his breath. The pain in his stomach and groin throb nastily, reflecting the bitter sentiments of man who caused it. “You didn’t, though. Why is that?”

“I don’t fucking know!” he growls angrily.

“I think you do know.”

“No, I don’t.”

“I think you like to talk a big game to make people think you’re in control, but inside you’re afraid and you’re lonely. You didn’t want to kill me because killing me would’ve made you just as despicable and guilty as your rapist father.” He laughs, shaking his head. “What if the rest of the pack discovered you were a murderer? They’d never look at you the same ever again.”

Yoongi tests to see if his ankle is broken. He flinches when he tries to flex his toes. “Don’t kid yourself. It’s like you said, you were never part of the pack to begin with. Killing you would’ve done us all a big favour.”

“Yes, well, here I am, still healthy and alive. Guess you aren’t as tough as I pegged you to be, Min.”

The glare the younger man shoots him could melt iron. “Did you really just bring me here to fuck me?”
Finding the strength to pull himself to his feet, he groans, stretching his legs and back like a feline. “Father found out what I’ve been doing. He’s very mad. This could be the last time we get to see each other. Isn’t it a shame?”

As he approaches the cage, he makes sure to be deliberate and sensual. Yoongi might think that he doesn’t know it, but he can sense the alpha’s fox-like gaze follow him to the cage. For someone who perceives himself as morally sound, he is quite a slave to his own hormones. This doesn’t come as a surprise. Any alpha’s priority, whether they are consciously aware of it or not, is what hangs between their legs. Alphas are known to abandon their own principles if deprived of sexual relief for long enough. There was always a chance Yoongi would be different. Observing him in his natural environment, there were times he doubted the alpha had a sexual bone in his body. It turned out not to be true in the end. Yoongi has entertained him well.

He firmly fists the material of the curtain yanks it away to reveal what stirs behind it. Yoongi’s gasp gets drowned by the sound of material collapsing on the floor. Hyunwoo is up on all fours, stalking along the perimeter of the giant, iron cage. The alpha wolf pays him little mind. Its eyes are glued to Yoongi. A perceived threat.

“What the fuck is that?” the guarded edge to Yoongi’s voice smothers any frequency of fear.

Seokjin sighs blissfully. “Beautiful, isn’t he?”

The beast stops to pull its snout back in a snarl, its deep, guttural growl reverberating off the walls. Excitement courses through him as he picks up a cold, slimy steak from the bucket and casts it between the gaps in the bars. Hyunwoo gives Yoongi one last, scathing glare before scampering off to feast.

Yoongi is speechless.

He smiles proudly. “There are only a hundred people in South Korea that carry the cluP- gene. We had to scour through thousands of reported cases of diagnosed schizophrenia, and twice as many blood test results. There was no previous evidence to suggest that their genes could lead to any leaps in scientific discovery, only that their genes could be traced back to our oldest human ancestors. At first, we tried on subjects that didn’t possess the gene. Their bodies contorted and their bones broke, as if they had every intension of transforming but didn’t have the requirements to do so.”
“Did it ever occur to you that maybe those genes were dormant for a reason? Maybe you were never meant to mess with them in the first place.” Yoongi looks between Seokjin and the wolf. “Look around you. How can you justify this with the amount of lives you’ve ruined?”

Hyunwoo swallows the steak easily. For a monster his size the meat has about the same nutritional equivalent as a small mouse. He throws a second steak into the cage.

“My research was going to resurrect an ability believed to be dead for hundreds of thousands of years. I would say that the sacrifice was absolutely justified.” He turns back to the alpha, who is still crippled on the floor. “Shapeshifters. The power to change into one of the most dangerous killers in the history of planet Earth. It would’ve been praised and reviled. It would’ve brought unprecedented chaos back into this modern, sterile, morally-righteous world.”

The way Yoongi looks at him is amusing. It’s as though a second head were beginning to sprout from his neck. “It didn’t go quite as planned, though. Dear old Hyunwoo here does not have the ability to change back into his human form. He’s stuck permanently as he is. A beast without human intellect is just that, my sweet. Just a beast.”

Unwilling to remain looking up at Seokjin, Yoongi uses a desk chair to help him to his feet. He leans against the desk, but his eyes never waver from him. Not for a moment. “How does Taehyung factor into all of this? He carries the gene, but whatever you did to him didn’t turn him into a beast with the mind of a human.”

“The kid is feral,” he agrees. “With Taehyung I decided to take a different road. We could’ve done exactly what we did with every other experiment regarding the cluP- gene, but this time I didn’t want to. It would be a waste for an omega so gorgeous to end up hideously deformed in one of these casings, wouldn’t it?”

“Raping and impregnating him was your solution then, was it?” he states hotly.

“Well, if transforming an already fully-grown person wasn’t working, I figured messing with the genetics of an unborn child was the next logical leap. We pushed Omega 2—”

“—Taehyung. His name is Taehyung.”

“—up to a point where his DNA was on the verge of mutating, and hoped it would be passed on to the child I put in him. Some of the experts got a little nervous, though. They feared that if we didn’t
take things to the extreme, we wouldn’t get any conclusive results at all. Part of the triggering process involves enhancing the symptoms. If you disorient the senses to a specific point, the cluP-gene is unlocked almost as a defence mechanism. To put it in simple terms, anyway.”

“You scrambled his mind.”

“We did what was necessary.”

“The baby died!” Yoongi yells. Hyunwoo skitters back and forth in his cage anxiously. Seokjin calmly throws him another steak. “It would’ve been a healthy baby if you hadn’t been so eager to play God!”

“Spare you theatrics,” he yawns. “You’re boring when you act like a third-rate prima donna.”

“What about the rest of us? We don’t have the gene. What did you stand to gain from tearing the rest of us from our lives?”

Without warning, he strides up to the alpha. Yoongi nearly panics and falls off the side of the desk, but Seokjin grabs him at the last second and bends him over it. With a fist in his hair he presses the side of the man’s face into the scattered papers strewn all over the desk.

When he doesn’t give an answer straight away, the alpha has the balls to scoff at him. He wouldn’t expect any less from his darling Yoongi. “You’re a psychopath, but I at the very least took you for a man of motivation,” he spits at him.

Seokjin laughs. “Boredom was my motivation. I gave the company and my father a few incentives to keep them at bay, promises that I knew I couldn’t keep, all so I could have some new toys to play with. And oh, did you serve me well.”

“Everything coming out of your mouth is a fucking lie.”

He leans over to murmurs into the alpha’s ear. “You’re stupider than you give yourself credit for, Min. I gave everyone good enough distractions to keep them busy, to maintain the illusion that they were working towards something of significance, but in the end everything that has happened to you and your family happened because I willed it. Namjoon and Jeongguk claimed each other because I knew they would. Taehyung went as mad as a dog because I gave the order. The only
reason Jimin can still stand to raise his chin in defiance is because it amuses me. I made Hoseok the rat. I wanted him to go behind your backs because it was fucking funny to watch him struggle to keep it all inside him. You think I took you because I had some higher purpose for you? You think there’s a justified reason behind it? Has being around me all this time taught you nothing about me?"

A lick of satisfaction hums in his fingertips as he feels the fight leaving Yoongi’s body. His shoulders slump, the tension in his body limp with defeat. “You could’ve just kidnapped us yourself. Why involve the company? The scientists? Your father?”

“Why screw over six lives when I could screw with dozens?” he shrugs. “I had the resources, I had the opportunity. It would be foolish of me not to do what I did.”

“Foolish and humane are not the same thing.”

He places his hand on Yoongi’s back and presses into him. The alpha tries to lift his foot to kick him, but is quickly reminded of the fact that he injured it.

“They are to me,” he punctuates slowly.

Chapter End Notes

God, it feels so good to finally be able to say Taehyung wasn't the wolf in chapter 6 XD

Also I'll be responding to comments from the previous chapter later today~
False Freedom

Chapter Notes

Warning(s): Mentions of prostitution and implied child prostitution

See the end of the chapter for more notes

False Freedom

As consciousness bleeds back to him, somewhere in the very back of his mind he wonders. The
dryness in his mouth, the tension in his temples threatening to go galloping into the thresholds of a
full-blown migraine at just the slightest jerk of his head, the gentle, mysterious throbbing in his
muscles, these symptoms have become so unsettlingly familiar with him that they’re on par with
the burn of liquor sterilising his throat and smoke in blackening lungs. It begs the question: where
will he wake up this time? When he bothers to peel back his eyelids and cringe through the
momentary bleariness, will he be somewhere he recognizes or somewhere foreign? He could just
be back where he belongs, in the four-room cell he shares with the rest of his pack. It could be in
the smaller cell he shared with Hoseok for a few months. There’ve been times he awakens alone in
an even smaller cell, no bigger than that of a toilet cubicle. Those are the worst. Often he’d find
himself staring for hours, immersed in painful nothingness until someone finally came along to
take him somewhere.

Just to make sure that this isn’t the case, he throws an arm out. It falls, hitting something solid but
soft. Come to the think of it, where they’ve taken him feels more comfortable than he’s been in a
bloody long time. The nests were about as close to actual mattresses that they had, but even then,
they weren’t completely flat. Namjoon insisted the odd curvatures had something to do with
supporting the backs of pregnant omegas.

When he breathes in, he tastes something dank and mossy on his tongue. Jimin can’t recall a
fragrance other than those of his pack that didn’t reek of sterile chemicals. Still, scents are
notoriously stubborn to shake off. The only way to truly wash out a scent is to bath in tea tree oils
and eucalyptus. And if you knew someone who had a eucalyptus scent you were fucked. That
shit’ll follow you to the grave. So even in solitude Jimin could still detect them on his skin.
Taehyung’s chocolate, vanilla and cherries. Hoseok’s rain and sawdust. Yoongi’s spring and hail.
Jeongguk’s sugar and peppermint. Namjoon’s earth and musk. Even Seokjin’s…

Prying his eyelids apart, he has to blink a few times because he realises the environment he’s in
isn’t immediately attempting to assault his vision. There is light, but it’s gentle and forgiving.
Natural light.
He immediately sits up.

The first thing he notices is that he’s in a bed. Not a futon, not on top of a blanket or a nest, but an actual fucking *double-bed*. With sheets, and a mattress, and a bedframe, and blankets, and pillows. His heart throbs against his ribcage. To the right is a window with slated blinds, and sunshine casts light over the foot of the bed. There’s a thin layer of snow on the windowsill.

His first instinct is to tumble out of bed and run to the window. He struggles to pull up the blinds because they stubbornly persist on falling further down.

“Fuck you!” he screams, right before the blinds right themselves above the window.

Throwing it open he’s hit with a piercing winter breeze that smacks him square in the chest. A temperature other than room-temperature. Goose pimples go running up his arms and his body releases a shudder, but he doesn’t care. He sticks his head out the window, out into the frigid air. His hands touch snow. It bites into his skin and turns it red, but it’s real fucking snow. Gazing over the aging roofs of neighbouring buildings, it takes him a moment to realise exactly where he is. Just across the street are stairs leading underground, a sign out the front that says: “Namguro Station, Entrance 3.” It’s his neighbourhood.

Closing the window slowly, he turns and catches himself in the reflection of a mirror, positioned on the other side of the double-bed, above a linoleum counter. His hands are trembling. He isn’t draped in the degrading piece of lingerie those bastards forced him to wear day in and day out for almost the entirety of his captivity. Instead, he’s in a wrinkly, faded blue hospital gown. His name is even mockingly stitched neatly onto the breast pocket. Is this some sort of joke? Are they trying to trick him into believing that he’s free?

Slowly approaching the counter, he notices a small bowl of sliced pineapple. It appears to be fresh. Beside it is a little note.

*It’s cold outside. Here is a coat to keep you warm.*

The message, ironically, sends a chill down his spine. Suddenly this room (which he is beginning to piece together is a motel room of sorts) no longer possesses the cheap, welcoming charm that it had when he first awoke. The feeling of being watched settles over him like trickles of ice-cold water webbing down across his spine. The box television in the corner is glaring at him. The old ceiling fan is listening to him. The wooden vanity has eyes.
He turns it over hoping to find more information, but he doesn’t. Looking up and around the room, he notices a goose-down, shin-length black coat hanging on a hook by the door. Jimin almost can’t believe it’s the first time he’s noticed the door in the corner of the room. It has a map of some kind on the back, detailing the emergency exits. Above it is a peephole. He peeks through it, but all he sees is concrete flooring, railings and blue skies. Hesitantly, he reaches out and places his hands through the armholes. Preferably, he wouldn’t like to touch anything that was purposely brought to his attention, because almost everything has a significance in experiments and tests, but in this situation he doesn’t have much of a choice. The hitting cool air caressing his back reminds him that he has nothing on but underwear and a thin hospital gown, and if he had to guess, outside is somewhere between five to ten degrees below zero. He wouldn’t get very far out there without a coat.

Beside the door, nestled under where the coat hung from a hook, are a pair of slippers. At some point in time they might’ve been white, but now it has turned into mouldy, yellowish colour that even someone as tight on cash as he is winces at. Still, he slips them on alongside the coat. After zipping it up and fixing the buttons, he looks around for any articles of clothing that may spare him from the winter. He avoids the television and the radio.

There are some old socks in the vanity wardrobe. The black wool is itchy against his skin, but it’s better than nothing.

Unable to remain within the oppressive bedroom for a second longer, he places his hand on the doorknob. But then—then he waits. He waits for a shadow to spring from underneath the bed and tackle him to the ground. A voice he doesn’t recognise to tell him he can’t leave. This has to be a trick. Are they testing him to see what he’ll do? Is this some mockery of what he’s been wishing—praying for all these endless days? Should he stay put just in case? There’s a telephone on the counter, but will it ring or will the dial be dead?

Slowly, he inhales through his nose.

Either way, he can’t stay here. He has to go back to his apartment. He has to believe that it was all just one big nightmare, and that he’ll return home to find it in the exact same state he’d left it in.

A few more moments pass, and he’s still standing there, frozen.

He scoffs. “So fucking stupid.”
He’s being ridiculous.

Turning the knob, his heart skips a beat as he wonders if it will actually open. The knob turns all the way. Jimin gulps and opens the door just a little bit. A wave of cool air enters, rustling his long, jet black tassels. With a burst of courage, he throws the door all the way back and steps out. Nobody stops him. The faint sound of a door opening has him flinching. He turns to find that there are other motel rooms on his floor. Someone has shuffled out in a hideously ugly brown dressing gown, her hair tied up in a messy bun that flops gracelessly as she bends down to pick up the newspaper outside her door.

It strikes Jimin, suddenly, that this is the first human being he’s seen that wasn’t his pack or a person in association to his abduction. Well—so he thinks. His eyes follow her like a hawk as she yawns, scans the front page of the folded newspaper and then kicks her door shut.

No, she probably isn’t in on it.

The coldness gets to his fingers rapidly. He shoves them into his pockets as he turns toward the stairs, only to falter, much to his inner exasperation. This has to be able the hundredth time he’s been caught off guard this morning. Namjoon would be mocking him to the centre of the earth if he were around to witness this bullshit. Typical omega. The fucking alpha cunt.

There are things in his pockets. In his right pocket it something heavy and smooth, and in the other, what feels like a folded-up piece of paper.

He takes his hands out of his pockets and tucks them under his armpits instead. Maybe if he pretends those things aren’t in his pockets, they would cease to exist altogether. Jimin is free now. He doesn’t have to play into whatever game they want him to participate in. This is fine. Everything is fine.

It occurs to him that perhaps someone at the front desk could shed some light on the situation. He discovers quickly that check-in isn’t so much an indoor entrance as it is just a window cut out of the wall on the ground level. The window in question is actually plastic, and the person behind it is distracted by a talk show airing on the television in the corner of the office. Rapping his knuckles against the window, he sees the bundles of curls turn to reveal an elderly woman. The bitch has the balls to look exasperatedly at him, as if he is genuinely interrupting her.

Pulling back the sliding window, she leans forward with a ballpoint pen between her manicured nails. “Mm?”
Jimin gets hit with a whiff of a stale alpha scent. Great. Just great.

“You wouldn’t happen to have been working last night, would you?”

The alpha grunts. “I work every day.”

“Right. Do you remember who brought me here? I’m afraid my memory is a little fuzzy.”

It’s a white lie. He remembers all the events that took place up until a handler pressed a chloroform-doused cloth against his nose and mouth.

The woman squints at him and shrugs. “Bunch of alphas came round carrying you, said something about you drinkin’ til you passed out. I assumed they were going to rape you but you seem in good shape.”

She says this with so much nonchalance he could’ve thrown up in her face. He doesn’t, though. Instead, he forces a smile, a trained talent picked up during the time he spent selling lies to alphas and betas (and the rare, anonymous omega). “What can you tell me about them?”

Again, the woman shrugs. Is this bitch slow or is she being an ass on purpose? “Left almost as quickly as they came. They didn’t linger, but they left without you for certain. S’not everyday an omega stays in one of the rooms all alone. You know that’s illegal, right? Could call the cops on you if I wanted.”

In these trying times, Jimin almost wishes he could swap places with Jeongguk momentarily. He’d know how to handle the situation without breaking a sweat. Jimin, on the other hand, feels a twitch in his fingers. Strangling her would be counterproductive.

It’d be all too easy for him to mention that accepting omega clients staying on their own is just as illegal, but he holds his tongue.

“Do you remember what they looked like?”
“Wouldn’t know,” she answers tiredly. “They were wearing masks.”

Jimin walks away puzzled. According to the desk clerk, they’d paid in cash for a full-night and breakfast—a meal he had immediately turned down.

The freshly lain snow that would have blanketed the footpath in the earlier hours of the morning have turned to grey slosh. The patches of snow that remain untouched are the ones surrounding the roots of leafless trees. On the roads, cars filter along like lines of ants on their way to work. As he passes a car dealership, a car honks at another for attempting a U-turn and he nearly has a heart attack. His flailing limbs and screeches of profanity are met with stares from mechanics assessing the damage of a client’s motorbike.

“Who are you looking at?” he yells angrily, cheeks flushed with embarrassment. He marches off before he can gauge a reaction from either of them.

As he breezes past a karaoke bar a song blares from the outdoor speakers. It isn’t a song he’s familiar with. It carries along a soft but sad melody that dances with the wind, chasing him faintly as he shuffles across the window of a café. Out of every relationship he’s been in, cigarettes and alcohol were his most abusive, but as his body persevered in resurrecting him in the morning, whether it be with a migraine or a sore throat, coffee was always there to comfort and soothe him. Jimin doesn’t know where he’d be without it.

Couples and clusters of friends sit on stools and on cosy armchairs, mitten hands wrapped lovingly around mugs of hot chocolate and lattes. It calls to him. That gentle aroma of coffee bean and warm milk.

But despite every fibre of his being serenading the coffee shop, he has no time nor money for it.

His apartment complex is three streets away from the motel, tucked away in an area where the buildings are older and delapidated. He banishes the many memories he has of walking with strangers down these lonely, hidden streets, cursing out his own vulnerability as the question tugs at the back of his mind: “Will they hurt me?” Most of the time, they did not. There was one time he’d been a bit too mouthy with a client and had gotten a fist to the jaw for it. Blood spraying the snow. The doctors had to wire it shut and he was on liquids for months. He recalls one of his regulars telling him he should only have to pay half because he couldn’t give blowjobs.

People really are the worst.
Scaling two staircases, he reaches number eight. Even the lock is the same, although the passcode was likely changed when the apartment was repossessed and sold. He rings the doorbell and waits. It’s only half a minute before a voice answers over the speaker.

“Who is it?”

It’s a man’s voice.

“My name is Park Jimin. I used to live here,” he informs plainly.

“Aren’t you the kid that went missing?”

“No, I ran away,” he lies. “Trouble with the taxman.”

“What d’you want, Jimin-ssi?”

“Wanted to know if you still have some of my stuff.”

“Afraid not. Aside from the furniture, I gave what was left to charity months ago.”

“Right. Thanks for nothing.”

Stepping back into the street, he looks around. It isn’t the first time he’s been caught with no money and no roof over his head. And well, there’s only one place he could possibly go now. Hopefully Taemin hasn’t upped and moved in the time he’s been away. Otherwise he’s royally f*cked.

It’s a shame he lost the apartment. It was small, and it was cramped, and there were cracks in the walls so large that house inspectors would spontaneously faint at the sight of them, but he’d lived there for the better half of almost five years. From the day he turned eighteen he’d left the Cuddlebear Club that employed him with all the money he’d saved selling his body. He considered himself lucky that the place let him go on his own volition. Most places aren’t so merciful. But he always knew his body had an expiry date.
The real estate agent had shown him a place or two, but the process wasn’t as long as it could’ve been. Jimin just wanted a roof, and that cramped little box, which was far away from his previous employment, fit just fine for him.

Some nights, in captivity, he thought about showing the apartment to his pack, wondering what they might say about it. Especially Hoseok. It isn’t in the alpha’s nature to say anything nasty, and perhaps the man would’ve looked around and commented on how adorable his curtains were, something dumb and insignificant and shouldn’t really matter but deep down it does matter.

Jimin hasn’t spoken to Hoseok much. Not since their argument.

Tears prick at his eyes and he angrily banishes them back to the earth’s core. They have no fucking right to be there.

Eventually he comes to the apartment complex he was looking for. Thank the gods it’s still standing. Taemin was bitching for months that it was due for a redevelopment. There are no elevators in the building, quite like where he used to live. His friend’s apartment is on the fifth floor. By the time he’s scaled all the steps he’s out of breath, criminally out of shape. There was once a time where he was healthy. He used to have stomach muscles his clients used to run their hands over and praise. Now look at him. He’s no better than a sack of potatoes.

There’s tape over the doorbell button with “Knock!” scribbled messily on it.

He snorts. Taemin still hasn’t fixed that fucking doorbell. What a cheapskate.

Rapping his knuckles against the wood, he waits. When he doesn’t get an answer, he knocks continuously until he hears a voice swear, and the sound of plates clattering against tile rings loudly from within. The door is thrown open and there he is, Taemin, the friend he shared a cigarette with as they shivered against a lamppost in the dead of night. They met while Jimin was still selling his body, and god did he need a friend in those times. Taemin was doing it too, but, while Jimin hadn’t had much of a choice in the matter, Taemin had done it to solely spite his mother. He was also the person who introduced him to the BDSM roleplaying club.

Taemin stands there, stunned, with a cigarette between his fingers and a towel wrapped around his head. His dressing gown drapes over his lithe frame, exposing his tattooed chest and boxer shorts. Eyeliner is smudged around his eyes, as if he attempted to remove it and then gave up halfway through the process.
“Jimmie,” he says calmly. Leaning against the door, he sizes him up. “Thought your body was at the bottom of the Han River. How you been?”

The omega was never really one for tearful reunions and wholesome embraces. In this field, sudden disappearances were common. Jimin doesn’t take his nonchalance too personally.

“Do you still drink cruisers?”

The size of Taemin’s apartment is in no greater form than the one Jimin used to own. The kitchen, bedroom and living room are all crowded into one, with a lumpy mattress cornered between a wall and the refrigerator, a small table with two wooden chairs situated in front of a washing machine, and a combination of faded old blankets used as rugs in front of the television. There is a single door next to the stove that leads into the bathroom.

Jimin doesn’t know why the familiarity brings him so much comfort, but it does. The very notion of Taemin kicking his habit of leaving clothes on the floor for months is something he may not have been able to emotionally cope with.

Snatching up the pack of cigarettes on the counter, he slides one between his teeth before accepting a cold, blue bottle of alcohol from his friend.

He grimaces when he looks at the labelling.


Ignoring him, Jimin turns on the stove and leans over to light his cigarette.

“You gonna tell me where you’ve been all this time?”

Flopping his head back, he exhales the smoke from his lungs. Ah, death’s gift to humanity. How he has missed you. It feels as though he can finally relax for the first time in over nine months. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”
Taemin produces a raspy chuckle. “You ain’t gonna tell me you were abducted by aliens, are ya? Cuz if that’s where this is goin’ I’m gonna havta get out the hard liquor.”

Alien abduction. That’s funny, in a depressing sort of way. It wasn’t aliens that took them but Jimin vividly remembers it feeling eerily akin to an alien abduction. The blood-curdling fear that pulsed through their veins. The foreign environment and how they never saw any faces other than their own. They treated them like aliens would human beings. Like rats. Without empathy and without remorse. That’s how most aliens treat humans in movies, anyway. In reality, whatever aliens that may exist probably have more humanity than their former tormentors—or current.

“You still keep rainbow pills in your bathroom?” he asks, completely avoiding the initial question. He still hasn’t determined whether or not he’s in a simulation. If he were to just sit down and blurt out the events of the past six months, this realistic simulation—if it even is that—may very well come to an abrupt end. If it isn’t a simulation, Taemin might admit him into a psych ward.

The omega nods. “You know I always do. I only have one colour, though. You ain’t gonna like it.”

Brushing this aside, he marches into the bathroom and starts sifting through the cabinet underneath the sink. Rainbow pills are generally bought in small, cardboard boxes, with an image of a model on the front with its shade of colour.

It’s easy enough to find, gathered next to a larger box with matching hair dye. He inspects the box and scowls. Pink. Of all the fucking colours in the rainbow it had to be pink. It immediately reminds him of Jeongguk. He sighs. It’ll have to do. He doesn’t have the cash to go down the street and buy all the shit he needs. Tossing the rainbow pill packaging into the sink, he also fishes out the matching hair dye, the bottle of peroxide and the lightening powder.

Haircuts aren’t the most expensive things to get in South Korea, but with the amount of times both he and Taemin would obsessively change hair colours and hairstyles, they eventually learnt their way around dying, cutting and bleaching hair themselves. It required a lot of trial and error. One time, about four years ago, they’d accidently left the bleach in Taemin’s hair for too long because they were getting smashed off tequila shots and his hair fell off in patches. Poor Taemin made an executive decision to just shave it all off as opposed to salvaging the dead hair that stubbornly remained. Taemin, with his small, gentle features, was still able to pull it off flawlessly. None of his regulars made any complaints about it.

Without needing an explanation, Taemin hands him a glass of soda water. Jimin tears open the package and drops the smooth, oval-shaped pill into the soda water. It fizzes aggressively and turns a bubble gum shade of pink. Scowling, he downs it all in one gulp.
Rainbow pills are a commercial, permanent alternative to changing hair colour. For something temporary, bleach or dye will work just fine, but as the demand grew for more outlandish, more long-lasting options, inevitably a cosmetic giant came along to answers their prayers. Rainbow pills first hit shelves in Britain twenty years ago. You buy a pill of the colour you want your hair to be, consume the pill, and watch as the colour of your roots change. It’s a long process. There is no pill that can make your hair grow faster, so people wanting to permanently change the colours of their hair might wait up to a year—or even longer—to achieve their ideal style. It has no effect on genes, and children born from people who’ve permanently altered their hair colour are born with the hair that their parents originally had.

Jimin quite liked his natural, black hair. He’s tried just about every colour under the sun—aside from pink of course—but every so often he’d revert back to his natural hue for fun. But he can’t continue to have it any longer. They may be following him. They may be spying on him. If he could alter his appearance in any way to throw them off, then he’ll do what he has to do.

Even if it means having stupid pink hair.

“I’m guessin’ ya want me to bleach an’ dye ya hair, too?” Taemin doesn’t seem bothered by it. The omega has used enough of Jimin’s hair products over the years that giving up a bit of bleach wouldn’t hurt him all that much.

“Cut it, too,” he takes a drag from his cigarette.

“It’s a shame,” Taemin turns to go get a chair, raising his voice ever so slightly to be heard. “You look kinda pretty with long hair.”

Jimin appraises the face that reflects back at him. There are eyebags as dark as bruises on his face, and his cheekbones are more pronounced than they’ve ever been. As the months stretched on, so did the patience of their captors. Some days, he and Hoseok weren’t permitted to eat. They were forced to watch as the rest of their pack ate their fill, while they clutched their bellies and wondered if they’d be allowed to have breakfast the next day.

Taehyung once offered him part of his bloody, raw steak, not understanding that he wasn’t allowed to offer him food. Remorsefully, he’d shoved the younger omega away from him. It seemed to be the only way to get the point across.

Taehyung didn’t look at him for three days after that.
It ate up his insides like termites to wood.

Placing down the chair, Taemin gestures for him to sit down while he prepares the solution. After nine and a half months, Jimin’s hair has grown down past his shoulders. It isn’t uncommon for omegas to have long, flowing hair. On the odd occasion he’d catch himself staring at long, wavy locks with a stab of envy, but he’d kept it short simply because he has had alpha clients in the past request he grew his hair out.

As far as he was concerned, if they were looking for omegas with long hair, they could take their business elsewhere. It was basic principle to keep to who he was. Changing himself for the sake of pleasing an alpha turned his stomach.

“Did you ever get in touch with your sister?” Jimin asks as Taemin tucks a towel into the collar of Jimin’s jacket.

About a week before Jimin went missing, he remembers talking to Taemin about his sister, whom he hadn’t spoken with for almost six years. According to Taemin, his sister was jealous of his superior looks and used to slut-shame him all throughout their childhood. He did miss her, though. He was working towards getting her phone number.

Taemin snorts as he begins chopping away at his hair. “Nah, that shit didn’t fly for very long. Mama said she’s marriage with a kid now and wants nothin’ to do with me, so I wasn’ gonna go near that shit.”

“Ah.”

As he drums his fingers on the arms of the chair, he can’t for the life of him think of anything else to bring up as conversation. Through the mirror he looks at the both of them. Taemin has round, rosy cheeks and is in good form, while he looks as though he’s been wasting away in a dumpster for the last year. If he were to describe even a fraction of the horror he’s been through, where on this great, green earth would he begin? What words could accurately convey the pain and suffering he has endured?

They exist in silence together for the next few hours. Taemin is on his second cigarette by the time he’s cut away all the weight of Jimin’s hair, leaving it in much the same state as it was in before he was taken. Jimin burns through five cigarettes, one vodka cranberry and three glasses of water by the time the bleach has set in, and when the dye had taken to his hair Jimin was about ready to fall back asleep.
“Dunno whether you know this, but ya got a funky thing on the back of ya neck,” Taemin mentions casually. “Be surprised if ya didn’t know tha’, though. Looks pretty painful.”

Jimin feels ugly inside. Like he’d just swallowed bleach.

*They’re listening. They’re watching.*

“It’s whatever. Thought it looked cool,” he mutters, refusing to look Taemin in the eye.

“Does look kinda cool,” the omega replies, sweeping up the hair on the tiled floor. “Almost looks like it’s part of ya skin. Ya get an artist to create tha’ effect, didja?”

“Oh-huh.” More likely, the skin had healed over the claws of the chip.

“Well, have a shower—make sure ya use the purple conditioner, not the red.”

“I haven’t forgotten.”

As he’s rinsing the suds out of his hair, relieved to be able enjoy a shower in privacy, a sudden ring startles him. Immediately, he shuts off the shower and throws open the glass door. The whole room brims with steam. The mirror has completely fogged over. The ringing is loud. An upbeat melody springs off the walls, demanding his attention. He damn near slips and cracks his head open he gets out of the shower so fast.

It’s coming from the jacket.

Shoving his hands into both the pockets, his fingers graze the device to feel it vibrating violently. It’s a cell phone. The ringtone is louder when he takes it out of the pocket. The phone is an old, disposable flip phone that hasn’t been on the market in what looks to be fifty years. He just wants it to stop ringing, hopes that if he waits long enough it’ll stop on its own.

But it doesn’t.
It rings and it rings until there’s a loud knock at the bathroom door.

“Ya gonna answer tha’ or are ya tryin’ to drive me mad?”

“Fuck!” he flips it open and holds it to his ear. In a hushed, sharp tone he hisses, “Who are you and what the fuck do you want?”

“Who—I need—I’m—” there’s a sob on the other end and Jimin feels his heart sinking into the floor.

“Jeongguk?”

“Who—who is th-this?” the voice sounds strained, as though in immense pain.

“Gguk—it’s Jimin. Where are you?” he asks with an edge of urgency.

“Hyung…” he sniffles and whimpers, “I don’t—I don’t know where I am. I fell out of bed and—and everything hurts so badly. My body—it hurts—I can’t move—”

The last time he saw Jeongguk, he was being dragged off somewhere with his hands on his stomach and fear in his eyes. He’s never been fond of Jeongguk. Never. From the day they woke up together to when he last saw him, he held disdain for the other omega. But in that moment, hearing him alive, breathing—relief settles in his lungs.

“Are you in a motel room?” he asks quietly.

“I… I think so. I don’t know.”

“Jeongguk, you’re going to stand up and you’re going to find out where you are, d’you understand me? I can’t come get you if I don’t know where you are.” As he has the phone pressed against his ear, he starts scrambling to towel himself off.
There’s some shuffling on the other end, followed by a whine. “Everything hurts. I can’t—I can’t stand up.”

“Crawl if you have to,” he growls, struggling into the clothes Taemin was generous enough to give him. Taemin is much taller than him, so he has no choice but to bunch up the legs of the faded black skinny jeans, and roll the sleeves up the furry blue sweater.

More indiscriminate noises continue to crackle on the receiver, but Jimin uses the time to dry his hair and brush his teeth. Taemin wouldn’t mind him using it. Collectively they’ve swallowed more jizz than the indoor swimming pool Seokjin no doubt has in his apartment. He nearly drops the phone when Jeongguk breaks down into wails of grief.

“Gguk—hey, listen to me,” he attempts to keep the panic in his voice to a minimum. “What’s going on? What happened? Did you fall over again?”

“The baby!” he screams. “My baby.”

“Fuck sake Jeongguk—tell me where the fuck you are so I can come get you!” he all but yells.

It takes about five minutes for Jeongguk to calm down enough to find out where he is. Most motels have business cards printed out on little stands on the counters. Jimin’s patience is worn thin by the time Jeongguk finally chokes out the address.

“The Palace Motel, Jangan-gu, Suwon.”

“Stay where you are. Don’t answer the door. Don’t call anyone. I don’t want you leaving that room until I get to you, are we clear?”

“But—”

“Are we clear, Jeongguk?” he repeats in a harsher tone.

“Okay… Please don’t hang up, hyung.”
“I have to. We don’t know where these phones came from and I’ll bet on your newborn child they’re listening in as we speak.”

Just as Jeongguk starts crying again, Jimin snaps the phone shut and stuffs it into the pocket of the goose-down jacket. Balling up the hospital gown, he stuffs it into the little trashcan by the toilet and marches out of the bathroom.

“Didya go and get yourself a boyfriend, did you?” Taemin asks curiously as he sits on the floor in front of the television, the volume turned down almost to a whisper. He’s in the process of painting his toenails a lime green.

Looking around feverishly, he asks, “Where’s your cell? I need to use Maps to get somewhere.” Licking his lips, he adds, “I also need to use your train card.”

“Why?” Taemin pauses to blow on his toes. “Where you goin’?”

“Suwon.”

“Suwon?” Taemin snorts. “Why would ya wanna go there, of all places? Suwon alphas are so fucking stingy.”

“Personal reasons.”

“Phone’s on the counter. You can have my card but ya can’t take my phone.”

He quickly writes down the directions on a piece of paper, which trains he has to take and where to transfer. Sifting through his bedazzled wallet, Taemin hands him his train card. “Will I see ya again soon?”

Pausing as he slides on his slippers, he looks back at Taemin and remembers that there was once a time where he considered him a brother. Closer than family. Now, Jimin isn’t certain if he could ever go back to feeling that way about his friend. He’s changed so much. He feels it in his DNA. The person he could once relate to no longer exists. In place he sees someone…foreign.
Swallowing, he answers honestly. “I don’t know, Min-ah. I just don’t know.”

Taemin turns back to his toenails and begins adding a second coating. “Be safe then, honey. Take another cigarette for your trouble.”

The train ride to Suwon is estimated to take about an hour and a half, as there was no way of purchasing express tickets without cash or a card. As much as he’d already taken from Taemin, he couldn’t add money into the mix. He still has bills to pay. It just wouldn’t have been right to accept money on top of the clothes and the train card he’d already robbed him of. Sitting still demanded effort. The beta sitting next to him kept casting him nervous looks, as if worried that he’s about to shoot up the whole carriage.

By the time he gets to The Paradise Motel, it’s well into the afternoon.

It occurs to him that Jeongguk never told him the room number.

It is with great reluctance that he confronts the receptionist. This one is younger than the other woman, with French nails and a peppy smile. She reeks of alpha pheromones, too, more virile and lustful. “I’m looking for an omega staying in one of your motel rooms. He’s alone and potentially injured.”

The woman drags her eyes up and down his form. “Do you have a name, cutie?”

Anger coils in his throat, but he beats it back with a rigid grin. *You catch more flies with honey, more flies with honey, more flies with—* “Jeon Jeongguk.”

“Technically, I’m not supposed to give you this information,” her tone swims with false friendliness.

“Technically, it’s illegal to accept omegas staying on their own. It violates the Patron Service Code all hotels and motels are required to follow by law. Now, should I make my merry way down to the police station I passed on my way here, or will you give me the damn room name and neither of us will have to speak of this ever again?”
The alpha isn’t smiling anymore.

She checks the bookings on her computer, and tells her he’s staying in Room 16. There’s never been a time in Jimin’s life where he’s ran so fast. The room itself isn’t that far from the front desk, but there’s still sweat dotting his forehead by the time he has a fist to the door.

“Jeongguk? It’s Jimin! Open up—or are you gonna make me kick down this door?”

It takes a full minute before the door unlocks. He finds Jeongguk on the floor, a complete mess. He too, is in a similar hospital gown to the one he was wearing. Slamming and using every bolt on the door to lock it behind him, he starts scouring the room for any bugs that might be listening in on them.

“Did you talk to anybody? Did anybody come by this room?” he asks agitatedly.

Jeongguk curls up against the side of the bed and doesn’t answer him. Jimin searches all the cabinets and draws, and even the bathroom, but he finds no trace of any bugs.

He kneels down in front of Jeongguk. “How were you able to call me?”

“The n-note.”

“The what?”

Jeongguk points to somewhere on the carpeted floor, and Jimin turns to find a piece of paper and a disposable cell—the same issue as the one in his pocket. Crawling over to it, he picks up the paper. On one side are two things: a phone number, and underneath it, an address. Flipping it over, there is a small note on the back, written in pen: Happy Hunting.

That’s when he remembers.

Looking in his other pocket, he pulls out two pieces of paper—the one he’d written directions on, and the other with the same note on the back. It too has a phone number and an address on the front, but they’re different from the ones on Jeongguk’s. Just to be sure, he uses Jeongguk’s cell to
call the number on the note, and sure enough, after a moment or two, his own cell begins ringing. Whoever had given these to them had every intention of reuniting them in some way or another. Even without the clues, there’s no doubt they would have gone looking for each other at some point.

Turning back to the other omega, he continues to probe him for answers, “Is there anything else they gave you? Is this all there is?”

Shaking his head, Jeongguk unfurls just enough to reveal what he has fisted tightly in his hand. A fifty-thousand won bill. He pries it from Jeongguk’s fingers, along with the note that came with it. As compensation, it reads.

Compensation? Compensation for what?

Just as his mind conceives the thought he banishes it from his mind. The answer to that question might just make him vomit.

“What’s the last thing you remember before you woke up here?” Suddenly he’s hit with a major sense of déjà vu.


“Namjoon wasn’t there?” Jimin doesn’t know why this surprises him so much. On the one hand, it made sense to separate them, but to deny a father the right to be there at the birth of their child…he fucking hates Namjoon, but he wouldn’t have wished that kind of cruelty on the devil himself.

Jeongguk shakes his head miserably. “They kept us in separate rooms.”

“So that’s the last thing you remember, holding the baby?”

“They let me breastfeed him and then—and then nothing…” Jeongguk wipes away a tear. “I don’t remember them taking him from me, or passing out. It feels—it feels like it was in the beginning, when they first took us.”
Jimin couldn’t agree more. Apart from being able to travel freely, the vibe he’s getting is almost uncanny.

Looking down, Jeongguk’s belly is still swollen, and would be for some time. It only hits him then that Jeongguk likely only gave birth yesterday, which would explain why he’s struggling so much to stand.

“Jeongguk,” he speaks to him quietly. “Wherever he is, we’ll get your baby back, but right now we have to figure out what the hell is going on. I don’t know where anyone else is, if they’re safe or not…”

“What—what should we do?”

Looking down at the fifty-thousand won note, he inhales heavily. “First, we need coffee.”

Before going to a café, they go to a thrift store first to find Jeongguk some clothes. Jimin wanted to leave Jeongguk in the motel room, because the hospital gown would garner some questioning looks from strangers, but Jeongguk refused to be left in the room alone any longer.

So, Jimin had helped Jeongguk limp to the thrift store.

It gave them unnecessary attention, and he mentioned this, but Jeongguk didn’t seem to care. He seemed determined, as if making it to the thrift store would be one step closer to finding Namjoon and the baby. Maybe a part of Jimin would’ve been proud of Jeongguk, if it weren’t for the fact that the much bigger and recently pregnant Jeongguk was leaning on him heavily for support. He was sure to make his complaints known to the younger, but either he had spontaneously lost the ability to hear or he was ignoring him.

The audacity of this kid.

They scavenged a thin blue hoodie, which he wore underneath a cream, black and blue sweater and a pair of baggy blue jeans that were about ten sizes too big for him, even with the shrinking baby bump, so they threw in a cheap, black belt along with it. Jimin also adds in a knitted woollen scarf to hide Jeongguk’s mating mark. The sleeves of the hoodie flair out around the wrists and have annoying tassels attached to them that he finds himself constantly batting out of the way as he helps dress Jeongguk in the dressing room. Jeongguk was given his own goose-down jacket to combat the cold, which he fitted over the layers and zipped up to the maknae’s neck. The outfit
overall cost only six-thousand won.

Jeongguk whines on their way to a café. “The hoodie hurts my nipples.”

“Shut up.” he mumbles, tugging the kid along by the hand. He’s so eager for a hot cup of coffee he’d sacrifice his first-born child for one.

It occurs to him to voice this, but then thinks better of it.

It’d be in poor taste, even for him.

They choose a table in the corner. Jeongguk is still a little sulky as he looks up at him. “I didn’t say it before, hyung, but I like your hair.”

“Shut up.”

“Pink suits you.” Honestly, who gave this kid permission to talk?

“Whatever. I’m getting the largest cup of coffee this place offers. What’d you want?” he says while eyeing the menu above the serving counter.

“Hot chocolate. And marshmallows, if they have them.”

Jimin scowls. “Could you act like an adult for once in your life?”

Jeongguk scowls back at him. “I am an adult and I want a hot chocolate with marshmallows.”

Sighing in frustration, like he might with a stubborn small child, he speaks through gritted teeth, “Gguk, there’s a likelihood that we’ll be up ‘til late tonight trying to figure out what the fuck it going on. Are you sure you don’t want something that might keep you awake longer?”
Crossing his arms over his chest, he looks away, pouting. “I want a hot chocolate, though.”

“Fuck, fine!” He ignores the stares that follow him all the way to the counter. A tight-lipped woman a few tables over from theirs pulls her young daughter closer to her, eyes cold as steel. “One extra-large coffee with two sugars and a large hot chocolate with marshmallows.”

The beta boy behind the counter shakes like a leaf under the intensity of Jimin’s glare. “But—but we don’t sell marshmallows.”

Slamming his hands on the counter, he leans over with his jaw as tight as a bike chain. “Did I fucking stutter?”

“N-no—”

“Dawn’s Serenity is a multi-million-dollar café chain that rakes in more revenue in a year than the all the average-wage earners in South Korea combined, and you’re telling me your manager can’t go fifty metres down the street to the local mart to buy a two-thousand won packet of marshmallows for my pregnant friend?”

Well, Jeongguk technically isn’t pregnant, but they didn’t have to know that.

Just when the beta looks about ready to have an emotional breakdown in front of his co-workers, someone wearing a navy blue apron (as opposed to the sky-blue aprons that all the other employees adorn) materialises from the back and placed a gentle hand on the beta’s shoulder. Jimin didn’t have to glance at her nametag to know that she is the manager.

“Terribly sorry for the inconvenience, I’ll go get you some marshmallows while my team are preparing your order—free of charge, of course.” The alpha smiles at him, but the stillness in her eyes leads him to believe she’d inwardly seething.

He’s been in confinement for almost year. He’s been starved and bullied and tortured. He’s been both mentally and physically abused, and he still can’t tell if he’s trapped in a highly advanced simulation or not. He thinks he can indulge in being a difficult customer for just one day.

Scoffing, he snatches the wireless buzzer from the beta and returns back to his table. Jeongguk had been watching the whole affair from a distance, and seems to be holding back a sad grin.
“What?” he snaps, collapsing into his chair dramatically.

“Nothing. Just that we’re supposed to be keeping a low-profile and you just went ahead and made a scene for my benefit.”

Cradling his head in his hand, he says, “Well, don’t get used to it. I’m just sick and tired of shit not going the way it’s supposed to and I’ll be damned if I don’t get what I fucking ordered.”

The coffee and hot chocolate comes. Jeongguk gets his marshmallows.

“How much d’you reckon the motel is charging per night?” Jeongguk asks as he sips on his drink. Jimin is busy scrutinising the people around them. So normal, so goddamn happy. Fuck people. “Maybe we could stay there an extra night—after we’ve found my baby.”

“We’re not staying there another night,” he mutters. “Maybe a different room in the building. Not the same room. I could be bugged.”

“It’s better than sleeping on the streets.”

As someone who has had to sleep on the streets in the middle of winter before, he can’t deny that. “We’ll see how much money we have left over. We need to get you a train card.”

After they’ve finished their drinks, they decide to return to the motel to negotiate another night’s stay—in a different room. It is important to establish a place that they can come back to if they ever get lost or separated, and Jimin isn’t confident that they can find a place cheaper than The Paradise Motel. At least, not one they could get to easily.

The flirty alpha is still there behind the desk when they walk into reception.

“How much for another night? We’d like to stay in a different room,” Jimin informs sternly.

The woman—who must be in her early thirties—inclines her head to the side and smiles slyly.
“Well, well, well, you’re certainly singing a different tune. Wasn’t it only an hour ago you were lecturing me about accepting service from omegas staying alone? Should charge you extra, since you are commissioning me to break the law.”

He hides his balled fists in his pockets as he repeats himself, “How much?”

“Bottom floor rooms, like the one your friend stayed in last night, are twenty-thousand won, balcony rooms are thirty-thousand won.” As Jimin checks the change he has in his pocket, the woman adds: “For you two, though, forty-thousand for a bottom, fifty-thousand for a balcony.”

Jimin scowls. “That’s too fucking expensive for a dump like this.”

The receptionist—whom he scornfully reads her nametag as Jiwon—looks smug. “Gotta give me some incentive to break the law. Otherwise, I’m not sure the both of you are worth the effort. If you go into heat and get yourself bred by one of our other patrons, we’ll have cops crawling all over here come morning. No one’ll want to come back here after that.”

Peeved, he glances over his shoulder at Jeongguk, who is sitting down in a wicker chair, rubbing his hands over his belly forlornly. Fucking hell. “If I give you a blowjob, will you let us stay free of charge for the night?”

The woman smirks, lacing her hands over her sternum. “I’m sure I could—”

“In one of the balcony rooms.”

“I—”

“You also have to give us free toiletries.”

The way Jiwon rakes her eyes up and down his body is all the answer Jimin needs. They exchange keys and he jingles it in front of Jeongguk victoriously. The maknae beams.

“How much did it cost?” he asks as Jimin helps him to his feet.
“Nothing. Do you think you can make it to the room on your own? I’ll help you up the stairs first, obviously.”

For a brief moment, Jeongguk’s face is nothing but pure confusion. The younger man glances between the receptionist, and then him. He’s glad the omega is smart enough to figure it out without needing an explanation. “Jiminnie-hyung…” he says quietly, disapprovingly. “You shouldn’t—”

Taking Jeongguk’s hands, he wraps them around the keys. Looking him in the eye, he says, “When we find your baby, we’re gonna need that money for diapers, blankets and clothes.”

“But hyung—”

“Listen to your hyung, Gguk. I’m doing this so we can both survive, okay? You’re going to go wait for me in Room 23 and you won’t open the door for anybody but me. Are we clear?”

There’s not a trace of content on the omega’s face as Jimin helps him up the stairs, but Jimin doesn’t care. He’s had to do a lot of unsavoury things in his lifetime in order to survive, adding a few more indecent deeds to the list wouldn’t make him any less condemnable.

Fifteen minutes later, Jeongguk answers the door with a hand mirror in one hand and scissors in another. He’s taken off some layers, leaving him in just his pants and hoodie. Jimin doesn’t question this. He hands the kid a bag of toiletries before marching straight to the bathroom to brush his teeth. Jeongguk sits back down on the edge of the double bed, snipping at his hair. He makes no mention of what happened. What’s done is done. There was no use discussing it and Jimin could think of a hundred other things he’d rather be talking about.

Once he’s done washing the musky taste out of his mouth, he snatches the scissors out of Jeongguk’s clumsy hands. “That’s not how you cut hair. Keep doing that and you’re going to look like your hair is made out of feathers.”

The younger blushes, but continues to hold the mirror up at eye-level so he can see the front. Getting comfortable on his knees behind Jeongguk, he starts snipped away at the long, lemonade pink hair. “I’m gonna steal some hair dye and rainbow pills from the pharmacy tomorrow. You can’t have this colour anymore. Makes you too recognisable.”
Jeongguk frowns at the mirror. “What should I change it to?”

Pursing his lips, he thinks for a moment. “Black.”

“Black?”

“Yeah. You’d suit it.”

The kid’s face turns a deep shade of red. “I—I haven’t had black hair since I was a child.”

Jimin shrugs. “Maybe it’s time to go back to it.”

Maybe it’s time to embrace that part of yourself again, Gguk.

They sit for awhile in peaceful silence. It couldn’t be any later that half-past four, but the sun is already beginning to set outside.

“Where do we go from here? How can we find them?” Jeongguk asks, voice hollow and wobbly.

Carding his fingers through Jeongguk’s mane to brush out stray hairs, he replies, “We’ll start with the address on your note. With any luck it might give us a clue as to where your baby is. Once we find the baby, we’ll work on finding the others.”

Jeongguk looks as though he wants to say something, but his small, cherup lips open, close, and the opportunity is lost.

They will find them.

They’ll find Jeongguk’s baby, they’ll find Hoseok, Taehyung, Yoongi and even that dumbass cunt Namjoon.
He’d swear his life on it.

Chapter End Notes

Hahah I know some of you weren't sure what to feel about last chapter, but hopefully this gives you a better idea on where the remaining chapters are heading~!

My Curious Cat
Taehyung relishes in the body warmth that shields him from both sides. Eyelashes flutter against cheekbones as he basks in the gentle noises surrounding him. With an ear pressed to the swell of Jeongguk’s stomach, he can hear the little human inside, the flutter of their heartbeat. The younger omega hums softly as he cards his fingers through his hair. Jimin snuggles into his shoulder from the other side. His brothers. There are so many things he’s wanted to tell the both of them, but he’s lost the tongue to communicate. While he still thinks in the same language, the ability to form words is lost on him.

The frustration comes and goes. In moments like this he can lie here and pretend that things haven’t drastically changed in their dynamic—for the best and for the worst. Nobody knows the gender of the child yet. Nobody but Taehyung, anyway. It’s going to be can omega, a strong and beautiful baby boy, he can feel it deep in his bones. He’s been wanting to tell Jeongguk for a long time, dropped hints here and there in the hopes that he might understand the implications, but every attempt is met with a confused smile and a pat on the head. He can’t very well blame them for not understanding him. They aren’t mind readers after all. It occurred to him to try and write what he wants to say, but as he tries to recall the characters that make up the Korean alphabet, a throbbing wades into the folds of his mind, hammering louder the harder he concentrates. It’s as if his mind refuses to recall it. Refuses to remember the language engrained into him as a child.

Across the room, the alphas murmur quietly to one another.

Always serious. Always speaking with a sense of purpose in their conversations. Every day or so they would gather to discuss plans of escape. Sometimes Jimin and Jeongguk would join them, other times they would elect to rest instead. Jeongguk is almost ready to pop. The omega will often find himself in states of sudden exhaustion and would take naps sporadically throughout the day.

Jimin, too, seems to be swaying in and out of fatigue, but for different reasons.
The slowing mobility of his pheromones suggests a drop in dopamine levels. There could be a number of possible reasons as to why that might be. It could be the experimentation finally taking its toll, or maybe the recent bouts of starvation forced upon him for his defiance. But Taehyung thinks it might have something to do with the fact that Jimin hasn’t spoken or acknowledged Hoseok for nearly the better half of a month. Jimin would never dream of swallowing his pride to admit it—and Taehyung wouldn’t expect any less from him—but he seems to really miss the alpha.

A sudden intake of air rattles the quiet.

Taehyung flinches away from Jeongguk. The omega is clutching his stomach, eyebrows furrowed in mild confusion, as if he can’t quite comprehend what is happening. Jimin stirs and mutters underneath his breath.

That’s when Taehyung smells it.

Peering around Jeongguk’s stomach, Taehyung almost forgets to breathe.

Thump-thu-thump-thu-thump-thu-thump

There’s screaming.

His screaming. Screaming as the fire consumes him whole. They lost the baby—they lost—where are they? Who are they? Sacrifices or martyrs? Peals of agony tear from his throat as Yoongi holds him in his arms. The alpha’s severe, calculated gaze stares off into the unknown expanse of the room, his mind elsewhere, but he grasps him tightly. Hoseok is trying to soothe him with a wet cloth. They’d woken up and whatever came out of him was gone. The place had been sterilised, as if the birth had never even taken place. The only evidence that remains is the swell of his stomach.

Hoseok is saying words. Words of comfort, maybe, but his voice gets smothered by the sheer intensity of his howls.

Standing at a short distance away, through his tears, he can see how devastated Namjoon and Jeongguk look. Jimin’s fists are bloody from pummelling the wall. No matter how fiercely he struck, he couldn’t even dint the pristine surface.

He’s suddenly overwhelmed by the distinct sensation of free-fall. Light as cotton. The heavy
emotions slipping from his pours like sweat before evaporating completely. Instead of landing with force, he lands with gentle grace upon a field of sand. The ocean creeps and recedes, shyly lapping at his toes. The sun is beating down upon him, but he feels no heat. Looking around he sees them. His pack. His family.

The corners of Jimin’s eyes crease as he laughs, loudly and freely. There have been many times where he’s seen the slightly older omega chuckle, but never laugh. Not like that. Water sloshes and spits up into the air as Jimin runs after Hoseok, who shrieks as the omega attempts to pull him under the waves. A little away, he can see himself—well, not himself—but an imitation of the person he once knew himself to be. There is no beastly movement to the tanned omega he sees, shaping the sandcastle with an element of care and caution he no longer possesses. Jeongguk is making the sandcastle alongside him. His tummy is so large that it spills over his swim trunks and rests snuggly on his folded thighs.

It occurs to him then that he’s known Jeongguk for longer with the belly than without.

As he gazes upon the omega, he attempts to imagine him with a flat stomach, like he was when they first met.

It unsettles him that he can’t.

By the shade of palm trees are Yoongi and Namjoon. The former lounges in the cradle of a hammock, a large leaf over his face, while the latter rests his back against the base of a tree, a book in his hand.

One day…

Someday…

When he’s torn from sleep he nearly cries. There isn’t anything in particular that has disturbed him. In fact, the room he has been locked in is as silent as a church at midnight. Chains shift and clang as he sits up. On all sides, what was once a nicely furnished, modern bedroom had been savaged by his outburst of frustration. Wall paper peels from gashes. The vanity is missing all of its drawers, and the contents it had once nursed within is now spilled all over the floor. Feathers scatter from the tears in the mattress, and pillow casings emptied of their stuffing. A nightstand lies on its side, the tall lamp that’d sat upon in shambles.
Lights of the city pour over the carnage.

To the left of the bed is a bathroom. The length of the chain attached to his ankle permits him to use the toilet and sink within it, but if he were to attempt to reach for the door leading elsewhere, the tips of his fingers would struggle to graze the cool, silver surface.

No one had come to visit him since he’d first woken up much earlier in the day. Seokjin is here, and so is Yoongi. Unlike Taehyung, he appears to have the freedom to walk where he pleases. The bruises, and the distinct smell of burning flesh that had followed Yoongi into the room when he came to visit him, gives him reason to suspect otherwise. He doesn’t quite understand where he is. What about the rest of their pack? Where is their leader and his mate? Where is Jimin and Hoseok?

Dragging himself from the feathered mess of the bed, he gazes out the wall-length window. If he gets close enough and looks down, he feels kind of woozy. Wherever they are, they’re up high.

The others aren’t here.

He can’t sense them at all.

Their scents linger on their bodies, but absence hangs like a dead weight in the air. When Seokjin had come to visit him, with Yoongi bringing along a tray of food (with his hair significantly shorter than when he last saw him, and had been bleached a light blonde), he’d been kind and gentle to him. Like the Seokjin who comforted him when he was at his most vulnerable. His tangy pheromones probed at him, coaxed him to settle down, to give in, but there was no denying the ugly twist in his stomach warning him that something was terribly wrong. Seokjin is not to be trusted. He has proven that on numerous occasions. The pack does not trust him; therefore, he does not trust him either.

Seokjin said some words. Some of which he didn’t quite understand.

Something about releasing him soon. Something about a hunt.

Recollection has become the bane of his existence. In the moment he is able to familiarize himself with the pace, to nod his head and do as he’s told, but if someone were to ask what he had for breakfast this morning, the memory skitters from his mind like a scared cockroach. Steak. He thinks it’s steak. That’s all he’s fed these days. Not fish, nor chicken, nor pork, only steak.
His memories are clearest when he dreams. They sing to him like ghosts. Some are so joyful, so lovely that he awakens smiling. Most of the time though, they are not so joyful or lovely. Sometimes they are so horrific that he questions if they’re memories at all. If someone were to ask him what those dreams were about, he wouldn’t be able to recall, much less articulate what exactly took place. All he knows for certain, as he awakens in a fit of violent sobs, is that they are egregiously unpleasant. He would whine like an injured animal. Usually someone is there to comfort him. Jimin or Jeongguk. The other alphas worry from a quiet distance, as if being any closer might upset the fragile balance that prevents his mind from shutting down entirely. He doesn’t know why. They haven’t explained it to him. They’re scared of something.

But what?

A knock at the door has him flinching into a corner.

The chain rattles. His heart escalates. A thin light from the door cuts through the dark, and from across the room he can see Yoongi’s catlike eyes peeking back at him. His heart leaps with glee at the sight of his packmate. Before he can process his surroundings, he is leaping over displaced furniture and splayed feathers and sheets to get to him. The door widens as he makes his swift approach. Light floods into the room and Yoongi stands there, frozen in bewilderment, unable to produce a reaction.

Just as he is about to reach him, excitement growling deep in his throat, his arms outstretched in a wide arch, the chain reaches its limit and he goes careening to the floor. His shin meets with wood from the vanity and he screams, clutching his leg. It throbs. It hurts so badly.

A hand touches him and he flinches back with a snarl. Yoongi gazes at him, hand outstretched in mid-air, as still as a statue.

“Taehyung…?” the alpha whispers quietly. “Show me your leg.”

But he can’t. He doesn’t want anyone to touch him.

Yoongi kneels in silence in front of him for a minute or so. He doesn’t seem to want to intrude. Instead, he is patient. Taehyung continues to whine until the pain subsides. It’s only when he has quietened that Yoongi has the courage to lean over and press a black key against the shackles. Its surface glows a synthetic shade of blue before it snaps open.
“I was told to give you a bath,” Yoongi says, wincing, as if the very notion of being told what to do displeases him greatly. “Seokjin said something about looking nice for his guest this evening. He wouldn’t tell me who it is.”

There is a flatness to Yoongi’s tone. The alpha has never been exactly expressive, but there’s something off in the way he’s talking. Taehyung can smell that it’s the Yoongi he has come to know and adore, but he sounds…*hollow*.

Yoongi crawls closer to him. Taehyung stares.

Clearing his throat awkwardly, the alpha presents his neck as a gesture of trust and fondness. His fingers slowly loosen from his bruised shin and he cranes upwards to nuzzles his nose against the man’s scent gland. The fragrance of spring. Of virility, birth and song. It seeps into lungs and incites a warmth only a member of his pack could ever hope to bring forth. Fear blows over, and what’s left is a feeling of security and comfort.

Once his nerves are quelled, he cranes to allow Yoongi to do the same to him. The alpha hesitates for a brief moment, but then leans in to mimic the gesture. The sensation of a nose against his scent gland has a shiver pass through him. Scenting is a ritual, an acknowledgement of mutual respect, love and acceptance. To scent, but not be scented by the other, would be the equivalent to a slap in the face. A rejection he doesn’t think he could bare. Taehyung never doubted Yoongi would scent him back, though the anxiety still persists, like a tick he cannot ignore.

“Let’s go,” Yoongi says softly.

The alpha helps him to his feet, and guides him out of the room and down a hallway. He is surprised that the walls aren’t bone white. Rather, they are painted an eggshell white, the kind of sentimentality a home might bore. Soft light ignites the hallway dimly, its source coming from a doorless arch at the very end of the corridor. Instead of going towards the beckoning light, Yoongi stops him in front of a closed door. An unbroken humming noise can be heard from behind it.

Yoongi knocks.

This puzzles Taehyung. He has never known Yoongi to ask for entry, not even when they were in that room with the blinding walls. But maybe that’s just his memory playing tricks on him again. Maybe it’s Jimin who never knocks.
“Come in.”

Hairs stand on end at the back of his neck. Yoongi, sensing his discomfort, places a hand on his back. A strong light eclipses them. It’s a bathroom. Tiled floors and walls. Two modern basins are to the immediate left, a large mirror behind them. To the right is a glass shower. The humming comes from a ceiling fan. At the far end of the bathroom, facing opposite the door, is a bath. Seokjin sits on the edge of it, dipping his fingers into the water.

The man is in a plain white dress shirt and black slacks. The first few buttons are unclasped and his sleeves have been rolled up past the elbow. His chest and neck are littered with dark blotches. There’s even a large, black one where his jaw meets his neck.

“It’s nice and warm,” Seokjin provides with an unsettling amount of glee. He seems unbothered by the wounds he has sustained. As though they are like tiny flea bites. “Make him nice and pretty. There’s a dryer in the top drawer, and clips and hair ties in a bowl by the toothbrushes. I’ve brought some clothes for the both of you.” He nods towards a pile, which sits upon the closed lid of a toilet. “You have two hours before our guest arrives. I’m sure that’s more than enough time to make him—and yourself—presentable. Don’t you think?”

Yoongi swallows hard. The look on his face…Taehyung can’t recall a time where he’s seen the alpha so tormented. “Yes,” he grits out.

Seokjin flutters his eyelashes with a mocking grin. Swaying back slightly, he cups his ear and asks, “Yes what?”

“Yes, yeobo.”

“That’s a good boy.” Rising, he brushes past them without sparing either of them a glance. As soon as he’s out of sight Yoongi slams the door behind them so hard splinters fall from the hinges. Taehyung winces.

“One day, Taehyung, I’m going to kill that man,” he growls as he marches over to the bath. He sits on the porcelain edge with a huff, crossing his arms over his chest.

Taehyung stares at him.
“Well? What are you waiting for?” Yoongi snaps. “Take off your clothes. If we aren’t ready by the time Seokjin comes back, he’ll shock the both of us.”

He quirks his head to the side. He doesn’t quite understand what Yoongi means by that, but he strips off his gown all the same. The material is thin. It comes right off him like a second skin, a crumpled pile at his feet. There’s no real shame or humiliation in being naked in front of Yoongi. Their pack have seen each other’s bodies enough times that it doesn’t faze Yoongi as Taehyung lowers himself into the water. The bath is the perfect temperature. Taehyung might’ve been able to enjoy it if he didn’t know that it was Seokjin who drew it.

Yoongi grabs a comb from the counter and starts on teasing out the knots in his long, red hair. Taehyung hugs his knees and toys with the surface of the water, mesmerised by how it ripples beneath his touch. He can’t remember the last time he had a proper bath. If he tries really hard, he thinks the last bath he had was at a bath house in Jeju, back when he was still with her. The woman whose name he can’t recall. Sometimes memories of her visit him in his dreams. While her natural expression is fierce, she always seems to be elated around him. Holding his hand. Laughing. When she opens her mouth to speak, he can’t hear what she’s saying, but it is said with such sincere affection that the relationship they shared was unambiguous.

“I know how this looks,” Yoongi sighs as he struggles with a particularly stubborn tangle of hair. “Whatever you’re thinking it’s not like that. Seokjin and I…”

From his tone of voice, it would suggest he has more to say, but instead frustration seems to bring a swift end to his attempts at an explanation. Yoongi works in silence for a few more moments, being as gentle as he can possibly be with Taehyung’s unruly mane.

Looking down at himself, he tries to comprehend the stretch marks marring his hips and stomach. They’ve been there for a while. He thought they’d eventually go away, but they’re as deep and pink as ever. The folds of his stomach are softer, too. Reaching down, he’s able to clutch a bit of extra skin left over from the… the pregnancy. At least, he thinks it was a pregnancy. Even though he can’t remember having sex. Can’t really even remember the actual birth either. There were tears. That’s the closest memory he has to it. Blurred vision, disorientation and a whole world of pain. He never heard the cries of his child, or held them in his arms. Sometimes he thinks about the child. Whether they ever took their first breath. Were they taken away by the men swathed in black? Were they killed?

Should he feel sad?

Angry?
… Relieved?

Even now he can’t quite process it. Can’t quite understand.

In the end, what was it all for?

Once Yoongi is done combing his hair, he uses a small, plastic cup to scoop water from the bath. With his other hand he tilts Taehyung’s head back gently. His eyes flutter shut as the water settles over his scalp. Yoongi repeats the action until Taehyung’s hair is completely soaked, then reaches for one of the bottles sitting in a metal cradle attached to the wall. As the alpha massages shampoo into his scalp, he speaks again.

“I’ll figure out a way to get us out of here,” he assures darkly. “I’ve already made a few attempts but—the microchips. He has a remote that can trigger them. Every time I do something suspicious he shocks me. Until I figure out how to get us out of here—steal the remote from him or—or something—don’t try and attack him. He’ll look for any excuse to hurt you.”

There was once a time when he trusted Seokjin quite a bit. Even the others didn’t consider him a threat at the time. Something changed, though. What that something was, Taehyung finds it impossible to recall, but it drastically shifted the packs’ attitudes towards the beta. Even he himself, whenever he looks upon Seokjin, his stomach coils and flips, telling him that there’s something painfully off. What exactly did Seokjin do to make him feel this way? Is it instinct that’s warning him? A memory his mind has repressed underneath a mountain of trauma?

The thing is, what memories he can draw upon are ones where Seokjin treated him with kindness and affection.

It’s difficult for him to draw comparisons between the Seokjin he knew and the Seokjin that keeps him under lock and key. Was he not as much as an experiment as the rest of them? Did they not drug him and plant a chip to the back of his neck as well? Why would Seokjin see fit to torture them, when it should be their captors?

Yoongi washes away the suds before lathering his hair with conditioner. “Seokjin hasn’t mentioned the others. He’s forbidden me to enter his study, so I could probably poke around for information in there. When we get out of this, we’ll find the others. After that…” he pauses, wringing the water from the ends of Taehyung’s hair. “Namjoon’ll know what to do.”
The alpha doesn’t sound too confident in that statement, but he must want to believe it all the same. While there was doubt Namjoon was qualified to be leader of their pack, especially with Hoseok and Yoongi having seniority over him, he was the only one willing to step up to the task. Taehyung likes to think that maybe, if they did reunite with the others, they could fall back on Namjoon’s natural instincts to guide them to a solution.

A lump forms in his throat.

A few tears run amuck down his cheeks, but he’s quick to wash away evidence by splashing water on his face. Yoongi doesn’t need to see him this way. He obviously has his own problems he has to deal with. On top of that he has to look out for his safety and wellbeing too—the alpha never asked for this.

His pack has been a source of strength in these trialling times. When they were separated, there were moments where he begged for death. The echoes of his cries keep him up at night. But his pack helped chase them away. Jeongguk has a beautiful voice. It helped rock him into a dreamless slumber on many occasions. Jimin is unyielding. Like a volcano that remains latent for only minor periods of time before his rage bubbles to the surface once more. It used to make him feel safe. Like the hand of an older brother. Hoseok is sensitive and empathetic. Always seemed to know what he wanted without putting him through the struggle of communication. Namjoon, adaptive and intelligent. A man of reason and practicality. Agreeable traits for a leader.

And Yoongi…

The quiet presence. Mysterious, calculating, maybe even a little misunderstood.

Seeing them laugh together, smile together, learn and change together… It brought Taehyung more happiness than any of them could ever know.

Now they’re separated again.

It’s like they’ve been cast into the depth of hell once more. Headless chickens running aimlessly in a coop, unable to find an escape, unable to flee the pain.

Yoongi scrubs and pampers him until the water goes cold. The smaller man helps him out of the bath and wraps him in a towel. “Pat yourself dry. I’ll get the hairdryer warmed up.”
Who knows how long it takes for Yoongi to brush and blow-dry his hair? Half an hour, or an hour? Once it’s completely dry, Yoongi wraps some of his hair in a small bun on the crown of his head, and straightens the rest of it. The clothes Seokjin left behind were standard formal wear. Slacks, a belt, a white dress shirt and a black tie. As Yoongi helps him into the pants he can immediately tell that he isn’t going to like wearing this.

He can’t remember what he used to wear, other than the flannel pyjamas they gave him during and post-pregnancy. But it mustn’t have been this. The material is stiff and constricting. He hates it.

“Stop pawing at it,” Yoongi chides softly, tapping his hands away from his thighs. “You’ll ruin the pants.”

Good, he thinks. These pants are asking to be ruined.

Yoongi sighs as Taehyung continues to pester and squirm. “Just, sit on the toilet lid. I need to get ready, too.”

Taking his folded clothes off the toilet seat, he pats at the space and gestures for him to sit down. He gets the picture and does what he’s told.

Yoongi takes less care in washing himself than he did washing Taehyung. He all but tears the gown from his body with mild disgust before kicking it into the bathwater. A blatant fuck you to Seokjin without explicitly stating it. Instead, he has a quick shower. He doesn’t seem to care that Taehyung watches him. Taehyung doesn’t mean to intrude. It’s out of curiosity, not perversion. Yoongi doesn’t have the body of a typical alpha. In fact, his stature and bone structure would imply he is an omega (if not for the shape of his narrow hips). It is not his physicality that makes Yoongi an alpha, nor his pheromones. Rather, it is how he holds himself. A flawed man, yes, but a man that commands respect nonetheless.

Maybe in another lifetime in another universe they could have worked. He and Yoongi.

Yoongi loves betas so much that it blinds him to their manipulation and abuse. And Taehyung… Taehyung isn’t sure he truly wants to be in a relationship ever again, at least, not in a romantic sense.

The image of the woman from his dreams briefly lingers in his mind.
Maybe someday…

In another life…

“I never apologised,” Yoongi says as he straights his tie. Their eyes meet in the mirror. “I promised to protect you from Seokjin, and in the end I couldn’t even do that. Guess I’m not the alpha in shining armour you always wanted, huh?”

Taehyung tilts his head to the side.

The alpha sighs. “No, you weren’t the type to want that, were you? That was always more Jeongguk’s thing.”

The touch of a smile reaches his lips, and Yoongi smiles back at him sadly.

“I might not be that alpha, the one people expect me to be for a nice omega like you, but I…” Apprehensively, Yoongi turns to face Taehyung, looking somewhat shy. He runs a hand through his wet hair. “I could be your friend. I think that’s what you need more than a hunky, reliable alpha, right?”

Slowly, Taehyung extends his hand towards Yoongi. For a fraction of a second, the older man looks at him in shock. Then, without hesitation, he holds Taehyung’s hand and shakes it firmly.

A sharp knock at the door as them flinching apart.

“Time’s up!” a sickeningly cheerful voice comes from the other side of the door. Anxiety comes galloping back into the folds. The calming steam and gentle ambience of the bathroom couldn’t protect them any longer. “Our guest is waiting for us in the dining room. I’ve already served the appetizers. Grilled teriyaki. I’m sure you’ll appreciate it, Taehyung.”

Their eyes meet for a brief but meaningful moment.

*Stay calm. I’m here for you,* Yoongi says with a look. Taehyung nods.
The alpha moves towards the door and opens it.

The coiled smile Seokjin gives Yoongi has Taehyung’s skin crawling. The beta has never looked at him like *that* before, and he counts himself lucky for it. Offering an arm, the alpha mechanically loops his around it so that they’re intimately linked, almost like a loving couple. The sudden paleness in Yoongi’s face, and the twisted sense of satisfaction on Seokjin’s face, murder that sentiment. The beta leads the alpha from the bathroom, and Taehyung figures that he is expected to follow after them, even though the beta gave him no indication. Like he’s a dog that’s *supposed* to trail their master.

“Sorry to have left you alone for a bit,” Seokjin announces as they exit the hallway into the main living space, which appears to work as a kitchen, a living room and a dining room all in one. “My partner is awfully tardy. Can’t get him out of bed some mornings, I like to joke that he’s more of a glorified cat than an actual person.”

“Seokjin-ssi, this all very nice but—” Taehyung falters in his tracks, Yoongi visibly tenses “—I came to talk to you about Taehyung, not have a pleasant dinner with you and your partner.”

“Well, yes of course, but it is not just my partner that will be joining us this evening.” As Seokjin moves to seat Yoongi a chair, the guest is fully revealed to him. Ocean and sand. Summer and wind. A tropic paradise. Faraway fantasy.

His heart lurches into his throat.

Their eyes meet and those sharp, catlike eyes fall upon him like the crushing pressure of a tsunami. The colour drains from her face, her doll lips parting in a speechless gape. She looks just as gorgeous as the day he last saw her. He remembers now. The airport. The hat she was wearing. The smell of her perfume. “*Be good, Tae.*”

Their eyes linger on one another for what could only be a moment, but it feels as though it stretches across the expanse of a lifetime. Breathless. Unspoken. Tears well and blur his vision.

“Taehyung, come here,” Seokjin beckons casually, gesturing at the seat beside *her.*

But Taehyung cannot move.
He cannot comprehend.

All this time…

Did they…

Did she…

Chuckling, Seokjin drifts over to his side and wraps an arm around his shoulders. It’s constricting, like the vice of a hungry python. “A bit rusty with his hearing I’m afraid. Not very good at doing what he’s told—much like that one over there,” he nods towards Yoongi, who sits rigidly opposite the woman.

With forceful guidance, Seokjin leads him over to the chair next to the female alpha. His legs feel as though they’ve turned to jelly. He can barely feel them, much less hear his own footsteps over the drumming of his heart.

Just as they’re about to pass, the woman springs to her feet and envelops Taehyung in a hug. “You have never idea…” her voice is shaky. “I’ve missed you so much, Tae. My sunshine. My beautiful omega.”

But he can’t quite understand—

“I was worried you were dead.”

Why is she here—

“I promised no unnecessary harm would come to him.”

How does she know—
“Thank god. Thank god…”

What—

“What’s going on?” Yoongi plucks the question straight out of his mind.

“How rude of me. You two haven’t formally met, have you? Min Yoongi, this is Lee Soomin, foreign associate for Cheongwa Incorporated. She deals with the sister companies in Japan and Hong Kong. Lee Soomin, this is Min Yoongi, a current PhD candidate in Psychology at Yonsei University. I have plans to hand over the Chief Psychologist position to him once construction in our Ulsan laboratory is completed.”

Taehyung jerks back to look at the woman—Soomin. That’s right. Her name is Soomin. Soomin.

A name that once gave him so much joy now incites fear within him. What is she doing here? What is she doing here?!

“Please, sit. We have much to discuss,” Seokjin continues pleasantly.

There’s an underlining guilt in Soomin’s eyes as she breaks away from him. A tilt of her head, so demure and unlike the woman he remembers, alludes to her uneasiness and distrust towards Seokjin. With slow grace, she sits back down in her chair. Seokjin urges him down into the seat beside her before assuming a position opposite him.

The scent that wafts from his right is almost unbearable. A punishment so cruel it would never have been conceived in his wildest imaginations. With a grin, Seokjin pours himself a glass of wine before doing the same for the rest of them.

“You were Taehyung’s girlfriend then,” Yoongi says evenly.

Soomin smiles. “Still his girlfriend.”

“After nine months of separation?” he throws back at her. Soomin’s smile wavers. “Estranged is probably the best you could hope for.”
“Now, now,” Seokjin says gently, too amused to be considered normal. “Soomin-ssi is our
honoured guest. No need to start feuds. She is an excellent addition to our foreign affairs
department. Multilingual, cunning, intelligent—she’s gotten our subordinate company out of quite
a few sticky situations. The international success of Cheongwa’s expansion would not have come
to fruition without her skills and talent. I dare say your future employment prospects in Ulsan
would not have been possible if not for her.”

“I have—” her breath hitches “—served your father’s conglomerate well. Tae—” she turns to him,
and Taehyung nearly jumps out of his skin when she clutches his hand. “You were treated fairly,
were you not? Seokjin-ssi said that he could help cure your schizophrenia. I was hoping to see you
in a better condition but—I’m just so happy to see that you’re okay.”

Yoongi growls. “You willingly handed him over to this psychopath?”

“The pills weren’t reliable,” Soomin snaps back, her pretty face scrunched into a defensive snarl.
“They kept the voices at bay but it wasn’t curing him. As someone who works for the company
I’m well aware of the stem cell research conducted in our facilities. Some of the experiments in
process have to do with altering mental diseases. They already have a prototype lined up that can
permanently alter the mind so that it is incapable of creating hallucinations. I read it all in the files
Seokjin-ssi sent to me.”

“And this prototype has been approved by the NDDA, has it?”

Snatching his hand back, Taehyung reaches for a skewer on the plate in the centre of the table.
Forks are knocked off the table and hit the varnished floors with heavy clamour. He pays it no
mind. He starts tearing into the sliced chicken with his hands and teeth, savouring the flavour as it
dances on the tip of his tongue. A groan of satisfaction rumbles deep within his ribcage.

“No?” Soomin tilts her head, regarding Taehyung with a frown. She adds slowly, “Such a thing
wouldn’t likely get approval by the NDDA because selling such a thing on the market would put
an end to the drug corporations that fund them. When patients are no longer dependent on drugs
the pharmaceutical companies that produce them go out of business.”

The other alpha snorts. “I suppose that’s what he told you, is it?” Once Taehyung is finished
devouring the first skewer, he reaches for his glass, lapping at the wine with his tongue. Yoongi
leans over the table, arms cross over his chest. “What Seokjin did to Taehyung scrambled his mind.
He lost the ability to fucking talk—to function like a normal human being. Look at him. Does he
look fine to you?”
A flash of chilling fear passes over Soomin’s face. She looks back over at Seokjin. “You promised —”

“I promised no unnecessary harm would come to him. The harm inflicted upon dear Taehyung was necessary to further our ambitions. I assure you the loss was not in vain.”

The musk in Soomin’s scent has deepened. She will be in rut in a few days’ time.

With a smile, Seokjin gestures a hand over to the mantle at the very end of the table. Fixed to the wall is a large gun. Taehyung shares a look with Yoongi. He licks at the sauce on his fingers. “You see that? It’s my grandfather’s sniper. Well, an exact replica of the one he had, anyway. He used to take it with him whenever he went on hunting trips to West Africa. Had the original melted down because its nozzle broke, and by that stage it was too old to be used anyway.”

“Will you allow me to leave with him?” Soomin asks quietly. “Will you allow me to take my boyfriend back to Daegu?”

“I’m going to release your savage omega into the wilds up north.”

A hot tear stays down the side of Soomin’s face. “Please.”

“And I’m going to hunt him with that sniper. I’ll have his head mounted on your office door, if you like.”

“He’s innocent. Please.” Her voice is on the verge of breaking.

“Innocent?” Seokjin swirls the wine in his glass calmly. “He might’ve been. I made sure to change that when you gave him to me.”

She jumps to her feet, her chair falling to the floor. “You had no right—”

“I had every right. You gave him to me to do as I pleased.”
“To help him—”

“*By any means necessary,*’ were your exact words, as I recall.”

A silence follows. Soomin looks at Taehyung, then at Seokjin, slowly backing towards the door. “This isn’t over, Seokjin. I’ll have you in jail for this.”

“I implore you to try,” Seokjin challenges easily. He doesn’t seem in the least bit concerned. “Tell Satoshi that I wish him health and good fortune.”

The last Taehyung hears of Soomin is the sound of her heels as she storms from the apartment. He doesn’t look back to watch her leave.

If he had, he might’ve died a little inside.

The next day, as early as dawn, Taehyung is thrown into the back of a truck, shackled and chained. He never even got to give a proper farewell to Yoongi, whom he hadn’t seen since dinner. Seokjin exchanges words with some people. Signs some papers. There’s a new gash on his neck that looks freshly sewn together. He’s too tired and overwhelmed to really be paying attention at this point. There wasn’t a whisper of sleep to be had the night before. All that kept running through his mind was that he’d been drugged and kidnapped under the knowledge of his own ex-girlfriend.

To think—she was the only thing that used to keep him going in that hellhole. Before his pack.

He feared that if he closed his eyes, he might see her again, in the same memories he had of her, only this time tainted by the reality set upon him. Did she ever truly love him, he wonders? Maybe Seokjin’s offer was just an opportunistic move to be rid of him once and for all.

There’s no real way of knowing.

It’s not like they could sit down and have a conversation about it.
“I’ll be seeing you again soon, my sweet,” Seokjin tells him as he leans over to kiss him on the forehead. Taehyung’s stomach turns. He might just throw up last night’s meal. “Try to go as deep as you can. I want it to be challenging. If I find you within fifty kilometres of the wall, I’ll be sure to keep you alive long enough to regret it. You understand?”

Taehyung pulls his lips back in a growl.

The beta scoffs. “No, of course you don’t. Well, you’ll learn soon enough anyway. If you’ll excuse me. I have a nice piece of meat waiting for me back at home. I’ll be sure to send it your regards.”

Tapping his cheek, the beta hops out the back of the truck and the doors close out the natural light, leaving him in suffocating darkness.

It’s freezing in this metal box, and it only gets colder the longer the engine runs. Chains sing as he’s rocked back and forth. Tires struggle through rough terrain for half the journey. Taehyung coils in a corner and tries his best to think of the memories his mind can salvage. Those of cuddles in the dark. Voices singing to him. A family that want him, that accept him. In place of his mother’s face, he thinks of Jeongguk holding a baby, and in place of his father—Namjoon, cooing over the child. His brothers—Jimin, Hoseok and Yoongi, there to protect him, there to love and comfort him.

It gets him through the trip.

Hours must’ve past. By the time the engine is cut off and the doors are being yanked open, Taehyung was nearly asleep. The muscles in his arms and legs ache from tensing in the corner for too long. The position hadn’t made him feel any warmer, unfortunately.

As he’s being dragged from the truck, his shoes meet thick snow. Twin dirt tracks, asserted by tires, leads off into the snowy expanse. There isn’t a building or tree to be seen for miles. Only the single road. A man pushes him forward, and he stumbles around the truck. Looking up, he sees a massive, concrete wall that seems to stretch on and on in both directions. There doesn’t appear to be an end to them. It reaches so high that he has to crane his neck all the way back to see the top of it.

Iron grips lead him through gates and security check points, but Taehyung pays them no mind. His eyes remain forward, eager, the anticipation building inside of him.
Eventually, they’re given entrance to the other side. The man and woman who brought him here are fitted into strange-looking costumes before they’re granted clearance. They don’t spare him the same treatment, which he’s thankful for. He’s had enough of wearing costumes for other people.

On the other side, it isn’t quite the same. Instead of white nothingness, they’re greeted by the outer perimeter of a forest. The trees are as tall as the wall itself. Giant titans that reach up to the heavens above. They hand him a backpack and abandon him a little way into the forest. Taehyung stands there, and watches as they march back towards the gate. Taehyung doesn’t have to open the bag to know that there’s food and water in there. He can smell it just fine. Shivering from the cold, he procures a blanket from a side-pocket and drapes it over his shoulders. Then, he walks into the deep of the forest, as though it beckons him like a sailor to a mermaid.

He leaves the bag at the root of a tree.

Barely any snow has fallen through the thickets of pine needles that shadow the lands. As he ventures deeper and strays further from the outskirts, the air grows thicker, and the darkness creeps like death upon him. Taehyung isn’t scared to die. Not here in this peaceful place, untouched by man for centuries. The roots grow more gnarly and tangled. The trees more monstrous and twisted. Shapes he’s never seen from pines before. Instead of reaching straight up, they bend and they wind around one another like serpents attempting to strangle the life out of each other.

Noises grow louder. He can’t even tell what animals they’re coming from.

They sound like creatures not from this earth.

It dawns on him, just as the light fades from existence, that he truly is free now.

Free from the voices.

Free from the facility.

Free from society.

The unknown should terrify him. It should have the hairs on his arms standing on end, and the beat
of his heart fluttering with unbridled fear.

He grins.

Throwing off the blanket, he goes running headlong into the blackness. A wildness as untameable as the wind unleashes within him, and he unburdens himself from walking on two feet, and begins his venture on all fours. Heart pumping, adrenaline spiking, his mouth waters for blood, for meat and game and wonder.

He can no longer feel the cold.

Leaping over a tangle of trees, the darkness is abruptly expelled by a burst of glowing colour. Fungi, mosses and plants that grow from the trees glow an almost ethereal light. Aquamarines, magentas and canaries paint the forest like an easel. Fireflies and butterflies draw lines of colour in the air that linger for seconds longer before vanishing out of existence. The pines are a variation of deep purples and vivid reds. A frog with no eyes and wings drifts by and he swats it with his paw excitedly.

Galloping further into the land of colour, his ears twitch at the sound of running water. Racing through trees, ducking, jumping, and sliding, it doesn’t take him long to find the source.

A hidden oasis reveals itself. A glittering lake of crystal-like water illuminated by the glowing canopies above. A waterfall thunders from across the other side. Even the rocks around it seem to glisten with a hue of lime green. Leaning over the lake, a reflection stares back at him.

Of piercing yellow eyes and rich, chocolate fur.

Chapter End Notes

My Curious Cat

Tumblr
The train rocks gently as it takes them further and further out of the city. The address sprawled out in impeccable script on Jeongguk’s folded note tells them that they need to go to Bucheon. They count themselves lucky that it isn’t somewhere out of the metro’s jurisdiction, otherwise they’d likely have to pay money for bus tickets bound further south. Originally, they’d planned to follow up on the lead after snacking on the mini boxes of complementary cereal left in the pantry, but around eight in the afternoon an incident had taken place in one of the motel rooms on the ground floor. Cops were crawling all over the place. Red and blue lights silhouetted their drawn curtains as he and Jimin lay on the lumpy mattress staring silently at the ceiling, too anxious to breathe. If they were caught, they’d be arrested for violating the Class Service Act. They wouldn’t be thrown in jail, of course. Omegas are rarely ever convicted, especially for such a mundane violation. But they don’t have the money to pay the fines. They’d be kept in holding cells until they could, and every hour that passes is an hour wasted not finding his baby or the other packmates.

In the morning there were still a few uniforms milling around the courtyard, and police tape and a restriction notice slapped over Room 5. Two omegas leaving together would’ve stunk of suspicion, so they had no choice but to stay put until the coast was clear.

It wasn’t until nightfall that it was finally safe to leave. They briefly stopped at the reception desk so Jimin could give the receptionist a piece of his mind. Apparently an omega patron had overdosed in Room 5 and seemingly without beta or alpha company, which had the police raising a few eyebrows. They made no further enquiries.

“Wouldn’t be surprised if she was harbouring other omegas travelling alone. Those running from domestic abuse situations have trouble finding roofs when shelters turn them away. You’d be surprised how often people will take advantage of those who’re desperate,” Jimin had ranted all the way to the train station. No, Jeongguk had wanted to say, he doesn’t think he’d be all that surprised to know how often people take advantage of the desperate. There might be a place in time in the future where he’ll be able to share his opinions freely, but in spite of all the progress he’s made to be more…assertive…he has to come to terms with the fact that he’ll never on the same level of confidence as Jimin.
Jeongguk can live with that.

It just isn’t the person he was meant to be, as much as he admires and—perhaps even envies—Jimin’s brazen attitude. The demons are still there, scratching their elongated fingernails at his door, begging to be let in. Dealing with them is more important than chasing fantasies of sweeping transformations that make him a stranger to himself.

It’s like Namjoon once told him. It isn’t realistic, nor is it necessary.

Pheromones waft from the alpha sitting next to him, immersed with his phone. It doesn’t have the same effect on him as it once had. The scent is muted, like a hang tag air freshener too many months past its used-by date. To his other side, Jimin idly opens and closes his disposable flip phone. The look in his eyes is intense, vindictive even, as he stares off into the blurred incomprehension that rushes by the window opposite them. Jeongguk gnaws at his bottom lip. It was easier to ignore the shadowed creature of self-destruction when the rest of the world was far out of his reach. The white walls were a different time in a different reality, where the horrors of his past were locked away in the back of his mind and excuse as a nightmare. Reality is upon them once again, though. And with it, the horrors. Jeongguk must be the worst mother on the planet to have let them take his child from him. He’d spied the chloroform-doused rag as his baby had suckled at his teat. The natural response from a first-time mother would’ve been to fight back by any means necessary, even if you are exhausted, even if you are still in pain, the welfare of the child far outweigh the welfare of your own.

But.

Jeongguk swallows hard at the memory.

He didn’t even scream. The chemicals went flooding up his nose and stung his eyes but he didn’t think to struggle. In that moment he’d clung to the happiness like a starving peasant. He didn’t want to believe it could end.

It was selfish of him. Namjoon never even got to be there. He doesn’t even know what his newborn looks like, doesn’t know his scent or his gender or anything, while Jeongguk has the privilege of knowing at least that much.

The thought of where his child might be, what they would be doing to him at this very moment…it breaks his heart. Just a little infant. Barely bigger than his two hands. They’d stolen him away
before he’d even had the chance to open his eyes. Is he in a research facility somewhere? Are they conducting tests on him? Who rocks him back to sleep at night when he cries? Who burps him after he’s been fed? Newborns share a scent bond with their mothers for their first six months of life. A child could be passed between a thousand experienced wet nurses and they would cry from dusk to dawn, but a moment in their mother’s arms it is welcomed with peaceful silence. As Jeongguk laid awake last night, unable to rest without his mate or child, he couldn’t stop thinking about him in a plastic crib somewhere, next to hundreds of other newborn babies, screaming.

A constant stream of fears and anxieties are filtered through his bond with Namjoon. The alpha is gradually losing his mind.

Every moment that passes Jeongguk can feel it getting heavier. Like the crushing weight of the ocean baring down against his chest. He wants to reassure Namjoon so badly. He can feel the alpha searching for it. For that reassurance. But.

But he has no reassurances to give.

He doesn’t know where their baby is. Every minute that ticks by he can feel his energy and strength leaving him, he had absolutely no sleep last night, he’s so tired that even the thought of standing up makes him want to burst into a hysterical fit of tears… God, he’s a mess. This is fucked up. This is so royally fucked up. They’ll never be able to spend the night apart from each other ever again. If Namjoon were to get a job and had to stay overnight at a lab or—or he had to stay late at the studio—oh god it’d take effort just to get through the day being separated. How can they ever hope to have careers if everyday is going to feel like this—like they’ve been cornered and they can’t breathe.

The building trepidation is so rampant that he doesn’t even register Jimin shaking his shoulder. Not until the omega closes his hand over his balled-up fist, which is fixed white-knuckled around his scarf, that he finally looks at his companion.

“Are you having a panic attack?” Jimin asks, voice lowered.

“I—” he takes deep breaths, his old therapist’s advice echoing off the walls of his mind. “I’m fine.”

“You better be.” Jeongguk shoots the older man an offended look. Cupping the side of his neck, Jimin looks him straight in the eye and elaborates, “You’re not the child you were when this all started. You’re basically married with a baby. We’ve…” he looks almost pained to say it “…been through some things, you and I. M’not gonna fucking tell you that we’re similar or some shit ‘cuz
we’re not. You fucking annoyed me when we first met. You still annoy me, but you’re—less annoying, I guess. My point is—you’re not the scared little boy who needed Namjoon to give you comfort and validation anymore. Let that twat die. You’ve got bigger problems now than just finding an alpha to knot you.”

The worries and the anxieties don’t just magically disappear, moved by the aggressive passion of Jimin’s words. If such a thing were possible he’d have stopped seeing his therapist a long time ago. The twist in his gut, however, does lessen somewhat knowing that, at the very least, he has Jimin to support him. To be the barking football coach demanding he stand up when he’s flat on his back in despair.

Nodding his head, he goes back to thinking about Namjoon and the baby, only this time with controlled breathing and relaxed fists.

Names had been thrown around in the dark of night when they couldn’t sleep. Children are named by their class, and long-ago people used to visit fortune tellers to help choose. That fell out of fashion a little under 200 years ago, after China boycotted products from its surrounding countries in protest of a trade agreement where Europe prioritised trade between Japan, Korea and South East Asia to boost GDP growth and prosperity. It destabilised the global trade relationships across the Eurasian continent, which then loosely influenced a cultural revolution that brought postmodernism into the fold and essentially deconstructed traditions from Eastern and Western society. Chinese and American traditions in particular were heavily scrutinised. People had their reasons, but as his Contrarian Theory professor put it, the only reason China and America were primarily targeted was due to their global economic reach. It gave birth to an era art theorists call the Contrarian Era, where waves of more rebellious, non-conventional art flourished.

Jeongguk had no names in mind. He was always on the fence about having children, even when he was younger. At school, he would overhear omegas talking about the names of their future children—and sometimes betas, too. Ironically, while fortune-telling fell out of style, hanja and their purpose in the Korean lexicon did not.

If anything, it boosted popularity to the point where there were more enrolments for Mandarin than there were for English in some universities.

Surprisingly though, Namjoon had a number of names that he wasn’t ashamed to suggest as he drew circles along the side of Jeongguk’s stomach. He even thought about their hanja and meanings, too. It never ceases to amaze him how intelligent Namjoon is. “I have more alpha names than I do beta or omega names,” Namjoon admitted sheepishly. “Growing up I always wanted alpha children because—because living in an alpha family was so easy-going and happy. I know not all alpha households are probably like mine but—you know...”
Even though it was too dark to see Namjoon’s face, he imagines the alpha blushing. “Alright, if it’s an alpha?"

“Well, my number one pick would be Junho.”

“And what hanja would we use?”

“Winter Lake,” he said as he traced the characters gently into his skin.

“Poetic,” Jeongguk giggled. “Wouldn’t expect anything less from you. What if they’re a beta?”

“Jinwoo, maybe.”

“Meaning?”

“‘Good Friend.’”

Jeongguk recognises the character 友 as it’s being written by the tip of Namjoon’s finger. The next question sits heavily on his tongue, and he wonders if he dares to speak it. Would someone like Namjoon even want an omega?

But then the alpha went ahead and answered the unspoken question anyway. “If it’s an omega, Haeun. ‘Ha’ meaning ‘sacred lotus’, ‘eun’ meaning ‘kindness’ and ‘grace.’”

Haeun. A beautiful name for a beautiful baby.

“Say Jimin,” he tries to sound as casual as possible.

The omega lolls his head back and blinks away the sleep. Jimin didn’t get much sleep last night either. He was paranoid about the cops. It didn’t take a genius to figure out that he has little faith in the police force, and with all things considered, Jeongguk could hardly blame him for it.
“Hm?”

“What do you think of the name ‘Haeun’?” he asks.

“Lil’ omegian for my tastes—you should call the kid something like Jimin,” he smirks. “Jimin at the very least is a name that could be construed as alpha, beta or omega.”

Jeongguk snorts. “I think I’m going to name him Haeun.”

Rolling his eyes, he rests his head on Jeongguk’s shoulder with a frustrated sigh. “Then why did you ask, asshole.”

As Jimin begins to doze off, Jeongguk can’t help but fight off a small smile. He doesn’t quite know what to make their budding friendship. Months and months of spite and ridicule don’t just wash away at the drop of a hat, and even though it isn’t nearly as bad as it used to be, Jimin still has some internalised issues. He wouldn’t dream of judging him for it. Two people can go through similar trauma but deal with it in entirely different manners.

It is…nice, though. That Jimin would drop everything to find him.

A rectangular screen infused into the wall beside the automatic doors flickers and briefly catches Jeongguk’s attention. Often on trains and buses throughout Korea, screens no large than A4 paper showcase a number of criminals wanted under suspicion of serious crimes. They garner very little interest from most commuters. He’s about to look away when he recognises a face. Hoseok. It appears to be a photo taken at work, because he’s in a casual blazer and a pressed shirt, his beaming smile on full display.

“Wanted on Charges of Paedophilia”

It’s a difficult pill to swallow. As someone who knows and has spent a lot of personal time with Hoseok, it’s hard to believe that they could even attempt to convince anybody he’s a child abuser.

Seems they went ahead with the smear campaign anyway, just as Hoseok said they would. God. Wherever Hoseok is right now he hopes he’s safe. If luck is on his side, he might be somewhere further out into the countryside, closer to where the abandoned settlements litter rural areas. Jeongguk recalls the alpha mentioning that he lived in Gwangju. If he’s going to wake up
anywhere familiar it would there. If there is a god—though he’s certain that there isn’t—at the very least, let him be around people he loves and trusts. Someone like Hoseok deserves that much.

It occurs to him that Jimin might want to know about it.

A more confident being might’ve shaken Jimin from his beauty sleep and called attention to the dilemma. But Jeongguk wouldn’t dream of it. He’ll tell him later. When he’s in a better mood.

The remaining twenty-minute commute flies by in relative silence. Around them are mostly white-collar workers and high school students on their way home from work. Clinging to the overhead handles in front of them are two kids in uniform, an alpha girl and an omega girl. School uniforms are tailored depending on class. Omegas wear skirts past the knee and blue badges on their sweaters, betas wear a style of loose pants that sewn tight around the ankles and green badges, and alphas wear ironed slacks and red badges. The alpha has her hand loosely placed on the omega’s back, using the jerk of the train carriage as an excuse to touch her. The omega laughs without any care for the quiet of her surroundings as the alpha cracks dumb jokes about a teacher notorious for punishing students over inappropriate dress codes.

“The look on her face when she saw your knee dimple—I’ve seen vultures make the same face on the discovery channel,” the alpha snorts and the omega giggles loud enough to garner a passing glare from a salary man to her left.

“What about your ankles!” the omega cries. “You sully the good name of ‘alpha’ with your indecency!”

Jeongguk nudges Jimin awake when they reach their destination. Two batty older women shuffle to assume their vacant seats, with more than a few harsh words to say about the high school omega, whom had gotten off with her alpha friend (though most likely more than that) a station or two before. They made no mention of the alpha’s behaviour.

“It’s snowing again,” he comments as they step off the escalator onto a relatively quiet suburban street. There’s a large, multilevel department store a few blocks behind them, and the street is populated by restaurants and cafes, but it is a weeknight. Most people just want to go home.

Taking his hand, Jimin walks with purpose away from the shops and deeper into the residential area, muttering under his breath. They’d acquired a destination guide they’d found in a drawer underneath the television in the motel room. It served as a distraction as they waited for the police to leave. Jimin had taken it upon himself to memorise where they had to go.
“Left from exit nine… head north for three blocks… turn right and go straight until you see the public library…” Jimin continues to mumble. They venture on a brick pathway flanked by dead trees. Blankets of snow cover a nearby bench, and just a little further up, there are tiny footprints dotted next to larger ones. A toddler and a mother, perhaps.

A couple walking their dog pass them. A kid on his bike almost loses control on a slate of ice surrounding a cracked lamppost. There are mostly apartment complexes near the library, but a little further from that are houses. Big houses. The kind that have two cars in their garage and large dogs guarding their gates. The lamps are few and far between now. Lights from houses paint the streets in soft squares or coaxing arches. Around this time omegas have either just finished cooking dinner or are cleaning up, betas and alphas are loosening their ties or changing into sweats, and the children trudge back up to their rooms to finish the homework they’ve been putting off for hours because it’s academy homework, not school homework. It’s not as important.

Mist vanishes into the cool air when Jimin breathes out. “Used to fantasize about living in a neighbourhood like this, you know. One where I had parents and maybe even a brother or sister. I tried to imagine a life where my biggest issues were scoring A’s on my exams or asking out a beta or alpha that I really liked… Makes you wonder, doesn’t it? What goes on behind those doors.”

“I used to live in a neighbourhood like this,” he says plainly. “My father beat me and my mother would leave at odd hours in the night to see movie producers and directors. Sometimes, she’d take me with her.”

“Yeah, but at least you were fed and got to go to school.”

“A director once bought me ice cream after he raped me,” he tries to say lightly, though his voice does tremble. “That was nice of him. I guess.”

Jimin slows to a stop, and Jeongguk stops a few paces after him. Looking back at the shorter man, he waits for an explanation, but Jimin doesn’t give him one. He just looks at him, eyebrows drawn as though someone just stabbed him in the foot.

“I’m sorry,” he finally says. “I didn’t mean it like that.”

“What did you mean then?” he asks without any real malice behind his words.
“I only meant—” Jimin chokes. His jaw twitches, like it always does when he has trouble articulating his thoughts. “Never mind.”

Jimin assumes his grip on Jeongguk’s wrist and tugs him along as though the conversation never took place, but Jeongguk likes to think that maybe Jimin is finally starting to realise suffering is not a competition.

They make a few more turns before stopping at a two-story house with white wooden panels and large Georgian windows. Unlike some of the other houses, parts of the residence aren’t completely gated from the pedestrian sidewalk. There is an iron fence with vines interwoven into the bars that blocks off the front patio. Jimin lets go of his hand and paces over to the mailbox to check the number, his slippers leaving tracks in the fallen snow. Eclipsed by the light from a nearby window, it calls to Jeongguk. Shuffling closer to the domestic glow, he cranes his neck to get a peak inside what looks to be a living area.

His heart drops like a stone into his stomach.

“This is it. This is the place on the paper—Gguk?” Jimin shuffles over to him with his hands stuffed into his pockets. Jeongguk barely registers that he’s there. His eyes are frozen, fixed upon what is being so blatantly put out on display before him. “Oh…”

The living room is nice enough. A black fur rug cushioning the legs of a glass coffee table from scuffing the wooden varnish underneath it, a sectional cream sofa with silk red pillows and gold tassels. Hanging from the high ceiling is an ornate light display that hug the bulbs nestled into shapes of flower petals. Against the far wall, adjacent to the windows, is a massive display cabinet full of what looks to be fine china. Beside it is painting Jeongguk recognises as a Bonnaire painting, a French painter heavily influenced by the Era of Enlightenment that was rampant in India and the Middle East about seven-hundred years ago. It wasn’t an original. Even though Bonnaire was a contemporary artist (died around fifty years ago from ovarian cancer), her works are notoriously difficult to acquire.

It isn’t the fancy home décor that caught his attention, though.

On the sofa are two people. One of them is broad-shouldered and conventionally handsome, with their arm draped over the thinner, smaller frame of another man, whose face is mousy and delicate. First impressions sometimes speak volumes. If he were to make assumptions—and he is making assumptions he believes to be accurate—it is an alpha-omega couple. Cradled in the arms of the smaller gentleman is a bundle of blankets. It squirms and squawks as the couple coo over it.
And Jeongguk knows.

He knows that it is his baby in the arms of a stranger. Someone he does not know.

“They…”

His bottom lip trembles.

“They gave my baby away.”

Jimin is silent. Jeongguk watches on as the alpha leans over and brushes the fingers over Haeun’s little forehead, thick, dark eyebrows pinched with concern. The omega bounces him in his arms. The worry and care oozing from every pour of their expressions somehow hurts him even more than if they were being cruel or negligent. Nature verses Nurturer. This is what he feared but dared not think about. Seokjin was always hinting towards something of this degree. Of snatching his baby away and handing them over to another couple. A loving couple. The longer he looks the more he sees himself and Namjoon sitting on that sofa with their child. This is what they could’ve been, if life had been kinder to them. This is how it should’ve been. A happy house and a happy family with no past traumas hidden away in the corners. The alpha probably went to an elite university and has a stable job. The omega probably keeps the garden prim and beautiful and knows how to cook a meal without charring it to a blackened crisp. The alpha likely doesn’t have class prejudices and the omega likely wasn’t molested as a child.

Jeongguk wonders what they were told. Did they dump the baby on the couple’s doorstep knowing they were desperate? Did they masquerade as an adoption service and screened them for the experiment beforehand? Have they planted cameras and bugs in the house to monitor them?

“Don’t—don’t freak out,” Jimin places a hand on his shoulder. Still, Jeongguk doesn’t respond. “Jeongguk? Hey—listen to me.”

“They ripped my baby from my arms,” he whispers quietly. “And they gave him to a couple that is superior to Namjoon and I in every single way. I—Seokjin did this. He knew what would hurt me the most in this world. He knew it and—just when I think he can’t sink any lower he goes ahead and proves me wrong.”

“Seokjin? What does he have to do with anything?”
Blinking away his tears, he says, “Seokjin’s been in on everything this entire time. The experiment, the punishments, the rewards—all of it. When he wasn’t stalking us himself, he had people follow us around, learn our habits, our mannerisms, just to ensure that when the day came when he finally took us we would do exactly what he expected us to do.”

The hand falls from his shoulder, and Jimin turns from him to lean against a drainage pipe. “That fucking piece of cow shit—” he turns back to him. Jeongguk doesn’t take his eyes away from his baby, but he imagines the omega’s face twisted with anger. “How come you’re only mentioning this now? How long have you known that Seokjin was behind it? Who told you?”

“I was barely two months along when he came to visit me.”

Jimin shoves him. It’s only then that he finally looks at his companion, confused but mostly annoyed. “And it never occurred to you to mention this to anyone?!”

“What difference does it make if you knew or not?” he snaps defensively. “You never saw Seokjin for the rest of your confinement. He never went to visit you while you were pregnant and threatened you and your unborn child. The most you had to lose was your life. I had much more than that to lose. If I could go back in time and do it all again, I still wouldn’t have told you—or the others, either. I didn’t even tell Namjoon, so I wouldn’t take it personally.”

Before Jimin has time to retaliate, Jeongguk is marching away from him. “Hey—!”

He can hear the omega follow him all the way to the gate, which he tests to see if it’s locked. It unlatches easy enough and he ascends the stairs up to the patio.

“Jeongguk, wait—”

“What, hyung?” he turns around to shoot a glare in Jimin’s direction. The older man’s foot stills on the first stair, looking at him strangely.

Then, Jimin grins. “I’ve never seen you get angry like this.”

“Yeah, well, first time for everything, I guess. Kind of in the middle of getting my baby back. Do you mind?” He turns back towards the front door, but before he can reach out and knock, Jimin seizes his wrist.
“Wait, Gguk, what the hell do you plan to do when that tank answers the door? Fight him?”

“I don’t know—maybe. Unless you have any better ideas.”

Jimin doesn’t refrain from rolling his eyes dramatically. As if the very notion of Jeongguk picking a fight with anyone is utterly ridiculous. And he’s well aware that it’s ridiculous. He’s not a fighter and he’s never pretended to be one, and there have been many a time where he’s rolled over and taken the bullshit the universe has thrown at him. But not this time. Not when it comes to his first-born child. Even if he dies fighting to get to him at least he can die knowing he did everything that he possibly could. It’d be the one redeeming act against the storm of condemnation in his life.

Tugging him over to the porch swing, Jimin brushes off a thin layer of snow before urging Jeongguk to sit down. “We’re going to get your kid back, Gguk. Charging into a private residence fists blazing isn’t going to do us much good, especially against an alpha. We’ll get our asses beat, and the twink will call the cops on us. That’ll be the end of it and it’ll blow any chances of you seeing that baby again, okay?”

“So, what?” he says, folding his arms over his chest. “We get back up?”

“What? No. We don’t need the alphas to steal a baby. You’re looking at the best thief in Yongdab.”

“Yongdab?”

“Place I lived just after running from my last foster home. You thought I was in the subway with a pan begging for money? Do I look like someone who’s begged for anything in his life? Fuck no. I stole shit. I lot of it. I was a real small kid—could fold and contort myself into small areas where most thieves can’t get to. Made a few friends that taught me how to rig alarm systems in cars and in homes. Became so good the papers even gave me a name.”

Jeongguk heart began to accelerate. He never even considered the possibility that Jimin could break into homes undetected, though all things considered it really shouldn’t surprise him. Maybe…just maybe, they might actually be able to pull this off. They might be able to get Haeun back without getting themselves beaten up or—worse—arrested.

Fingers shaking, he takes Jimin’s hands into his own, his lips trembling and his eyes glassy with
unshed tears. “You really think we can do this? You really think we can get him back?”

“No, but I reckon I could get him back.” Jimin’s lips coil into a proud smirk.

“But—”

“Trust me.” Jimin gazes at him unblinkingly. “If you can extend trust to someone like Namjoon then at the very least you can grant me the same.”

Taking a deep breath in an effort to calm his nerves, he asks, “What if it all goes wrong?”

“Things get ugly you’re going to run. Don’t wait for me.”

“Hyung—”

“I’m not saying that to be a hero,” he stresses assertively. “You can’t get your kid back if you’re in jail. And you certainly can’t spring me from jail if you’re in there with me. You understand? You’re no good to anyone if you’re caught.”

He squeezes Jimin’s hands. “Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that, then.”

Jimin nods. “Alright, you’re going to go scout the perimeter of the house to find any potential entry points other than the front door.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m gonna go find somewhere to piss.”

“Right.”

“Come find me when you’re done.”
Cold sweat drips down his temple as they hastily tread through the dead of night. Jeongguk can’t hear anything over the roar of blood in his ears and the step, step, stepping of their feet against the pavement. They’d just gotten off the last bus of the evening that was bound of Daehwa. Their destination is just a few stops before at Madu, Ilsan. Even now, even though they’d fled the scene of the crime over forty-five minutes ago, the numbness of pure, unsaturated adrenaline still gallops like a horde through his beating veins. The weight he cradles in his arms feels almost non-existent to the crisis that rages within his mind.

They are officially criminals.

They broke into someone’s home and stole a baby from a happy couple who, for all they know, are likely innocent of any wrong doing. When Jimin had swiped Haeun from the crib the baby was still crying—as he had since they’d found the house—but the moment he was placed in Jeongguk’s arms, Haeun went silent. As though he knew he was back where he belonged.

As they’d bolted for the bus station a harrowing thought occurred to Jeongguk. It nagged at Jeongguk throughout the entire bus trip to Ilsan, and even still now as they follow directions towards the address on Jimin’s note. Going back to Suwon wasn’t an option for them. Not now that their original hideout has been compromised and soon, their faces may very well be as prolific as Hoseok’s in the news. The house did have security cameras. When the police seize the evidence there’s no question whether they’ll release it to the public. As of tonight, they’ll be known to all of Korea as the omega duo that stole a baby from a loving home.

“Hyung,” he calls out quietly, readjusting Haeun in his arms. “What if we made the wrong decision? Those people…they could’ve been Haeun’s one chance at a normal life.”

Jimin is quick to dismiss this concern, “Don’t fall into that sort of thought process, Gguk. It’ll only make you depressed.”

“But it’s a little true, isn’t it? Namjoon and I…after all that we’ve been through…we’ll never be a normal, functioning family. Look at me. I’m a mess after only being apart from him for—what—two days? We’ll never be able to hold down stable jobs unless we happen to work in the same office—and even then I’ll have to take Haeun to work with me—”
Sharply turning to face him, the other omega shoots him a stern look. “Jeongguk, none of us are going to have normal, functioning lives after this. Whether or not you should’ve left Haeun with that couple is completely beside the point and—though you may not like it—wasn’t your decision to make in the first place. That child isn’t just yours, he’s Namjoon’s and he’s ours. If you think Yoongi and Hoseok would’ve just stood aside and said some shit like ‘well if that’s what you think is best for your child’ then you’re dumber than I gave you credit for.”

Biting back tears, he tries to speak, “But what do we—”

“Enough of this bullshit.” Jimin drags him along before Jeongguk is even given the chance to get weepy and emotional again.

They end up at another large house. Unlike the last one which screamed mid-western suburbia, this one is sleeker and more modern, a high-end downtown style that basically cries contemporary success. To one side of the house is a large garage with a wooden door, and beside the mailbox is a small, closed-off courtyard that can only be seen through the tiny gaps in the gate. An overhead canopy hangs above the entrance, and to both sides are fountains that spill water from thin gaps in the walls into stone ponds. Jeongguk imagines that this place would seem almost exotic in the early months of summer, where the flowers bloom in the canopy and tiny birds flutter and nest in the vines.

A dim light is on in the upstairs window, indicating that perhaps someone inside is still awake.

“What if this is Seokjin’s house,” Jeongguk says fearfully.

“I doubt it.” Jimin tries to peek through the frosted windows on either side of the front doors. “A young, rich bachelor, heir to his father’s company and fortune wouldn’t bother living this far out of the city. This house screams ‘married with children.’”

Haeun is fast asleep in Jeongguk’s arms now, half his little face covered by the blanket they stole him in. A tiny little human. That they made. He and Namjoon, together.

Taking a step back, Jimin sighs. “Well, here goes nothing I guess.”

He presses the doorbell, and like a chain reaction, the echo of the bell runs down hallways and wakes up the entire house. Lights go on, a dog comes racing to the door, barking with excitement.
Haeun squirms and gurgles at the offending noise. The poor thing probably hasn’t gotten any proper sleep he’s had such an eventful few days.

A number of voices can be heard approaching. Females ones and male ones. It seems as though there’s at least four people living here.

Locks are unlatched and one of the double doors open to reveal an older alpha male couple, maybe in their early fifties, and the shadows of female faces peeking over their shoulders in curiosity. Also alpha.

“Little late for a visit, isn’t it?” one of the alpha males asks humouredly, while his partner looks rather grumpy with their disturbance.

Jimin’s mouth opens to say something—but is then interrupted by the sound of feet thundering down steps—followed closely by a rambunctious crash. They all wince. The dog starts barking madly again. The women and men look behind them, and even one of them rushes to go help them.

Then—“Jeongguk!”

His heart slams against his ribcage as he takes a step towards the door, breath caught in his throat. “N-Namjoon-hyung?”

“For fuck’s sake Joon you could’ve seriously hurt yourself!” the woman who’d disappeared returns, looking miffed, and followed closely behind her is none other than Namjoon.

“Hyung!” Jeongguk cries, extending an arm out for him. Namjoon pushes past the barricade of human bodies crowding the door to get to him. He takes them into his arms and Jeongguk bursts into tears against Namjoon’s neck. “I was so—oh god, you’re okay. I’m so glad you’re okay.”

When Namjoon doesn’t say anything, he grows a little concerned, until he feels the wetness against his forehead and realises that the alpha is crying. Their noses bump together as they share a small but tender kiss. Words can’t describe how wonderful it feels to be back in Namjoon’s arms. The stress and exhaustion that came from being apart creeps away like a headache from a painkiller.

Namjoon breaks away to coo at the baby. “This whole time I was left wondering what our baby looked like.”
“He’s an omega,” Jeongguk says, though the statement is obvious. “Our little Haeun.”

Scents don’t come into full force until they’re teenagers, when hormones rage and sex is a near constant thought in their minds. As children, their scents are gentler and subtler, but still distinctly there. Haeun smells like mint chocolate.

Sniffing, he wipes a tear from Haeun’s cheek that’d fallen on him during the tearful reunion. “He’ll be a heartthrob, just like his mother.”

“And a genius like his father.” They grin at each other.

“Joon, I hate to interrupt, but who are these people?”

They both turn to regard the group of alphas still lingering by the door. With an arm snaked around Jeongguk’s waist, he guides him forward. He wipes a few tears from his eyes with the sleeve of his dorky pyjamas and says, “This is Jeongguk, my mate, and our child, Haeun. Jeongguk, these are my parents—my sister and her partner.”

One of the women screams and shoves everyone out of the way to get to them. She bends over to croon at Haeun, and the other woman, a taller and more graceful young woman, cranes to look over her partner’s form. “Joon-oppa has told us all about you. How you met and everything.”

Jeongguk side-eyes Namjoon, “What exactly did you tell them, hyung?”

“No need to be sceptical,” the kinder looking man throws his hands up and approaches with a swagger in his step. “Namjoon spilled all the beans about what happened. No need to fear, dear, I solemnly swear that your secret is completely safe with us.” He offers Jeongguk a hand and he shakes it without giving it a second thought. The shock is immediate, and he pulls back his hand with a violent flinch. “Oh um—sorry, Namjoon did mention that. I’m very sorry. My name is Dongho, but you can call me ‘Dad’ if you like. That grump over there is Junhyun—” he points a thumb to the man who’s still standing at the door with his arms crossed over his chest “—this is my lovely daughter, Jinseo, and her girlfriend, Songin.” He indicates to the woman cooing over Haeun as Namjoon’s sister, and the taller one with long hair as the girlfriend.

“Nice to meet you?” it comes out as more of a question, though he doesn’t mean for it to. He mentally slaps himself before he says, “My friend—Jimin—he’s apart of our pack. Haeun and I
wouldn’t even be here if it wasn’t for him.”

Namjoon looks surprised at this news. “Really now?”

The other omega grudgingly kicks at the ground and pointedly avoids the curious stare he receives from Namjoon. “It’s whatever.”

“Better come inside then,” Junhyun says with a yawn. “While this is all very exciting, I’ve got to get up at six tomorrow to meet with contractors.”

“You’re always meeting with contractors,” Dongho huffs without taking his eyes off Haeun. “Wouldn’t you like to hold your first grandchild in your arms?”

Namjoon encourages Jeongguk forward until they’re in front of his father. The man’s demeanour is strikingly similar to that of Yoongi, only this man is a margin taller with a patchy beard. Much like Yoongi, the man also intimidates him slightly— at least with the same level of intimidation he felt when he first met Yoongi. Unfortunately, this man is not Yoongi. He is Namjoon’s father, who he had never even considered meeting when they were all in confinement. Though, it would make perfect sense now that he and Namjoon are claimed and have a child together. Would seem almost insulting not to meet the people who raised his partner.

With mild reluctance, he offers the baby for Dongho to hold. Cautiously, the older man takes the bundle into his arms, and—

And Haeun immediately starts bawling.

Dongho gives him back rather quickly, as though he has committed a heinous crime worthy of punishment, and Haeun is quiet again.

“Good to know my own grandchild hates me,” Dongho says flatly. Namjoon laughs and slaps him on the shoulder.

“Go to bed you old fart, I’m sure Haeun will be less cranky in the morning.”
Three of the five family members elect to go to bed because they either have work or classes the next day, but Namjoon and Junhyun stay with them in the kitchen as they recount the events that brought them here. The kitchen, as expected, is a grand spectacle to look at, with black marble benches and white, glass cabinets that reach to the ceiling. They have a golden retriever named Cronos, who lost interest in them rather quickly and went to go lay on his bed beside the television. A talking refrigerator makes them cups of hot chocolate. As Junhyun places the steaming beverage in front of him, he opens his mouth to ask—but Namjoon has already brought out a container full of marshmallows and drops two into his mug with a knowing grin. Jeongguk blushes.

Jimin rejects the marshmallows offered to him, and says he prefers his drinks bitter.

“Why doesn’t that surprise me?” Namjoon drawls as he places the container back in an overhead cupboard.

“Fuck off.”

“It’s awful what the two of you have been through,” Junhyun continues. “It must’ve been traumatising to wake up in a strange place hours after birth without any sign of your child. It’s such a relief that you’re safe here with us now.”

“We can’t stay for long,” Jimin announces. “Soon the whole country will be on the hunt for us. We also have no clue where the others are. Our safest bet is to reunite with the others and then lay low for a few years.”

“It’s not just us who’re wanted by the law,” Jeongguk finally divulges. “On the train—Hoseok—”

“Ah,” Namjoon nods and he quickly leaves the room for a moment. When he returns, he has a tablet in his hand. With a few taps, he finds an article all about Hoseok’s crimes and associations with the former condemned CEO of The Angels of Light. It even goes as far as to suggest Hoseok himself is a paedophile. “There are dozens of other articles just like this one all over news sites. I tried cross-referencing the sources but majority of them lead to dead ends. I mean, except for a few that indicate his co-workers in having a hand in the smear campaign.”

“Poor Hoseok…” Jeongguk says sadly. “I hope he’s okay.”

“You know, if you ever find your friends, they could always come live here with us,” Junhyun suggests cheerfully. “Dongho will grouche about it for a few days but he usually finds new things to
“Dad, we can’t do that,” Namjoon immediately contests. “You’d be harbouring criminals. If we get caught you and Dad’ll go down, too. Maybe even Jinseo. We could never put you in that position.”

“Do you expect me to stand aside as the police hunt you down?”

“Yes, if you wanna keep Dad and Jinseo out of this.”

Junhyun sighs tiredly, pinching the bridge of his nose beneath his glasses. “It’s late. We can discuss this tomorrow. I’ll set up the guest bedroom for Jimin and find something for the baby to sleep in.”

As his father leaves, Jeongguk purses his lips at Namjoon. “He’s not going to let us go without a fight.”

With his mouth pressed into a grim line, Namjoon replies. “I know.”

Jimin yawns loudly. “We’ll think of something tomorrow. Right now, I’m about ready to pass out.”

It’s oddly…comforting, being in Namjoon’s childhood bedroom. There are academic trophies on a shelf lining the wall, and beneath it are photographs of younger, middle school and high school Namjoon, giving speeches on podiums and shaking hands with who he assumes to be the school principal. Aside from the toy chest in the corner and a shelf filled to the brim with teenage spy novels though, the rest of the room could easily be mistaken for a spare bedroom. The bedcovers are a plain white, with the pattern underneath folded by the pillows to reveal a plain navy blue with white stripes streaked across it.

The make-shift crib was made from an empty, square container which Junhyun padded with layers of thick blankets, and there was even a little pillow to rest Haeun’s head on. As Jeongguk tucks Haeun in, he asks, “Do you have any idea where we might go from here?”

“Just like you, I was given a phone number and—what I think are longitude and latitude coordinates, but whoever’s phone number it is, they’re not answering. I’ve been calling them non-
stop for two days,” Namjoon explains as he lays out some spare pyjamas for Jeongguk to change into.

“And the coordinates?”

Sitting down on the edge of the bed, Namjoon fiddles with his fingers. “On Maps it leads to the North-South border.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm still pissed about the mint chocolate debate because as someone who worked at an ice-cream bar I can confirm MINT CHOCOLATE WAS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR FLAVORS.

So I made namkook’s child’s scent mint chocolate WHATCHU GONNA DO ABOUT IT NAMJOON?? HUH??!! YOU MAD?!?!? GONNA CRY ABOUT IT?!!
The senator’s fundraiser began with a cringe-worthy “comedic” speech by the alpha senator in question two hours before Yoongi ever spied a platter of food. The organisers were just finished auctioning off dates to a number of pretty omegas that’d been displayed on stage like glorified trophies. Majority of the bidders had been wealthy, ancient-looking alphas who took no moral issue with essentially buying other human beings. As long as the omegas are willing it’s perfectly ethical, right?

Their large, round table has a bouquet of pink oleander flowers bunched in the centre, surrounded by an elaborate display of orange lilies. Before him is an empty space between an assortment of cutlery that begins big but tapers off into tiny spoons and folks. A plate of dinner should be there. It is as if the entire event is mocking him and his empty stomach. The attendees and the organisers are all in on the ruse, and here he sits, as they snicker and taunt him with his back turned. Seokjin sits to his left with a hand on his thigh, stroking at the fine material of his slacks that the man had tailored and made for him in the span of a mere few hours, when for any normal person it could’ve taken up to a week to prepare. The beta denied him lunch today because, in an effort to blacken Seokjin’s eye, he’d fractured the older man’s collarbone instead. The damage cannot be seen beneath his double-breasted, navy-blue blazer, but seeing those bandages wrapped around his shoulder gave him more satisfaction than any black eye could have.

The other guests sharing their table are all important in one way or another. Seated opposite to them is the CEO of Telekin, another massive industry conglomerate that rivals the wealth and power of Seokjin’s family legacy. The only difference being, Telekin were made famous for their Internet providers and their advancements in computer technology, as opposed to bleeding crooked rich clients dry with an onslaught of legal fees. The female alpha is with her husband, an omega half her age that has been the face of Eternity (a multi-million-dollar fashion brand) since he was sixteen years old. To their right is a baseball player, Park Hongjun, and his beta boyfriend and
celebrity chef, Jeong Minho. The last couple appear to be avid supporters of Senator Junghee (as they have mentioned at length with their interactions with the other guests) and wealthy investors. For the life of him he cannot recall their names, all he can say for certain is that one is an alpha and the other is an omega.

Seokjin had formerly introduced Yoongi as his boyfriend, and spun the same bullshit story he’d told Soomin two nights prior. It wasn’t so far from the truth that Yoongi couldn’t play up the façade, as he did study psychology and has a near obsession with the functions of the human mind. The others didn’t pry too much. It was mostly polite conversation and feigned interest that only kept their attention for so long before falling into discussions of business and politics. In that regard it was only too easy for him to zone out.

Their presence didn’t deter Seokjin from trying to embarrassing him as much as he pleased. While bidding began for a fancy yacht ride around Jeju Island, Seokjin leaned over to whisper all the nasty things Seokjin wanted to do to him in front of all these “pathetic little pretenders,” as he put it.

While every muscle in his face fought to maintain his composure, he made sure not to reveal anything. He’d never dream of giving Seokjin the satisfaction. Though he allows the subtle touches that aren’t quite so subtle to everyone else at their table, and the endless regurgitation of lies that goes pouring out of Seokjin’s mouth, the pit of his gut burns with disgust. Everyone of these people are a parody of the upper-class aristocratic system and none of them seem to see the irony in that. All except for Seokjin, it would seem. Despite this, Yoongi fashions himself the biggest joke of them all. What is stopping him from standing upon his chair and proclaiming to the entire room that the man sitting beside him is a maniac keeping him prisoner in his apartment?

The answer is obvious, though the reality does not sit well with him regardless.

Nobody knows him here. In terms of wealth and prestige Yoongi is all but a peasant. To even attempt to bring down the heir to one of the richest business conglomerates in the country is a challenge, but to even consider that he might dint the perfect, gleaming charade Seokjin has built around himself is laughable at best. A deadly mistake at worst.

Seokjin has made it plainly clear that his life is only worth as much as his entertainment value. The moment he ceases to amuse Seokjin, or even cause complications to his empire and fortune, will be the day Seokjin ends him for good. Yoongi still isn’t entirely convinced that the others are still alive. Seokjin has made no sweeping gestures of truth when it comes to their whereabouts or wellbeing. Instead, he lies about them. During sex he’ll spin sick scenarios of how he brutally murdered them. Each time the story would be different. Sometimes he says he gutted Jimin head to toe with a sharpened blade, other times he confesses that he “boiled the bitch alive.” What’s even worse is that the more he elaborated on the gory details, the more his cock would twitch and harden inside him. In these times Yoongi would chant the mantra in his mind: Seokjin is a liar.
Senator Junghee says a few more words before finally, waiters start bringing out the main courses. Saliva pools in his mouth as a plate of cutlets and fluffy mashed potatoes is placed in front of him. Just as he’s about to pick up his folk a hand snatches his wrist and pulls him out of his chair.

“What the f—”

“Do excuse us for a moment,” Seokjin says politely to the people at their table. “I have a matter I wish to discuss privately with my partner.”

Of course, being the richest person at the table, the others have very little to say about Seokjin’s absence. Yoongi stiffly let Seokjin drag him across the banquet hall and down a hallway into a bathroom. “You better have a fucking good reason for dragging me away from dinner you shithead.”

“God you’re hot when you’re cranky,” Seokjin breathes before shoving him up against the marble counter. Yoongi’s eyes immediately flicker from one cubicle to another over the slope of Seokjin’s broad shoulder, hoping that some unfortunate guest doesn’t happen upon their compromising position. They appear to be the only ones here.

Seokjin dives down for a heated kiss and Yoongi fiercely counters the kiss with all teeth and no tongue. His lips are always his first act of violence. Tugging, biting, piercing until there’s wells of blood, pooling like pin-pricks of raspberry syrup upon his fat bottom lip. Satisfaction simmers as Seokjin flinches away to swipe the blood with the pad of his thumb. What might be misconstrued as an expression of innocent surprise crossing Seokjin’s expression is soon replaced by a sinister grin. The beta’s large hands are upon him, groping and squeezing him in areas that kindle a morbid fire within him. Yoongi is quite acquainted with the knowledge that his relationship with Seokjin is the single most fucked up thing that he has reluctantly participated in. Alcoholism and drug dealing are more of an improvement in some regard than fucking a man who raped and impregnated your friend, tortured your packmates and is essentially holding you against your will.

Those overbearing pheromones hit him like a brick house careening off the side of a freight train. The force is so powerful that his head rocks back and his jaw drops. In a state of brief paralysis, Seokjin doesn’t hesitate to undress him, popping open the buttons of his shirt in a careful, precise fashion, and sliding the blazer from his shoulders.

A pheromone high is much like an orgasm. Brief, but powerful.
It liquidises bones below the pelvis and entices a feeling of strong lethargy. Depending on the individual, pheromones could have many functions. They can hush a bawling baby. They can attract suitors to a lonely soul. They can be used to sway an argument or they can be used to exhaust a fight. Pheromone highs, though, have the unique function of bringing sexual arousal. It only works under the condition that those on the receiving end are consenting, sober and of mature age. Someone can reject a wave of pheromones simply by projecting their own, and children aren’t influenced by them at all. They are impervious to it. The waters get murky when someone is inebriated. Intoxication already works to disorientate certain senses, and can leave any person vulnerable to influence—regardless of their class.

And though he would like to excuse his acceptance of the high on alcohol, Yoongi hasn’t had a drop of liquid courage this evening. Offers were made by waiters in white tuxedos, and even Seokjin himself suggested earlier it would help ease his nerves, but it was the one thing Yoongi didn’t indulge in. Not on an empty stomach. Not when they’re in a situation where he might run his mouth.

The shirt is taken from him, exposing him to the coolness of the public bathroom. As feeling returns to his limbs, he roughly fists the front of Seokjin’s necktie.

“You always fuck me with your clothes on,” Yoongi growls, pulling at the tie until it strains against Seokjin’s jugular. “Take off your fucking shirt or I’ll tear it off myself.”

Delight glistened in those deep, warm eyes and the beta is quick to shrug off his blazer and pop the buttons of his shirt. The tie is tugged from his neck, and Seokjin uses it to bind Yoongi’s wrists to the faucet of a sink. The awkward position over the basin forces him to arch his back and pulls at the muscles in his biceps. He hates it. He hates it when Seokjin has almost all the control during sex. Every time they fuck it feels as though he’s sacrificing just a little bit more of himself. As if Seokjin is deliberately wading him into the waters. He fears what he might find when he can no longer feel the surface lapping at his clavicles.

Seokjin soothes a hand down the curve of his spine. In an attempt to mask the shiver, he tries kicking the beta in the balls. His foot misses and hits his thigh instead. It makes Seokjin laugh. Trapping him between the sink and his tented hard-on, Seokjin leans over to toy with his pebbling nipples. Copper fills his mouth as he resists the urge to moan.

“I like how hard you try to pretend you don’t like it,” Seokjin croons adoringly. He takes his fingers away briefly to wet them with his saliva before pinching his nubs again. Yoongi squirms rigidly. He doesn’t like his nipples being played with. No matter how many times he has reminded Seokjin of this fact, the beta doesn’t give a fuck.
Sex is exclusively about what Seokjin likes.

If he gets Yoongi off, it isn’t out of generosity, but rather because watching Yoongi fall apart gives him self-gratification.

Yoongi might try to draw this correlation of selfishness with his father or his past failed relationships, but he couldn’t think of a quicker way to murder his own erection.

When Seokjin is done boring him with his nipple-fiddling, the hands diverge into different directions. One slides into his hair while the other snakes down the expanse of his pale (and very empty) stomach. Seokjin snaps his head back and pain tingles the discs in his spine. “Don’t look away from the mirror now,” the beta murmurs, eyes leering at him through the reflection. “Want you to see what you look like when I’m ruining you. How filthy you are.”

Yoongi pulls at his restraints and the sink jiggles precariously. If he really put his weight behind it, he could pull the faucet straight off the counter. It’d cause a terrible mess, but at least he’d have something to hit Seokjin with.

Lust aches in his nether regions. A sorry reminder that his level of spite for Seokjin does not overpower his need for a good dickin. Seokjin loosens his belt and shoves a hand down the front of his trousers, gripping at his swelling erection. Yoongi bows his head and bucks up into the heat of Seokjin’s palm. It is a mistake. With uncompromising force, Seokjin yanks his head back again. “Don’t look away,” he warns.

Yoongi is left with no choice but to watch the events unfold. He can’t discern with confidence that he enjoys looking at himself being fondled in a mirror. For the most part, he finds comfort in privacy.

The stroking and clenching continue until he’s well and truly stiff. To say he isn’t aroused is a filthy lie. The pleasure tingles at the tips of his toes and his balls tighten with anticipation. The fragrance of pineapple is something that garners no love or affection from him. In any other scenario, it may even induce fear or disgust. However, in this moment of vulnerability, it is an aroma sent down from the Heavens to tempt him. Tangy scents of citrus and summer. Those are the trademarks of beta scents. His father smelt like sea salt and lemons. His exes a celebration of exotic islands far off across the Pacific Ocean.

Betas.
It never ceases to amaze him how they can incite such feels of attraction and disgust.

Even now, as Seokjin shoves down his slacks and rubs at his puckered entrance, he can’t tell which urge is stronger—the urge to climax or the urge to vomit.

Seokjin tries to insert a finger without any lubrication, and gets his foot stamped on for his troubles. “Have it your way then.”

Digits are shoved knuckle-deep into his mouth. He gags and grips the faucet as fingers tickling his uvula. The choking becomes so violent that he coughs and snot explodes out his nose and tears wet his eyelashes. He looks…he looks so fucking pathetic.

Seokjin doesn’t draw out the preparation for particularly long. After all, “You are still loose from when I had you for lunch.”

At the very least, he’s generous enough to coat his cock with his own saliva before slowly entering him. To Yoongi’s surprise, he can tell that the man isn’t fully erect. He’s getting there, though. When Seokjin’s lower belly is brushing his buttocks, the beta starts running his hands all over Yoongi’s body. Squeezing him. Kneading him. Yoongi is silent the whole time, fighting back shivers of arousal he knows he shouldn’t give in to.

Eventually, the hands settle at the bone of his hips. “You want to know how I really killed your precious pack?”

There it is.

Yoongi was hoping it wouldn’t come to this, that they could just have a quick fuck in a public bathroom and then go back to the banquet as if nothing happened. But Seokjin’s penchant for violence, blood and perversion only seems to double by the day. It’s as if the beta is anticipating something. Building it up in his mind. Could it be the hunt he had promised? Yoongi hasn’t seen Taehyung since Soomin came over for dinner. The morning after, the omega was gone, and while he made sure to voice his displeasure in the form of a beating, Seokjin had only mocked him through a red-stained grin.

“Don’t fucking talk about them,” he spits coarsely. He sounds harsh but inside his heart bleeds.
Seokjin rolls his hips sharply. Yoongi’s knees almost buckle. “Why not? If you care about them so much, surely you’d want to know the truth of their demise?” Leaning over, he snakes an arm around Yoongi’s waist, and secures his hand over Yoongi’s throat. The alpha watches him in the mirror. Those dark, chestnut eyes are hooded by his fringe. “Besides, I don’t believe I gave you an option.”

Deliberately, the beta starts moving his hips painfully slow. Yoongi groans. “Don’t—”

“I fed Jeongguk and Namjoon’s baby to a pack of stray dogs.” He can feel Seokjin twitching inside him. Now he thinks he might actually throw up. “I made them watch, and then afterwards I let the dogs take turns with Jeongguk. And Namjoon, with his big words and veiled threats—god it was so tiring to listen to. So I cut his tongue out. The dogs ate that, too. When they were done with your maknae—”

“Stop.”

“I—”

“I said fucking stop!” Yoongi yells so loud his throat burns.

It doesn’t please Seokjin very much, so he shoves his fingers back into Yoongi’s mouth. He can feel him hardening inside him. “I split Jeongguk in two with a knife, from his uterus to his throat. You should’ve seen Namjoon. The terror on his face. I’ll never forget it.”

Seokjin is a liar. Seokjin is a liar.

Seokjin’s thrusts become broader and more forceful. “I cut off Namjoon’s balls and watched him bleed out. At that point he seemed like he watched to die. Then, I went for Hoseok—”

Yoongi tries squirming away, but in this position he’s trapped, mobilised in Seokjin’s clutches without any means of escape. He can’t do this anymore. He’s a monster. He’s—

“I locked Hoseok in a glass coffin full of maggots and tarantulas. Oh, it was a magical sight to see. I wish you could’ve been there—” his thrusts become more erratic “—I could’ve watched him crying and screaming for days. Pretty sure he ruined his own vocal cords.”
Seokjin is a liar.

“I added a scorpion into the mix. It stung his cock and he died within half an hour.”

Seokjin is a—

“Taehyung got his ankle caught in a bear trap—”

Liar.

“I fucked him with a shovel. Bled like a stuck pig—”

Seokjin is—

“And Jimin—”

Liar.

In that moment he sees the situation for what it really is. As much as he tries to deny it, he feels the water lapping at his hairline, eager to swallow him whole. The future is what he has avoided most of all. Where exactly do you think this is going to go? Do you think this will end well? Think about your brothers. Think about your family.

Seokjin is a liar and he’s going to tear you apart.

The beta pants in his ear as he fucks into him in short, sharp thrusts. His orgasm is building, he can feel it. The shit spilling from his mouth becomes incoherent and easy to ignore. Yoongi knows that if he’s going to act, it has to be now, while he’s distracted and his influence is at its weakest. The finger wriggling between his molars rubs at the inside of his cheek. Squeezing his eyes shut, he bites down as hard as he possibly can.
Next thing he knows, Seokjin’s screams are echoing off the bathroom walls and blood is all over the marble counter. The beta stumbles back, clutching his hand. Yoongi spits out the finger and doesn’t give it a second thought. Tearing the faucet from the sink, he swings around and strikes Seokjin in the face. A spray of blood hits the tiled wall but there’s no time to linger and admire it. Hastily, he struggles out of his restraints, pulls up his pants, snatches the pile of clothes from his feet, and bolts out the door. As he makes a mad dash towards the exit, he hastily redoes the buttons of his shirt and fixes his belt. He must look as though he’s just escaped a bar fight, or well—just had rough sex. His dishevelled appearance attracts some questioning stares from staff and the odd guest, but Yoongi has no gripes bowling over anybody that happens to idly wander into his path. Red carpet and white walls go by in a blur. Blood roars like an engine in his ears, exhausting all efforts to fuel the adrenaline carrying him out of the building.

Yoongi very nearly breaks the glass of the revolving doors in his haste to flee. The biting chill of late January smacks him in the face but he can barely feel it. His skin burns. Even though Seokjin had escorted him into the banquet hall earlier that evening, he couldn’t help but look at these familiar streets with an air of fear. Seoul is a gargantuan city of high buildings and suffocating crowds. This isn’t Daegu. He didn’t grow up here. He has no friends or family here. The only person he knows who lives in Seoul is…

Is his father.

No, he’s being ridiculous. The last form of communication he’d had with his father was ten years ago. It was a hand-written letter she’d given to his mother, which she then passed on to him. It was originally intended for his mother. She didn’t bother to contact him directly. His first impulse had been to burn the fucker, but his mother persuaded him to at the very least read the contents of the letter before he made any rash decisions.

It was mostly about how sorry she was, though in his rage he couldn’t help but feel the hand-written calligraphy was anything other than a declaration of self-pity. Sentences such as: ‘Though I know in my heart you might never forgive me for what I’ve done to you and Yoongi, please know that no matter what has happened between you and I, my love for you will always be the same.’

Honestly, how things turned out didn’t seem fair. His father had hurt his mother the most and despite it all, she moved on. Her romantic endeavours after the divorce have, so far, been a complete disaster, but she at least has his sister now. As far as he knew, his father re-married and has kids of his own. It’s as if Yoongi is the only person still hung up about it. Clinging to abusive relationships with betas because his own beta father never bothered to call or send him a letter. A conversation about the sensitivities of this topic have been discussed briefly with his mother, but whenever she pries too much, Yoongi shuts her down. His sister had even suggested that he make the first move, and reach out to her.

He should’ve scoffed and told her to fuck off.
Instead he did try to contact her, and she never responded to any of his calls or messages.

Pacing down the stretch of stone steps, Yoongi continues to run. Winding and backtracking through the streets hoping that his scent isn’t strong enough to track. The consternation begins to build the deeper he treks into unknown territory, and also attributed to the fact that it’s dark as hell. It isn’t an issue he notices in the main streets, but one turn into a side-street and he struggles to see where he’s walking, let alone his own feet. The snow that has fallen over the last couple of days has turned to slush on the sidewalk. The pavement and roads are wet. The smell of trash and pollution reek from pipes and open gutters.

His foggy breath obscures his vision at points. The shirt and blazer do nothing to protect him.

If only he knew where the others were. He was so certain that the information he needed was in Seokjin’s study, but any and all attempts he’d made to break into the study were thwarted.

The people that pass barely spare him a glance.

Drifting past an alley, he thinks maybe he might have to sleep on the streets tonight. In the morning…well, he’ll deal with it when it arrives. His nipples are so hard they hurt, and the sweat on his forehead has began to freeze on his skin. No, if he sleeps in the streets he’ll get pneumonia. He might have to join the homeless in the subway or…

Or swallow what scraps of pride he has left and find his father’s address. If the letter to his mother is to be believed, and she hasn’t moved in the last ten years, she lives somewhere in Songpa-gu. He’ll have to find an address archive (databases generally found in public libraries). There’s a chance he won’t be let in to the apartment if he tracks down his father’s location, but he’ll sleep outside the front door if he has to.

Finding the local library was more difficult than he anticipated. He’s strayed so far from his starting point that he may as well be scrounging the plains of an alien planet. Seoul is so unlike Daegu. The urban life of Daegu embraces and respects the nature and environments it has taken host to. Vines scale multi-level buildings and slither around the columns of hulking car parks. In the spring and the summer these vines burst with pink flowers and sweeten the noxious dust that comes sweeping in from their northern neighbours. Trees large and proud grow as tall as ten stories in certain areas. Just around the corner from his old apartment is a park that ignites the darkness in yellow fairy lights. Tourists come just to take pictures in its picturesque groves.
In Seoul, industry and fabrication is the name of the game. Neon paints the pavements. The only escape is down the hideaways of narrow alleys that reek of piss and pollution. Billboards of plastic faces smile over products of luxury and vanity. Churches larger than department stores rise like titans in the urban landscape, their glowing red crosses reaching towards the clouds.

An alien city with alien people. An omega brandishes a wallet from her leather handbag and it glitters with jewels. An alpha steps out of a car worth more than the fortune of three generations. The copper taste in his mouth is nauseating. Yoongi hadn’t paid any mind to it before because he was so focused on getting the fuck away from Seokjin, but now that he can actually taste the fucker’s blood, realise that he physically clamped his jaw down and tore bone from ligament…

His eyes roll to the back of his head and he has to cling to a nearby lamp post as he throws up spit and bile. An omega hanging off the arm of his alpha makes a noise of distaste as they pass him. An elderly man mutters under his breath. No one thinks to ask if he’s okay. Not that he would expect them to do so. Alphas rarely receive emotional comfort from anyone other than their romantic partners or their mothers.

The bile feels like acid burning into the flesh of his throat. His periphery is blurred by welling tears. Rocking his head back, he cups his upset stomach and he keeps walking.

It isn’t long before he swallows his ego and asks a stranger, “D’you know where the local library is?” His speech is slurred from exhaustion, but he’s well aware of the fact that he sounds intoxicated.

The man is older, in his early forties, and an alpha. Yoongi looks down and realises he’s holding hands with his beta daughter, whom he guesses is around eight. The alpha frowns. Either in disapproval or concern. Yoongi doesn’t give a shit. “Sir, are you okay? Do I need to take you to a hospital?”

“Library,” he corrects.

“Library?”

“Yes, where’s the library?”

“It’s a bit of a walk from here…” the man’s frown deepens.
“Don’t care. Just tell me where it is.” Yoongi doesn’t mean to come across as harsh as he does, but standing in one place for too long isn’t doing his anxiety any favours. Wherever Seokjin is now, he won’t let him flee without consequences. If he isn’t careful, he’ll go stumbling back into the bastard’s clutches.

The alpha clears his throat, looks down at his daughter, who watches the exchange with passive curiosity, and then says, “If you keep going straight down, you’ll eventually get to Gangnam station. Turn left from the fourth exit, and walk until you see the church with the archangels overlooking the entrance—you can’t miss it. The library is behind the church.”

The stranger was surprisingly helpful, which is a rarity for anyone born and raised in Seoul. He has to assume they were born elsewhere and only came to Seoul for business prospects. Larger libraries in Seoul are open 24-hours, and are largely supervised by robotic technology. If unlawful activity is detected, footage of the incident is automatically sent to the local police, who then take action. Those who fall asleep in libraries, whether they are homeless looking for shelter, or students who have depleted all their energy, are also kicked out by security. At this time of the night, and on a Saturday no less, the long tables and private reading areas are all but abandoned. A few students linger here and there, but seeing as the new semester hasn’t even started, most have little incentive to be here.

Yoongi finds an archive panel near the computers and starts looking for addresses in Seoul under his father’s name. There are a few that come out of the search results, but only one in Songpa-gu. Borrowing a pen from a nearby student and scribbling the address on his hand, he looks up the address on Maps before leaving. It’s quite a walk. On foot it might take him forty-five minutes to get there—half an hour if he runs. It doesn’t matter, though. As long as he’s moving. As long as he doesn’t stay in the same place for too long, there might be a chance he won’t be found.

Forty-five minutes is more than enough time to ponder what he might say to her when he finally sees her again.

How do you re-connect with a parent that has caused you so much harm? Maybe it was easier for her, knowing that she had no biological ties to him. They used his mother’s egg and a donor’s sperm. But when he looks back on their family, when they were whole, even knowing that he bared no physical resemblance to his father…she was still a part of him.

Why does he still feel this hatred towards her, even after all this time? It happened when he was five years old for crying out loud. You’d think 20 years would be enough to recover from all that, but in the end it did nothing to tear the ingrained resentment root and step. Instead, it felt as though it only built momentum overtime, coming to a head in the pique of his adolescence and lingering through the relationships he’s had over the years. He used to think that he had a good head on his shoulders, convinced himself that his issues had nothing to do with his father and the hopelessness of his love life could be chalked down to ‘bad luck’. Things got a little murky after he got wrapped
up in a religious cult, no thanks to his third boyfriend, and then after that, a date with a capitalist
that used to visit underground dog fighting pits because seeing feral animals fighting to the death
was funny to him. Man, he really picked the worst of the bunch.

Is it because they’re betas…?

Yoongi snorts. If he humours that kind of logic he may as well just go back to the cult. They’ll
appreciate the bigotry.

There were many times, when he and Seokjin were fucking, that he’d picture his father, especially
when things turned violent. He thought about killing her. About making her suffer. It never truly
gave him any satisfaction, not really. When he disassociated his father with Seokjin it was more
pleasurable. He couldn’t hurt his father, but at the very least he could hurt Seokjin. His laughter
when his fist connected with his nose, or when he admired a chipped tooth Yoongi gave him, it
only made Yoongi want to hit him harder.

Then there’s his surrogate family. The people who were unexpectedly thrust upon him, and under
the most peculiar circumstances. Taehyung is out there somewhere—north, if what Seokjin says is
to be believed (which is to say, not very creditable). Namjoon, Jeongguk, Hoseok and Jimin could
be anywhere. They could be together. They could be scattered.

Or they could be dead.

Yoongi doesn’t dare ponder if they are. It wouldn’t be in Seokjin’s nature to end it so abruptly.
Deep down, Seokjin is a child without empathy or compassion. Squishing the butterfly is what a
lumping idiot might do in a split moment of cruelty. Seokjin is the kind of person to pin the
butterfly to some wood, and use a pair of small scissors to make tiny incisions in the wings. As the
insect quivers and struggles to release itself from the pins in its wings and body, Seokjin would
take a pair of tweezers and rip off its antenna.

Light-headedness clouds his mind. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad, to reconcile things with his father.
To finally bury the skeletons that plague him. Maybe then he could move on and find somebody
that doesn’t enjoy cruelty—in any shape or form—or has interests that don’t involve blind worship.

He hiccups and turns a corner, assuming that it is the street he’s looking for. He’s fairly close now.
Just a little further, just a little…
Belatedly, he realises that he’s hit a dead end. Not the street he was looking for after all. His hand grazes along the cool brick walls and brush the side of a dumpster. As he turns, the shadow of a rat scurries out of existence. As he lifts his tired head, he sees the silhouette of a person spotlighted by the glow of the busy street. The pit of his stomach coils. A terrible, foreboding instinct is telling him that danger is near. As he lifts his head to gaze at the person standing at the entrance of the alley, dread settles into his bones.

No…

It couldn’t be…

He was going to find his father. He was going to reconcile with her. He was going to spill all the built-up emotion he’d bottled up inside him over the years. The hurt. The grief. The anger.

How is possible that this walking nightmare cornered him so quickly?

His eyes fall to the hand to find the finger still missing. Against everything he knew, he’d hoped the bastard would at least go to the hospital to try and get it re-attached. No. Only a reasonable person would think to go to the hospital to reattach a lost finger. This creature. Whatever they are…

“Should’ve kept to the main road, darling,” he says casually. “Though I guess that’s a lesson they never tell alphas, right?”

Gritting his teeth to the point of pain, he asks, “How did you find me?”

With an easy smile that could easily be interpreted as harmless if one didn’t know Seokjin, he takes his phone out of his pocket, and reveals a map with tiny little red dots on it. Some of them even appear to be moving, through it could just be the hunger talking. “Those chips aren’t just a way to shock you when you’re being naughty.”

“Why didn’t you do it then?” Yoongi snaps, eyeing the space to Seokjin’s right. Maybe if he ducks under his arm—“Why didn’t you shock me back in the bathroom?”

Seokjin rolls his eyes. “Use your imagination, Yoongi. The chips aren’t magic. I have to be at a certain proximity to shock you. By the time I got my wits about me you were already out of range.”
“I’m not going back,” he shakes his head fiercely. “I won’t. You can’t fucking make me.”

The maniac seems to interpret this as a challenge. “Who says I can’t?”

Even with the shadows casting Seokjin in darkness, he still sees the hand reach for his blazer pocket, which he knows contains the remote he uses to electrocute him. With a stiff spine and a guttural voice, he growls, “Stop.”

Seokjin’s entire body goes rigid. The tips of his fingers are on the folds of his pocket, hovering but frozen. With all his energy and strength, he pushes back against the very pheromones designed to calm and appease him. Domination and power wash over the beta like the goddess of spring melting away the snows of winter. Seokjin buckles and he’s brought to his knees. His hands shoot out to catch himself before his face can hit the pavement.

Control pounds through his veins like the beating of a war drum. His inner self clawing its way back from the depths from whence it was banished. It’d been so long since he’s felt this way, like he finally has the choice to stand his ground and know that all the cards are in his hand. He’d been so wrapped up in Seokjin’s web of lies and manipulation that he hadn’t even realised how much power he had lost. How much of his own identity had been stripped away and left him a bare, hollow husk of what he once was. It moves him with such emotion that tears sting the corners of his eyes. He had been so consumed, so fascinated by the corrupted entity of Seokjin’s being that it never even occurred to him that he had a choice this entire time. A voice to speak. A power of autonomy Seokjin couldn’t touch no matter how desperately he tried to convince Yoongi otherwise.

“You will not touch me anymore,” Yoongi says firmly. “You will not hurt me, or my family ever again. The pain you have caused us is nothing but a distraction. Because you know deep inside that you are empty. You’re emptier than any of us will ever be. You have your money and your prestige, but what truly interests you is the very thing you will never have nor understand.”

As Seokjin bows, paralysed, Yoongi approaches him. He deliberately pries the phone from his hand, then reaches into his pocket and takes the remote as well. With all the force he can muster, he crushes the remote against the alley wall, and pockets the phone.

“The next time we meet, Seokjin, you won’t leave alive.” Swinging his leg back, he kicks Seokjin in the side of the head.
The beta hits the cold, concrete floor, unconscious.

And Yoongi integrates back into the unknowing, unseeing crowds just shy of the darkness, casual and at ease with himself.

Chapter End Notes

Wow. Metaphors.

Also this week has just been all kinds of shit tf is happening to the world? No for real my heart goes out to all the victims.

Anyways, you ain't here for that, so lemme know your thoughts on the chapter in the comments~ if you have any questions I'd love to hear them:

Tumblr

Curious Cat
If the Devil’s work is to drive people to madness than the catalyst of such insanity-inducing evil is the vibrating of a phone you do not wish to answer. Upon his old wooden desk, the very one he’d hunched over for nights on end in his final years of high school, the ancient artefact of a less technologically-advanced era quivers so violently that it fills all corners of his childhood room. Coiled in a nervous ball on his desk chair, he chews at his thumb nail, haunted by the phone he refuses to pick up.

It’s been days since he woke up in a random motel on the outskirts of Gwangju, stupefied by the sudden freedom that had befallen him. The phone had been nestled in the pocket of a jacket hanging by the room’s front door, along with a piece of paper he immediately set fire to. He has been seriously contemplating destroying the phone as well for quite some time, but whenever he sums up the courage to even pick it up he just can’t bring himself to destroy it. While he’s fairly certain the constant ringing is coming from one of them, there is a small, naïve but hopeful part of him that thinks it might be Jimin. It could just as likely be one of the other members of the pack, too, but his bleeding heart yearned for it to be Jimin. What brings him a little solace is the thought of Jimin fretting over the other end of the line, wanting desperately to get in contact with him, to find out whether he’s alive and well, or maybe even (though he knows it is impossible) want to forgive him for the sins of his past.

First initiative when he left the motel room was to find his pack. His unexpected burst of determination was quickly flattened by the image of his face plastered all over criminal notice boards. He’d never find them before the police found him. The only safe place left was his mother’s. When he’d arrived at the front door his mother and sister were overwhelmed with conflicting emotions. Trying to persuade them that he is not a paedophile wasn’t very difficult. His mother admitted that she didn’t believe the accusations for even a moment—not even when The Trident, the journalist website she reads almost religiously—made a story condemning him for “tainting the sanctity of foster care agencies across the country.”

It still has his stomach in knots. The scandal, the accusations, the lies. He’s officially screwed. No matter where he goes or what he does, everyone is going to think he’s a paedophile.

His disappearance over the last nine months was a little harder to explain.
Rather, he didn’t really explain it to them at all.

Not because he didn’t want to, but because he felt that he couldn’t. Even days later he’s still grappling with his release. Walking down the street, a street he’d walked down many times as a kid on his way to the bakery, now incites anxiety and fear. The trees that spill over fences and the little terrier that barks every time he and his sister raced to school, the restaurants and the cafes that all seem to perfectly replicate the memories of his childhood, no longer coax whimsey or excitement from him. It’s all cold and tainted. Just like his public reputation. He doesn’t feel safe in his own home, let alone his old neighbourhood. According to his sister the police had already prowled their house hours before he’d shown up in a speechless daze. Hoseok suspects it will not be their last visit, either.

Authorities in South Korea aren’t the most reputable.

Corruption from the wealthy spreads like a weed into all institutions. The rich pay the politicians who pass the laws the police enforce. It’s a common saying that officers serve the wealthy, not the defenceless. The amount of money in their former-captors possession is unknown, at least to Hoseok it is, but having some secret government facility that employs hundreds, maybe even thousands of people, is enough indication to know that he’ll never see the light of day again if he’s arrested. There might not even be a trial. And who would care? Even the accusation of paedophilia is enough to condemn someone, whether it is true or not.

It won’t be the last time the police harass his family. A heavy pocket of bribery money, an angry mob backing their cause and a horde of news outlets starving for a slice of some juicy, topical material is ample incentive to continue hunting him. Even being seen in his mother’s backyard is too risky.

On top of it all he’s still trying to determine if he’s being followed or not.

They wouldn’t just…let him go? It’s too good to be true. Well, it would’ve been much better if there wasn’t currently a smear campaign demanding the removal of head, but it’s an undeniable improvement.

At least, that’s what he tells himself.

The vibrations continue. It seems to go on forever. If he answers the phone this surreal dream will come to an end. Suddenly, he’ll be back in that prison and he’ll never see the faces of his sister and mother again. But…
But he’d get to see Jimin again. And Namjoon, and Yoongi and Jeongguk and Taehyung…

No, he can’t stay here.

His mother has already given so much to him. There was a time, before all of this—before he’d even gotten the job at *The Angels of Light*, when he’d promised himself that he’d pay his mother back a million times over for the sacrifices she made for him. Other mothers from school used to tell her he was a failure of an alpha, that his mannerisms were much too “omega-like”, but she always defended and supported him.

And how does he repay her in the end?

By becoming the country’s most wanted suspected paedophile.

He can hear the mothers’ voices sneering in their homes. “*You remember that alpha boy you used to play with at school? I always knew he was a funny one. Now the whole country knows he’s just a sick kiddy-fiddler.*”

The vibrating finally ceases, and Hoseok sits there looking at the ceiling, batting away his tears. Silently, he pockets the phone. He’s cried so much just in the past hour that he can feel a headache creeping in from the back of his head. His mum keeps coming into his room at random intervals with weak excuses, like giving him snacks or reorganising his closet, but he knows the real reason why. She’s worried. She’s worried that he might revert back to a certain way of thinking that he struggled with in his late adolescence. She fears that if she leaves him alone for too long, he might get some dangerous ideas.

Try as she may, it was almost inevitable.

There’s a beautiful, old bridge a few miles from his childhood home, one of the many relics of old Korea that still cling to existence, even after the country underwent centuries of modern transformation. It’s tall and broad and made almost entirely out of wood. A shallow creek slithers beneath it, a poor imitation of the galloping river it used to be. He could take his sister’s convertible out there. Have the top down. Feel the winter winds freezes his scalp and burn his throat. Appreciate it one last time. One time before the end.

He nearly has a heart attack at the knock at his bedroom door. Spinning around on his chair, a hand
to this chest, he sees his sister leaning against his doorframe. His beta sister is in baggy sweat pants and a loose shirt. Despite the lack of effort, she still manages to look effortlessly beautiful.

People used to say she would’ve made a perfect omega.

She came to resent that sentiment as she grew older.

“Could hear that phone from my room,” she says with no anger or irritation. She tilts her head in curiosity. “If you aren’t going to answer it, why don’t you just throw it away? It’s obviously making you uncomfortable.”

“I can’t,” he replies shortly.

“Why?”

Because it very well may be the only connection he has to Jimin. To the others. It might be his former captors but what if it’s not?

“I can’t say.”

Huffing, his sister strides over to his bed and sits down with an air of attitude. A smile touches his lips. She crosses her arms and says, “I respected your wishes not to speak about it before, but do you really intend to keep it from us forever? You were gone for nine months, Hoseok. Mum thought—” she chokes “—mum thought you were dead. Then out of nowhere we see your face in the tabloids and people are calling you a paedophile. Then—then you just show up at mum’s doorstep and you look like you’ve been through hell and back. Look at you—you’re so skinny. What the fuck happened? Who hurt you?”

“It’s not important.”

Nina laughs dryly. “Not important,” she echoes. “You know, you never used to keep all these secrets from us. When dad left, we swore to each other that the deception and the lies would end. Have you forgotten about that? Or do I have to remind you how fucked up things actually got?”
The tendon in his jaw twitches and he bows his head shamefully. “I haven’t forgotten… I’ll never forget.”

“Then talk to me. Spare mum if you have to but I’m made of tougher shit. You know I’d never rat you out the cops so what gives? You’ve got nothin’ to lose telling me.” As he turns to regard his sister, he can see the sincerity burning in her gaze. Hoseok wouldn’t dare ponder the thought that Nina would ever double-cross him. The three of them have always been very close.

For a brief moment, he really does consider spilling everything.

He humourous himself in imagining the look on her face as he divulges all the sickening details. About how they were set up for breeding, about the blatant dehumanisation they were forced to suffer through. Being tortured. Being starved. Falling in love. Bonding as a pack. The solidarity and brotherhood. Crying. Shouting. Fighting. Staring across from a faceless entity.

What would Nina think of Jimin?

They have a mutual habit of spewing profanity. Tougher spines than he’ll ever hope to have. Though he thinks Jimin might not appreciate his family, due solely on the fact that he had the privilege of having one to begin with.

The sound of the doorbell cancels any fantasies of sharing his horrific experiences with his sister. It’s only moments later that Nina is pulling out her phone and leaping from the bed. “Mum says the cops are at the door.”

“Oh fuck.”

He feels his heart sinking. There’s no way they won’t find him.

Just as he’s on the verge of a mental breakdown, Nina springs into action. She throws open his closet, and drags Hoseok by the scuff of his collar into the wardrobe full of his old clothes. Just as he turns around to tearfully tell his sister that there’s no point, she closes the doors in his face and growls at him to “shut your fucking mouth oppa or I swear to God—”

Listening carefully over the sound of his own heavy breathing, he can distantly hear the stern, hard tones of policemen, along with the gentle quiver of his mother. His heart nearly explodes when the
phone starts vibrating fiercely in his pocket. Slapping a hand over his mouth, he pulls the phone out of his pocket and, without hesitation, snaps the phone in half.

It immediately stops vibrating.

He sinks to the floor of his closet and wriggles under a pile of his winter jackets, all the while trying not to sob too loudly. It’s harder to hear inside the closet, but he can still catch his sister’s voice carrying up the stairway as she goes to greet the policemen.

For a while, it’s just conversation. Both his mum and sister sound calm.

It isn’t long before he hears footsteps. From the sound of it, there’s two of them. One pair of shoes heads in the direction of his sister’s bedroom, the other goes straight for his. Breathing is almost beyond his comprehension the moment the policeman enters his room. Nothing can be seen beneath the weight of all his coats, but he can smell the alpha’s pheromones.

“You won’t find anything new,” his sister tells the alpha firmly. “We already told you we haven’t seen Hoseok in almost ten months.”

Her pheromones ripen slightly, a tinge of lemons probing the room. She’s trying to ease the policeman’s suspicions. Hoseok trembles. They know he’s here. There’s no way they don’t know. One of their neighbours must’ve seen him and reported it. Why else would they be here?

After some rummaging, the alpha answers, “Just a routine check. We can’t rule out that he might’ve come back here at some point.” Then the policeman inhales sharply. “Ma’am, you’re positive he hasn’t come to see you recently?”

“Yes, I’m positive,” his sister snaps a little too defensively. His heart has sunk so low it’s basically at his feet. “Why do you ask?”

“Reports from people who knew him personally informed us that his scent is sawdust. I can smell it all over this room.” Heart thundering in his ears, Hoseok bites down on his fingers. They’re going to find him. It’s over. He’s going to jail for the rest of his life. It’s no secret that paedophiles get it the worst in prison. He isn’t built to intimidate.

“Yeah, no shit. This is his childhood room. Scents can linger in places for decades depending on
how often the person visits. Didn’t they teach you that in your training?” Oh god, his sister’s smartass attitude is going to make it so much worse for him. The police will beat him *then* throw him to the dogs.

“Smells fresh,” the policeman clarifies.

Without hesitation Nina fires back with another excuse, “Mum aired out his old clothes. She’s thinkin’ of selling them.”

Hoseok can’t tell if the policeman is smart enough to catch on to her apparent fib.

While each second-gender have pheromone influences that they can easily use to their advantage, police are specially trained to identify manipulation tactics and how to effectively counter them. If his sister isn’t careful, she just might be sharing a jailcell down at the local provincial jail if she doesn’t play her cards right. There have been countless instances in the past where police have been manipulated by suspects’ pheromones, but the police force have wised up to tactics in the past couple of decades.

Footsteps move across the room, hard and heavy. *Thud, thud, thud…*

*Thud, thud, thud…*

He can’t determine which is louder, the sound of his heart or the sound of the police officer’s shoes.

*Thud, thud, thud…*

“This is your brother’s closet?” the voice is so close to his hiding place that Hoseok nearly pisses his pants.

“Yeah.” Maybe to the officer she sounds entirely composed, but there’s an edge to her voice that even Hoseok can hear through the wood of the closet doors.

The creak of the doors opening sucks all the life out of him. He’s too scared to move, too scared to
cry, too scared to breathe. Even with light flooding into the closet Hoseok can only see darkness. Any moment now, the officer is going to smell his fear and tear the winter coats straight off him. He woke up this morning not knowing that this would be the last day he’d ever spend in his childhood home. The last day he’d be a free man, with the love and support of his mother and sister culminated beneath the very roof that kept them safe. He’ll never get to joke with his sister about her abysmal love life ever again, or help his mother with the cooking, or find the rest of his pack and let them know that he’s safe.

He’ll never get to tell Jimin how much he means to him.

Just as Hoseok is certain this is the end, footsteps enter, and the other officer announces, “Nothing out of the ordinary was found in the beta’s bedroom.”

“I’m right here you know,” Nina growls.

“There doesn’t seem to be much evidence that he was here, either,” the first officer says finally, and he can hear the man stepping away from the closet—but not closing the doors behind him, much to his distress.

“We just need to check the rooms downstairs and then we’ll be out of your hair.”

“Guess you don’t need me to show you around. You’ve become quite acquainted,” his sister says snidely.

It isn’t until the officers are making their way downstairs that Hoseok finally has the courage to release the breath he’d been holding. His hands are shaking worse than a patient with arthritis. So much nervous sweat has accumulated under his armpits that his shirt is completely soiled. He chokes back on the bile rising in his throat.

The minute the officers leave he’s tumbling out of the closet, coats splaying out on the bedroom floor. He trips and stumbles his way to the bathroom. He half expects his lunch to go spewing out of his mouth, but the feeling eventually subsides, and he’s left sitting with his cheek resting on the porcelain rim of the toilet seat. On the tiled wall are faded old stickers of cartoon characters from a show he used to watch obsessively as a child. Hanging from the back of the door is a times tables sheet that he used to stare at while brushing his teeth.
Though the rose-tinted nostalgia embraces him like an old friend, Hoseok knows deep down that he can’t continue to stay here, to hide from authorities for the rest of his life. His sister and mother deserve better than that. They shouldn’t have to suffer for his mistakes.

As the crescent moon hangs in the sky and his family sleep soundly, Hoseok makes preparations. He stuffs food into the side-pockets of a duffle bag and rolls as much clothes as he can into its crevices. Sitting down at his lonely desk, with nothing but the desk lamp to illuminate the remnants of his past, he writes two letters—one for his sister and one for his mum—and sealed them in envelopes. Most of the contents of the letter addressed to his mum are just reiterations of what she already knows. How much he adores her, how sorry he is for all the shitty things he’s done, asking for her forgiveness. But to his sister, he’s more honest. In simplest terms he explains the unlikely circumstances of his disappearance, briefly goes into detail on some of the horrors and challenges he faced, but ends the letter with a description of his pack. His second family. If only to cushion the severity of his trauma. It’s the least he can do for her, seeing as he is about to steal her car.

He leaves the letters plainly addressed on the desk, and turns off the lamp light. Shoul ering his duffle bag, he pads downstairs as quietly as he can, and snatches the keys to his sister’s convertible on his way out. Readjusting his black bucket hat, he throws the duffle bag into the backseat.

It’s entirely possible that his sister and mum heard the noise of him opening the garage door, but by the time they could even make it down the stairs he’s already gunning it down the sleepy streets. Tears catch on the cotton of his face mask and seep into the material. The only thing stopping him from turning back around and returning to his mum’s arms is to pretend that he isn’t leaving forever. He’s just going for a drive. He’ll be back before sunrise. Mum’ll have pancakes frying in the kitchen and his sister will be blasting her music in the bathroom while she straightens her hair. He’ll be back before any of them even notice he’s gone.

At around three in the morning he makes a pitstop at a gas station and buys a container full of gasoline, some cigarettes and a lighter.

Hoseok doesn’t smoke, but he figured it would seem less conspicuous.

With the bucket hat and the mask his entire face is properly obscured from scrutiny. As the cashier is ringing up his purchases, he sees his face appear on the panel behind her. It’s a photo of him smiling widely, showing off his front teeth. It was taken at an office party. It was a coworker’s birthday. He was still a fairly new employee when it was taken, so he hadn’t yet known what was actually happening behind the scenes. Somehow, the harmless photo is cast in a whole new light when the word paedophilia is sprawled out in bold underneath it.

He’s about to look away when the screen changes to a different wanted suspect—a face he instantly recognises. The photo is a little grainy, as it was clearly taken from CCTV footage, but he
knows those hard lines and scathing glare anywhere. Underneath Yoongi’s photo it says: “Theft, Grand theft.”

What the fuck.

It looks like he isn’t the only criminal in the pack. He’d say it grieves him to see Yoongi’s face on a wanted panel, but to be honest he’s just happy to see the man alive and well.

Well enough to break the law, anyway.

He puts the gasoline under the front seat and tosses the lighter and cigarettes in the glove compartment. For a short while, he sits in his car, hands resting on the wheel, looking out onto the silence that stretches on and on and on.

So, he’s doing this. This is happening. There’s absolutely no going back now.

With a heavy sigh, he pulls out onto the main road. The street lights flash across his knuckles as he tears down the pavement.

“Jimin, if you’d just listen—”

“You just don’t get it, do you?” Tracks of wet, salty tears glistened under the harsh lighting of the bathroom. Hoseok tried to remember if it was the first time he’d ever seen Jimin shed tears. Even now, with the fragility of his stature, the omega had a stiffened upper-lip and unbridled anger in his gaze. “What do you know? Omegas and children get exploited by the thousands and all you do is sit there and pity yourselves because ‘not all alphas’. Fuck you. Fuck you and your fucking gender.”

While Jimin stood as the epitome of strength and vengeance, Hoseok could only crumble in despair. The last thing he wanted was for Jimin to see him so pathetic, so weak, but he just couldn’t help himself. “I never meant to hurt anyone. I tried—I really did, Jimin. Please, you know how much I love children I would never want them hurt—”

“Shut up,” the younger man said coldly. “If you even had to shoulder even a fraction...”
The omega shook his head and turned away from him, and in his mind Hoseok had lost the omega for good.

That was the last time they spoke to each other—about a day or two after Taehyung’s miscarriage. Emotions were high and everyone was traumatised and upset. In retrospect, Hoseok doesn’t know what he was thinking, trying to patch things up with Jimin so soon after disaster had struck them. In his stupid mind he thought that reconciling with Jimin would somehow make things better again. But it didn’t, obviously. Wounds were still fresh. Jimin was still angry at him and was too busy trying to be strong for the other omegas—especially Taehyung.

While their pack was still as strong as ever after the incident, they were all suffering beneath the weight of melancholy. Namjoon was almost impossible to talk to for at least a week afterwards, gaze distant and reflective. It was Yoongi who stepped in to assume the leader role in Namjoon’s brief emotional absence, taking care of the omegas but also being a quiet support for Hoseok in his darkest hour. Some semblance of normality was inching back as time went on—at least until Jeongguk went into labour.

Now he doesn’t even know if the others are alive. Though Yoongi is—apparently.

If the others are alive, they could be anywhere. Some might still be trapped in the facility, others might not even be in the country. He wouldn’t know where to begin if he were to try and find them. Yoongi could be the easiest to find. Well, if the cops don’t beat him to it.

Hoseok drives. Drives until he’s almost on the other side of the city. It doesn’t take nearly as long to get from Seonam to Dongmyeong. Gwangju is a city of colour. Buildings higher than fifteen stories adorn bright peach colours and little ddeok stores boast hues of sky blue. The houses of his neighbourhood were marigold and soft lavenders. The elementary school was a combination of lime greens and mango orange. The personality of the city is what compelled Hoseok to remain in Gwangju instead of accepting a position in Seoul. While Gwangju is still a city of over two million people it isn’t quite disengaged from the substance life has to offer. People care about each other here.

After parking the car across the street from his old workplace, he sits on the hood of his sister’s convertible and appreciates the moment. It’s cold, but the warmth of the engine cooling down is enough to keep him comfortable.

*The Angels of Light* is a one-story brick establishment with a carpark and a gated fence. Everyday, when he arrived at work, he parked his car closest to the gate and greeted the security guard that sits at the front desk. Past him, there’s Moon-ah, the receptionist, and a little further down, past the bathroom and the water cooler, were their cubical desks. At the end of the aisle of cubicles, you can see the boss’ office through a large, glass window. Hoseok loved his job. He had others passions
but, there was no beating the fulfilment of finding a safe and happy home for an unwanted child. At least, when he sat down at his desk he felt like he had a sense of purpose, and it wasn’t always just paperwork.

He visited broken homes, temporary housing facilities, families in domestic abuse situations, foster homes, people from all different walks of life. Some parents were evil because the corruption had eaten them up from the inside, other parents made bad decisions because they themselves had had terrible parents. Whatever the sins of the parents, the children were always pure. Even the troubled ones.

He vividly recalls one time when he’d had to find a home for twins. One of his hardest cases. One was suffering from severe epilepsy and needed a trained guardian who knew how to deal with such situations—or at the very least was willing to take some class on the subject. The other twin was perfectly healthy. His boss suggested it would be easier if they were separated—even though it’s illegal to separate biological siblings. It would’ve been strictly off the books, of course, but he refused to give up on them.

Eventually he did find a home for them. It was a case he was glad to never see in his in-tray ever again.

With the gasoline under his arm and the lighter in his pocket, he jumps the fence of the estate. His heart is thumping loud in his ears. He’s never done anything like this before. What he did for the agency was highly illegal—yes, but there’s never been a point in time where he’s actively gone out of his way to break the law. Up until he took the job, he never got into any trouble with the authorities. This though—this is a whole new situation he never imagined himself being in.

Despite the goodie two shoes and the coward that run deep into his veins scream at him to walk away, a stronger part of him feels justified in being here.

It’s been a long time coming. It’s finally time to burn this shithole to the ground. It won’t end all the suffering of children across the globe but if he could do anything to rectify the wrongs he has committed, this would be a start. The fire will garner a lot of attention. He’ll be caught. He’ll go to jail. And—he’s so fucking terrified, but it’s better than cowering in a corner for the rest of his life.

Popping the cap, he starts spilling the gasoline all over the entrance and on the surrounding bushes, hoping it’ll be enough to eventually burn every inch of the building. He does this slowly and carefully, avoiding getting any spillage on his sneakers or his clothes. When the container is empty, he throws it aside and takes out the tighter. He looks around, paranoid that he’s being watched, but what little is revealed by the street lights shows that there is nothing but silence. Such a peaceful place.
He sets it on fire and takes a few steps back. He’s mesmerised by how quickly the fire spreads across the bushes and starts feeding from the wooden windowpanes. Hoseok savours the moment. All his life he’s always been scared of the consequences. It sickens him to the stomach even now, just thinking about the terrible things that await him in his future. But it was worth it. Just to see it all slowly turn to ash. He lingers for a minute or two before jumping back over the fence. Reassumining his place on the hood of the car, he watches as the flames eventually reach up towards the sky, until the entire establishment is ablaze. For a moment he considers just waiting for the police to arrive and turning himself in, but he thinks that, considering his freedom has a countdown, he may as well go for a ride with the top down. Maybe he’ll go visit that bridge.

It’d be a peaceful way to go.

Sirens blare behind him as he enters on to the highway. Red and blue lights flash in the rear-view mirror. Hoseok floors it and the police vehicle tailing him matches the speed. There are barely any cars on the road at this time in the morning. It almost feels as though they aren’t tearing down the city of Gwangju but are somewhere else entirely, like a desolate country road in Nevada. The sirens tear up the silence like a rabid dog barking in the night. Wind whips through his hair and freezes his skin until he’s numb to it.

It’s the first time in a long time that Hoseok feels calm.

His heart rate is average, his palms aren’t slicked with sweat and he isn’t on the verge of passing out. Because unlike back at the facility, and unlike being back at home, he knows how this is going to end. There’s no ‘what if’ scenario. He has no way of escaping the police. This is it.

The thought is oddly cathartic.

The roar of another engine cuts through the expansive highway. For a moment, Hoseok thinks it’s coming from his car, but reminds himself that his sister’s convertible is a silent sweeper. Glancing in his side mirror, he sees a black shadow hot on the rear of the cop car. He frowns. How bizarre. What maniac would go for a joy ride at almost four in the morning? Why would they risk blowing the speed limit so they can chase after an active-duty police car?

Then—the unpredictable happens.

The car goes ramming into the side of the police cruiser and it goes spinning out of control. Hoseok slams on the breaks. The friction of the tires screaming against the pavement. He turns around to
watch the cruiser smack into the divide barrier and the mystery car swerves to a screeching halt in the middle of the empty, six-lane road. A police officer struggles out of the passenger-side door, and the driver of the black Mustang bolts as quick as a cat over to the dazed officer. At this distance he can’t see the person’s face—only a flash of short, mint green hair. The stranger drags the officer into a sleeper hold. The police woman is too injured and confused to put up much of a struggle. Green-haired Crusader ducks their head into the shattered window of the cruiser to check something, before snatching the gun from the unconscious officer’s holster.

“What the fuck?” he says aloud. He can barely believe what he’s witnessing.

“Hoseok!” the person calls. Chills go running up his arms.

Yoongi…?

“We gotta get outta here, come on!”

“Fuck me,” he groans and leaps out of the car. He swings his duffle bag over his shoulder and goes running over to the Mustang. As he gets closer, it’s clear to him that it really is Yoongi, but he looks very different from the silver-haired fox he’d come to love. How the fuck did he find him? What the fuck is going on?

Not only has he changed his hair to a blinding mint green, his clothes make him look…well, like a drug dealer. A trendy drug dealer at that. He tells him this as he’s shoving his bag into the boot.

Yoongi laughs, climbing into the driver’s seat. “You gotta look the part, or else the druggies will think you’ve gone soft.”

He’s wearing black, ripped jeans and a leather jacket adorning a collection of badges and spikes that give it an urban flare. Underneath the jacket, he’s only wearing a thin, printed t-shirt. In winter. The psycho. His heavy black boot rests on the pedal, and he revs the engine just as Hoseok clicks his seatbelt into place.

“Are you out of your mind?” Yoongi smirks at him. Hoseok’s jaw drops. “Are you wearing earrings?”

“Shut up, Hoseok,” he snorts and shoves the stick into drive.
Chapter End Notes

I know I said on twitter that this would come out later than expected but I hammered through it anyway.

Also Run Era Yoongi? All the yes.

Curious Cat

Tumblr

Feel free to ask me anything~ or if you just wanna chat about something you love. That'd be awesome too~!
Namjoon never considered himself a lucid dreamer. In the past, dreams tended to slip from his mind moments after awakening, and he would go about his day without giving them a second thought. At university he always considered sleep therapy a bogus science. The discipline of psychology he had quite a spot of respect for. But sleep therapy is a different story. It isn’t nearly as reputable and well-researched as the other branches of psychology, and some notable figures in the psychology field have even gone as far as to accuse it of being a pseudo-science. Yes, he thought of it as no better than what hack psychics would try selling on television or at divination fairs. The studies of sleep patterns and dream interpretations are about as valid as horoscope readings, in his personal opinion. Which was always correct.

And that was how he felt for a long time.

Trivial anxieties, such as sleep paralysis and bedwetting, were things only people of inferior intellect would harp on about.

Or so he thought, right up until he and Jeongguk made the impulsive decision to claim one another. Jeongguk never told him what he dreamed about. At least, not early into their relationship. Prior to claiming one another Namjoon had very little interest in what Jeongguk pondered over. He was quiet, submissive and obedient, qualities that are becoming less and less common among the omega race, and is what initially drew him towards the omega in the first place. If there is a God though, he has quite the taste for irony, as Namjoon quickly found out the hard way, when after permanently sealing their fates as one, he came to know that his bonded partner suffered from petrifying nightmares, and without them knowing it was possible, waded into Namjoon’s mind when they were at their most vulnerable. It’s not to say that they necessarily share the same dreams. It is more to do with the feeling their dreams elicit which translates through their connected minds. After a pleasant dream of sitting on the beach counting miniature crabs, Jeongguk would awaken to tell Namjoon that he dreamt about the summer he spent with his uncle and aunt. After having unpleasant dreams…

Well, Namjoon simply doesn’t know how Jeongguk is able to close his eyes at all.

He’s well aware that their connection has made permanent changes to his psyche, he just didn’t
realise how deeply the roots grew until he bothered to reflect on the man who studied omega biology. It never occurred to Jeongguk to ask why he studied omegas. If his partner asked, would he answer truthfully? Would Jeongguk even want to hear the truth? A subject that once excited him now turns his stomach. To examine omegas was to see them as spectacle, a puzzle waiting to be solved. Like an alien probing at the lesser species. A documentarian narrating a monkey’s way of life. It made him feel powerful to be the one picking apart the functions of their bodies. To be the one to draw his own conclusions on their behavioural and psychological tendencies.

It took being on the receiving end of uncomfortable scrutiny to realise the irony of the situation. It took binding himself heart and soul to an omega to realise how toxic and illogical his initial justifications had been.

Now he lives to bear the consequences of his actions.

After claiming Jeongguk, his dreams became more visceral, bordering on lucid—though there is a distinct lack of control on his part. Recollecting the dreams come more easily to him, but whether they are dreams worth recollecting is a debate for another time. Yes, their unique connection has changed him in many ways. Even made him change his thoughts about goddamn sleep therapy, of all things. His young-self would’ve snorted at the very notion. The sheer amount of arguments from other psychology majors couldn’t sway him on his opinion, nor could the lecturers he harboured respect for. Much like his views on omegas, it was a perspective he never anticipated to shift.

But, he supposes such a drastic change is able to occur under extraordinary circumstances.

Around him are trunks of trees, blackened against the night sky, twisting and coiling up towards the stars. In the near distance are the quiet chirpings of quaint grasshoppers. It smells oddly sweet. Sweet but damp. As though the plumes of spring have taken to the air after freshly lain rain. It reminds him of Yoongi and Hoseok.

Such a scent should bring him comfort, but his heart is thudding hard in his chest and the tips of his fingers feel violently tingly. It’s like his blood sugar has taken a plunge. It feels as though a weight is strapped to his forehead, creating suffocating tension. Sweat slicks his temples, and exhaustion poisons every fibre of his being. Such a feeling has only ever struck him whenever he is physically distant from Jeongguk. The trauma of their separation has seeped into his subconsciousness. What used to be something that only affected them physically in the beginning, slowly started to take a psychological toll on their brains, too. Now separation is as good as being involved in a severe car accident.

Looking up at the near unnatural moonlight, he soon finds that what hangs in the sky isn’t a moon at all, but rather, Jeongguk, coiled into a fetal position, eyes closed and all in white. His skin is
glowing, as if he has transformed into the moon itself, but as he stumbles clumsily forward, hands reaching towards the night, he cannot touch him.

He thinks that, if he could only find somewhere higher—

Charging further into the forest, he barely gives any mind to his surroundings. Not the gargantuan flowers that coil open as he breezes past them, not the tiny critters that scuttle into the foliage, nor the noises of the forest beckoning him into the oblivion. He is solely drawn towards the moonlight.

It isn’t long before he’s out of breath, completely depleted. In this condition, he’ll never reach Jeongguk. Even an attempt would be ludicrous. But still, he treks further onward. He doesn’t know where he is, exactly. His dreams usually take him to somewhere that is, at the very least, recognisable. Like the generic skin of a school classroom or some back alley that looks like every other back alley in Seoul. This place…it’s unlike anything he’s ever encountered before. While this is undoubtedly a forest, the colours that exude from every crevice beam with artificial, neon heaven. As though the plants had absorbed the juices of technicolour straight off the buildings in the heart of the capital. The bugs look and behave differently. The animals give off a whimsically unnatural vibe as they bound like glitching figures from a computer. A deer with massive horns struts by, stills and turns, figure all in black, and its eyes a glowing white. Caught in the cradle of its horns is a canopy of vines and vibrant, blue flowers.

As he ventures, the gnarled and twisted trees and the walls of winding underbrush make way for a massive clearing. Here, Jeongguk is so far away he almost blends with the milky way of stars dotting the vast and empty expanse. The moonlight is so strong that it turns the grass a pale bone hue. They flutter with the wind as it rolls across the lonely plains. Closer to the outskirts of where he emerges is a hill. He approaches it, even as his legs seem to gain a kilogram with every step he takes towards the elevated area. It doesn’t take long for his knees to buckle, and he looks up at dear, sweet Jeongguk and thinks that maybe he’ll never reach him.

At a crawl, he drags himself across the grass. Upon contact the blades melt and turn to watery milk. It seeps into his clothes and adds even more weight, until he’s brought to his elbows and his spine is curving painfully. Adding a thousand pounds couldn’t stop him from reaching the top of that hill. If it meant reaching for Jeongguk, the fracture of his bones would mend immediately, and the pain and exhaustion would be met with tender nullification.

But he can’t go any further than the cusp of the peak. With his cheek against the wet, melting grass, his heart breaks a little. Jeongguk is his moon, his sun and his stars, but it isn’t enough to fight what anchors him to the earth. It is as if gravity itself exists to spite his love.

Then, something emerges, moving across the pale clearing, stalking with ease.
Judging by the shape of the hulking silhouette, Namjoon’s first assumption is that it is a very large dog. Fear trickles down into the pit of his stomach as he is reminded of the wolf scrutinizing his mate. Had it come back to swallow his moon?

These anxieties only linger for mere moments before it slinks from the shadows, and in place of a dog, a figure of a lone person. It’s difficult to say if they are a man or woman, omega, beta or alpha. In this place his senses are dulled. Inhaling through his nose only produces a myriad of fragrances he’s unfamiliar with. However, what is most distinct about the person is their long, vibrant red hair. Like silk and wine, toying in the gentle breeze. He knows this person. Who are they? Why are they here?

Namjoon is only given a fraction of time to marinate in his thoughts before he’s suddenly shocked awake. The image of a fantastical landscape bleeds into something more real and tangible, the face of his sweetheart lingering over his form with mild concern swimming in his chocolate irises.

Gone is the long, somewhat knotty pink tassels. It’s still taking some time for him to adjust to the change. Yesterday, they both got haircuts. Well, Jeongguk’s hair was already noticeably shorter when they showed up on his parents’ doorstep, but the job was admittedly (and much to Jimin’s chagrin) a little poor. Now, around the sides his hair is close-shaven, and the top neatly falling over his eyes. Jeongguk insisted on dyeing his hair black, and to follow the trend, Namjoon had decided on a light platinum-blonde colour—a shade or two above what Yoongi has. Jimin was somewhat miffed that he’d reverted back to the hairstyle he had before his abduction, as he kept urging them to alter their appearance as much as they could to avoid being recognised.

Jimin might be scared of Seokjin, but Namjoon isn’t.

In fact, he’s hoping the bastard will come find them. If he does there will be worlds of pain to pay for what he’s done to them.

When Jeongguk first told him about Seokjin, that he was the mastermind behind everything, Namjoon had been unsurprised. What confused him was the fact that after this revelation, Jeongguk had profusely apologised to him. The omega had wrongfully assumed his anger was directed at him. But of course, it wasn’t. Jeongguk was right to keep it from him, even if Seokjin was bluffing about his disturbing threat. He not only had himself to look out for, but Haeun as well.

“Why the long face?” Namjoon coughs groggily, reaching to touch Jeongguk’s complexion.
“I could feel your distress,” Jeongguk explains. “Were you having a bad dream?”

“Sort of.” He doesn’t want to go into detail in case he worried the omega further. “I think I saw Taehyung.”

Brightening, Namjoon watches the concern wash away instantaneously with inward satisfaction. “I’ve been dreaming about him too, you know.”

He quirks an eyebrow at the maknae. This is news to him. “Oh? You have, have you?”

Crawling on top of him, thighs straddling his hips, Jeongguk nods his head enthusiastically. “He was a wolf.”

“Taehyung was?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Huh…”

“He was gorgeous. I’ve never seen something so beautiful in my entire life—well, that’s not true. Haeun is up there.”

Tilting his head, he asks, “And me?”

Jeongguk nods. “Yes, of course. Everyone in our pack is beautiful. But—oh you should’ve seen him, hyung. He was huge and majestic, he didn’t look like a normal wolf at all he…he looked like something that didn’t even come from Earth, you know? His eyes glowed and his hair shone and his paws were—”

Resting his hands on Jeongguk’s waist, he almost completely zones out. He simply smiles and nods along with whatever the younger man is saying, but his primary focus is on the sparkle in Jeongguk’s eyes. Looking back, he wonders if he ever saw Jeongguk this happy. It’s hard to say. There were happy moments—sprinkled in with the near constant fear and hurt. But he’s never seen Jeongguk this elated, this cheerful and full of life. He wonders if Jeongguk was ever this happy
before he was taken.

He also wonders if he was ever this happy too, before he met Jeongguk.

It’s hard to say. Jeongguk gives him a different kind of happiness unique to love. It isn’t necessarily familial love, but it’s just as powerful.

Would he go back and endure the nine months of pain all over again, just to end up here?

It scares him that the words on the tip of his tongue are: yes, I would.

If it meant he had Jeongguk, the pack, Haeun…

He blinks, only just comprehending the absence of his son. “Where is Haeun?”

He’d unintentionally cut Jeongguk off, but the omega isn’t bothered by it. Jeongguk smiles softly. “Jimin-hyung and your sister are downstairs looking after him.”

“Jimin?” he echoes, not even attempting to hide his surprise. Never would he ever peg Jimin as the maternal or doting type. In fact, he often pictured the omega withdrawing in disgust at the mere thought of holding an infant baby. He snorts. “A bit out of character for him, isn’t it?”

Shaking his head, Jeongguk says, “I think Jimin-hyung has really changed—I mean, not entirely but he’s much nicer than he was before.”

“He called you a slut,” Namjoon comments bluntly.

Jeongguk waves it off. “It’s water under the bridge. If I got offended every time someone called me that I’d have been hanging from the ceiling by my neck a long time ago. Besides, he wasn’t wrong.”

It wounds him to picture something so disturbingly graphic. It sickens him to think of how close Jeongguk came to ending his life. “Don’t say things like that. You’re not a slut.”
“I’m a slut,” he reaffirms with a lazy smile, slowly arching to rub his ass against Namjoon’s clothed penis. “Only difference is I’m an exclusive slut now.”

“You’re not funny,” he growls, gripping Jeongguk hips to thrust up against the omega’s tight buttocks. He wonders if it’s by pure coincidence that Jeongguk chose to wear only a pair of cotton, baby-blue pyjama shorts and a loose t-shirt, but all things considering he’d be a fool to think the boy didn’t plan this from the beginning.

Being only in a pair of silk boxer shorts and a shirt himself isn’t helping matters all that much.

“Well, hello there,” Jeongguk giggles as the blood rushes to Namjoon’s cock. “Hyung, lemme take care of you. It’s been so long since we’ve had sex.”

The last time they were intimate would’ve been before his third trimester. It got to the point where Jeongguk was simply too big to really think about sex, and Namjoon himself—though he did jerk off in the shower a few times—was too stressed to even suggest it. The baby and their future became the priority, and anything else could wait until a later time.

But oh, how he’s missed having Jeongguk like this. It baffles him how lucky he is. How if it weren’t for the fucked-up circumstances that brought them together, he wouldn’t be lying here at this very moment, beneath this ethereal being.

The morning light that filters in through the blinds fall over Jeongguk’s pretty face. His eyelashes flutter and his head rolls back as he moves his hips slowly on top of him. “Hyung, I want to ride you,” he mewls quietly.

“You’ve—you’ve never…” Namjoon trails off, squeeze his eyes closed as the pleasurable burn starts to build inside him. “We’re never done this position before.”

“I know, I just wanna be the one taking care of you this time.” Jeongguk slowly rises to his feet on top of the mattress, and through hooded eyes Namjoon watches his mate teasingly strip away his clothing. The omega didn’t even have the decency to wear underwear underneath his cotton shorts, as if they weren’t revealing enough already. Jeongguk makes sure not to break eye-contact with him, standing over him as though he knows Namjoon is putty in the palm of his hand.

In that moment, Namjoon doesn’t even know his own name.
Even with evidence of his pregnancy still apparent, he’s perfect. The perfect skin of his thighs looks so soft he wants to bury his head in them. Small stretchmarks have developed around his hips and there’s still a small bump where their child used to be. His nipples and chest look softer than before the pregnancy, and slightly raw from breastfeeding.

Placing his hands over the stretchmarks on his hips, Jeongguk shyly admits, “My body isn’t as sexy as it used to be. I have a mum-bod now.”

“You’re still perfect,” Namjoon breathes, and he means it.

The compliment makes the omega suddenly bashfully. Sinking back down on top of Namjoon, the alpha can feel the slick forming a wet patch on his lower abdomen. Reaching behind, Jeongguk relieves Namjoon’s dick from the confines of his boxer shorts. Jeongguk pumps him a few times, enough for him to chub fully. “You’re so big, hyung.”

Namjoon moans, hiding his face against the pillow as Jeongguk continues to flick his wrist like an expert. Then Jeongguk is urging him out of his shirt. At this point, he’s willing to do whatever Jeongguk tells him to. God, he never thought he’d be reduced to this: completely and utterly at the mercy of an omega. And he isn’t complaining, either. Jeongguk’s small hands caress his body, worshipping him like a king. Fingers tweak his nipples and his eyes fly open in shock, slapping a hand over his mouth to catch the surprised moan on the tip of his tongue. No one’s ever done that to him. He’s never allowed any one to do that to him. He’s not a damn omega. But…but Jeongguk is looking at him so sweetly, knowing that he only wants to please him. That there’s no judgement or disappointment that exists between them.

“I guess that’s something we both have in common,” Jeongguk giggles as he continues to roll Namjoon’s nipples between his fingers. And it feels good. He reaches for Jeongguk, hooking his hands under his armpits and thumbing at his swollen nubs. “Hyung—you s-shouldn’t, I’ll—”

Jeongguk looks like he wants expire on the spot as tiny drops of milk leak from his nipples and slide down the bumps of his ribcage. Namjoon can’t resist chuckling at how cute Jeongguk is. He heaves Jeongguk a little further up his body to trail feather-like kisses up and down his torso, leaving light pink hickeys along his defined clavicles and coming to a stop at his neck. He noses at Jeongguk’s scent gland, a combination of sweetness and earth seeping from the crevices of a scar he left behind on him. Objectively, it’s ugly to look at. The teeth indents are pink and puffy in certain places where the scar tissue didn’t heal properly, and the canines have left pinprick wholes in the flawless flesh as a reminder of their poor lack of judgement.

But on Jeongguk, it somehow complements his elegance. There isn’t a beauty mark or a scar that
could tarnish his looks.

To uphold the ritual, Jeongguk scents him thoroughly, purring contently as he continues to play with his nipples. Namjoon’s hands glide across Jeongguk’s back until he stretches them over his buttocks, squeezing and kneading the fleshy globes until he has Jeongguk moaning against his jaw.

Cupping his face, Jeongguk leans over to kiss him gently on the lips. “I never want this moment to end.”

Namjoon agrees, kissing the younger man back with as much tenderness as he can possibly convey in just a kiss. They continue to kiss as Namjoon lazily opens Jeongguk up with his fingers. It doesn’t hurt Jeongguk as much as he expects it to, and when Namjoon is met with any amount of resistance he slows it down and flexes his fingers gingerly. On average an omega doesn’t fully recuperate from child birth until a week after, but this bond he and Jeongguk share is something that almost transcends biological function. Together they are powerful, somehow, more resilient and less vulnerable. Every time they have sex he’s worried he’ll hurt Jeongguk. Compared to how betas and alphas are built, so much can go wrong with omegas and their bodies, and yet, whenever he feels that flicker of doubt within him, Jeongguk is quick to reassure him. Omegas are stronger than they look. Just under a year ago, he would’ve been sceptical, but over the time he has spent with Jeongguk he’s come to learn that it’s true. Omegas are strong. They certainly have a better pain threshold than he does, that’s for sure.

“Oh,” Jeongguk sighs against his mouth. “I’m ready.”

“Are you sure?” he doesn’t mean to sound as concern as he does. Jeongguk tilts his head to the side cutely and pokes him in the cheek, right where his dimple is.

“I’d know better than you.”

He chuckles. “I can’t dispute that.”

He would know immediately if he is causing Jeongguk any pain anyway.

With one last kiss, Jeongguk moves back so that he’s aligned with Namjoon’s cock. The maknae gives him a somewhat awkward smile before sinking slowly down, taking him in inch by inch. Namjoon keeps him steady by the hips just in case his thighs give out under the strain. He can tell that it’s a little overwhelming for Jeongguk, simply by the crease between his eyebrows, but the
omega persists anyway, as if he’s trying to prove something.

“Don’t push yourself, sweetheart. We’re not in any rush.”

The reassurance falls on deaf ears, and despite it not making much sense, Jeongguk sinks all the way down onto him. Immediately, Namjoon tries to sit up, seeing the tears well in his omega’s eyes, but Jeongguk pushes him back down, a hand on his chest telling him not to move. He can feel it hurting Jeongguk. It occurs to him that maybe Jeongguk is reverting back into that mentality of attempting to punish himself during sex—something they have been struggling to overcome together over the course of their relationship.

Deliberately, Jeongguk starts rolling his hips, insides hugging him so tightly that Namjoon almost forgets to breathe. A shudder runs through him as the pleasure ripens. The pain Jeongguk initially experienced quickly subsides and his concerns go running off with any other coherent thought he’s ever conceived.

Jeongguk starts bouncing on top of him, his fluffy hair bouncing along with the movement. He starts fast and dirty, almost like an alpha in the midst of a rut, chasing some unforeseeable force like he was born to. Oh, he’s so gorgeous. So incredibly irresistible. His hands rest on the curve of his waist and he runs his thumbs along his ribcage. They’ve never done it in this position before: with Jeongguk on top and Namjoon on the bottom. It’s not something he really ever thought about—until now, that is. Though he really can’t say why they never tried this before.

It dawns on him though, as Jeongguk continues bouncing up and down, up and down—

His dick isn’t hard. At all.

It could almost be forgotten under the curve of his semi-swollen tummy, but when Namjoon sees it he’s filled with concern. Any omega becomes slick when aroused—hell, they’ve been known to produce slick at times without rhyme or reason, but with male omegas it’s always apparent that they don’t feel pleasure if their penises remain soft. That’s when it hits him. The pleasure he’s experiencing is entirely one-sided. He’s the only one getting anything out of this.

“Jeongguk, stop,” he says weakly. “Jeongguk—”

But Jeongguk starts to get frustrated and bounces harder. That’s when Namjoon’s hands fly to Jeongguk’s waist to physically stop him. The omega falters.
“Jeongguk, you’re not aroused,” Namjoon chokes out, ignoring every impulse in his system to keep thrust up into Jeongguk’s tight warmth.

“It’s fine,” Jeongguk says shortly, a mild tremble in his voice. “This isn’t about me. It’s about you. I want to make you feel good.”

“I don’t want to have sex if I’m the only one getting pleasure from it.”

The omega’s lips press together, as though he’s about to cry, and covers his face with his hands. He makes no move to stop Jeongguk as he slowly un-straddles him and rolls onto his side with his back to him. Turning to face the omega, he places a gentle hand on his neck, drawing tiny circles against the tiny hairs at his nape.

“Talk to me,” he prods softly.

It takes a moment for Jeongguk to gather his thoughts. As the silence stretches on all Namjoon can really do is reach out through the connection and give him as much love and support as he needs. It is a tad awkward, lying on his side still uncomfortably hard, but he does his best to ignore it.

It doesn’t take long before Jeongguk turns back over to face him. To his relief, the omega doesn’t look upset, but the tiny frown creasing his face indicates that he’s conflicted.

“I thought I could do it,” Jeongguk divulges finally.

“What?”

“You know, be more…more assertive.” He swallows heavily. “I can’t shake the feeling that I’m so submissive during sex because of all the shit I’ve been through. I’m at a point where I no longer want to let it influence me, you know?”

Namjoon can feel his heart sinking a little. “But it still does…”
“Yeah,” Jeongguk replies in a quiet, almost fearful whisper.

Gingerly, he runs his fingers along Jeongguk’s jawline and across one of his cheekbones. “You like what you like, Gguk. You shouldn’t force yourself to do things you aren’t comfortable with—especially when it comes to sex.”

“But—but you like being dominant and you still obviously enjoy what I was doing.”

Namjoon shrugs. “I enjoyed it because you were doing it. If it was anybody else, who knows how I would’ve reacted?”

A small blush dusts Jeongguk cheeks and he tries hiding his embarrassment against a pillow. Through their bond he can feel his omega gently unwinding from the turmoil twisted up inside him. It reminds him that things aren’t as ideal as he’d hoped it would be. They still have so much pain and trauma to work through. Part of him feels there are things about them that may never change, no matter how long they’re in therapy for, like his jealousy or Jeongguk’s self-loathing.

“Let’s…let’s go take a shower,” he suggests, climbing out of bed, dragging Jeongguk with him.

Jeongguk giggles and stands up on the bed, hooking his arms around Namjoon’s neck and folding his legs around Namjoon’s torso. He groans dramatically, carrying Jeongguk piggy-back style into the connecting bathroom. He damn near slips and falls on the way.

“You should also brush your teeth. Your breath stinks.”

“Why didn’t you tell me before?!?”

After the shower, the both of them head downstairs for breakfast, coming upon a curious sight in the kitchen area. At the dining table, Jimin and Jinseo are sitting cooing over a napping Haeun. It’s quite a sight to see—Jimin getting along with an alpha that isn’t Hoseok. Namjoon thought he’d never live to see that day.

“It’s time for me to feed him,” Jeongguk fusses, reaching for Haeun, but Namjoon directs him over to the stools by the counter.
“You should eat first. You need all the energy you can get today.”

Hopping up onto a stool, Jeongguk’s eyes follow Namjoon as he produces two bowls from an overhead cupboard. “How come?”

“You, me and Dad are going to see our family physician today to make sure there aren’t any post-pregnancy issues. We can’t say for certain that the doctors who delivered Haeun ran any tests on you after the fact.”

“Post-pregnancy…issues?” Jeongguk echoes slowly, the mortification evident on his expression.

The concern probes at their connection, and Namjoon follows up with a quick clarification. “Just to check for blood-clotting, infections and if the placenta came out and stuff. You haven’t experienced any pain since we reunited, right?”

“No…” As Namjoon places a bowl of wheat flakes in front of him, he looks down at it with a queasy face.

“Gguk, you’ll be fine. This is just a precaution we have to take. Our family physician has promised to conduct the tests privately, and he’s even offered to take a look at Haeun to make sure everything’s in order. Every new mother has to go in for post-pregnancy check-ups. It’s standard procedure.”

Stabbing at the flakes with his spoon, Jeongguk asks, “And you trust the doctor?”

“Yes, I do.”

For the past twenty-four hours their entire family have been on the look out for any news surrounding the kidnapping of a newborn infant. Considering the severity of the crime, Namjoon had expected to see the story plastered all over the front page of news outlets across the nation, but surprisingly there haven’t been any reports made to the police—from what they can tell, anyway. Namjoon even went as far as to check social media outlets in search of any mentions, but they all had to do with unrelated cases. Though, he did come across some wanted criminals—one for theft and another for arson—who looked suspiciously familiar.

According to Jeongguk, the couple that had Haeun in their possession appeared to be doting
towards their son. One would think any loving new parents would cause a public outrage over the kidnapping over their child, but he’s starting to suspect it isn’t quite as simple as that.

If they knowingly obtained Haeun illegally, then it’s possible they haven’t gone to the police out of fear of facing charges. If they weren’t aware of the illegality, then perhaps they contacted the “adoption agency” that provided him, and was promptly told to keep their mouths shut. Either way, just because the news hasn’t been made public, doesn’t mean it won’t be in the near future. They still need to take precautions and keep a low profile.

After breakfast, and Jeongguk had breastfed Haeun, his dad herded them into the family car along with Jinseo, who needed to be dropped off at the bus station a few blocks away. Most of her classes are in the afternoon because she’s a lazy shit and she knows it.

She plants a sloppy kiss to his cheek before stumbling out of the car. She proceeds to smack her face against a stop sign and everyone in the car winces.

“I’m okay!” She springs to her feet with her hands up in the air. “I’m okay!”

“No one was asking,” Namjoon snorts. She gives him the finger before swinging her bag aggressively over her shoulder and strutting towards the bus stop.

“Honestly,” Dad rolls his eyes. “I don’t know how you and Jinseo turned out so clumsy.”

“Dad, you literally fell down the stairs this morning.”

Jeongguk slaps a hand over his mouth to muffle his laugh.

Dad splutters and shoots him a harmless glare through the rear-view mirror. “I’ll have you know—Chronos bowled me over because your father was putting kibble in his food bowl—”

Unfortunately for them, their family physician is an alpha (which is the most common gender demographic in the medical field). At the clinic, they have to explain the situation to Dr. Park, that Jeongguk is claimed, and that he can’t make any skin contact with Jeongguk without causing him severe pain. Maybe if Dr. Park hadn’t known Namjoon since he was a child, he would have been reluctant to accept the circumstances without notifying the authorities, but having his father there did help ease some of the tension.
They spared him of the truth, of course, and excused it as an accident.

Dr. Park didn’t look like he believed them, but he agreed to look at Jeongguk and Haeun anyway.

Halfway through the exam his phone rings. He and Junhyun, his other dad, had gone and bought new ones for he, Jeongguk and Jimin the day before, and added all their numbers to each other’s contacts. At the moment, Jimin is at the house all alone, which Jimin had been fine with. They’d taught him how to navigate the channels for the TV in the lounge area, and the omega wanted to catch up on a drama he’d been following before he was taken.

So, one could imagine his surprise when Jimin’s name showed up on his phone.

Excusing himself from the room, he leaves to answer. Heavy breathing can be heard on the other end. “Jimin? Is everything okay?”

“Someone’s at the door.”

He falters mid-step. “What?”

“I said ‘someone’s at the door’ you dumbass.”

“Where are you right now?”

“I’m hiding in the guest room closet.”

“It’s probably just a door salesman. They’ll go away,” he concludes flippantly, turning around to go back towards the exam room.

“They’ve been knocking and pressing that doorbell for nearly ten minutes—and they’re still going.”
Huh. That’s weird. “Maybe it’s a neighbour?”

“For fuck’s sake Namjoon, can you please get back here and sort this out? It could be Seokjin for all I know.” It’s clear Jimin is attempting to keep his voice under control. Namjoon can tell he’s panicked through the receiver.

“Well, the exam isn’t finished it. We could be here for another half an hour.”

“Fuck, just—get back here!”

For a moment he considers lecturing Jimin on being a dramatic asshole, and that he has bigger priorities. He wants to stay with his mate and child. Jeongguk needs him more than Jimin does. But...he is the leader of their pack, and that means he has to make sure everyone is safe. Biting his lip, he looks back at the door to the exam room. He knows in his gut that Jeongguk and Haeun will be perfectly safe here with Dr. Park and his father. They won’t be too far behind him. The separation wouldn’t be long enough to cause them too much strain.

“Okay, I’ll be there soon.”

“Yeah, you fucking better.”

He hangs up and enters the exam room to explain the situation. Jeongguk doesn’t seem too bothered, resting comfortably on an exam table as dad cradles Haeun in his arms. “If Jimin says he needs you, you should go.”

Dad gives him cash to take a taxi back home. It only takes him ten minutes to get back to the house, and well, he doesn’t know what he was expecting, but it certainly wasn’t two alphas that look as though they’ve walked straight out of a punk-rock magazine cover. “How the fuck did you guys find my house?”

The alpha with dark red hair sitting on the stone step looks up, and then his mouth pulls into a massive, heart-shaped grin. “Kim Namjoon!”

With a goofy, cackling laugh Hoseok jumps into his arms. A nose brushes his scent gland and he’s sure to scent Hoseok too before placing him back on his feet. Leaning coolly by the door is Min Yoongi, and when it registers in his mind who he’s looking at he swaggers over to him. Namjoon
“You look like you sell drugs on a college campus.”

“Good to see you too, yah big tree.”

After they scent each other, he lets them inside the house and calls up the stairs to Jimin. “Oi, I think you’ll wanna come down here. We have company.”

Namjoon hears the guest bedroom door open, and then Jimin’s voice echoing down the hallway. “Bitch, it better’ve been a girl scout or some shit—”

Jimin pauses at the top of the stairs, gazing over the banister at the three of them with a blank face. Hoseok shifts from one foot to the other nervously, as if he’s uncertain of how he should react. With deliberate steps, Jimin walks down the steps until he’s at the very last one, his eyes solely on Hoseok.

The alpha’s bottom lip wobbles precariously, and his eyes fill with unshed tears. “Jiminnie, I’m—”

Snatching the back of Hoseok’s head, Jimin drags him into an open-mouthed kiss. Yoongi makes a noise of disgust before dragging himself over to the kitchen. “Nice to see you too, Jimin. You fucking sap. Namjoon, please tell me you have food. I spent all my cash on this leather jacket. This shit wasn’t cheap.”

“Don’t fucking say you’re sorry,” Jimin says when they finally break their kiss. “You’ve done fucked up shit. I’ve done fucked up shit. We’ve all done fucked up shit. Let’s call it even and never mention it again.”

Namjoon coughs into his fist. “Can we, um, maybe sit down for a second? This is all a lot to take in.”

“We can talk over food,” Yoongi calls from the kitchen. “Get your butts in here. I got some shit to tell you.”

Jimin laces his fingers with Hoseok’s and drags him along, eyeing the alpha’s new hair. “Red looks good on you.”
Giggling, Hoseok says, “I like your hair, too.”

The omega’s face twists with unhinged distaste. “For real? I fucking hate it.”

“N-no, it—it makes you look softer,” Hoseok compliments apprehensively.

Instead of disputing this, as Namjoon expects him to, the omega procures a brief but genuine smile.

So, as Yoongi helps himself to all the supplies in Namjoon’s parents’ kitchen, the rest of them sit at the dining table to catch up on what’s been going on. Yoongi explained that, after making a courageous escape from Seokjin’s clutches, he went looking for Hoseok first, since he seemed to be the furthest from the rest of them and needed his help more. He knew the three of them were already united, and had assumed they were somewhere safe. There was also mention of what happened to Taehyung, which came as disturbing news to all of them, although it did explain why the coordinates on his note indicated the North-South border.

Once Yoongi was finished recounting his adventure, Hoseok spoke about how he was hiding at his mother’s place after he found out he was wanted under suspicion of paedophilia, and how he drove to his old work place and burnt the building to the ground. Jimin wasn’t the only one impressed by this. In all honesty, Namjoon never thought he had it in him.

Jimin talked about his struggles getting to Jeongguk, and then the obstacles they had to jump through just to get Haeun back.

“Let me get this straight—within days of our release, Jeongguk and Jimin steal a baby from a couple, Yoongi steals cash, cards and a car, and Hoseok burns down a building? Have you all lost your fucking marbles?” Though he says this with a touch of affection, none of them seem to care nor acknowledge the severity of their crimes. In their eyes, they’ve been separated from society for so long that they’re beyond giving a monkey’s ass on government-enforced authority. And Namjoon couldn’t be prouder.

As for him, he had woken up in a seedy motel that had no qualms keeping shady activity off the books—which is an experience all of them seemed to share—and that his first call of protocol was to look for Jeongguk and the baby. By nightfall, with little success in his efforts, he had no choice but to go home to his family and explain everything to them. The very next day, he went out searching again, this time with his family helping him, but they had very little information to work with and came back empty-handed. It was that night Jeongguk and Jimin suddenly showed up at the door. He also mentioned the phone number and coordinates on the note he had in his jacket.
“I’ve kept calling the number, but around yesterday the line was disconnected and it no longer rang out.”

Hoseok squirms in his seat. “Yeah, that was—um, it was probably me.”

“And you didn’t answer?”

“I didn’t know who it was! It could’ve been anyone!”

Jimin makes a gesture as if to brush the matter aside. “It doesn’t matter now. We’re all reunited.”

“Well, not all of us,” Yoongi reminds as he’s stirring three packets-worth of ramen in a boiling pot. “We still don’t know where Taehyung is. I was able to find you guys through my phone, but Taehyung’s signal hasn’t moved for days. It could only mean one of two things: either he’s dead, or he somehow found a way to remove it once he was taken north of the border.”

Namjoon proposes a third theory. “It could be that the connection is being tampered with. It’s been well documented that The Forest of Ruin tampers with technology, almost like it has its own force field.”

“It’s possible,” Yoongi agrees. “But I think if that were true, the connection would’ve dropped out altogether, not just stayed in the same spot.”

He shrugs. “Can’t be too certain.”

“No, we can’t.”

“Fuck!” Jimin curses, shoving a pile of magazines off the table. They splay across the floor in a messy heap. “I’m going to kill Seokjin. I swear, if you don’t do it, I will! Like it wasn’t enough to keep us prisoners for nine months of our lives, subjecting us to torture and humiliation, he has to go ahead and fuck with us even after setting us free. Fucking hell. I wish I could go back to the day we all woke up in that fucking box and strangled Seokjin where he lay.”
Leaning back in his seat, his arms crossed over his chest, he turns the situation over in his mind, toying with all the different possibilities. Yoongi hands Hoseok a bowl of steaming ramen and together they inhale the food like their life depends on it. “We can’t kill Seokjin—not yet, anyway.”

“Why not?” Jimin frowns, at least having the decency to pick up the magazines off the floor. “It’s the least he deserves.”

“I agree, but we shouldn’t make any rash decisions. We only just got our freedom back. If we go killing one of the richest heirs in South Korea do you really think we’ll get away with it? None of us can afford to go to jail. We’ve wasted enough of our time in confinement and we have a child to think about now, too.”

And Namjoon would be damned if Haeun had to visit him in jail. That’s not the type of father he wants to be.

Jimin looks frustrated. “Then what? We just sit back and do nothing? While he gets to live the rest of his life as a billionaire bachelor?”

“No.” Leaning forward, he rests his elbows on the table, thinking hard. “We need Seokjin.”

“Need him—”

“Jimin shut up,” Yoongi blubbers through a mouthful of ramen. Hoseok is holding a bundle of noodles between his chopsticks, regarding Namjoon tensely.

“Yes, I think that we—”

But he gets interrupted by dad and Jeongguk coming home from the doctor’s. Jeongguk is more excited than surprised to see Hoseok and Yoongi at the dining table, while his dad is all kinds of confused. Hoseok immediately gets up to coo over the baby, while Yoongi continues to chow down on his bowl of ramen like it’s about to be taken away from him at any moment.

As Namjoon introduces the alphas to his father, Jimin updates Jeongguk on what’s happened so far. Once every last drop of broth is gone from Yoongi’s bowl, he asks to hold Haeun. It’s a little odd, to see someone as severe as Yoongi look upon a baby with such tenderness. But he supposes
that, in some way, Haeun isn’t just his and Jeongguk’s, but rather, he belongs to all of them. Haeun will grow up with a strong pack foundation that will always be there to love and support him. They’ll dote on him, protect him, and raise him to be the best person he can possibly be. It’ll be that way for all their children. If they ever decide to have another one, or if Jimin and Hoseok finally overcome their parental stipulations to start a family of their own, they’ll all be well taken care of.

“Well, to be honest, I worried for a second. I really thought there was trouble,” his dad says as he cleans up the mess Yoongi made in his kitchen.

“Well, it’s just that—there’s a woman sitting in a car across the road. She looked a little suspicious but it’s probably nothing.”

Perched on the cushions of their sofa, which sits in the frame of the house’s front bay window, the five of him (plus his father) peek through the gaps in the blinds to get a good look at the lady across the road. Low and behold, in the driver’s seat of a sleek, black sportscar is a woman wearing outrageously large, bug-like sunglasses that cover-up most of her face. It’s difficult to tell from this distance whether she’s even looking at their house or not. She doesn’t appear to be doing anything noteworthy. She’s just sitting there.

“And you’re sure she’s not someone you recognise?” Yoongi asks his father.

Dad shakes his head. “This is a family neighbourhood, she’s too young to be a parent and she’s too old to one of the neighbour’s kids.”

Readjusting Haeun in his arms, Jeongguk places a hand on Namjoon’s shoulder. There’s a tiny hint of concern in his voice when he asks, “Hyung, what should we do?”

Namjoon looks at his family, and then back at the woman in the sportscar. “She doesn’t seem threatening.”
Jimin snorts. “She doesn’t seem to be doing anything at all.”

“I think we should wait a while. If she’s still there in a couple of hours I’ll go and confront her.”

For once, no one really disputes his decision. They go back to the kitchen, and for the rest of the day they pretend the existence of the mysterious woman was never mentioned. At some point Haeun soils his nappy and, instead of resolving this like a group of adults, they collectively decide that the nappy-changer would be the loser of rock-paper-scissors. Then, when Yoongi loses, he tries to talk his way out of it by implying that Jimin cheated and the game itself has a rigged system. It doesn’t end up working. Jeongguk supervises as Yoongi disposes of the repugnant-smelling nappy and replaces it with a fresh one, all the while Jimin and Hoseok are holding back fits of laughter. The faces Yoongi is making throughout the whole procedure is simply too hilarious to ignore.

Halfway through a conversation about Taehyung, Jimin and Hoseok suspiciously disappear. It’s not as though their absences were noticed by Yoongi and Jeongguk, who were debating on ways to get across the North-South border. Namjoon gives Hoseok an arched eyebrow as they’re tripping up the stairs, and is given nothing but a cheeky grin in return.

“Hypothetically, if we somehow pass the security checkpoints, what then?” Jeongguk sighs, handing Haeun over to Namjoon because his arms are getting tired. “You can go put him back in his crib if you like. Should be a couple of hours before he wakes up.”

“We pack enough to last us a couple of months out in the wilderness and we do our best to track Taehyung down,” Yoongi replies. “It’s the best outcome we could hope for—unless we somehow get a scientist who has been across the border before to guide us, but I hardly think that’s a plausible option.”

“Gguk—”

“Hm?” Jeongguk looks up, smiling at him drowsily.

“You should probably take a nap or something.” Haeun woke them up a few times during the night. They took turns getting up to care for him, but he can feel Jeongguk’s energy declining gradually.

As if his body were reminding him of the fact, he covers his mouth to hide a gaping yawn. “I’ll go
Smiling, Namjoon kisses his love on the forehead before leaving up the stairs. They still haven’t purchased a proper crib for Haeun to sleep in—mostly because they know their stay here is limited—but the container they padded with thick blankets seems to do just fine. On his way to his bedroom, he passes the guest bedroom door. It’s closed—unsurprisingly. It occurs to him that maybe he and Jimin are in need of a chat at some point, preferably before they leave.

If he wants to take his role as a leader seriously, he can’t have Jimin spiting him and undermining him at every turn. Before it used to bruise his ego, but now he sees the issue for what it really is: unnecessary conflict.

While the bickering, on occasion, can be a little entertaining, as adults they should work through their differences so that—at the very least—they can cooperate with each other. If this petty feud continues to fester, it might get to the point where it’s a detriment to their teamwork as a pack.

He carries these thoughts with him into the bedroom. Laying Haeun carefully onto his back, he spreads out a blanket on the flat surface of the comforter before tucking his son into a nice, cosy burrito. His dad taught him how to do it yesterday. He’s a little embarrassed to admit that it took him hours to get it half as good as his dad but—it’s good enough. It’s a stroke of luck that his parents are around to help he and Jeongguk with these kinds of things. By themselves—young and extremely unprepared—their lives would be leagues more chaotic.

Gingerly picking his son up, he marvels at how tiny he is. A precious little miracle. So many things could’ve gone wrong. They easily could’ve lost Haeun forever if luck weren’t on their side. And now that they have Haeun he’s never going to let his son out of his sight ever again.

As he places Haeun in the make-shift cradle, his son yawns cutely. Namjoon’s heart breaks. Happy tears collect at the corners of his eyes and he laughs at how stupidly sentimental he is.

“I hope the day never comes when you ask me how I met your mum,” he whispers. “And if it does, I’ll tell you we met at bible camp.”

For nearly half an hour, he simply sits there, on the floor of his childhood bedroom, watching his son sleep. During this time he has many thoughts, many concerns, and many hopes. As much as it pains him to consider, Haeun may not have a normal life. May not be able to go to school. May not be able to have the childhood he had. And then he thinks about how omegas get screwed over by the system. How they can’t hope to be too ambitious in the corporate world. How they can’t walk around alone. If Haeun ever brought home an alpha—oh god. He doesn’t even know what the hell
he’d do.

How can he raise Haeun to respect himself without being a hypocrite? How can he shame the alphas that might shame his son if he used to be one of those alphas?

“You look like you have the whole world on your shoulders,” Jeongguk tells him as he leans against the doorframe.

Namjoon blinks away his thoughts with a stiff smile. “It kind of feels that way.”

“You shouldn’t think about it too much,” his mate kisses him softly before crawling into bed. “What you’re feeling right now is probably what most first-time parents feel.”

Except most first-time parents weren’t forced into parenthood by a secret underground science facility.

“You’re right,” he says, standing up to pull down the blinds. “I’ll come check on you guys in an hour.”

“M’kay,” Jeongguk sniffs adorably.

Closing the door soundlessly behind him, Namjoon heads for the guest bedroom. Knocking on the door, he waits a few moments. He hears Jimin swear, along with Hoseok’s characteristically panicky voice.

“It’s just me, guys,” he calls out.

“Fuck, come in then you cockblocker.”

Hesitantly opening the door, he’s hit with the stench of sex immediately off the bat. The ceiling light is on, and Hoseok is attempting to wrestle back into his jeans while Jimin sits cross-legged on the bed in a singlet and underwear.
As anticipated, Jimin hits him with a deathly glare. “We were kind of in the middle of passionate, messy love-making, what the fuck do you want?”

Hoseok’s smile is so big it makes him look almost cartoonish. His neck and chest are littered with hickeys. “He took my knot.”

“Oh, good for you man—um,” scratching the back of his neck awkwardly he asks, “Jimin—I was kind of hoping we could talk for a bit? Shouldn’t be long. Believe me no one is more aggrieved to interrupt your—um—’passionate, messy love-making’ than I am, but it’s a bit important.”

Rolling his eyes dramatically, he pulls Hoseok in for one hot, open-mouthed kiss before slapping the alpha’s ass and telling him to go find him some snacks. Namjoon sits on the very corner of the bed, where he’s confident he isn’t sitting in jizz, and watches his fellow alpha go strutting clumsily out the door, the silly grin a permanent fixture on his face.

“So, you forgave him rather quickly,” Namjoon comments once the door is closed and they’re alone.

Crossing his arms over his chest and getting comfortable against the headboard, Jimin says, “Yeah. What of it?”

“Well, back when we were…you know—you wouldn’t even look at him.”

Sighing, Jimin runs a hand through his hair. “Yeah, well I was fucking scared, alright? When I saw he was wanted I thought for certain the police would get him. I had to—to accept the fact that maybe I’d never see him again, and I dunno—shit changed. We talked about it some more—before you came barging in uninvited, thanks for that.”

“Sorry, I didn’t want to, but I feel we needed to talk.”

“Oh god,” Jimin shakes his head. “What about? Did I offend your precious cum-bucket again? Because if it’s about how I think Haeun’s hair looks like public hair I swear I didn’t—”

“Jimin, I thought we were past this—”
“Yeah, yeah. Sorry, or whatever. I run my fucking mouth and it gets me into shit all the time. I know that. Me and Jeongguk are okay now, so what’s the fucking problem?”

“It’s us that I think is the problem. I’ve tried apologising to you for months now and you won’t forgive me. How many times do I have to say ‘sorry’ to you before you’ll believe that I’m—”

“Fuck, Namjoon.” Jimin glares at the wall opposite him as though it’s the root of all his problems. “I know you mean it, alright? I know you fucking changed. Doesn’t take a genius to see how much you worship Jeongguk and that kid.”

Namjoon frowns. “Then…then why won’t—”

“It’s just pisses me off,” Jimin shakes his head. “How you couldn’t see things for what they were until you literally put yourself in an omega’s shoes. You didn’t change and grow on your own. You changed because you fell in love and realised how your attitude and behaviour hurt him. Why is it always like that? Every alpha came from an omega, but it takes you having an omega of your own to finally get the fucking picture.”

“But if I grew and learnt from my mistakes anyway, what does it matter how I changed?”

Jimin looks contemplative. “Because you should’ve never been that way to begin with. Like—look, Namjoon, I don’t fucking hate you anymore, alright? I wouldn’t go as far as to say I particularly like you, but believe me, it’s a fucking improvement. Just, give me time, okay? I know you’ve changed but I got my own shit to deal with. That time when—when you called me out, talked about how I have some internalised classism myself it—well, it struck a fucking nerve, asshole.”

“Sorry.”

“Stop fucking saying that. God, you alphas and your fucking sorry’s. I don’t wanna hear it.”

“Then what do you want to hear?”

“Nothing, no words, only action.” Then Jimin finally looks at him. “Treat your omegas like royalty, because god knows no other alpha will. Give Haeun what little freedom he can have, make sure Jeongguk’s happy and safe… You don’t need me to tell you that, though.”
Smiling, he says, “No, I don’t.”

“Good chat, Joon. And if you really wanna please me don’t you dare interrupt my sexy times with Hoseok ever again.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t dream of it.”

At around 6:30pm, his other dad gets back from work, and at around 8:30pm, he and his grumpy dad go and confront the woman sitting in the car. They concluded that at some point, she’d driven off and come back with dinner, because she wasn’t parked outside when Junhyun pulled into the driveway. However, when they went to check out the front bay window, her car was back in the exact same spot, only this time, she had a light on.

“Do you think she’ll kill us?” Namjoon asks his dad as they cross the road in their ragged slippers.

“If she does, it’d be one hell of a way to go, wouldn’t it?”

“Dad, I don’t think you’re taking this very seriously.”

“Oh, I’m taking it dead seriously. Like, funeral-home levels of seriousness.”

Rolling his eyes, he tries to ignore the cold sweat on his palms as he knocks on the window of the driver’s side. The woman flinches, still wearing those ludicrous sunglasses, even though the sun went down hours ago. She seems hesitant to roll down her window, but when Namjoon and his father make it clear they aren’t going away, she caves.

“Sorry to disrupt you ma’am,” he says politely. A whiff of pheromones tickles his nose, identifying her as an alpha. “You’ve been parked outside the front of our home almost all day. Is there something you need help with? Are you lost?”

Namjoon notices the empty, scrunched-up paper bags in the passenger seat. She must’ve had take-away for lunch and dinner.
“No—well,” she sounds nervous. “I’m actually here because I want to speak with you and your pack—” he and his father share a tense glance “—I have information that I’d like to share with you. I’ve been—well—I’ve been trying to sum up the courage to go knock on your door but I—I’ve been talking myself out of it all day.”

“Well…” Namjoon purses his lips, searching for any hint of disapproval in his father’s eyes. “Do you maybe want to come inside?”

“I—” she seems taken back at the suggestion “—I guess?”

She reaches round to the back seat, and Namjoon takes a step back, assuming she’s reaching for a weapon. Instead, what she produces is a pile of manila folders. As she locks her car, she turns to him and holds out her hand, “I suppose introductions are in order? I’m Lee Soomin, I’m Taehyung’s g—ex. I’m his ex.”

She grimaces at the clarification and Namjoon carefully shakes her hand. “Kim Namjoon.”

“I know, I—I read your file. You seem like a very capable individual.”

“Thanks?”

Confused, he leads her into the house. It’s only when the front door closes that she finally takes off her sunglasses and reveals her face. She’s very attractive. Taehyung often spoke about his girlfriend’s beauty, she looks a lot more feminine than most alpha females do.

The others were crowded in the lounge room, peeking out the window to watch the events unfold. Hoseok nearly screams when he sees the woman enter. Jimin is more or less curious, while Jeongguk is apprehensive, searching their connection as if to confirm that she isn’t a threat. Yoongi by far is the angriest to see her.

“Namjoon, what the fuck is she doing here?” the alpha growls, looking about ready to throttle her.

“Before you get angry, Yoongi-ssi, please just let me explain my situation. I swear I wouldn’t have come here if I feel I didn’t have to but—I kept thinking about Taehyung and how scared he must be.” She clutches the files in her arms tightly to her chest. “I’m in way over my head and—and I know there’s nothing I can do at this point to save him but—maybe I can still help in some way.
From the information I was able to get access to, you guys really took care of him.”

“What do you want?” Yoongi asks scornfully.

With her expression as severe as Yoongi’s, she answers, “I want what you want—for Taehyung to be happy.”

This seems to satisfy the tension somewhat, though Yoongi still looks guarded.

“Maybe we should talk over some tea?” Dongho suggests cheerfully.

Much to Jinseo and Songin’s disgruntlement, they were told to go upstairs as this was an ‘adult matter’, to which his sister disputed that she technically is an adult now, but was sent away regardless. Though he imagines they’re still listening intently on the staircase.

“I supposed I should explain myself,” Soomin says as she sits at the head of the table. Namjoon sits at the opposite end, with the rest of the pack on either side. His dads are in the kitchen busying themselves cleaning up from dinner (as they’d had to cook for twice as many mouths as they had before), but still plainly eavesdropping. “I’ve been working for Cheongwa Incorporated—a stem cell research company financed and owned by Wangseong, the corporate conglomerate owned by Seokjin’s father—for five years. I was their Foreign Associate, and travelled to branches in Tokyo and Hong Kong to overlook the process of expanding the company internationally. I met Taehyung when he was a second-year at Kyunghee University, and I was a guest speaker for his International Business class. It wasn’t long after we started dating that he dropped out of university due to his illness. Our relationship developed faster than normal—Taehyung had to move in with me and my family because his own were…well, they had issues.”

“Was Taehyung on medication at that stage?” Jimin asks.

Soomin nods. “Yes, but they weren’t perfect. I met and became friends with Seokjin about a year after I met Taehyung.”

They all grimace. Hoseok almost chokes on his tea. “You were friends with him?”

The alpha looks visibly uncomfortable. “Pardon me, but do I honestly have to explain to you the extent of Seokjin’s manipulation? At the time, I thought he was a perfectly charming, friendly—but
Cunning—young bachelor. There was nothing about him that set off any red flags, at least, at the time. In hindsight, me mentioning Taehyung and his condition piqued his interest quite a bit. I thought he genuinely cared about helping people.”

She wipes away a stray tear. “I was wrong. So wrong. And I feel awful about it. Please—believe me when I say I had no idea. He told me Taehyung would be admitted into the facility around the time I had to go to Japan, and during the therapy I wasn’t allowed to see him…” She shakes her head, frowning down at the tears she swiped away with her fingers. “I’m not stupid. I did start to get suspicious when I lost contact with Seokjin as well. I filed inquiries weekly at work, and when I finally said that I’d be reporting it to the police, Seokjin just—shows up, out of nowhere, after ignoring my calls for months. He showed me evidence that Taehyung’s condition was improving, and photos of him looking happy and I thought… I thought maybe I’d made the right choice, and when he was released, we could be together again.”

It’s interesting, to look around at all the different faces at the table and see their thoughts flitting across their expressions. Jeongguk and Hoseok seem sympathetic—or at the very least believe she is telling the truth. Yoongi and Jimin, on the other hand, have little compassion to spare her. Namjoon himself can’t say for certain what he believes. She could be genuine or she could be a very good liar.

Clearing his throat, Namjoon asks, “Why have you come to us, Soomin-ssi? More than half of our pack are wanted on felony charges. Our duty is to each other, not to mend your broken relationship—”

“I don’t want to mend it,” Soomin says shortly. “I only want what’s best for Taehyung. I figured you wouldn’t be so easily convinced so I—I brought you these, as a show of good faith.” Placing the files out on the table, they all lean in to see what they are. “They’re files on all of you. I managed to get a hold of them through a contact of mine. There’s some information about Seokjin, too.”

“With all due respect,” Yoongi drawls as he casually flicks through his file as though it’s the dullest piece of literature he’s ever read, “what do you propose we do with this information? We have no means of getting across the border to find Taehyung—not legally, anyway.”

“You will if you’re with Seokjin.” This gets their attention. Namjoon straighten in his chair. “The scientists that make annual expeditions across the border are field researchers employed under Cheongwa Incorporated. Half the staff and security at the border owe their Christmas bonuses to Seokjin’s father. If you get to the border with Seokjin, he’ll be able to get you access through the security check points.”

“But how could we convince Seokjin to come with us?” Jeongguk asks.
Wordlessly, and without hesitation, Yoongi reaches for something, and pulls out a standard-issue service pistol. Hoseok is the only person who doesn’t express some level of surprise at the sight of the gun. Possession of firearms without a license in Korea can land you a felony charge if you’re an alpha, and a misdemeanour if you’re a beta.

“I think I have one or two ideas in mind,” Yoongi says, and though his voice is even and steady, there is no denying the underlying wrath that simmers beneath his words.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, I think this is the longest chapter so far. There's a LOT happening but yeah, what'd you expect, it's the second-last chapter.

Just wanted to say thank you to everybody who've supported/followed this fic. You're all amazing~!

Tumblr

Curious Cat

Twitter

(Also if you were wondering, Hoseok's look is inspired by War of Hormone era)
Seokjin is awake long before the deafening echo of his alarm bounces off the walls of his bedroom. One week to the day Yoongi bit his finger off like a child turned savage from neglect and went running into the night. There’s still a tender bruise to his temple where he’d been kicked, making it difficult to sleep on his side without experiencing numbing discomfort. He hadn’t had the slightest intention of going to the hospital to get his missing finger looked at, or his multiple head wounds. No, he was far too fixated on the thought of finding his darling little dolls and all the ways he could mess with their lives. However, a meeting with his father and the investors of Genius Corp. the following day had stunted his plans. Seeing his finger, well his **missing** finger, his father immediately put the meeting on hold and ordered him to go to hospital to get it looked at. It was clear by his tone there would be no room for dismal. After seeing someone about it, it was discovered that his finger (lack thereof) had gotten infected. Lovely. His sweet little honeysuckle had given him a parting gift.

It gave him a few nasty ideas of what he might do to Yoongi when he gets his hands on him.

Turning over, he cancels his alarm and rolls out of bed. He has to be at work by 10am. Rather late by Korean standards, but being the deputy CEO does have its advantages. The quiet of his apartment is like white noise. It fills every tall corner, every pristine crevice. Empty. Boring. He hasn’t even touched the rooms he kept Yoongi and Taehyung in, though he knows both rooms couldn’t be anymore different from each other.

Yoongi’s room is impeccable. Not a crease on the sheets and blankets, not a thing out of place.
Taehyung’s room is chaotic. Like a rabid animal had ravaged the scene and left not a pillow unturned.

For breakfast he has a bowl of bran cereal, a glass of pineapple juice, and a bowl of berries. He discovers dust on the surface atop his fridge and makes a mental note to scold the maid about it. He showers, brushes his teeth, and then dresses in his office. As he stands before the mahogany vanity, illuminated only by the LED light of his computer, he lowers his gaze.

Half obscuring the mirror is a dollhouse. As he folds his tie, he admires the little figurines he had custom-made by a popular, hyper-realistic doll maker from Russia. Ordinarily, she’s extremely hard to place an order for, because the waiting list is rather long, but when offered the right amount she was willing to prioritise his request.

An immaculate, perfect little family.

They’re even better than the people they are based off of. Their faces look up at him, still, quaint and silent, frozen in the positions he left them in. Personally, he can’t tell which he prefers: the unconditional obedience of a doll or the thrilling unpredictability of a person. There’s no denying that, after a while, the novelty of the dolls and their otherworldly beauty wears thin. But humans. Humans will forever be entertaining. Just the thought of his puppets, running amuck without their strings has blood surging to his crotch.

As he turns, he notices the monitor on the computer. The background default is a map of Seoul, with tiny red dots moving around. Unfortunately, the map doesn’t go any further than Incheon, so wherever the dots may be, they are not in Seoul. They haven’t been for quite some time.

That is not to say he hasn’t found other amusements.
The news has certainly been informative as of late. Of arsonists in Gwangju burning down a certain foster agency. Of a thief who pick-pocketed four wallets before hijacking a car that was left in a parking lot behind a tattoo parlour. And a curious phone call from the Head Psychologist about a missing baby. They weren’t smart about it, either. He can’t turn on a television or pass a newsstand without seeing Yoongi and Hoseok’s faces, and Jimin and Jeongguk were said to have been caught on the house’s CCTV cameras moments before the robbery. Of course, he told them not to concern the police on the matter. Three strikes and maybe they would be arrested all too soon. Seokjin didn’t want that. Not yet. He still has so much planned for them.

That reminds him.

He ought to pay downstairs another visit. He owns several of the apartments in the complex, including the one directly below this one. It’s currently being...renovated, so that it may be of better use to him.

Flashing dots light up the screen. Curious. All five of the signals, excluding Taehyung’s, appear to be in his neighbourhood. Perhaps they will pay him a visit.

He hopes they do.

It would make this otherwise dull day a joy to behold.

Hongmin calls to remind him about an international call he has to make to Thailand, as well as relaying a few replies to the inquiries he’d made on facility security. His assistant is always at the office an hour before he is, responding to emails and organising meetings and functions.

The air is noticeably more frigid in the underground carpark. It’s so cold that the hairs on his arms stand on end. His fingers are itching to reach for his pocket, where his brand new phone is,
desperate to check the location of his things. It is no coincidence that they showed up in his neighborhood. They’re here for him.

Instead of reaching for his right blazer pocket, he reaches for his left pants pocket, and brings out his car keys. The Mercedes is parked haphazardly across the three parking spaces he’d reserved for himself, while every other car in the lot is crowded together, barely centimetres apart. The heel of his shoes clap against the concrete. Distantly, he can hear the sound of tires rolling over gravel.

Lights flash from the car when he unlocks it, and just as he places his hand on the driver’s door, something cold as ice grazes the nape of his neck.

He laughs. “Back again so soon are you, Yoongi? Did you finally realise that no matter the breadth of your hatred, you could never have a cock better than mine?”

“Not exactly.” Ah. It isn’t Yoongi. The voice is smooth and velvety, so different from the rough growl he’s grown so fond of, though it is equally baritone. It’s hard to say if he’s disappointed or not. Frankly, he’s just happy to encounter one of them at all.

“Namjoon,” he greets, staring at the morphed reflection in the car door. He can’t see the towering oaf, so he must have his arm outstretched to keep a small distance. “I trust you’ve been keeping them nice and safe for me? So generous of you to bring them all so faithfully back. Though, you did fail one of my assets.”

“Do you think I’m here for a friendly chat, do you?”

Seokjin snickers. “A shame. You were always so entertaining to talk down to.”
“You still see us as objects, don’t you?” He hears a rattling near his ear. The alpha is shaking. Pathetic. He calls himself ‘leader’ does he? “That’s all we are and will ever be to you, a bunch of rats caught up in your labyrinth.”

“You could be free from it all, you know,” Seokjin says slyly. “All you’d have to do is pull that trigger. But let’s be real here for a moment, Namjoon. You wouldn’t do it. You wouldn’t know the first thing about taking a life.”

The barrel of the gun presses hard against his skin. “Don’t underestimate my ability to protect the ones I love.”

Very calmly, since he’s so eager for an excuse to escape the mundanity of his job, holds up both hands, one still clutching the keys between his thumb and forefinger. “I should warn you. This carpark has security cameras in every corner. You won’t leave this place without being seen.”

“Not my priority.” Roughly clutching the scruff of his suit, Namjoon shoves him in the opposite direction of his Mercedes, his pheromones alert and overpowering. It would seem his pheromones wouldn’t work as effectively on Namjoon as they do on Yoongi.

They don’t walk very far. Right at the exit of the fifth floor basement car park is a large, beat-up minivan. The side door is yanked open and Namjoon uses his foot to kick him inside. Hands and arms reach out to grab him. It happens so fast that he barely has time to react before he’s being strapped to a chair by belts. Jimin is practically in his lap as he’s binding Seokjin’s wrists to the arms of the chair, and he can smell Hoseok behind him, tightening the belt around his neck until it’s marginally uncomfortable, but not enough to kill circulation altogether.

Something gargles, drawing him to the baby seat in the chair beside him. A tiny infant looks at him with only the curious confusion a newborn could emulate, and Namjoon climbs into the middle seat.
“You look good, Jimin,” he says casually. “Gained a few pounds?”

Jimin gives him a dry smile before awkwardly climbing into the seats at the very back, “accidentally” kicking him in the side of the head as he goes.

Jeongguk is in the passenger seat, and he can smell Yoongi in the seat in front of him. “Green suits you,” he compliments, eyes on the rear view mirror, waiting, anticipating that sharp, intense gaze to be turned on him.

But Yoongi doesn’t react. In fact, none of them seem to even acknowledge that he’s there once he’s well and truly immobile. Except for the baby, of course, who seems to be smelling a scent he hasn’t smelt before. It unnerves him.

“Going on a family trip, are we? I’m touched you bothered to invite me, you were always so adamant I wasn’t a part of your little band of brothers.”

After putting on his seatbelt and checking on the baby, Namjoon turns to shove the gun into his side. “More of a rescue mission than a family trip. As you said, we are missing one of our brothers and would very much like him back. We can’t get him back without you, though.”

“Ah.” The corners of his mouth twitch upwards as he nods his head. “You need me to get across the border.”

“A small favor,” Jimin speaks sweetly, patting him on the head. “It’s the least you could do for us
after all the bullshit you’ve put us through.”

“And what would stop me from exposing all of you at the border and walking away from this a free man?”

Yoongi turns the key in the ignition and the car vibrates to life. “Don’t kid yourself, Jin. We all know ending things so abruptly isn’t your style.”

He laughs. The belt strains against his neck when he habitually tries to get closer to Yoongi, but he can’t. It’s almost cruel, to have the beta this close with no means of reaching him. “Too right you are, my dear. Though I am rather curious, what will you do once we have passed the border? After all, last time we saw each other you did say you intended to kill me if we ever met again. You can understand my concern for my well-being.”

“If you get us safely across the border,” Yoongi says, “I promise I won’t kill you.”

A reasonable deal to be sure, but he can’t know for certain whether Yoongi is lying or not. The alpha has never really been known to lie, though likes he to keep his secrets close to his chest. Better to say nothing than to attempt a lie is Yoongi’s philosophy.

Still, he can’t accept the promise as truth. They have more than enough reason to go back on promises to silence him for good. Looking at Namjoon, he smiles in the face of his grim seriousness. “What about you, dear leader? Wouldn’t be beyond putting a bullet in my head the second I have you over the border?”

“Just because you’re a psychopath who’d probably kill me if given the chance? No. If all goes smoothly I won’t have to do anything.”
“I make no such promises,” Jimin snickers behind his ear.

Jeongguk and Hoseok remain quiet on the matter.

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Driving all the way up to the border from the centre of Seoul is a tad problematic. On multiple occasions they have to pass by toll booths. It was an issue they hadn’t initially thought through, so after barely scraping by unnoticed by the attendants of the first toll booth they encountered, Jimin and Yoongi swapped places. While Yoongi and Hoseok’s faces are virtually everywhere on wanted boards and panels, Jimin and Jeongguk have yet to be of public concern. For days they were compulsively checking South Korea’s Most Wanted lists, anxious for any mention of a pair of baby snatchers that targeted an affluent area in Bucheon. However, there was nothing. Not a single passing mention by the Bucheon Police Department or any news outlets. It’s as if the crime had never taken place. Jeongguk had been rather conflicted about their recklessness not having any foreseeable consequences, and how it only seemed to worsen his guilt over the matter as the days dragged on. Jimin and Yoongi, of course, were quick to dismiss his concerns while Hoseok was internally having a panic-attack. Namjoon soothed all worries and argued that they’d all had to make questionable decisions, but so long as their priorities were to each other, their actions were just.

So, they were able to pass the remaining toll booths without a single hiccup.

As they drew nearer and nearer to the border, the amount of houses and buildings scattered throughout the northern parts of South Korea thinned. The trees start to get larger and stranger. The snow thicker and whiter, untouched by the scum of shoes and the dirt of tires. Their large backpacks obscure the back window of the car. They’ve been packed to the brim with perishables, clothes and camping gear. Enough to last them months. The only people with any camping experience are Jeongguk and Hoseok, and Jeongguk admits that the trips his grandparents took him on were only weekend-long hikes that didn’t require learning basic survival skills.
Regardless of how this fact unsettles all of them, Namjoon is confident they will be perfectly comfortable. The tent they bought has an inbuilt heater, a cover and a tarp to keep them nice and toasty during the night—and perhaps during the day if it’s too cold outside to travel. They have a burner and cooking appliances, plenty of food, water and burnables with them. If anything, Namjoon thinks they’re overprepared, if that could even be possible given the situation.

Their most controversial decision was bringing Haeun along.

Leaving Haeun behind with Namjoon’s parents was a sentiment that both Namjoon and Jimin shared—and it is quite possibly one of the only times they’ve ever agreed on something. Jimin felt it wasn’t safe to have a fragile baby within fifty miles of Seokjin, while Namjoon couldn’t stand the thought of Haeun catching a fever or a chest infection while in a forest in the dead of winter. Yoongi, Hoseok and Jeongguk on the other hand, vehemently disagreed with separating Haeun from his mother. And well, though he is the father, there was really nothing Namjoon could say or do to dispute that fact. The first six months are a vital bonding period between mother and child. Disrupted by separation or neglect can have lasting consequences that can follow the relationship all the way to adulthood in extraordinary cases. There’s also an unspoken question on whether they would even return to South Korea when all is said and done, though no one dares speak of it. It is an unstable, uncertain future. It almost scares them as much as returning to the science facility.

“What weird things do you reckon are in that forest, hyung?” Jeongguk asks as he gazes tiredly out onto the snowy expanse. They’ve been driving for hours now. He’s beginning to lose feeling in his legs.

“How?” Namjoon nearly dozes off until the sound of his name snaps him back to reality.

For the past week their pack have been waking around the clock to take care of Haeun. Somehow, even with the extra hands on deck, Namjoon and Jeongguk are still exhausted. Perhaps it isn’t just waking in the night. Perhaps it’s the weight of their newfound responsibilities pressing down on them.
“You know,” Jeongguk yawns. “The forest you spoke about, over the border.”


Jeongguk hums. Seokjin desperately wants to make a comment about how stupid Namjoon looks with his mouth half-open, but is thwarted by the gag they stuffed into his mouth two hours ago. “Do you think there might be some freaky things living there?”

Shrugging, Namjoon throws an arm over the baby seat to poke Haeun in the cheek. The tiny human only produces a kitten-like yawn before turning to lean his little head on the other cheek. “Most accounts say that the life forms they encounter in the forest are difficult to describe. Although—” Namjoon laughs like a dork “—one scientist—Doctor Cho Jaebin—said that being in the forest was like tripping on hallucinogenics.”

Jimin snorts. “Only you would find that funny you fucking nerd.”

“Well I mean—it’s funny if you read it in context.”

Groaning, Hoseok kicks the back of Seokjin’s seat, jerking him forward. The beta groans in pain. “This place sounds like an actual nightmare. You don’t think Taehyung somehow got out of the forest, do you? Maybe he went around the forest, or something.” Even to his own ears, Hoseok sounds like he’s grasping at straws.

“Taehyung is in the forest,” Yoongi asserts.
“Yes, but how do you know know, you know?”

“I had a dream.”

Namjoon turns around to look at Yoongi. Even Jimin and Jeongguk glance at Yoongi through the mirror. Hoseok goes suddenly pensive. The comment wouldn’t have held so much gravity if not for the fact that they had all, at some point recently, had a dream about Taehyung as well.

“Guess I wasn’t the only one,” Jimin says, staring out in front of him, hands lax on the steering wheel. They haven’t passed a car for nearly half an hour.

“Gguk and I have had dreams about him, too,” Namjoon confirms, turning his attention to Hoseok. “What about you, Hobi?”

“It was just a dream,” the alpha says quickly. “Nothing special about it.”

“But you did see him?”

Silence stretches on for a few moments. And then, turning towards the window, Hoseok mutters, “Yeah, I saw him.”
Eyes narrowed, Namjoon reaches over to yank the gag from Seokjin’s mouth. The beta winces and licks his chapped lips. “Did any of your experiments have cognitive powers we aren’t aware of?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Namjoon surges forward, grabbing Seokjin by the throat. “Answer the fucking question.”

The sudden increase in pheromones upsets the baby and the omegas in the car. Haeun opens his eyes and begins to cry, sensing that his father is angry. The pheromones immediately flatten. Namjoon lets go of Seokjin and takes Haeun out of the car seat, rocking him gently in his arms.

“Dad didn’t mean it,” he attempts to hush the squawking child. There’s an awkwardness and guilt laced with his voice suggesting that he doesn’t know how to handle the situation. “It was an accident. I’m sorry.”

“Give—give him here, hyung,” Jeongguk holds out his arms, looking visibly shaken. Feeling ashamed with himself, Namjoon carefully hands Haeun over to Jeongguk before leaning back in his seat with a frustrated sigh. As Jeongguk cradles the child, he uses his omega pheromones to soothe the baby’s distress. Like magic, Haeun’s cries taper off into little whimpers. He looks up at his mother’s face and goes quiet. Jeongguk smiles.

“Fatherhood not living up to your expectations?” Seokjin mocks.

The comment prods ever so slightly at Namjoon’s insecurities that he can’t help but allow it to fester in his thoughts. Instead of giving the jab any acknowledgement, however, Namjoon says to the rest of the pack, “I don’t remember seeing any information on telepathy in Taehyung’s file.”
“That’s because there wasn’t any documented research about it,” Yoongi reaffirms with indisputable certainty. “It does remind me of Dr. R. A. Muller’s theory on cognitive pack bonding.”

Namjoon scoffs arrogantly. “Dr. R. A. Muller’s research has been universally panned by the institute and discipline of psychology since he suggested that our detachment from nature is the root cause of dwindling birth rates. Trust me, I’ve read enough of Muller’s work to know the guy’s maybe had a few too many mushrooms while writing his papers.”

“Seriously, Namjoon? After all the crap we’ve seen?” Yoongi shakes his head. “At this rate I’m willing to fucking believe the sky is about to fall at any moment and we all live, breathe and die simultaneously on the back of a two-legged Pegasus.”

“What’s Muller’s research about?” Hoseok asks, feeling as dumb as the rest of them. Sometimes they find it difficult to keep in conversation with the two alphas when they start disputing about documented research and articles published by renown psychologists or sociologists.

Crossing his arms over his chest, Namjoon doesn’t seem too content with speaking any further on the topic, but Yoongi is more than happy to explain it to them. “Muller came out with an article a couple of decades ago that’s been…rather controversial in the psychology sphere.”

“Understatement of the year,” Namjoon grumbles.

The van rattles as it runs over a bump in the asphalt. “Muller believes that around the time packs existed, there were stages of relational bonding that elevated the overall cohesion and strength within the pack. Stage 1 is Trial, when members are still unfamiliar with one another and engage in a ‘trial period,’ to see if there’s any real potential for something…greater to form. If there are members incompatible with one another, one or both generally leave to find packs better suited to their personalities. Stage 2 is Union, when the pack becomes more realised. Members start to scent one another comfortably and begin creating platonic, romantic or sexual relationships with other
members of the pack. This is also the stage where different roles in the pack dynamic are finalised, and roles vary from pack to pack. Muller suggests that most packs don’t make it past the second stage, but if they do, they transition into Ascension, which is a stage that a pack progresses and perfects for the rest of their lives.”

“What is Muller’s research based off of?” Jeongguk wonders half-heartedly, only idly listening in on the conversation.

“Wolves,” Namjoon answers tersely before Yoongi has the chance to. “Even though our descendants are a completely different species of canine, he based his theory off the cognitive coherency of wolves in packs. He doesn’t have any proof, only that through observation he said that the wolves seemed to be able to read each other’s thoughts—which is ludicrous. He has no real way of knowing that to be true.”

“I’m not suggesting he was completely right,” Yoongi snaps grouchily. “It’s no fucking coincidence that we all had dreams of Taehyung, though.”

“Maybe it is,” Jeongguk says gently, quietly. He draws a smiley-face on the foggy window. It’s icy to the touch. “We all miss him so much. It isn’t the same without Taehyung. It could just be our brains telling us that...that we’re one short of someone important, you know?”

Seokjin has been quiet this entire time. He’s even surprised at himself for being able to hold his tongue this long, but he isn’t sure how he should respond. They’re totally off their rockets if they think Muller’s theory has any validity. Perhaps he took the experiment too far in a few places and now they’re all slowly descending into madness, just like Taehyung. Excellent. The probability of him making it out alive has plummeted exponentially. Although, the dream thing is an interesting aspect to consider. He ought to get in contact with the Head Psychologist if he ever gets the chance. It might be something worth exploring later down the line. That is, if he does make it out of this situation alive.

“Did the couple know?” Snapping out his revere, he looks up to see Jeongguk gazing back at him.
It amazes him, how little anger he sees in those bright, sparkling eyes. Seokjin could’ve murdered his entire family with a hatchet and the simpleton would’ve, at the very most, cried about it. “Did the couple you gave Haeun to know he was stolen?”

Attempting to relax his throat as much as possible, Seokjin answers, “They knew a few details, but not everything. We gave them your medical records to reassure them the child didn’t have any hereditary diseases, and in accepting responsibility for the child they also agreed to ongoing contact with psychologists, who would document the child’s behavioural and emotional development. Though, taking him from you so early was more a detriment than a blessing.”

Jeongguk frowns. “How so?”

“There’s some debate on when the mother-child bonding becomes less influential in the child’s life. Everyone agrees that after six months the child is less reliant on their mother’s pheromones and starts to develop independent emotion and intelligence. Some believe that by taking a child from their mother immediately after birth and replacing them with a surrogate can emulate the same bonding experience, but in light of the complaints we received from the couple, it would seem that is not the case.”

“So they knew they were getting Haeun through illegal means?” Namjoon clarifies.

Shrugging, Seokjin says, “I suppose they had some idea. We never gave them any damning evidence of the fact, but I’d guess they had an idea when we asked them to sign multiple non-disclosure agreements along with suffering through a rather rigorous screening process.”

“Why wouldn’t they just…adopt?” Jeongguk questions, more to himself than anyone else.

“The father has a criminal record,” Seokjin explains. “Racketeering.”
“That’s a federal charge,” Hoseok says. “Any adoption agency would be willing to review parents with misdemeanour charges depending on the severity of their crimes, but a federal charge is an immediate termination of the application.”

“And I supposed you had a hand in getting him a shorter jail sentence?” Jimin asks sarcastically.

To this question, Seokjin only smiles mysteriously.

Unwilling to speak any further about the pain Seokjin has caused them, Hoseok takes the conversation in a different direction and starts talking about seed collectors in the south that believe plants will become the future’s primary currency. It’s an interesting topic that they all enjoy tossing around, though Namjoon eventually has to gag Seokjin again because his contribution to the conversation is more than a little unwanted.

Turning around a bend further up the lonely road, the massive, North-South border wall comes into sight. It’s a towering, grey, concrete-looking behemoth that seems to grow right up into the clouds. It’s incredible how quickly they were able to conjure up such a large wall considering how quickly the radiation had spread. Although the wall has come under construction and reinforcement over the past couple of centuries, it is generally still as it was three hundred years ago. It’s ugly and breathtaking, unlike anything else existing on this earth. The China-Korea border is apparently much less secure. In place of a massive, concrete separator, there just a barb-wire fence anyone with a taste of suicide might jump over. The radiation had spread south, so Korea was more at risk than China ever was, so the Chinese government never regarded the threat with equal severity.

Turning to Seokjin, Namjoon flashes the gun to remind him of its existence. “You’re going to get us past the security checkpoints without going through the metal detectors, alright? Tell them whatever you need to in order to gain us passage, I don’t care, but god knows I will not hesitate to pull this trigger if you try anything funny with us. If I’m going to prison I’ll have no gripes killing you before I do.”
Despite his initial mocking of the alpha, internally Seokjin knows that he’s likely telling the truth. Seokjin nods his head to show he fully understands the consequences.

Hoseok and Namjoon go about releasing him from his binds as they approach the wall, where two security guards gradually begin their ascent towards the vehicle. Jimin stops the van and rolls down the window. His entire composure completely changes into something so sickening sweet even Jeongguk rolls his eyes.

“On behalf of the North-South Border Patrol I’m going to have to ask you to turn back your vehicle, this is a restricted area and all regular citizens are denied access past this point,” one of the guards informs Jimin importantly.

Pulling the side door, Seokjin steps out of the van. The guard immediately pulls a gun at the sudden action, but then lowers it upon seeing Seokjin’s face. Without hesitation, Seokjin produces his identification to the guard. “My name is Kim Seokjin, I’m here to escort this team of environment analysts across the border so that they may observe the plant growth that has formed as a result of radiation exposure.”

“Mister—Mister Kim,” the guard’s composure slips for half a second before he rights himself. “Of course. Forgive us for our scepticism. We were not informed of your arrival beforehand.”

“A bit of an unscheduled decision on my part. The fault is all mine.”

“It’s—it’s uncommon to have omegas on field expeditions,” the other guard, a woman, observes. She looks in through the passenger side window and frowns at Jeongguk. “Particularly omega field researchers with children.”
“Only one child,” Seokjin clarifies. “They aren’t field researchers. They’re husbands to the environmental analysts. They both wish to be with their alphas on this trip, one of them has just given birth to a beautiful baby omega and the other is expecting. As you can understand, they are quite against the idea of separation, as are their alphas.”

The guards look eager to dispute this, but at the end of the day they are only guards, and to deny Kim Seokjin entry into the border could be detrimental to their livelihoods. Jimin is furious at the suggestion that he is with child, and makes a point of shoving Seokjin in the shoulder as they get out of the van. They shoulder bags that strap securely around their torsos to help bear the weight of them. Yoongi also shoulders a diaper bag that didn’t have any room in his backpack, and Jimin has a pacifier container sticking out a side pocket. Jeongguk carries the least, as he has Haeun in a wrap secured around his shoulder. Aside from the infant child, he carries a smaller backpack with a first-aid kit and some water bottles. They’re escorted by the guards to the entrance, a pair of large doors that open when a guard presses their thumb against a keypad. Namjoon lingers closely behind Seokjin, the weapon concealed within his jacket pocket. The others linger closer to Jeongguk and Haeun. If things go badly they’ll be the ones needing protection the most.

The doors open into what could easily be construed as airport baggage security. On the upper levels are people in uniforms typing away at their computers and murmuring seriously into their headsets. Employees walk to and fro, seemingly from all different professions. Military personnel, government servants, swarms of security. Seeing a few scientists breezing by in lab coats is more than a little triggering for all of them.

A person lingering by the metal detectors spots their entry and approaches them with a smile. Seokjin steps forward, turning up his charm to eleven and greeting the woman with open arms. “Officer Kwon, it’s been too long!”

“Seokjin! Yeah, I’m stationed here until at least the summer which is a bloody pain but—eh, whatcha gonna do?” the woman—another alpha—shrugs before looking at people behind the beta with concern. “Who’re these people? More scientists?”

Coughing, Seokjin smiles. “Yes—well, the alphas are—” Jimin bites down on his tongue so hard tears start to form “—the omegas are tagging along. They’re rather attached to their spouses.”
With a dumb grin, Hoseok throws an arm over Jimin’s shoulder and gives him a wet smooch. He gets an elbow to the ribs for his troubles.

Officer Kwon’s gaze settles on Jeongguk and Haeun, her concern deepening. “Maybe you should talk to Doctor Lee before we let you through. I’m not sure taking a baby into restricted lands is such a good idea.”

“As you say,” Seokjin drawls, smiling handsomely at her. “Where is Doctor Lee, anyway? He isn’t in his office smoking, is he?”

The alpha giggles. “No, he’s been clean for some time. Though if I ever catch him it’ll be the last thing he ever does!”

Using her radio she requests for Doctor Lee’s presence. The security guard and Seokjin, as they wait for the doctor to grace them with his company, catch up on lost time. From what the others can gather from their conversation, they appear to have known each other for quite a few years. It disturbs Yoongi that so many people regard Seokjin with so much fondness and respect. How could they stand to smile at him, after the horror he has put them all through? Do they know what he has done? Do they know what he is capable of? Surely not. Otherwise, would this woman deign to hug the beta so warmly?

It doesn’t take long for Doctor Lee to come hurrying down the stairs. He seems to have a slight limp in his right leg, and his hair looks greasy and unkempt. There’s a sheen of sweat on his upper lip as he heartily shakes Seokjin’s hand. “How unexpected!” he comments in a raspy, frog-like voice. “Delighted to see you again. It’s been too long. What brings you all the way to the border on this chilly day?”

Seokjin explains the false situation he’d whipped up as a cover, and then Officer Kwon chimes in with her concern for the baby. To everyone’s surprise—save for Seokjin—the doctor only waves it away. “There’s no risk, not for the baby or the expecting mother.” He shakes Jimin a curious look
and he feels the blood rush all the way up his ears.

“Neither a baby nor an expecting mother has ever been sent over the border in the three hundred years it has existed,” the guard says seriously.

“The breakdown in radiation has been working faster than anticipated. Babies and pregnant omegas are no more at risk than you or I—and if you were to ask me personally, the north hasn’t been toxic to humans for quite some time.”

“So you will allow us passage?” Seokjin asks expectantly.

“To be sure,” the scientist pauses, giving Seokjin a strange look. “Though I can vouch for your safety from radiation poisoning, the same can not be said for exposure to the elements, Mister Kim. If these environment analysts are so eager to go north then with your permission I see no reason to stop them. However, you should consider the risks nature itself might pose to the baby and the pregnant omega, particularly if you intend to stay for longer than a week.”

Officer Kwon asks Seokjin, “How long are you going up there for?”

“An undetermined amount of time,” Seokjin answers. “They wish to stay for as long as possible, but I’d say that if we do not return in over three months, you ought to send a search party.”

Officer Kwon nods her head grimly. “I’ll dispatch a team if it comes to that.”

“I’m sure they’ll be just fine,” Doctor Lee smiles, the wrinkles pulling around his mouth. “It’s very
rare for a team to go missing over the border. By the looks of it, the team you’ve assembled here seem quite prepared. Though, by ‘us’ you’re talking solely about the group you’ve assembled, right? You don’t seriously intend to go there yourself do you?”

“He does,” Namjoon finally speaks up, placing a genial hand to the small of Seokjin’s back. “We’re good friends of Seokjin’s. He’s been talking about going over the border for months now, we just needed some time to make preparations for the departure. He’s already informed his father that he’ll be taking a leave of absence, though he’ll still be working on behalf of the company.”

“Right, right,” the scientist agrees, although the strange look he gives Seokjin’s clothes isn’t lost on the rest of them. “I’m afraid I don’t know who all of you are. You are…?”

Doctor Lee offers his hand and Namjoon accepts it easily. “My name is Doctor Park Moonbin. I’m a field analyst for Seoul University, and Cheongwa has agreed to fund me on this expedition.”

“Oh yes—you’re the one who published the dissertation about the population decline of the Lotus Mantis and the rise in humidity in Greece, yes?”

“Not my best work,” Namjoon lies humbly. “The university threatened to drop my scholarship if I didn’t get it finished before the Winter Solstice.”

“Oh no, I thought it was quite informative.”

Jimin cannot help but notice, as the nerds exchange banter about shit nobody cares about, that Hoseok looks about ready to expire. The flesh of his face has turned an awful, off-putting shade of milk, and his eyes are wide enough to garner suspicion from any keen observer. He seems to periodically re-adjust the straps of his backpack, and sweat glistens against the harsh, sterile lighting coming from above.
Quite naturally, Jimin steps closer to him and takes both his trembling hands in his own. Giving them a reassuring squeeze, he drapes one arm around his waist, and places the other on his flat stomach. Thankfully it’s more difficult to tell he isn’t showing with how thick his coat is. Even though it personally makes him cringe at the thought of getting pregnant, he thinks he might as well play along. If it means getting past this bloody border faster than he’ll just have to grit his teeth.

It seems to work. Hoseok is relieved that he has something else to focus on other than his poor acting and nobody seems to second guess the display of affection.

“He’s lovely,” Officer Kwon coos. Jeongguk is about the only one other than Seokjin that appears completely relaxed. Guess those years of acting did amount to something in the end, however superfluous. Looking over at Yoongi, who is standing the closest to Jeongguk, she asks, “You should be proud.”

Yoongi’s jaw drops, a dispute ready on the tip of his tongue, but before he can deny any relation to the baby, Seokjin cuts in, “I wouldn’t get too close to his husband and child, Kwon. Doctor Min is quite possessive.”

Yoongi and Namjoon look about ready to tear Seokjin limb from limb, but Jeongguk handles it with the utmost of grace. “As are all alpha fathers. You wouldn’t happen to have a private area where I could breastfeed him, would you?”

Thanks to Seokjin’s misleading comment, Yoongi has no choice but to go with Jeongguk to the private area Officer Kwon leads them to. It would be very weird for Namjoon to offer to go with Jeongguk, seeing as they’re under the impression Jeongguk is just his coworker’s husband. It would attract too many questioning looks to be comfortable. Though it pains him to not have Namjoon with him, Jeongguk thinks it’s best Namjoon stays close to Seokjin in case he tries anything ambitious. While Yoongi certainly has the skills to apprehend Seokjin if necessary, they’ve all been attempting to keep him as far away from Seokjin as they possibly can.
They’re taken to a small chapel where employees can go to pray. The place is empty and rather peaceful. Yoongi and Jeongguk are relieved when Officer Kwon leaves them alone.

“I shouldn’t be here. I need to keep an eye on Seokjin,” Yoongi growls, leaning back against the pew gloomily. “Of course he’d use any excuse to undermine me.”

“I’m glad.” Yoongi looks at Jeongguk questioningly as he hands the alpha his son so he can remove his coat. “Seokjin is obsessed with you, hyung. I feel so scared when he’s around you.”

“I can handle him.”

“Physically you can,” Jeongguk agrees. “But after everything he’s put you through emotionally…”

“It’s nothing. He put everyone through hell.”

“It’s not nothing,” he denies. Carefully taking Haeun back into his arms to feed him, Jeongguk says, “You’ve always been strong, hyung. From the very first day we met you were always in control, even when the rest of us weren’t. Seeing you when you fought Seokjin… I really admired you for standing up to him. If you hadn’t…” Jeongguk looks down at his son sadly, his voice reverting to a gentle whisper. “Who knows what would’ve happened.”

Yoongi doesn’t even want to entertain the idea. If Seokjin had won and seized control of the pack, if Seokjin had followed through with his plans for the omegas.
Well, Jeongguk wouldn’t be holding his and Namjoon’s child in his arms, that’s for sure.

“But you know hyung, you don’t have to be tough all the time. Even though you’re acting strong in front of the others, I can tell it hurts to be around Seokjin. That look in your eyes? That disgust you feel in your stomach? I know exactly what that’s like.”

Yoongi wouldn’t mind some alcohol or a cigarette right about now. “If I break, he wins.”

“You’re a human being with feelings,” Jeongguk says gingerly. “Admitting someone has hurt you doesn’t mean you’re letting them have their way. It’s quite the opposite, actually. By denying it you’re locking away that fragility in a box. You won’t let anybody near it, even if it starts poisoning you from the inside. Eventually, you’ll start thinking death is a mercy that spares you from the pain, that anything could be better than breathing. And when you draw that last breath, that is when you let them win.”

Marinating in this perspective for a moment or two, he looks up to the altar and he wonders. “So you’re saying survival is the best revenge?”

“Survival, living, loving, continuing on with your life after the fact… Don’t live out of spite, live with a purpose beyond those who’ve hurt you. The ones you love are the only ones that matter.”

Staring at the breastfeeding mother, Yoongi can’t help but look at Jeongguk a little different. Not the kid he once was. He still remembers the conversation they had in that bathroom all those months ago. Jeongguk was the first to reach out and talk to him. Extended friendship and trust when everyone else was scared and paranoid.
Now the kid’s a mother. Fucking hell.

“Pregnancy has made you a wise old crone.”

Jeongguk sticks up his nose petulantly, ruining whatever respect he had for the kid’s maturity. “I’ll take that as a compliment.”

Back with the rest of the pack, conversation has somehow led them to having coffee with Officer Kwon and Doctor Lee. Namjoon finds it a little surreal, sitting there with a gun in his pocket, while Seokjin recounts a “funny story” about how he and Namjoon stole a rucksack full of spray cans way back in the day and vandalised a teacher’s white picket fence. It was all completely false, but it seems Seokjin is extremely talented in weaving stories made of one-hundred percent bullshit. It was almost nauseating, to simply sit there and pretend as though he and Seokjin are childhood friends, powerless to the narrative he weaves about them.

“Namjoon was a bit rebellious in his youth.” No, no he wasn’t.

“And one time in the seventh grade he threw gum at a teacher and—” Oh god no. His younger self would’ve been absolutely mortified at the thought. He loved his teachers.

“Seokjin-hyung,” Jimin interrupts with practised amiability. “Time spent here is daylight we could be using to our advantage out there. We should get going.”

Hiding a smile behind his cup of coffee, Seokjin says, “Right you are, Jimin. You should go find Yoongi and Jeongguk to let them know we’re leaving. Although, I’d proceed with caution. You know how touchy they get when they’re left to their own devices.”
Seokjin glances at Namjoon just to feed off his reaction. Namjoon looks ill.

“Touchy?” Doctor Lee echoes. “They have a baby with them!”

“And alpha’s sexual deficiency is his own business. Not that I need to remind you of that, do I, hyung?”

The older man chortles, going red in the face. “I suppose not.”

“The chapel is just down the hallway—two doors down from the bathrooms. It has a crucifix above the door so you’ll know it when you see it,” Officer Kwon informs Jimin, who gets up from his seat.

Jimin rolls his eyes, muttering “perverts” under his breath.

Hoseok deliberately scooches to fill the space Jimin left beside Namjoon, smiling awkwardly to the strangers sitting across from them. They’d been making a conscious effort to get to know more about them and their research and careers, but for the most part any questions thrown Hoseok’s way were purposely redirected towards Namjoon and Jimin, who spoke with more confidence than Hoseok would ever dare hope to have.

Now that Jimin is gone though, he does find it a little harder to breathe around these people.
“Your husband is beautiful,” Officer Kwon compliments warmly.

“Oh—uh, yes. I think so.”

“When’s the baby due?”

Hoseok blinks stupidly. “What?”

She gives him a funny look. “The baby?”

Namjoon places a hand on his thigh, giving it a tense squeeze. He clears his throat. “October.”

“October? You must’ve just recently discovered he was pregnant.”

Laughing nervously, Hoseok says, “Yes. A surprise to us all.”

Watching Hoseok flail through the conversation gives Seokjin more satisfaction than any contribution he could make. The alpha is his own worst enemy.

The three return soon enough. Haeun is a little fussy after feeding, so Yoongi does his best to burp the infant. As planned, they bypassed the security checkpoint without needing to go through
protocol searches, and Yoongi almost can’t believe that they make it all the way to the exit without somebody attempting to stop them in the process. Everyone seems to have so much respect for Seokjin, so much unconditional faith in his authority, that no one spares them a wary glance.

Before large, stainless steel doors they say their farewells to Doctor Lee and Officer Kwon.

Doctor Lee personally shakes all their hands as a show of respect, and when he offers his hand to Jeongguk, he extends it out of impulse. The omega immediately stiffens, jaw rigid, as unbelievable pain stuns his entire body. The others tense, immediately recognising Jeongguk’s mistake, and Namjoon feels the pain by proxy. To their credit, neither of them scream.

“Is something the matter?” Doctor Lee asks, noticing the tightness of Jeongguk’s expression.

It’s at this moment, while everyone is distracted, Seokjin slips his hand into Namjoon’s pocket and takes the gun.

Pulling his hand away from Doctor Lee’s, Jeongguk’s body immediately relaxes. “I’m fine,” the omega says shortly. Jeongguk almost can’t believe he was able to speak without choking. “But thank you for your concern.”

The blistering winter air hits them as the doors open. Yoongi hands Haeun back to his mother so that he can be wrapped snugly in the sling.

As the doors are closing behind them, Jimin almost does a double-take at the monstrously-sized trees they are faced with on the other side. “Holy shit.”
Hoseok feels as though his legs are about to give out at any moment. The trees are so gigantic, so godlike in their presentation that they are a reminder of just how small and insignificant they truly are. All their toils, all their struggles meaningless in the face of these colossal pillars of nature. Namjoon throws his arm around Hoseok as a show of comfort, and the six of them go trudging through the snow towards the unknown. They make Seokjin walk in front of the pack, just so he remains within their sights and doesn’t do anything unexpected.

It becomes obvious rather quickly that natural light doesn’t penetrate the forest. Beyond the trees on the outskirts of the forest, there appears to be only darkness ahead of them. An ominous feeling creeps over Hoseok as he gazes into the distance.

Jimin nearly trips over a tree trunk, and turns to curse at it before stopping short. Hoseok and Namjoon look back before stopping, too.

“Guys,” Namjoon calls, and the rest stop.

At the base of the tree is a backpack. Jimin opens it up as the rest of them crowd around him, and inside he finds capped bottles of water and perishables.

“Does it have a nametag?” Yoongi asks.

Jimin shakes it head. “Nothing. Could’ve just been left behind by a researcher.”

They take the water and perishables and leave the bag where they found it. As the natural light begins to fade, it occurs to Namjoon to reach for his gun to remind Seokjin of their deal. He pats his pockets and frowns. His mouth opens, about to voice his confusion, when Seokjin holds up the
gun, pointing it at Namjoon’s head. The rest of the pack freeze. At the sight of the weapon Jimin seizes the scruff of Jeongguk’s coat and pulls the omega and the baby behind him.

“No sudden movements,” Seokjin warns. “Or I’ll shoot your leader between his eyes.”

Resigned to the shift in power, Namjoon carefully raises his hands above his head. “Don’t do anything stupid,” he tells the others, glancing at Yoongi in particular. “What do you want from us? Our homes? Our lives? Our families? You’ve already taken that all away. We have nothing left to offer you.”

“Be cautious with your words, Namjoon,” Seokjin purrs, cocking the gun so that it’s pointed at Jimin and Jeongguk. “I haven’t taken everything from you.”

Yet.

“So what then?” Namjoon continues hastily, attempting to drag the conversation out for as long as possible. So long as Seokjin is talking it shouldn’t matter. “You’re going to take us back? Are you going to turn us in to the authorities?”

Perplexed, Seokjin lowers his gun slightly. “Turn you in? So the government can own you? Don’t be stupid, Namjoon. It bores me when you act stupid.”

“Then what?” Yoongi snaps, getting increasingly frustrated. He’s had enough of Seokjin’s games. “What the fuck do you want from us?”
“I want you to entertain me.”

Turning to Jeongguk, Jimin whispers, “You have to go.”

“Hyung—”

“Go.”

Jeongguk slowly starts backing away. Just as Seokjin notices him, he turns and runs into the darkness. Seokjin points the gun in his direction in an attempt to dissuade the omega, but Jimin steps into the line of fire, daring Seokjin with his eyes to pull the trigger.

To no one’s surprise, Seokjin starts to laugh. “Jeongguk has the right idea. Let’s play hide and seek. I’ll count to a hundred, the rest of you can go run and hide in the forest.” Checking the number of bullets in the chamber, he smiles. “There’s a bullet here for each of you. I guess I don’t have to explain what happens to if I find one of you, do I?”

Hoseok starts to sniffling. Taking the safety off, Seokjin starts counting.

“One. Two. Three.”

“Run!” Namjoon orders, not taking his eyes away from Seokjin until he’s sure all the pack members are out of sight. Jimin goes running in the direction Jeongguk went, while Hoseok panics and runs in the opposite direction. Yoongi sprints into the darkness behind Seokjin, the veiled darkness a blessing to their speedy escape.
As soon as he no longer hears their feet thundering against the soil, Namjoon backs away from Seokjin.

“Thirty-five. Thirty-six—”

Namjoon runs. He runs as fast as his long legs will permit him. Vines curve up and out of the soil, forcing him to go in a zigzag-like formation that makes it virtually impossible for him to go straight ahead. It grows dark quickly the further he ventures, his heart thumping against his eardrums and cold, fearful sweat soils his armpits. The fading light doesn’t deter him from attempting to find Jeongguk. He prays that Jimin has found him by now, but considering the intricacy of this forest the prospect is becoming increasingly unlikely. It’s as if the forest itself is designed to disorientate and confuse all sense of logic.

On the opposite side of the forest, Hoseok is having a panic attack. He’s crying and whimpering as he tries navigating through the dark. He’s such an idiot. He should’ve run after Jimin so that they weren’t separated but—but Seokjin started counting and he just… Oh god. He’s lost. He’s so fucking lost. Seokjin is going to find him first. He just knows it. Seokjin will find him and put a bullet in his head and his body will be left abandoned, never to be found. No one will mourn him. No one will miss him—

Yoongi can barely hear his surroundings over the sound of his own breathing. Fuck. Picking this direction was a mistake. Instead of chasing after the others, he figured they’d be harder to pin down if they’re separated and scattered, but now he’s really started to doubt this line of logic. At least together they can pretend they feel safe. Alone, in this foreign, strange place, they’re as good as dead anyway. Even if Seokjin doesn’t find them. Even if by slim chance he gets bored and goes back to the border, they may never be able to find each other again. And how could they? Seokjin’s old phone is still safely in his pocket, but even with its tracking capabilities, the interference in the forest renders it utterly useless.

The further he goes the darker it gets.
He can’t see his hands or his feet. He’s tripping over roots and branches and barely catches himself in time. Yoongi knows that Seokjin will likely go after him first.

Through his meandering in the dark, his ankle gets caught in a tree root and he goes tumbling down a small hill. Many times his spine and the back of his head smack against more hard, gnarly roots and the occasional acorn. By the time he reaches the bottom his entire body is aching. His body will be littered with bruises tomorrow.

As he lifts himself from the damp soil, the weight of his backpack pressing down on him, he notices that the atmosphere is rather...different. Along the outskirts the weather couldn’t have been more frigid from the February winter, but here he could almost describe it as *warm*, though not uncomfortably so. Looking down at his hands, he sees light emitting from tiny mushrooms. They’re no bigger than the size of his fingernails, cropping up out of the earth. They glow a funny shade of teal.

A cry of surprise cuts through the dark and Yoongi struggles to his feet. He pushes past a thicket of bushes and suddenly he can see again. The moss growing off tree trunks are all kinds of greens, blues and magentas, providing the same light intensity as actual light bulbs. Before he can even absorb what he’s seeing, the cry sounds again, closer this time. He follows it, certain that the voice belongs to Hoseok.

His suspicions are confirmed when he finds Hoseok flat on his stomach with his enormous backpack practically squashing him against the dirt.

“Hoseok!” Yoongi runs over to help him upright. The alpha sits on his bottom with a rather miserable look on his face, dirt stuck to his face where his tears have dried. “Are you okay?”

“A maniac with a gun is threatening to hunt us down and kill us,” Hoseok clarifies emotionally.
“Right. Fair enough. Let’s get going—we can’t stop here. We’re not far enough away from him for my liking.”

“Oh what’s the point?” Hoseok sighs. “He’ll find us. He always finds us eventually.”

“No, he won’t,” Yoongi says impatiently, tugging at Hoseok’s arm in an attempt to get him to stand up. “If we stay here he might.”

It doesn’t take much convincing to get Hoseok to stand up after Yoongi threatens to kill him prematurely. Thankfully, Hoseok didn’t manage to get seriously injured while lost in the dark, other than a few scraped knees. As they go deeper, the environment appears to grow more and more alive. They spot random animals appearing that they’ve never seen before. Animals with white, glowing eyes and insects that seem to be able to disappear and reappear out of thin air. The canopy of trees above glitter flamingo pink and crimson red. The noises from the birds range from somber to instrumental, like strings pulling on a violin.

They start using the magnetic compass Hoseok kept safe in his pocket in case they got lost. It isn’t nearly as convenient as the tracking device on Seokjin’s phone might’ve been, but it’s enough to point them in the general direction of where he thinks the others disappeared.

“This place is trippy,” Hoseok comments as they pass a large caterpillar with glowing little orbs on the tips of its spikes. “At least it’s not cold.”

No, the warmth has seeped into his jacket and he’s starting to sweat. Though it makes for awkward movement, it’s hardly a top priority at the moment.
“Are you sure they went in this direction?”

“Jeongguk, Jīmin and Namjoon went north-west, you went north-east, and I went north. I can’t say it’s accurate but unless they’ve changed trajectory we might still have a chance of finding them.”

They step over a small creek with murky white water. Hoseok makes a face. “This place could be dangerous. What if we—”

A cry cuts through the peaceful ambience and Yoongi slaps a hand over Hoseok mouth. It continues, echoing throughout the forest, the distinct sound of a baby wailing. Yoongi’s heart stops. His lungs sink down into his stomach and in that moment he dreads the thought that something terrible has happened.

He and Hoseok seem to be on a similar wavelength, because the alpha is caught between bursting into tears and hyperventilating. “Oh god,” Hoseok sobs. “Oh god, oh god, oh god. Jeongguk—H-Haeun—!”

Grabbing Hoseok’s hand, Yoongi springs in the direction of the bawling. A flurry of butterflies burst from a nearby shrubbery when Hoseok accidentally stumbles over it, and birds caw at them like hecklers for daring to step near their nests. None of the beauty or energy of the forest seems to matter in that moment. They clumsily step on unknown substances and their fingers graze species of mosses they’ve never encountered before. For all they know they’ve contaminated themselves with toxic substances that could rapidly eat away at their flesh.

But none of it mattered.
They come to a screeching halt on the outskirts of a tiny clearing, where roots and vines appear to shy away, leaving room for patches of purple grass to sprout from the soil. They duck under the brush of some plants when they catch sight of Seokjin. Standing opposite to the beta is, much to their pain and anxiety, Jeongguk on the baby.

“Where the hell are Namjoon and Jimin?” Yoongi hisses under his breath. He was sure they’d have found Jeongguk before Seokjin did.

“Maybe they got lost?” Hoseok is barely able to speak through his struggle for oxygen.

Haeun’s yowling in Jeongguk arms, sensing the near palpable distress of his mother. As Jeongguk holds his son close to him, he stares down the barrel of the gun Seokjin points at him. “The weakest are always the first to die,” Seokjin tilts his head, not a single emotion apparent in his eyes. “Think of it as a mercy. A quick death for you and your son.”


“You really should be thanking me.” Seokjin takes a step forward, and Jeongguk preemptively takes a step back. “In a way, your happiness, your mate, your son—it all exists because of me. If I hadn’t taken you out of your miserable little life, you’d still be fucking strangers in parks and back alleys. If it weren’t for me you’d have been used and killed by now, and not a single soul would’ve given your death a passing thought.”

Sinking to his knees, Jeongguk coils over Haeun as though to shield him. “Please, Seokjin. Not my son. You’re right. I do owe everything to you. You saved me. You gave me meaning in my life. Please—please give me this one mercy. Don’t kill my son.”

“Say it,” there’s a hint of anticipation in Seokjin’s voice as he gets closer to Jeongguk. “I am your
Jeongguk doesn’t hesitate. “You are my God.”

“You are nothing without me.”

“I’m nothing without you.”

Seokjin stops just shy of Jeongguk and the kicking, writhing baby in his arms.

Hoseok turns to Yoongi. “We—we have to do something.”

His heart throbs in his rib cage. Looking upon the scene, Yoongi tries frantically to think of how they could interfere without getting anyone killed in the process.

“I’ll spare your child.” Jeongguk looks up at Seokjin, tears streaming down his face. The eldest smiles at the youngest.

“Thank you,” Jeongguk’s voice quivers. “Thank you, hyung.”

Turning his back to Seokjin, Jeongguk carefully removes the wrap from his body. He places the
newborn gently on the grass, making sure the fabric and blankets are nicely wrapped around Haeun. But he keeps screaming. Jeongguk reaches over to wipe away Haeun’s tears. Deliberately, he then rises to his feet. He can feel the cool metal of the gun nuzzle at the ridges of his spine. Jeongguk doesn’t look away from Haeun. Even through his own tears, he doesn’t look away.

“Farewell sweet maknae,” Seokjin croons with the tenderness of a lover.

“Yoongi-hyung!” Hoseok snaps.

Just as Yoongi throws himself from the shrubbery, both he and Hoseok freeze at the guttural growl that rumbles the earth beneath their feet. Seokjin looks at Yoongi and Hoseok, caught between confusion and pleasure at the sight of them. On the other side of Seokjin and Jeongguk, a shadow stirs, large and slow.

Omega pheromones harshly penetrate the air around the clearing, so fierce and possessive that Yoongi and Hoseok fall onto their hands and knees. Haeun’s cries cease. Jeongguk stiffly turns his head towards the shadow, the fear and trepidation building in his chest. Tree branches rustle violently as the figure emerges, four paws, a massive, bushy tail and a snarling snout illuminated by the technicolour of the forest. Its fur is a rich chocolate brown, with grey and mahogany around its face and ears. Paler browns cover its skinny legs and giant paws. Its eyes. Oh, its eyes. Glow bright like open flames, yellow and penetrating. The pheromones have no effect on Jeongguk, but he falls back onto his knees all the same, as if confronted with the image of his creator. He lowers his head and bows, his entire frame trembling.

But the wolf bares no interest in Jeongguk or his baby.

Its attention is solely on Seokjin.
Despite the clear threat the hulking beast poses, he can’t resist the grin that spreads across his face. “Taehyung, is that you? Of course it is… I’m at a loss of words, my dear. You finally changed—and against all odds!”

The wolf snarls at him, spite and hatred in its eyes. Seokjin glances at his gun. “Ah, does the gun frighten you, sweetling? I can put it away. Change back now. We can talk this out like adults. You can tell me all about how you managed to shift forms. You’ll be a very rich man when I show you to the rest of the world—”

Suddenly, the wolf surges forward, locking its colossal jaws around Seokjin’s entire forearm. The shock and pain of his teeth sinking through the material of his suit and digging deep into his flesh is enough to make him drop the gun. Despite the weight of pheromones dragging him down, Yoongi crawls across the grass and snatches the gun away from Seokjin. In one quick jerk of its head, the wolf tears Seokjin’s arm off. The beta screams, blood spraying Jeongguk and Yoongi in the face. Behind him, Yoongi hears Hoseok yelling at the top of his lungs at the horror show on display.

“Taehyung—Taehyung, I promise you I’ll—” but try as he may, there was no dissuading the wolf from attacking Seokjin’s throat. The sound of his windpipe and voice distorting and breaking under the pressure is perhaps the most terrifying thing any of them have ever heard.

They all watch, utterly stunned, as the wolf tears Seokjin apart. Blood goes everywhere. It taints the grass a deep crimson, it sticks to the side of Jeongguk face and drenches Yoongi’s hair. And even though it’s Seokjin, Jeongguk and Hoseok still scream and sob. The wolf devours the beta’s entrails and gnaws at the bones of his legs and pelvis. At some point, Hoseok faints.

Halfway through the brutality Namjoon and Jimin go stumbling gracelessly into the clearing, only to stop short at the sight of the wolf. “Oh fuck.”

“Is that Seokjin?” Namjoon asks, his face green with disgust.
And they all just stand there. There’s nothing to be said. Nothing to be done. They can only watch it all unfold.

Only when Seokjin is but an indistinguishable carcass of bone and leftover organs does the wolf start to shrink. Bones contort and hair recedes back into skin, the snout compressing into the skull and the eyes turning a dark, chestnut brown. Long, gorgeous red hair extends from the scalp and flows prettily down his naked back, and in place of the monstrous creature is Taehyung, as beautiful as the day they last saw him.

The man looks down at himself, as his bare skin slathered in Seokjin’s blood, and then all of a sudden he keens over and throws up bits of Seokjin’s organs all over his dead body. Jeongguk is the first to move, crawling over to Taehyung and placing a hand to his spine. The omega tenses at the touch, and snaps his head in the younger man’s direction, eyes wild—almost feral. But just as soon as the wildness is there, it vanishes. His pupils dilate and Taehyung noses at Jeongguk’s scent gland, recognising his mild, inoffensive scent.

Jimin reacts next, running up to Taehyung and throwing his arms around him. The feral omega only bares his teeth for a brief moment before he realises who it is, and scents Jimin too. When Hoseok is finally able to pull himself up into a sitting position, he sits there dumbly, confused as to why Taehyung is there instead of the massive wolf. Impatiently, Jimin beckons the alpha over with a wave of his hand. Hoseok can’t conjure up the energy to voice his confusion. He crawls over to them, poking Taehyung’s cheek just to make sure he’s actually there. Taehyung playfully bites his finger in response.

Namjoon is the last, skirting over the stray limbs and organs to get to Haeun, and scooping the baby into his protective arms. The baby babbles happily up at his father.

“Hyung,” Jeongguk wipes some blood from his cheek and smiles at him. “Taehyung-hyung hasn’t met Haeun yet.”
Very carefully, Namjoon kneels in front of the cluster of his pack, all of them scenting or embracing Taehyung. Jeongguk brushes his lips against Taehyung’s ear. “Hyung, it’s our baby. Our little Haeun. He’s an omega, just like us. Isn’t he cute?”

Curiously, Taehyung breaks from the touches of the rest of his pack and slowly crawls over to Namjoon, his movements strange and primitive. Namjoon is a little conflicted on whether Taehyung will hurt the baby. There isn’t anything threatening about the way he looks at Haeun, but he’s nervous all the same.

Taehyung sniffs him. Smiles. Then licks the side of his face.

Haeun matches a face of disgust and well, Namjoon can hardly blame him. It was only moments ago Taehyung was using the very same mouth to rip Seokjin limb from limb.

“I think he likes him,” Namjoon sighs with relief.

“Sorry we were late,” Jimin says. “We came across a map nailed to a tree. It must’ve been left by one of the expedition parties and we were trying to read it.”

He wipes his hands on the grass before pulling the map from a side pocket. “There’s an abandoned city thirty kilometres from here. It’ll only take us two—three days tops to get there.”

“Or we could go home?” Hoseok suggests, though he doesn’t look particularly sold on the idea.

Namjoon gazes upon Taehyung, the result of what Seokjin’s sadism and greed had done to him,
and knows that even against all odds, if they were able to go back across the order without getting arrested or detained, it isn’t where Taehyung belongs. It isn’t where they belong. Their country is no longer their home. Their people are no longer their people. It’s as though the experiment has isolated them completely. Changed them completely. While Taehyung’s metamorphosis is more literal, the rest of them are no better.

They are but strangers. Ghosts to the people they once were.

Who knows what awaits them further into the forest? What dangers lurk. What horrors they may face. It couldn’t be any worse than what they’ve already suffered.

They have a chance at freedom. Of knowing no laws of the government or the oppression of society. What matters exists here, between the six of them, a bond that cannot be broken, a brotherhood, a solidarity.

Namjoon meets with Jeongguk’s gaze and an understanding passes between them.

“I think a vacation is long overdue,” Namjoon announces. “According to the map there’s a river not far from here. Better go clean ourselves up.”

Yoongi winces, as if just acknowledging his clothes are drenched in blood. “No kidding.”

Though they are all deeply disturbed at what they just witnessed, and the unbridled power Taehyung has at his fingertips, it is a trauma to be dealt with at a different time. For now, they quietly celebrate the reunion of their pack and the infinite possibilities that await them in the future.
Wow.

Okay, where do I even begin? Well, before I explain the future of this story and my account/fanfic presence in general, I just wanted to start off by saying I feel so touched and overwhelmed with the amount of love and support I've received for this fic. Because of the dark subject matter, I prepared myself from some genuine hatred from some readers, but to my surprise I barely got any of that. So thank you. To those who've been with me since the beginning of the fic, and for those who are new as well! You're all amazing!

Now onto another matter. I want to be an author. I've wanted to publish a book for some time now, but whenever I sit down to write something knowing I'll eventually try and get it legitimately published, I get intimidated. So... I kind of cheated myself this time? I tricked myself into writing in the mindset that this is a fic, but I fully intend to change this into a book. Since I adore fic writing so much, I've been considering posting my books here first, receive feedback and support to motivate me to stick it through until the end, and then after having it "completed" on the site for a few months, I withdraw it from the site, go through major edits, changing names and locations so that BTS are in no way associated with it and also add/remove stuff, and then send the manuscript to publishers. Idk, just a thought. What do you guys think?

Anyways, since I plan to change this into a book, I would REALLY appreciate some constructive criticism. Not about spelling/grammatical errors or inconsistancies, because I'll pick up on that when I go back and edit, but more about the overall themes, characters, pacing, etc. You can say stuff like "I feel like blah blah needed more development" or "I didn't believe blah blah's character growth I think it needs more blah" or whatever. That would be much appreciated it!

For those who were bummed about missing certain scenes (like Jimin finally taking Hoseok's knot), you should know that I plan to add an anthology-esque extended collection at the very end of the book with a compilation of different scenes that didn't make it into the final product (either due to pacing issues or because it happened to take place during a character's POV that didn't have anything to do with the scene itself), so hey that's some incentive to support me, right?

Anyways, I'll be posting updates for upcoming stories/book release dates (if it gets to that), etc on my twitter.
Here's my Curious Cat and my Tumblr if you have any questions!

Thanks again guys. You're the best!

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