sclera

by alovelyvixen

Summary

The second that he was able to comprehend how other people were feeling, his mother asked him to never make eye contact. It was a scary thing, and other people would agree. She told him he had bright eyes; They were full of happiness and dreams, and she wanted to keep them safe.

He didn’t listen.

Notes

wow!! i posted a story!! this has upcoming chapters, as it is a story, so please anticipate those, i hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter 1

Jaemin was rushing from his class to the next one, as always. His eyes were shifted down, only to be able to see the feet in front of him and not make eye contact.

Ever since he was younger, teachers and such would tell him to look up, and to make eye contact because it was respectful. All the other kids would look adults in the eyes when they talked to them, to show that they were not insubordinate to their authority. Jaemin greatly appreciated anyone that took the time out of their day to aid him in developing. Nobody was able to tell, though.

The second that he was able to comprehend how other people were feeling, his mother asked him to never make eye contact. It was a scary thing, and other people would agree. She told him he had bright eyes; They were full of happiness and dreams, and she wanted to keep them safe.

He didn’t listen.

All of the children were terrified of him. There were endless rumors spread around about what he did to people, or what he would do if you talked to him, or what would happen if you looked into his eyes. They soon began calling him ‘No-Face’, and concluded that he was a creature, not a person. It followed him even now, into high school.

Jaemin hated normal eyes. Normal eyes were judgmental and they had so much hatred in them when he caught a glimpse. The pupils would narrow and grow smaller with anger, and double in size with prudence. Most eyes were plain brown, or blue, or green, and he hated it. Normal eyes were all over the place and were put on a pedestal for being beautiful and simplistic. The eyes that he looked into the mirror and stared back at were petrifying and unbearable.

Teachers understood when he began packing up minutes before class ended, then sped out the classroom the moment the bell dismissed them. Nobody wanted to bump into him or see him, and
he felt the same way. The hallways may not be entirely empty, but enough that he could go through to his next class. When he quickly walked down, people would move. Out of a high school of 2,000 students, there was not one that didn’t know his name, whether it was Jaemin or No-Face.

Though, nobody called him Jaemin. He would say that the only people who knew his name were those in his classes, but still referred to him as No-Face.

His mother was furious when she realized that he was being ostracized. Being someone who loved him all his life, she could not understand why they found him to be a monster. She did not have his eyes, as he had gotten them from his father.

They were the only pair of normal eyes that he loved. Every time he looked into them, they beamed with love, and happiness, and they sparkled as she spoke to him.

He told her that he didn’t mind it. They left him alone most of the time, and he was able to get an education. What she was worried about was being alone, but that was the least of his concerns. The world had proved to be horrible, and he didn’t want any part of it. As for the rest of the time, bullying was nothing new to him. You were brave, or tough, if you stood up to No-Face. It was almost as if you were slaying a dragon.

When he came home with bruises or cuts on his face, his mother would cry silently while he lay down and she nursed his wounds.

A nasty rumor once went around, that a group of freshman from another high school were planning on gouging his eyes out. Such a threat, unfortunately, was not new to him, but in such a large scale, he was terrified.

He didn’t see the outside world for a while, as they tracked down the group and tried to prevent
any harm from coming to him. Adults saw him as an endangered species, and wanted to keep him on display. All of them were still scared, though. Humans are scared of lions but they keep them in cages to look at.

That month was the best month of his life. No outside world. It felt like he was a happy kid again, and that he was able to live his life as if nothing was wrong.

The rumor turned out to be true, and a restraining order was put into place. These kids were psychopaths, soon - to - be killers, and they wanted to get rid of No-Face. Once he was back in school, he learned that they were put in a special institution. He wouldn’t ever have to face them again.

Though, after he came back, they found he had developed a weak spot. So many people wanted to stare at his eyes, but he never looked up. ‘Jaemin!’ They would call to him in class, just like his mother did, and he looked up. His ‘peers’ were using his own name against him. It didn’t take long for him to realize what he had succumbed to and eventually stopped.

Life resumed as per normal for him months later, and he continued to live as No-Face Jaemin.

His birthday came around, and he was turning eighteen. Though, he was nearing the end of his junior year. Because of the various incidents that would occur, he would miss months of school, and was already late starting school because of all the adjustments to be made. The gap wasn’t too big, because some people were also eighteen, but it just made him that much more different.

Jaemin stared at himself in the mirror, cross - legged. His face had matured quite a bit. If he covered his eyes and peeked through them, he was sure that people would consider him handsome. In fact, that’s how he would judge himself when he looked in the mirror. Now that he had grown, his body was filled out and he was able to look at his body with pride. He had never had issues with self esteem - other than the obvious - but it was nice that he was growing to be more handsome. His black hair made his eyes look more pronounced, especially the way that it curled and framed his face.
He moved his hands away from his face and looked himself in the eyes. The light from his window made them look glossy, and reflected off from where his ‘pupil’ was. They were an opaque shade of black all over, almost matching his hair. When he blocked out the rest of the world, he, too, found them beautiful.

The glossy vantablack eyes that stared back at him were his. Jaemin smiled at himself and watched as the eyes lightly sparkled a light gray, something that only he was ever able to see.

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Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

jeno and jaemin's first interaction.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Amidst the near summer season, which couldn’t yet be called Spring, Jaemin was studying for his finals. His constant trips to and from the library were something to marvel over. Nobody ever sat at the table that he had, essentially, claimed, because it was bad luck; Whatever the rumors were saying this time. The library was his favourite place. During lunch, the librarian would let him sit behind the desk. Mostly, because the students had scared her so much, that she thought he would do something to her if she told him to leave. Over time, he thought that she would realize he was harmless, but she never did.

The library was also open to the public, so some came to marvel over the boy with the black eyes. It was to their dismay that he never made eye contact or looked up enough that they could catch a peek.

He was studying far ahead of the other students. Finals was not for another month or so, but he wanted to get a boost before the library was swarmed with students and he would have to retreat to the private room that the librarian used as a break room.

Jaemin, ahead in his second class, was on his way to the library. He made haste walking down the stairs, eyes averted as always.

His foot must have caught on something, because he fell on the landing of the staircase. What an inconvenience. After he picked up his laptop that had fallen out of his hands, and adjusted his bag on his shoulders, he looked up to regain his balance.
It caught on someone.

They made eye contact for a second, before he panicked and quickly turned around to continue on.

“Hey!” The person grabbed his arm. Admittedly, he was not scared walking around the halls, or in general, but whenever someone had him in a vulnerable situation, he was terrified. It was a boy, and he was even more affected. Girls could hurt him, but boys could hurt him further. They did hurt him further.

Jaemin narrowed his eyes and pulled away angrily - but more so out of fear.

The footsteps of the boy followed him as he went down the last flight of stairs. At this point, he was on the verge of crying. Last time someone followed him, he had to buy a new laptop.

“Go away!” He spun around and yelled.

There was nobody there. Jaemin looked around and saw the boy retreating back up to the landing of the stairs. Coming down the stairs was another student. The latter two looked around each other in confusion. Better not fuel their minds. He went back off into the direction of the library.

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Back in the library, he was so exhausted from the sheer terror of that ordeal that he had fallen
asleep at his table.

When he slept, his mother said he was safe. Nobody could harm him in his sleep. Sleep was a place for dreams; If you were having nightmares, you weren’t sleeping. It was something else.

*You sleep with your eyes closed, Nana. Everyone does. It is simply the way that the body works when it is tired. You are no different than anyone else when you are asleep. We all sleep the same, no matter who you look at. Nobody’s eyes are able to be seen. You cannot see their eyes, or what color they are, or their shape; None of that. Nobody is able to see your eyes, and they cannot judge you. Close your eyes and escape.*

So, falling asleep at school was the most normal thing he could do while on campus. There was some people who wouldn’t be able to recognize him when he was asleep, even. They only looked at his eyes - or rather, his downward gaze.

He missed it when the bell rang, and nobody bothered to wake him, because he was sitting at No-Face’s table. Half a class period went by before he was woken up.

Lucky guess as to who woke him up.

Jaemin was naturally terrified again, because this seemed like he was being stalked. Multiple events had taken place to make him second guess anyone that ‘coincidentally’ appeared in random places the same time as him. The boy was especially intimidating, and gave him an itchy feeling in his stomach, and put a lump in his throat. “Go away.” He figured that it would be easy to scare someone away with such a harmless command. A look in one’s direction would scare someone alone, normally.

“You’re late for third period.” The boy piled up Jaemin’s papers that were spread out across the
“I apologize if I scared you earlier, I wanted to see your eyes.”

There was a catch, he was sure of it. Jaemin looked up at him, in the eyes. He hid his shaking hands under the table; If he wanted to see his eyes, he could. That would get him to stop following him, it always worked with curious strangers in public. Fellow students were much different, but this one was different. This kid seemed as harmless as some child in the grocery store. His chest grew tighter with every second he stared, and the other looked at him if he had lost something in his eyes, and were searching for it. Eventually, he reprised his normal averted gaze and shoved all of his stuff in his bag, running out of the library to the bathroom to calm down.

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Chapter End Notes

oooh thank y'all so much for liking the story so far! i was scared that nobody would like my idea but hey it be like that sometimes

anyways i plan on updating every friday, lets hope i go through with that. let's winwin y'all
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

jaemin emotions always get in the way.

Chapter Notes

thank y'all so much for liking this i didn't think anyone would like my odd idea that i got from some airport pics skhsghs

i almost forgot to post this,, i was so caught up with superhuman and rewatching awkward. (that show is so raunchy my young mind used to be so corrupted) enjoy the update!

It burned deep in his throat to finally let out his fear. There was no use looking in the mirror and watching himself cry, so he was sitting in one of the stalls, drying the tears that soundlessly ran down his cheeks. Contrary to any idiot’s belief, he cried the same tears as everyone else. When he was scared, he would quietly let them fall with little emotion. If he had too much emotion crying in the school’s bathroom stall, he would make noise and draw even more attention to himself: There were enough rumors about him as it is, even when he walked around with a blank expression.

Jaemin’s jacket sleeves were damp, because he had quite a lot of emotions. Sometimes they would come out, even when he didn’t want it. They had to leave his system one way or another.

One pro about having black eyes was that no matter how hard you cried, nobody could ever tell.

Third period was culinary, which was the worst class. Because of the lack of willing participants for his group, he was stuck on prep. This meant chopping everything, and washing dishes, and cleaning up counters and floors. The only thing he enjoyed was that he could eat the example dish that the teacher made.
Being late just resulted in someone else having to take that job, who was not participating or contributing to their group. Jaemin retreated to the station, and sat on the other end of the table. Any closer, and the student might have flipped out.

He recalls a time before, when he was a freshman taking home economics.

In home economics, you also cook, but only in duos. That teacher was much more strict, and forced someone to work with him. His name was Jiseok. Jaemin liked to let his eyes flick up every now and then to take a look at him. Every day, he would notice something more about him. About two weeks since the beginning of their partnership, he noticed the elegant way his eyes were shaped; Not the eyes themselves, but the shape. They sloped in a way that he had never seen, and he often found himself marveling it the best he could.

Jiseok noticed that he had begun to stare at him. Jaemin would shamefully look away when he caught him, for two reasons: The look he gave him when he caught him was full of disgust and discomfort, and Jaemin stared because he thought he was beautiful. A male.

He’ll never forget what Jiseok told him when he caught him one day, sitting at his table in the library.

’Hey, No-Face,’ Jiseok walked up to him and hit the table a couple times to get his attention. ‘Stop looking at me during class, and in general. The semester is almost over, and I expect you to stop before then. I hate it when you look at me with those soulless eyes. It’s appalling, you freak.’

It didn’t break his heart, but it did create a feeling of yearning that made him question a lot. Fantasizing about going around with men was sinful, and he was sure his mother would die from having her son be any more different than he already was. For the time being, he convinced himself that it was just his eyes. He liked his eyes, and that is why he would stare at them. Jiseok’s character and personality, and looks had nothing to do with why he was so infatuated with him.
Jaemin entered the class, and everyone looked at him as, though cooking, stared at him.

“I apologize for being late, I fell asleep in the library, studying,” He said gently, bowing to the teacher.

The teacher sighed and wrote him off, meaning he would only get half points for participation today. It was nothing, considering that grades like that were flawless on his record. “Your partner was more than willing, eager, even, to trade you out for our new student.” A look of pity came onto the teacher’s face. Seeing pity in normal eyes disgusted him.

Though, he knew what that meant. Without a partner, he could not eat the teacher’s example dish, because it would go to the new student, he would not be able to cook, and he would be stuck washing dishes and cleaning up stations. As if his least favourite class could get any worse, he was now a custodian for the students. He collected himself and sat at the stray desk that always lie near the door, preparing to act as the class slave.

It wasn’t until the end of class that he was required to start cleaning and washing dishes, which left him tons more time to study and get work done for other courses. There was even enough time to plan out the coming days.

Approximately twenty minutes before class ended, he started cleaning up messes - that, he may note, were worse than normal to simply give him a hard time - and washing the dishes. Admittedly, he liked working by himself in most cases. It was much more enjoyable than working with someone who he knew feared him and thought of him as something other than human. His mind was at ease, knowing he was not inconveniencing anyone or stressing them out.

On the way back to his new desk, a lot of eyes were on him. And for what?
Jaemin pulled his backpack up onto the desk to put his work away, and was greeted by a torso in his insanely good lower field of vision. He waited to be greeted rudely, or complained to, or bothered for no apparent reason.

Several seconds passed before he was forced to shift his eyes up a bit to get a vague idea of their face.

It was none other than the boy who had bumped into him in the hallway, and woke him up in the library, and made him cry despite just having encountered him.

“Hello?” The boy bent down and looked at him from below.

“What do you want from me?” Jaemin said helplessly, and turned back to his things.

“I’m new? I think I stole your partner from you, I’m sorry.”

Of course it was him. God, he would have to tell his mom about this random new kid following him around - and, more importantly, talking to him. Nobody ever just wanted to talk to No-Face. It made them look weird, and he was surprised that this kid was still walking the halls with other people.

“My partner didn’t want me, I am not bothered,” He pulled out his phone and unraveled his headphones to watch dramas during lunch.
“Hey, I apologize if I’m bothering you. I’m Jeno,” The- Jeno stuck his hand out.

Nobody wanted to be his friend. Nobody wanted to get to know him; They didn’t even want to know something as simple as his name. It did not bother him, but it did when they actually wanted to. Why did they? What was the occasion? What were they going to bother him about this time? What would it lead to? Jaemin wouldn’t trust anyone.

The bell rang, and he turned around and left the classroom without answering Jeno, or even looking at him.

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Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

jaemin's past catches up with his present.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Admittedly, ignoring everyone and averting conversation did nothing to make him seem any more friendly or different than what the rumors said. It was either ignore them - which, did still encourage rumors - or make a fool of himself by trying to prove them wrong. In his youth, that is exactly what he tried to do; Now look at what it had done.

Jaemin loved watching k - dramas, and currently his favourite was ‘The Universe’s Star’. Despite the great nature of death and despair, he looked into the other parts of the plot - excluding the love aspect.

Despite how okay he seemed, he found himself sad. Nobody liked him, and that would not change when he got older, and moved out. That last part was even questionable. In the show, WooJoo was very relatable to his own personal character. Not entirely, though, because he was a celebrity. But, even with tons of money and a set future, he finds life empty and useless. There is no significance to life if you can see exactly where it is headed. As he was progressing through the episodes, though, Byul was saving him, and giving him reason to live. ‘I would love for someone to be my Byul,’ Jaemin thought, before immediately slapping himself.

WooJoo was famous, and admirable. Of course someone would want him; Nobody wanted Jaemin.

He sat behind the return desk at the library, feet kicked up while he watched it. Students would walk by and throw their books on the counter, and, if they were brave enough, in his direction. While he watched, he ate, and it made students mad, until they concluded it is because he scared the librarian into letting him eat.
It was the one time that Jaemin didn’t try to avoid others’ gaze. The screen reflected off of his eyes, and you could barely see that they weren’t normal. Everyone’s eyes were like that. Of course, they recognized him, but had no care to bother him on their own free time.

One of the main characters in the show reminded him of Jeno. Byul’s best friend, Yi - Na, is quite bothersome. Even though she shows up for approximately the length of one episode, she is a nuisance. Though, Byul called her a best friend and was happy around her. Jaemin couldn’t say that about anyone.

The books being thrown at him on the desk were piling up, and falling onto the floor. He was extra into it, considering that she had come back to life to protect him. It was sweet, to say the least.

His feet were knocked over who knows how long later, and he looked up, shocked.

“Keep your eyes down, freak,” A random student had tossed a textbook on the desk and it made a small stack fall. Sometimes he was convinced that students came to the library and checked out books, even just for small intervals of time.

Jaemin narrowed his eyes and pulled the books back on the desk. This didn’t last for long, though. Whilst he was pulling the books back onto the desk and organizing them, a taller, yet younger - but still notably handsome - student grabbed onto the back of his shirt and yanked him so that he fell over the front of the desk. The audacity these underclassmen had, all because of the dumb rumors.

He composed himself and dusted off his clothes like normal, picking up the books. As they went away, the girls swarmed around him were laughing and commending him for bullying an upperclassmen.
“Hey!”

Someone from the library called out and he ignored it. There were tons of people that yelled - despite the fact that this was a fucking library - so it didn’t bother him.

“It’s Jeno!”

At that, he absolutely didn’t look up. Jeno was some sort of trouble. A threat, almost. Yeah, sure, Jaemin had never had a friend before, but it was for a reason. Some new kid, coming to the school, was the most suspicious way to universe could suddenly decide to give him a friend.

“You heard me!”

The books in front of him were picked up. With a glance, it was the person he didn’t want to see. What was he even doing in the library?

“Are you okay? I saw you fall. You were basically thrown over the edge of the desk, and the books-” Jeno stood up, sighing. Still, nothing. Clearly, he was new, because even the teachers ceased to blink an eye when such things happened.

“Jeno, what are you doing? Go eat lunch. I am fine, and the books are fine,” Jaemin paused the show and set his headphones down to organize them back onto the counter.

“Are you sure? I ran in here to see if everything was okay, you know. I was trying to get to the office.”
“You’re lying, because the office is across campus. Anyone would know that,” Suddenly, his voice became harsh and threatening. “Quit following me around and acting like you want to hang around me, or I’ll have you taken out of this school quicker than you were able to get in. Don’t think you’re special just because you’re new.”

Jeno’s eyes went wide, and he scoffed. “Really? You’re the one getting angry at me? That’s what I get for being nice.”

The newly discovered bad side of him must have brought out karma, because another random person, this time a student in his same class, walked up to him.

“Oh, bullying a new kid. No-Face is getting brave,” He grabbed him by the shirt and pushed him to the floor. “This fresh meat isn’t yours to cook. Don’t suddenly think you’re special, and that you can order someone around like how you do in your spare time. You haven’t stopped trying to fit in, I see. Know your place, freak.”

Jaemin was angry, and he looked up to see who it was this time. His throat tightened up. It was a face he hadn’t seen in quite a while.

“I told you what would happen if you looked me in the eyes again,” Jiseok lurched forward to grab him, and some students rushed over to pull him away. How nice, you would think. But no, they were not thinking of Jaemin, they were thinking of Jiseok. They were exclaiming, ‘Jiseok, your record!’ ‘You’ll get a detention, you’ll get expelled!’ ‘He’s not worth it!’ As if he were the victim.

Here was the current bane of his existence, interacting with his former.
“You’re lucky I have a clean record, No-Face.” Jeno was still there with a dumbfounded look on his face, which caught Jiseok’s attention. His lips stretched into a grin. “You don’t know No-Face? You really are new. We’d better get you away. I’ll tell you all about him.” Jiseok slung his arm over Jeno’s shoulder, and they were gone.

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Chapter End Notes

i almost forgot to post again pls forgive me

BIG NEWS: with dnyl coming out i was hit with a big strike of inspiration and i am working to pump out a chensung fic set in that universe,, look forward to it yee yee
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

jaemin reflects on the day.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

On the drive home, he was thankful for Jiseok. Once Jeno knew about all the rumors, he would leave him alone. It seemed like he was the gullible type. For once, someone knowing didn’t bother him. Jeno was scaring him, so it was better that things be flipped around, so that he was the one scaring Jeno.

“Honey! Wait, look at me,” His mother grabbed his face when they arrived at a stoplight. “You have a bruise on your cheek! What happened this time?”

There was no asking who it was, because if they accused all the time, there would be nobody left in the school. More often than not, they had fake witnesses, too, and the school board was too stupid to think they were lying. He was driven to and from school now for the same reason.

“Someone pulled me over the library desk and I fell into the floor, and some books hit me. I didn’t realize there was a bruise,” Jaemin pulled down the visor and looked in the mirror. There was definitely a bruise, so he must have not felt his face hit the floor or any books fall and hit his face.

She sighed, shaking her head, as always. “You haven’t been getting hurt so much lately, but it seems like they’re getting more violent. Jaemin, I’m getting more worried for you; you haven’t gotten seriously hurt and I don’t plan on that happening.”

I do, he thought.
“When we get home, I’m icing your bruise, and I’m looking for more.”

Jaemin waved her off before looking out the window. They were tinted, so nobody could see inside. It looked just like his eyes, from the outside, except that people liked the look of opaque black ‘eyes’ on a car.

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The black-eyed boy lay on the couch, watching a new drama that his mother recommended, while she rested ice on his cheek and on the 3 other bigger bruises.

“Such big books, they’re studying hard, they must be smart. Clearly they are not smart enough to leave my son alone! They haven’t learned human decency!” She exclaimed, angry. Only when he had more than minor injuries to him would she get mad.

“Mom, please, I can’t hear the show,” Jaemin teased her. He was still able to hear her angry remarks, now made under her breath.

The show was a love story. Typical of his mother to encourage him to pursue love with such propaganda. This was not new to him.

He thought for most of the episode, while the cold bags of ice on him numbed his skin and seemed like dead weight. New students never approached him, or talked to him. Sure, they were unaware of the rumors, but were terrified of his eyes alone. The same went for everyone. Over time of being
an outcast, the exclusive ways of society became predictable, no matter what kind of person it was or how they seemed. When it came to such circumstances, everyone was the same.

“There’s someone following me around school,” Jaemin looked down.

“What!” His mother jolted upwards. “How long? Has he done anything to you? I will have to call the school and tell them to look out for him.”

The normal, routine questions to keep him safe. “His name is Lee Jeno. I see him everywhere I go. He’s new. When I was walking to the library, I bumped into him, and I fell. I fell asleep in the library, and he was there to wake me up. He is in my culinary class, and he stole my partner. He ran into the library after I was pulled over the desk. Just won’t stop talking to me. He won’t stop staring into my eyes. It’s only been a day, but he’s scaring me.”

She stroked his hair. “Oh, baby, he’s intimidating you.” Her voice wavered, out of pure sadness for her son. It was obvious that his pain hurt her to hear about, even in the smallest amounts. “I’ll contact the office, and let them know. Lee Jeno.” For a moment, she continued to stroke his hair until he looked up at her.

“The scariest part is that he stared into my eyes, without any emotion. Just stared. It made me cry, I had so much anxiety afterwards,” Jaemin exhaled.

“I can’t remember the last time someone tried to intimidate you. But I know how I had to pick you up. Better take these off before your skin turns purple and your blood cells give out.”

While she took off the packs, he thought about how different Jeno’s approach was. How scarily personal it was to talk to him, and look him in the eyes, and hang around him like they were two of the same. He was sure that this tactic would falter the second Jiseok told him about No-Face.
Jaemin would rather Jeno know him as No-Face.

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Chapter End Notes  

the dnyl fic., about that.,

BUT i apologize for this being so short i really need to write more of it skdkfgdj but anyways stream dont need your love :)

The second that he had entered the school, he was escorted to the office. Obviously for something bad. As per usual. Jaemin was taken to the usual guidance part of the office. His mother knew nothing about this, most likely. He went ahead of the teacher who had attempted to bring him there himself. The normal lineup of people was there, the normal staff.

He stopped in the waiting area, seeing that his counselor was busy. What was he even here for, then?

“Jaemin,” His counselor peeked out from the board room and waved him in.

The boardroom was.. Something else. It just meant that something was going wrong. He walked in and rolled his eyes when he saw Jeno sitting with his counselor. Jaemin took a seat and looked at them with a pressed look. Who cares in Jeno saw his eyes in their entirety?

“Your mother called to file a report on Jeno. Jeno came up here to file a report on you,” She looked between them both. “What’s going on here?” His mother only filed reports if she was really scared.

As odd as it sounded, nobody ever tried to report Jaemin, despite all the rumors. Either they were too scared, or they liked the torture he received by being there. “My mom already told you. She’s just worried about me, you can drop it if there’s no evidence.” He shook his head. “What does it say on his report?”
Her gaze dropped. “The usual.”

Jaemin reached over and took the paper.

“Hey, isn’t that a breach of confidentiality?” Jeno looked at her. But she wasn’t seeing anything.

Upon examining it, it took Jaemin .5 seconds to tear it up and throw it on the table. “Tell Jiseok he has to try harder.” A dozen of these reports in his handwriting came in weekly, trying to get him in some sort of trouble. “Is that all?” Jaemin sighed and looked back up at her. “This isn’t really anything new.”

“You said that he was following you around, and your mother said he was intimidating you. I.. Can’t really say this is true. You run into a lot of students, many times a day, and I don’t think he’s intimidating you. Jaemin, you’re getting older, and this aggression-”

“Please get to your point,” He pushed his chair back. Another daily lesson on how his psyche was damaged was not on his morning agenda.

“Jeno seems nice. Which is why you’re going to be his Scholar for the week.”

The whole Scholar thing was a long story, and was mostly just to help him get into a good college. With good grades, you could be apart of it. Not only was it a mentoring program, but it was like an internship. Nobody wanted to be mentored by him, and nobody was ever mentioned for it, so he was earning free merits. Until now.
“What sort of scholar am I to him? He’s new, and I’m sure he could get into the program himself, considering we share a culinary class.” Jaemin was already upset at the notion of having to babysit someone who made his heart pound in fear.

“You’ll get even more merits, and perhaps it will help your social status,” She slid him Jeno’s Scholar forms, with all of his current information, that she probably forced him to fill out. “You know how this works. I already informed your mother, who was easily persuaded.”

Who could he trust if he couldn’t trust his own mother?

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The both of them exited the office as he read the top paper. He knew the drill, which was awful. There was a checklist of tasks he had to complete by this time next week on the back, that Jeno had to sign off on.

☐ Off-Campus Study Session (Minimum of 3)
☐ Lunch Period (Scholar Help Session) (Min. 2)
☐ On-Campus Study Session (Min. 2)
☐ Non-Verbal Conversation (Call, text, etc.) (Min. 1)
☐ Tour of the School (Min. 1)
☐ Academic Growth/Understanding (Min. 1 Subject)

With those also came the responsibilities such as walking him to every class (tardies would be
excused on this occasion) and making sure he wasn’t getting into any sort of trouble with other peers. The only one he would be getting in trouble with was his Scholar.

“We should get to class-”

“We still have 40 minutes before the bell rings. Nobody is here yet, that’s why it’s empty,” Jaemin shifted his eyes back down as per usual. “I was going to the library anyway, so let’s knock one of these out.”

Jeno scurried along, trying to keep up with his fast pace. “So your name is Jaemin.”

“Mhm.”

“Why do they call you No-Face?”

Jaemin didn’t hesitate to look up at him like he was stupid. “Isn’t it obvious? Jiseok already told you everything, too, so don’t act all coy.”

“Are you really violent?”

“Do I seem violent to you?”
“No.”

“There’s your answer.”

Jeno noticed that he had some bruises on his arms, and some peeked out from his shirt. “Have you ever fought back?”

“That wouldn’t exactly help my scholarly image, now would it?” He couldn’t help being rude in the midst of this. And it was only the beginning of the week. Jeno kept going down the line of questions, such as if the rumors of his violent acts were true, or the supernatural ones, or any of the off-beat ones. Though he turned all of them down, he doubted that he was taking any of this to heart.

“Are you..”

Jaemin stopped in front of the library, finally. “Am I what?” There was a guilty look on Jeno’s face.

“....Gay..?”

Something about that made him snap. He looked around for any other students before dragging him into the library, amongst the shelves, cornering him in the fiction section.

“Considering everything else you’ve asked me, do you think that’s going to be true? You’re just going to believe everything Jiseok told you? Would you believe everything the students go around
telling you?” In this dim corner, he looked soulless.

Jeno regretted saying anything, ever. He swallowed. “Why did you stare at him, then?” There was nothing but curiosity in his voice.

Jaemin blinked. If he had told Jeno that, then surely everyone knew. Or maybe it was just Jeno. “Wouldn’t you want to look at something normal for once if you looked like this?” He clenched his jaw. “Come on, we just wasted time.”

It was nice that someone was listening, or at least someone had the decency to ask, but he was speaking to deaf ears. That’s what it was like talking to everyone - his mother excluded.

They walked in silence to his table. Jeno needed assistance in chemistry, as well as art, so as if that conversation never happened, they studied. Tomorrow they planned to study art, and at lunch today they would have a tour of the school. Since Jaemin had a doctor’s appointment on Thursday, they couldn’t plan that far ahead. Not that the planning for today and tomorrow was done yet.

“Jaemin,” Jeno looked up at him while they packed up to go to his first class.

He looked up for a moment to signal that he was listening.

“Can I have your phone number?”

Jaemin looked up at him and slung his bag over his shoulder. “I already have your number, it’s on the form. I’ll send you a text to let you know it’s me.” He said without letting a moment pass. Jeno
nodded, and followed him to his first period.

+++ 

Chapter End Notes

DUUUDES this is so unrelated but stan hrvy, his music is so cute and he's friends with the dreamies and he's cute i just aaaaa

ANYWAYS there is a possibility i might not update once a week, because im falling behind on having enough content to post whoops,,, yall know where to bother me to update though :)
Classes seemed like a relief, what with Jeno having to be by his side almost every other time. This might be useful, as the whole Scholar thing was supposed to be, but it was more of a bother than anything since he was scared of him. Plus, still a bit of lingering suspicion, considering that when he wasn’t hanging around him, he was talking with other people. His social status wasn’t tanking, so something was definitely up.

At the moment, he was in culinary, with Jeno. There was nothing to do but clean up, since he had a leg up on his work.

“Hey, No-Face,” Some girl walked up to him.

“Sheesh.” He kept his eyes down, washing the dishes.

“You’re Jeno’s Scholar, and he needs some help,” As in, their little friend group needed help.

“I don’t need to help during class hours. If he really is struggling with something, he’ll ask for my assistance after class. Helping him wasn’t even on his agenda during class hours. This was one of his only times to catch a break.
“That’s not very Scholarly of you,” She huffed. “I can report you to your counselor for not helping out your assigned student, and you’ll lose your extra credits.”

Jaemin kept his head down, but narrowed his eyes. “He’s not the one that came up and asked me for help, either. On top of that, the counselors can only receive reports like that from the assigned student themselves. So go ahead.”

There was nothing else to be said, so she walked back to their table. If Jeno’s friends thought they could reap the academic benefits of him having a smart, organized Scholar, they were wrong, or take advantage of him at all, for that matter. They didn’t want him before (and never would) so they could never have him.

The end of the class was nearing, so he had to hang around to wait for Jeno. This whole ‘escorting him to every class’ thing was tiring, and he still had to do it for the rest of the week. Jeno was taking forever to finish eating. Bold, considering he had English next, where he was not allowed to eat. He walked over and nudged him. “We have to leave soon.”

“Huh?” Jeno let out a noise that made him look up in what could only be described as confusion.

Everyone laughed at Jaemin, but he just sighed in slight frustration. “We don’t have all the time in the world, let’s go.”

Still, he didn’t budge. He was more annoyed than anything, but to everyone else it looked like anger. The amusing faces around him filled with fear when he snatched up Jeno’s backpack and slung it over his shoulder. “Let’s go.”

For a moment, he noticed that he was scared for a few moments. That lingering presence of fear in his eyes, stilled movements, shrunken pupils. It was normal for everyone when he did make an
attempt at any action that wasn’t purely helpless or nice. Jeno put his food down. It was a surprise to the students. A new kid? Not scared of No-Face? Furthering their shock, he grabbed his bag back from Jaemin and set it down on the table. The look he gave him wasn’t mean. It was more in the nature of, ‘hey, you have my bag, so I just took it back’. Harmless, in Jeno’s eyes. He didn’t realize what he had just done.

- 

Jeno was basically jogging along with Jaemin as he walked him to every class, trying to match his fast pace. This is how he would normally walk, and he couldn’t afford to be caught slipping just because he had an anchor tied to him. He knew it annoyed Jeno. Just an added bonus.

“Hey!” The other had fallen behind because he wanted to catch a drink of water. Jaemin would ignore him.. If he hadn’t grabbed onto the back of his backpack.

“Jeno-” He turned around, but it wasn’t Jeno. Jeno was still running down the hallways. It was just another student looking to bully him around. With his little pet running to catch up, he was being pushed into the wall and manhandled for the sake of being rough. Jaemin just rolled his eyes and awaited whatever was to come. It was the normal shoving him to the ground and hitting him with his own books by dumping them on him, then running away because god forbid they actually get caught.

The bully cleared out, and he saw Jeno bend down to help him pick up his stuff. He’d been watching the whole time, of course. What else would he expect him to do?

“Get to class, you’re going to be late. It’s just down the hall, tell them I’m in the nurse, because that’s where I’ll be.”
Jeno scoffed. “I can be a minute late, relax.”

Jaemin looked up at him, angry. A couple students walked by and were listening in on their conversation and watching them. “Fine. I’ll take you. Stop reading my papers!” There was one in his hand for a LGBT crisis hotline, and he lunged forward to grab it. Great. He had just taken that out of pure curiosity, and that was the last thing he needed getting out. “Listen, Jeno, you’re already fucking up this week and it just started.” The organization in his backpack was lost as he just started shoving papers and books in.

He looked shocked, of course. But that’s what he gets for ruining the slight reputation that he had built up over the course of a few months to protect himself from what was now to come, because he had ruined it for him within a matter of a few seconds. Little contact between them, that wasn’t academic, was mandated. Some stupid new kid who knew no boundaries whatsoever was not going to ruin his life.

Both of them stood up and walked over to his class. Instead of popping in for a quick second to say hello to his teacher, and introduce himself as Jeno’s Scholar, he opened the door enough for him to get in, and left.

♡

Chapter End Notes

whew chile all this angst, might have to flood the fic with fluff soon,
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

jaemin breaks.

Chapter Notes

! trigger warning!
there's nothing graphic or anything, but as someone who's experienced these feelings before i sort of triggered myself while i was writing this and started crying but maybe that's just me. just wanted to put this here just in case.

“How could you do this!” Jaemin threw his bag down onto the couch. “You don’t even know what you signed me up for, and I have no way of getting out of it.” His mother was doing the laundry, when he had just ran in - literally. Since she wasn’t picking him up, he had to walk, which quickly turned into a run for his life. This small argument had been going on for a minute or two, since he had to work up the courage to even begin to form a rebuttal against the most important person in his life.

“It’s good for your college resume, and she said it would also get you behavioral merits.”

He turned red, in anger. “I have to be with him at all times. I have to talk to him every time I see him. I have to get him out of situations, be his babysitter- He has to come over!”

She let out a chaste breath and looked at him. “Maybe that’s not so bad, Jaem.”

“Seriously? You’re taking the school board’s side on this?” Jaemin furrowed his eyebrows.
“Soon enough, you’ll be out of here, and you’ll be doing these things, and you’ll thank me later. For now, you are just getting accustomed to it.”

This was unbelievable. Unlike the normal teenage ‘you don’t know me, I can’t believe you’re making me do something other than what I want to do’, this was a breach of the comfort that he knew. His mother was his one and only vice to happiness in the world; She was letting him go, emotionally. There was no more understanding, or mutual trust, because his future was on the line. A burning sadness settled in his stomach and squeezed at his throat.

“Jaemin.” She stood up. Before she could even make her way over he grabbed his bag harshly and hastily made his way up to his room.

His home was the one place that he really felt safe, and it would be gone now that she would just be letting people come in. Jaemin felt tears come to his eyes as his body slumped against his bedroom door.

Have you ever felt alone? That’s how he was feeling. Alone on a spiritual plane that could only be described as a personal swimming pool, where you’re at the bottom. Everything around you in your life is moving like the waves, and above you there are people, but you’re stuck at the bottom.

Despite the fact that all he had previously clung onto was his mother, he was floating at the surface happily, sun beaming down on him, and he had some sort of unknown title in the world. Today, he sunk to the bottom.
“Jaemin..” His mother knocked softly on the door. “Jaemin..”

He rolled over in his bed. His phone was lit up, as his alarm blared on. She thought he was asleep, but he had been awake for quite a while now. His alarm had woken him up, and he was lying in bed, listening to it. It was annoying, deafening, and awful, but it made him feel something other than this unshakeable sadness, so he listened to it like he would listen to a song.

After he knew she was trying to form words, he turned it off and sat up. Eventually, her feet would go away from under the door, and he would go to school. He went and aimlessly picked out an outfit from his closet. His bag was already packed, so no having to worry about that.

Jaemin slung his bag over his shoulder and opened his door to leave. To his surprise, his mother was still standing there.

“Here you go.” She held out a plate. “You should eat, since you didn’t come downstairs.”

“I have to go and wait for Jeno,” He contemplated picking up a piece of whatever she made to please her, but instead, he looked at her and made his way past. “Goodbye.”

It wasn’t hard to tell when something was off with him, because of how little he ever had to emote. With this sudden significant shift in mood, it was like the world stopped spinning. The walk to school was either quicker than usual, or he wasn’t thinking about it. Jeno was stopped inside the school, next to the office, with all his new friends, including Jiseok.

He walked up and nodded at Jeno once there was a silent moment. “Do you want me to give you that tour of the school now? Just to cross it off the list?”
“Hey, he’s hanging out with friends,” Jiseok bumped in. Of course he would bump in. He shoved Jaemin’s shoulder, getting no reaction. That sparked a hint of madness, but he turned away. “Classes don’t start for fifteen, anyways. Go take your tour and come back if you have time.”

Jeno shrugged. “It would take up any other time. Sure.”

Him and Jeno walked away, towards the closest place. Jaemin tried his best along the way to avoid places that he most likely already knew, or that he knew that he was aware of, just to save them both the time and hassle. For the next few minutes, he was a tour guide, speaking as if he were reading a manual word by word.

They reached the cafeteria, where some students were eating lunch, and it was quite loud.

“If you enter the right line, it’s for vegetarians, if you enter the left line, it’s for everyone else, and the center is basically a snack bar, or a place to get utensils and such.” Jaemin looked around to see if there was anything else to explain.


“I’m fine.” He brushed it off. “There’s an exit that leads out to more classrooms, and the sports areas, as well as the fields. Let’s go that way.”

The two of them walked across the basketball court silently, since it was self explanatory. They were approaching the performing arts building, when Jeno - who else - broke the silence.
“Is it that flyer that I saw yesterday? In your bag? Does it make you uncomfortable that I know-”

“You don’t know anything, so shut up,” Jaemin stopped and turned to him. “How do you know I didn’t just get it handed to me? That it didn’t come in a packet? Maybe I picked it up, maybe someone put it in there. Quit prodding places that shouldn’t be touched.”

Again, the other looked shocked. He was lucky that he hadn’t cursed at him at all. Jeno stood under the hoop, staring. One of the nearby trees shifted, and the sun beamed down on them. Jaemin’s eyes began to shine. On one hand, they were magnificently opaque, like a marble, and where almost like something that an oil painter would draw. On the other, they were poetically glossy, only due to the tears welling up in his eyes.

“Jaemin.”

Jaemin turned around and kept on walking to their destination. It wasn’t the end of the world. Jeno wasn’t the first person to ever see him cry on this campus. He wasn’t special. Nobody in this world was special.

Jeno’s footsteps drew closer until he came into his foggy peripherals. “I’m sorry for prodding, but.. Um.. I- Can’t..” Here comes the pity party. “You can’t be my Scholar if you’re upset. It damages the quality of my learning experience.” He all but babbled out.

“Bull. Shit.” Again, he was facing him. “I’m doing a perfectly fine job. You compromised this. And since you did, I can’t be held accountable. And for what would I be? My feelings? If you want a happy - go - fucking - lucky Scholar, go get one. I have feelings, Jeno, that range from happy to sad, even if my eyes are fucking soulless, so just shut the fuck up and quit trying to get more information on me for god knows what reason.”
He swallowed and looked at him with, what, sadness, pity, anger, confusion, spite..? Jaemin wasn’t the best at reading emotions that weren’t exclusively those listed. Jeno bit his lip. “How about we go back to the counselor’s office, and we can pick this up later or something?”

Jaemin could really let out some emotions right now… So he gave in to his request. Just a small cave, a little indulgence. Jeno better not make him regret this.

+++
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

something is off about jeno.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Back at the office, he led Jeno back to his group of cool kids, immediately passing them up when he made it there. Jeno was left behind, and he made his way to the counselor’s office. Of course, his counselor couldn’t do much for him, now that his mother had left his side of the playing field, so he just cried. He would much prefer to do it alone, maybe in a bathroom, but he didn’t want to put a tardy on his record.

She pressed on to try and get anything out of him, but even in silent pauses to catch his breath, he wouldn’t say anything. It ended in him sighing and slumping back in his chair as he sniffled, and she wrote him a pass.

From this point on, he would need to try and suck it up, so that he wouldn’t ruin this ridiculous but essential opportunity. His feelings luckily didn’t shake his focus and drive to get good grades, but rather such aspects as a person. It pained him to walk alongside Jeno and his friends, and aid Jeno in non-academic endeavors if he so wished. This sudden weight was so odd, he didn’t know what it was or where it came from. Definitely not from Jeno.

The other would keep looking over at him; First, he assumed it was for help, so he would perk up. When that wasn’t it, he would assume it was just him staring to stare (since Jaemin was more than willing to let him look him in the eyes). Both of those were wrong, and he wasn’t going to ponder on it, so he took these looks as some form of pity.

It seemed like forever when the end of the day came, and he damn nearly ran out of the school. He went to cut the long way back home, when he saw his mom was waiting for him outside. Great.
Jaemin hopped in the car.

“Hi, Jaem.” She sat with the engine off, and turned to him. God, did he want her to start the car. “I was thinking that we head out to a restaurant and have some dinner later tonight.”

“I have to call Jeno and set some things up, and I have homework to do.”

“Oh, Jaem, have you been crying?” An attempt was made to grab his chin, but it failed. She was the only one other than himself that could really tell any difference with his eyes. They were puffy around the lower waterline and a bit red, and irritated.

He pulled his phone out from the front of his bag and started dialing Jeno’s number. Empty words to Jeno were better than meaningful ones that would fall upon deaf ears. “Hello?”

“Oh, hey, Jaemin.”

“We didn’t do much today, so tomorrow I propose we do one session before school, one during lunch,” He sighed, and she started the car. “And one after school. You can come home with me if you would like. Same time the day after, minus the before school, and instead finish the tour..”

“Okay. That sounds okay with me.”

Jaemin put him on speakerphone as he put all that into his calendar. “Friday we can finish up with
“You coming home with me again, and then it’s over.”

“You’ll have to remind me of that.”

“Don’t worry, how can I forget when I have you on a leash like a puppy?”

There was a nervous chuckle from Jeno. “Um, Jaem? You know that there’s clubs and student organizations for, you know, peo-”

He hung up the phone and sighed, closing his eyes. His mother was looking over at him, he just knew it. If he had to take a guess at what Jeno was going to say, it was that there were clubs for LGBT. Which he wasn’t and he was just making blatant assumptions. Jaemin just wanted to go home and bury himself in his work, and then go to sleep.

The next time he picked up his phone was a little while later, when he had gotten home and was halfway through his work. Jeno had called twice, and that was it. Thankfully he wasn’t as insistent through telecommunications as he was through verbal communication. He called him back, this time keeping the phone to his ear.

“I’m sorry if I struck a nerve earlier. I’m being really invasive but-”

“Jeno, I cannot wait for this to be over. You are breaking me down and ruining my peaceful existence.” Jaemin threw his pencil down. “I hope you and Jiseok become great friends so that you
can leave me alone. Hang out with him instead of bothering me. Become more interested in what color my bruises would be rather than what my favourite color is. Let him set you up with a nice girl so you can stop poking into my, frankly, non-existent love life.”

He was silent for many moments.

“What is it?”

“What is what, Jeno.”

“What’s your favourite color?”

Jaemin grumbled and took a deep breath. “I don’t have one. What’s your point? In fact- What’s your goal? You keep patronizing me, oh- Jaemin are you okay? Are you violent? Are you gay? What’s wrong? What’s your favourite color?” His voice took on a mocking tone. “What questionnaire have you been given to get information on me?”

“Well.. I’m curious. I’ve never met anyone with scleric eyes. And you seem normal enough.”

“For god’s sake, you’re curious- I wasn’t aware! Glad I seem normal enough to have my privacy invaded. Why don’t you go ahead and ask me to send nudes while you’re at it.”

“... Would you?”
He scoffed and went to hang up the phone.

“Wait! Jaemin! I was kidding, it was a joke. Don’t hang up.”

“I’m confused as to why I am still on the phone. What do you want from me?”

“Perhaps before we head over to your house after school, we can go and get something to eat, or drink. Some type of snack.”

“I’m not allowed to go outside on my own. It’s dangerous for me, and my mom would never allow it.” Even if she was forcing him out into the world little by little. “Besides.. I have food at my house.”

Jeno sighed deeply. “You’re missing the point, but okay. I guess I’ll see you before school tomorrow.”

Jaemin didn’t want another second of this baffling, infuriating, and meaningless call, and didn’t hesitate to hang up as soon as he said that. He gave off such an uncomfortably different vibe that, again, brought him to tears, even through the phone. Hopefully the rest of the world was better than this school, and he wouldn’t ever have to feel this feeling Jeno gave him ever again.

+++
haha did i not update last week.. whoops.

fr though i was busy for friday and saturday and updating on sunday would have through me off so im sorry mvhfhfgh i hope this chapter made up for it
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

jaemin's mother knows best (even when she knows nothing).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

While Jeno was busy fulfilling some sort of request for Jiseok, presumably, he was dragging himself around his room. His Spotify was loaded up with tons of new music that he had yet to listen to as he tried to cleanse himself. His laptop sat on his desk, displaying a bootleg Buzzfeed article titled, ‘15 Ways To Improve Your Mood Instantly!’ For obvious reasons. One of the first bullets on the list was to clean your environment.

So here he was, pushing his bed to the corner of the room, shoving his bookcase against another wall, dragging his nightstand next to his bed. That was enough change for him. It felt different, but not quite enough to have his endorphins flowing.

“Jaemin..” His mother was knocking at his door again.

“Come in.” I guess.

She walked in and did a double take at her surroundings. “Oh.. You needed more room?”

“Yeah,” He hated small talk. “Space.”
“Well.. Are you feeling okay? Have you eaten? The sun is almost down,” She was probably about to head off to work, and wanted to make sure he was okay.

“I’ll eat. I still have quite some things to do.” Suddenly, he was praying that she didn’t see his desktop. It was a good thing, but his mother was one to worry; A bad thing was that she was also one to hover. Recently, it came as a blessing that she worked nights, now, because that meant he could be alone for a small window of time.

His mother sat down on the bed, opposite from where he was standing in front of the window. “I’m glad that you’re getting your work done. I think you should wake up extra early tomorrow, and eat breakfast with me.”

As much as he wanted to turn such an offer down, he had nothing to combat it that was logical, and that wouldn’t break her heart. “Sure. I can’t guarantee that I’ll stay long, though. Jeno, you know?”

“I… I know.” It seemed as though she was regretful for a few moments. “I’ll see you in the morning.” She pressed her lips together and left the room.

-  

The following morning was the hardest to get up to in a while. He was essentially slamming doors and shoving things around out of pure drowsiness, which barely wore off by the time he was ready and made it downstairs. His mom was laid on the couch, with food lying on the counter.

“Good morning, Jaem.” She sat up and rushed over to the table. “Lots of meat today, to prepare you for the commute to school.”
“Thanks,” Jaemin pulled out his chair and plopped down.

She looked like she had some sort of interjection, which was wiped away by her patting his head and smoothing his hair. He’d let her have that, if anything.

“I’m sure you’re aware that I won’t be able to get you a car. At least, not anytime soon. Again, I apologize for that, since you’re going to be a senior next year, and you know how to drive since you had enrolled in the driving course your school provided.. You know how things are, and eventually-”

“Thank you, mom. I already appreciate you putting clothes on my back, okay?”

“I’m sorry, that’s not what I am getting at, I just-” She sat down next to him. “I’m upset at myself for that. What I’m trying to say is, since we can’t yet afford a car, I bought you a bicycle.”

Jaemin looked up from where he was stuffing food into his mouth.

“L - Listen, Jaemin,” Her voice got a little shaky. “I know that you have to run from school sometimes. It is obvious how to have to run from people, and I was pondering on that. A bicycle would make the trip much easier.” She swallowed. “Uh.. Anyways, It would also let you travel, get places faster.”

He was thanking her far too much this morning, considering he was supposed to be mad at her, or upset with her - or whatever he was. It was amusingly contradictory how she was giving him something to travel with, but on terms that he was able to come home safe.
“I just don’t want you to feel trapped. It’s almost reaching that period in your life, and I feel guilty. Please don’t be afraid to live your life a little - because of me.” There were other factors, but that’s not what this was about. “Do you still remember how to ride a bicycle?”

When he was younger, his mother and father had taught him. “Yes.” It was one of the few memories that he liked to remember and hold dear to him about the latter third of their family.

“It’s by the door.” She stood up and rubbed his shoulder. “I’ll see you when you get home, Jaem.”

- 

His mother was more than right. He was there in half a song, and the lock and supervision would assure that his mother’s investment would be safe. While he was locking it up, he took notice of the smaller details. There were smaller carvings, essentially, in a lighter and sparklier grey, and the rest was a glossy black. Jaemin knew exactly what her vision was in the design. It made him swallow and stare at it with inconsolable sadness.

“Jaemin?” Jeno walked up next to him and he jumped. “I didn’t think you would actually be here this early.”

He grumbled and shook his head. “I want to get this over with.”

“That’s a nice bike,” His peer jogged along, to the library, presumably, as Jaemin began his trek.
“Thank you, I appreciate it,” Mothers had a thing for pleasing others unknowingly. Motherly instinct and influence.

“I have my license, so I drive. Even though I’m not far from the school, it’s good practice and adjustment. Maybe I can drive us to your place after school.”

Jaemin looked at Jeno. Not because he had suggested to drive them, but because he wondered how someone could have such atrocious mannerisms in their speech pattern but still portray what they meant to say. Jeno had a pretty average GPA and grades to be proud of, so how could he be such a different person?

“No?” He stopped in front of him.

“Yes, okay? I was thinking about something.”

“Was it your favourite color?”

“Oh my god,” Jaemin sighed into his hands and walked around him. “Not this again.”

“You still haven’t told me. I asked you, what? A day ago? It’s a simple question. And you can’t say that you don’t have one, because everyone has a set of colors that they tend to lean towards.”

Jaemin opened the library door and held it for Jeno. “Fine. Black.”
“That’s a lie.” Jeno stood in the doorway and challenged him.

“For fuck’s sake..” He mumbled under his breath.

“You have the dirtiest mouth,” Jeno continued out. “It’s a lie because nobody likes their eye color.”

He opened his mouth in shock. That should be offensive, but it wasn’t, and he hated how true it was. Last year he had taken psychology (not to mention he walked around a building full of insecure teenagers every day) and he knew this. “You’re too smart for your own good. I’m not putting my hands on you, so move, or I’m finding another entrance.”

“So, it’s not any of the colors on the darker end of the spectrum.”

+++}

Chapter End Notes

dont you love it when your internet goes out the day that you need to update bc me too

heres that update, another one is coming on friday as per usual. thank you for all the wonderful comments and support that continues to roll in, i will never stop expressing how grateful i am that people like my niche idea so much ;,,)
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

jeno's getting warmer.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Surprisingly enough, it seemed as though a day ushering Jeno around wasn’t as bad as normal. Jeno’s clique of unnecessarily narcissistic and pushy friends were on their typical eye-roll level behavior. As gloomy as the entire day was, as per usual, it felt brighter. Assuming it was the bicycle, he would be easy on his mother.

“Hey, I don’t know where you live,” Jeno stopped him when he was just about to get on his bicycle.

Ah, fuck. They did plan out one of the off-campus study sessions for today. “Okay, then I can lead the way.” He swung his leg over the seat, almost sitting down when Jeno pulled him up by the waist. “Don’t touch me, stop it-”


Of course. To go with Jeno’s high qualifying grades and academic resume, he could drive himself. That rang a bell, so perhaps he had let it slip his mind. “What am I to do with my bicycle?”

Jeno rolled his eyes. “I don’t drive a tiny clown car. Put it in the trunk.”
Jaemin took a deep breath and bit his tongue. With a spiteful look, he got off. Jeno - unexpectedly - so graciously grabbed the handlebars and led it on the way to his car. “I’m starting to lean towards it being silver, or one of the colors that isn’t really a color.”

“Please stop,” He looked at him and groaned.

“Okay, for now.. What’s your favourite show?”

“The Universe’s Star.”

“Wow, you didn’t skip a beat on that one. What’s it about?”

An annoyed look came onto his face, naturally, and he wasn’t sure why. This was an opportunity to talk about something he liked. For once, the inquirer actually looked interested. “The main character, who is obsessed with a celebrity, gets hit by a car and becomes a grim reaper.”

“Sounds.. Fun.”

“Let me finish. When he is losing motivation to live, she comes back to life to save him and make sure he’s able to live longer and see the value in life, and how much he does and is doing for people.”

Jeno’s eyes widened and he stopped in his tracks. “Wow..”
“Did you expect me to say something like Idol Room or Hello Counselor?”

“No, just not that deep and meaningful.”

“You obviously don’t know me, then. Let’s keep going, come on,” He grabbed the bicycle by the spine and pulled it.

“We’re at my car, and that’s why I asked. So I can know.”

Jaemin narrowed his eyes. “Mhm. Hope you do well with that knowledge.” He looked at the car in front of them. It was silver, and had a big trunk, a medium sized front seat, and a considerably smaller back seat. A normal car, wasn’t too expensive or flashy. Modest.

“Like the color?” The other popped open the trunk, picking up his bicycle.

For the moment he lifted it, his muscles flexed inside of his shirt. Nobody at this school, based on his observation, really had any sort of muscle. This was new. In turn, he was staring at his biceps.

Jeno noticed him staring, and Jaemin immediately flushed red. Now, this could go one of many ways. He could out him for it, and use it to make fun of him. He could out him for it and use it to out him in some sort of way. He could act like he didn’t see it and just tell Jiseok. Or he could ignore it.
“Don’t say anything cheesy, I know I have muscles, okay?” He chuckled and raised his eyebrows as he shut the trunk. “After you.”

The two of them got in. A strong scent of fast food was present, which was expected. It was clean, orderly, and not a bad environment. He leaned back in the seat and closed his eyes. For once in the entire time they had known each other, Jeno hadn’t made a single attempt to talk to him in the journey to his house, aside from the occasional request for directional queues. They reached a stoplight, and he turned to him.

“Are you nervous or something? Is it finally catching up to you, the rumors of me being a psychopath and mysterious non-human being?” Jaemin made an attempt to scare him.

Jeno simply leaned back and stared at the red light. “I can’t talk while I drive, or I’ll get too distracted, or invested in talking.”

“Shocker,” He chuckled and shook his head. “Left. My house is on the corner.”

It didn’t take long for them to pull in, and for him - Jeno - to pull his bicycle out of the trunk. His mother would probably be thrilled to see him coming home with someone; Less thrilled when she would realize this was his Scholar program assigned student. He took his time walking them inside, just in case she was unprepared and in case they were disturbing her.

“Jaemin!” She was walking down the stairs. “Hi, oh my god, hello.” Her hands were wet, so she wiped them off on the shirt to be able to stick her hand out towards Jeno. “I’m Jaemin’s mother, I’m glad to have you over.”
“This is Jeno,” He flatlined and held a blank look on his face. Truly conveying that this wasn’t a friend, it wasn’t anyone special, it was the ridiculous student he was supposed to mentor and the one that she reported for harassment.

“Apologies, Jeno, I’m just very protective of my Jaeminnie, here,” She sighed.

He took out her hand with a smile. “I can tell. It’s understandable. He takes pretty good care of himself, though. Frustrating to converse with.”

“I see.. Well, I’m just going to be walking around. You can act as if I’m not here, I’m sure Jaemin has everything under control, but let me know if you need anything,” Her place in this situation was beginning to falter.

“We’ll be in the kitchen.” Jaemin slid past her. “Thank you.”

It took her a surprise, due to her high expectations. She really wanted to him to study in his room. Without even asking, he knew. All she wanted was for him to have friends and have fun, so he wasn’t upset about that.

Jeno followed along, looking around. If he was looking to find pictures, there weren’t any. All of them were upstairs within the confines of the rooms. Considering that their family was a taboo, even just to look at, nobody deserved to see them. The kitchen table was fairly empty in comparison to the rest of the surfaces; The one that wasn’t cluttered with decorations.

“Are you hungry or anything?” He shoved his bag on a chair next to him.
“I think I’m okay,” Jeno sat back.

“Didn’t you say that you wanted to go somewhere and eat?” Jaemin squinted his eyes.

“I could always eat whatever I want when I crave it.”

Jaemin scoffed and leaned forward. “What you want to study first? Your literature teacher told me you needed a bit of help, so maybe we can do that right now.” He feigned to notice Jeno looking at all of the distracting things in the room, and, ultimately, looking for pictures.

“Your mom likes cool toned colors. Maybe you like cool toned colors.”

“Now isn’t the time, Jeno, you can bother me later. We’re studying.” The black eyed one pushed his advanced literature book at him. “It has good notes, and is far better than what they’re giving you as far as understanding goes.”

“I’m holding you to that,” Jeno grinned and pulled a notebook out of his bag (which, Jaemin almost strangled him for tossing onto the table).

+++
okay at this point honestly im gonna say that updates are to be expected between friday and sunday bc my life has gotten WAY more busy than it was before

and you know what, im gonna say it,

this story has the best tiny little congregation of readers i luv u all
All that was left on their tour of the school was the classroom halls, which would be useless. Jeno had already been around a lot of them, and he wasn’t going to get involved in anything further, since it was too late in both the year and the commitment period. The two were walking down the halls, simply, because he already knew his way around.

“Shouldn’t we have done this before? When I barely knew where anything was?”

“You know- You know very well why we didn’t finish that,” Jaemin glared at him. The only reason they were talking, and he didn’t have his headphones in to mute everything, was because Jeno had insisted on it, blackmailing him with the threat of telling his counselor.

“You could have just told me you weren’t feeling well, and I could have withheld my knowledge to make you feel better later on,” He began walking backwards in front of him.

“You’re the worst,” Jaemin pushed him with his shoulder and sped ahead. “Come on, I don’t want to be walking around forever.”

Jeno rolled his eyes. “Listen, it’s not even that bad. There’s nobody around, we could do whatever we want. Even if we take our time, we’ll have time left over. More time to study, right?”
“We don’t need another before school session,” He had this all calculated out, there was no way they had missed something.

“Noo.. Jaemin,” The taller of the two leaned into him. “I just need tutoring, you know this. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have been pushed into this program. My grades are good for a reason. Because I get tutoring. The stuff I learn needs to be shoved into my head in order for me to understand it to any degree.”

“Is that why you still haven’t gotten the memo to not be so annoying?” Jaemin shoved him back. It soon turned into a shoving match, which completely registered as a fight to him, but Jeno was smiling. He’d forgotten who was stronger here; A shout was let out. To prevent himself from falling, he grabbed onto his shoulders. In turn, Jeno wrapped his arm around Jaemin’s waist, and pulled him up (him holding onto his shoulders wasn’t doing much).

Jeno was looking at him with what could be registered as pity. “Maybe you should have paid more attention to my muscles.”

“Quit it,” He was pushed away. “I have no reason to.”

“Pull something like that again and I’ll have to catch you,” A lunge made for his waist made him stumble a little bit.

“And you wonder why my mother reported you for bullying,” Jaemin scowled and kept on walking.
“I know why,” Jeno was walking awfully close to him. “It’s because you’re precious cargo. Duh.”

“What, like a snake? A circus animal?”

“No. Uh… Maybe a cat? Like a panther?”

“You absolute jerk,” Jaemin scoffed. “Yeah, I have black hair and black eyes. Black panther, ha ha.”

“You look into things too much. I was talking about, like, how they’re soft and can be gentle, but are generally ferocious. It’s basically you in a nutshell. I wasn’t making some dumb comparison that you’ve probably heard a million times since last year.”

Considering his nature, he highly doubted that. But whatever made him content; So far, it seemed like he hadn’t once poked fun at him at his expense, but there had to be some underlying deceit and spite in it all. “Thanks. I appreciate you- You know what, just.. Thank you for the compliment.” If he thought things through too much - which, he had never heard from anyone before (then again, nobody but his mother knew him) - than he would work on that.

“Speaking of your mom, I felt like I was intruding the other day. Maybe we could study at the place that I had originally wanted to.”

Just as before, he wanted to reply with an instant, outstanding no, but he couldn’t. His mother had gotten him a bicycle for this exact reason; To get out at least a little bit to get a sense of the world. As embarrassing as it was, he didn’t know much about the world, other than the way it tended to perceive him. “Fine. Tell me where it is, and I’ll meet you there.”
“I can drive you, you know,” Jeno didn’t waste a second replying to his response that had taken a few moments to form.

“I have to head home first, to grab some money.”

“I can pay for you.”

“I’m a vegetarian.”

“Any specific reason?” Jeno furrowed his eyebrows, clearly doubting him.

“My mom is.”

“So you have no restrictions against eating meat?”

He didn’t really like where this was going. “Make a remark about me being gay and I will-”

“I’m buying you a burger,” The other looked at him blankly. “Not everything is some sort of joke with me. I don’t think you realize I’m not an offense asshole like most people are to you. You’ve never done anything wrong to me, and I’m not scared of you.”
Jaemin realized that they had stopped at the end of the hall. In this moment, Jeno’s eyes were burning into him with command. He was speechless, to be quite frank. The rest of his words were mostly empty space, empty promises that he hadn’t paid enough attention to prove to be true. It was that he wasn’t scared of him. Scared was an umbrella term in his case; Ignorant, disrespectful, pensive, were attachments. Not only had Jeno tolerated him, but he wasn’t scared of him.

“Let’s just go back to the library-”

Jeno grabbed his arm and he tensed up. It made his anxiety go from zero to one hundred. If Jeno wasn’t scared of him, he had a whole new power and influence over him, that scared Jaemin himself. His eyes teared up, his breathing stopped, and he swallowed.

That look was full of pity. The look that he gave him seeing that he was on the verge of breaking down just because he was holding his arm. “I mean it,” Jeno loosened his grip.

+++ 

Chapter End Notes

im finally writing ahead of time someone give me a cookie
everyone is a ride or die for jaemin and i felt that
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

jaemin and jeno's trip outside, pt1.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After school, Jaemin’s heart was beating a million miles a minute on the way home. He wanted to take his time, but his anxiety took hold of the pedals, arriving there within minutes. His mother stood up and rushed over the second she saw him panting.

“It’s fine, it’s fine, I promise,” He swallowed. “I’ve got to go out with Jeno. He wants to study at a restaurant that is right next to the school. I have the address, if you want it. I just wanted to rush back so that I wouldn’t leave him waiting for too long.”

“Why didn’t you just go with him?” Her face was full of shock. Still absorbing the fact that, a day after she had let her son off of his leash, he was going outside.

Jaemin swallowed. “I wanted to let you know.”

“You could have called me.”

As his mother, and the person who knew him the best, she could most likely feel the fear and anxiety that was pulsing through him. “Let me just go and get ready. I need to grab my money, anyways.” Finally an excuse that was viable. He sighed and quickly went upstairs. To be truthful, his money was in his backpack. It always was. All he needed was some time to let out some air before he exploded.
A few minutes later, his mother was shaking his shoulders. “You fell asleep. It’s been five minutes.” She had gotten worried about him, about how he was feeling.

He shot up and rubbed his eyes. “I’m sorry, I was tired.”

“Baby.. Did you take your medicine?”

“Yes,” Jaemin groaned.

“Maybe we should get you out more. I don’t want to up your dosage.” Simple anxiety medicine, that could go wrong if they weren’t careful. “I noticed it hasn’t been working lately. And apparently you’ve been extra aggressive, as indicated by Jeno. So the side effects are taking place..”

It felt as though he was guilty of something, but he wasn’t. Made him feel bad, made him upset, like he let his mother down.

“I think it’s good that you’re going out. Maybe we can take you off of it if you keep it up.”

“I’ll try,” He yawned. “I’m going now. You can call me, or something, Whenever you feel like it.” Jaemin lifted himself off the bed and grabbed his backpack. “I’ll let you know when I’m coming back. Thanks, mom.”
The ride to the restaurant was scary. With his only pair of sunglasses on, and his hood up and drawn over his face. It made his heart pound to by whizzing down the street around handfuls of people. Each pedal closer he got to the restaurant, the bigger the number of handfuls grew. There were no bicycle racks at the restaurant, so he was left looking for Jeno. If only he had paid more attention and remembered what color his car was. Jaemin stumbled around, looking into every car, maybe an indicator that he was around.

He groaned and sighed. After twenty minutes of walking around, he realized that his anxiety had clouded his brain. Why hadn’t he just *called* him.

“Hello?”

Jaemin whipped his head around, until Jeno came into his line of sight. Apparently, he was waiting, leaning against the trunk of his car.

“How long have you been watching me stumble around like an idiot,” He grumbled.

“Why are you bundled up.. They’re going to think you’re coming in to rob them,” Jeno looked him up and down, at his baggy clothes, hidden face, sunglasses.

“I’m not trying to get robbed or jumped myself. Can we just eat?” Jaemin was rushing him, and tried pulling him inside.

“I wanted to study while we eat,” Clearly, the message and the aura that he was giving off wasn’t getting through to the other, who was trying to make eye contact with him. It was extremely difficult for him to do so, though. Obviously. That was the point of wearing sunglasses, since they blended in with his eyes.
Jaemin glared at him. “Can we just go back to my place? My mom won’t mind, you’ve been there before.” Someone walked by, incidentally bumping into him. His voice lowered to a mumble and he swallowed.

Jeno hadn’t been around anyone that was like this, which was quite mind-boggling for him. Though, he had heard about such signs of nervousness, and social anxiety. He looked at him and detected instant anxiousness in his disposition. “Do you wanna eat in the car?”

“Yes,” He gripped the handlebars of his bicycle.

“Nice,” The bicycle was lifted out of his hands. “There’s a bike rack around the side, but I assume you don’t have a lock. Guess its going in the car with us.” They shuffled along to his car, Jaemin watching him as he pushed down the seats in the back and set the bike near the back. “Now there’s enough room. Pretty sure I have some blankets stuffed under the seat.”

“Okay.”

He sighed and furrowed his eyebrows at him. “You’re really shy, huh?”

“Shy is an understatement, you idiot,” Jaemin grumbled under his breath.

“There’s no need to curse me out. You stay here, and I’ll get the food,” Jeno held the keys out to him. “Assuming you know how to start the car, you can turn on the air conditioning. Hop in the back, and lock the doors.”
Jaemin grabbed the keys and jumped in to wait for him, immediately.

Okay then, Jeno thought. Couldn’t blame him. If he was scared to be outside alone, being inside a car, trapped, would be no different. It must be dangerous outside for him. “Try not to crash my car.”

“I’ll run you over with it.” He brought his knees up to his chest.

“I heard that, just wait here.” Jeno shut the door. Jaemin was still snarky and sharp, through his moments of fear. What a character. Who knew if he was like this all the time? Honestly, he was dying to know. Not out of some errand for Jiseok, or another kid, either.

+++  

Chapter End Notes  

whats this? a tiny bit of jeno insight at the end owo? (i wanna do not living omg dgtkstrhsbtr) i think this might be my favourite (at the moment, i have other things planned) scene ive written so far, the second half is already sososo cute :,,(
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

a taste of friendship.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He counted the minutes, and it took Jeno approximately fifteen to leave and return with their food. About ten minutes in, he realized that Jeno had paid for it all when Jaemin had brought money to prevent just that. Guess it could be for gas, since he told him to turn on the air conditioning. Did that take gas? Who knows.

Jaemin saw him coming and crawled over to the door to unlock it and open it for him. “About time.”

“You sound very threatening at a whisper,” Jeno pushed the bags towards him and climbed in. “Let me pull out the blankets, it’s kind of cold in here.” He reached a hand down under the front passenger seat and pulled out the messiest, most jumbled up bunch of blankets he could imagine.

The other began to dig through the bags, full of french fries and wrapped patties, as well as some drinks shoved inside. “Where’s my food?”

“I told you, I got you a burger and fries.”

“I didn’t think you were serious,” Jaemin held his hands up when Jeno threw the blanket at him.
“It’s good. And, it’s comfort food, so it should calm you down,” He threw the blanket around his shoulders. “Lucky you wore a sweater.”

“It’s thin.” The smell, which he had just realized, enticed him to pull out some fries and a burger. He munched on some of the fries while he opened the burger wrapper. “What’s a burger patty made out of?”

“Take off your hood and glasses. You look weird.” Jeno unwrapped his halfway and took a bite. “Cow.”

“Oh, okay,” Jaemin eyed it. He looked up and raised his eyebrows. “Wait- What do you mean I look weird?”

“You look like you don’t want to be seen inside a car. Nobody can see in here, unless they press their face against the window, so you should be fine.” By now, he was a little bit used to seeing his eyes.

“Fine,” He pushed his hood off and shoved his glasses up onto his head.

Jeno could now see him. The way his eyes were wide and curious looking at the burger, eyeing it since, clearly, he had never seen one so close before. It was innocently precious. Never had he met someone so oblivious and unaware of the immediate world around them. He watched him take a bite, looking straight at the burger. His eyes lit up and he chewed it with sheer enjoyment.

“Thank you,” Jaemin said when he finished chewing, taking another bite as soon as the words left his mouth.
“Wow, I think that’s the first time you’ve ever said something blatantly nice to me,” Jeno pulled out a ketchup, peeling off the lid and placing it between them. “You’re welcome. Glad I can be the one to break your streak.”

He sucked some ketchup from the burger off of his fingers. “Don’t be cocky, I just like it a lot.”

“I’ve found your Achilles heel,” Jeno took a sip of his drink. “As long as I stuff you with good food, you’ll shut up.”

Jaemin hated to admit that, and tried to glare at him, but instead pouted and took another bite. He wasn’t aware that he was scarfing down the burger, and shoving fries in within intervals, as well as sipping on the soda he was given. All the while, being eyed when he wasn’t paying attention. It was obvious that he wasn’t built to be a vegetarian; Not when he was eating this burger like he had never eaten a meal before. Jeno simply watched in amusement and ate his food as he normally would.

His burger began to whittle down to the wrapper, and he looked up at the other. “What?” Jaemin narrowed his eyes.

“Nothing, nothing.” Jeno couldn’t finish the food he had gotten, but the other had no problem scarfing it down in the time it had taken him to eat a quarter of his. “Do you wanna start studying now?” He shoved the burger in the bag with his fries and sipped his drink.

“You’re not going to finish..?” His black eyes looked brighter than ever peering into the bag to see how much food he had left.
Jeno pushed the bag towards him, scoffing in amusement.

“No, I just wanted to know-”

“So that you could have it. Take it,” He tried to hold back a smile before he reached under the seat, where he had gotten the blankets from, for his backpack. “You don’t need to get your stuff anyways, it’s straight out of this book I have.”

Jaemin laid on his stomach and pulled Jeno’s unfinished food out of the bag. It was awfully generous; At this point, he had basically paid for both of their meals, and now they had just become his meals. If he wasn’t sacrificing his own time and helping him with his work, he would feel way more guilty. He felt guilty around Jeno, no matter what.

- 

“Make sure you do the work, okay..? Just.. Do the evens, and I’ll check them,” Jaemin nodded the best he could with his head in his arms. He was trying his best to suppress his yawns by taking in deep breaths. That had really filled him up and made him feel extremely fatigued; The only other time he had felt like this was when he had gorged himself on neoguri, once.

“You got it,” Jeno obviously noticed it more than he knew. His eyes were heavy, his body was still, and he was slightly slurring his speech. Meat could do that, and giving it to a vegetarian - well, not anymore - was like a drug. He was also on his stomach, lying parallel to Jaemin. While he was still awake, he did the whole page as practice. His help had actually been working.. The whole page was done in a minute without struggle.

A few minutes was a few too long for Jaemin. When Jeno looked over at him, he was fully relaxed, his face peacefully cradled in his arms in the softest expression he had ever seen him wear. He
looked so comfortable and tiny, under his warm, knitted blanket, curled up and sleeping.

His sleep proved to be heavier than ever when he hopped into the front seat and drove him home. Upon arrival, he stared back at him. Still asleep, probably the happiest he would ever be in his presence. Jeno shoved the fast food bags under the seat, so that his mom wouldn’t see and get upset. He would be thoroughly upset to lose his tutor.

“Jeno?” Jaemin’s mother opened the door with a worried look on her face. He had knocked on the door without Jaemin, so she was naturally worried that something had gone wrong.

“Hi, Ms.,” Jeno didn’t want to alarm her, and carried a gentle tone. “He’s in my car, he’s sleeping.”

“Oh,” She let out a huge breath, holding her chest. “Okay.” Assuming the silver car in the driveway was his, she saw him through the rear window.

“He was really tired,” Jeno popped open the trunk; Still, he slept. “Oh, no, I can do it. I wouldn’t want you to strain yourself,” He kneeled in when she reached in to bring him inside.

Jaemin’s arms were curled in, and he was in the perfect position to be lifted up. One arm hooked under his knees, and the other cradled his back. The blanket was still wrapped around him, like he had tried to swaddle himself.

“Are you on the football team?” Jaemin’s mother was staring at him stand up straight with her son in his arms.
“No. I just keep myself in good shape,” He looked up. “Can you show me where his room is?”

“No. I just keep myself in good shape,” He looked up. “Can you show me where his room is?”

“Of course,” She guided him inside. “So, he’s your Scholar kid?”

“Yeah. He’s really good at it, considering that he’s not the nicest person when you first get to know him.” Jeno chuckled nervously.

“Yeah. He’s really good at it, considering that he’s not the nicest person when you first get to know him.” Jeno chuckled nervously.

“Mhm..” She bit her lip. “Well, it’s just a good thing that you are a nice person. I cannot express my regret for reporting you, I don’t know a single person who would do this for him, or be willing to tolerate how he can be sometimes. He’s not mean, I promise.”

“Mhm..” She bit her lip. “Well, it’s just a good thing that you are a nice person. I cannot express my regret for reporting you, I don’t know a single person who would do this for him, or be willing to tolerate how he can be sometimes. He’s not mean, I promise.”

“Trust me, it’s okay. I’ve dealt with worse people. High school, you know?” Jeno grinned at her as they walked side by side up the stairs. Jaemin’s head lolled back a bit, almost bumping into the turn in the banister, before he caught it and held it gently. “I get that he has to protect himself and he can’t exactly trust anyone.”

“Trust me, it’s okay. I’ve dealt with worse people. High school, you know?” Jeno grinned at her as they walked side by side up the stairs. Jaemin’s head lolled back a bit, almost bumping into the turn in the banister, before he caught it and held it gently. “I get that he has to protect himself and he can’t exactly trust anyone.”

“Does he trust you?”

“Does he trust you?”

That was a good question, did he? “I would ask him. I’m assuming the answer is no, because we’ve only known each other for a week. I’m not upset if he doesn’t.” He felt him take in a deep breath. “Seems like you’ve raised a trustworthy son, though.”

That was a good question, did he? “I would ask him. I’m assuming the answer is no, because we’ve only known each other for a week. I’m not upset if he doesn’t.” He felt him take in a deep breath. “Seems like you’ve raised a trustworthy son, though.”

“Thank you,” She swallowed. “Here, let me get that.” Jaemin’s door was plain, and when she pushed open the door, his room looked slightly different from the rest of the house. Nice, though, and he could see him residing here. He gently set him down on his bed and peered down at him.
“I don’t think I’m getting my blanket back,” Jeno sighed, smiling.

“He can get it back to you. Just not now,” She nodded, biting the inside of her cheek.

The other male was looking at Jaemin, and she was looking at him. She already trusted him. It was difficult to fake being nice to her son, and even if they had only known each other for a week, that was long enough for her to trust him with Jaemin. The only conflicting factor was, why? Why was he going out with him to study, and being friendly, and going the extra mile? All for a social outcast that he had just met.

+++  

Chapter End Notes  

this was so cute even if jaemin hasn't opened up yet :,,) apologies if this looks like a checklist because of how many lines there are. there's a lot of dialogue fdgstbhgfvgtdbf
Jaemin awoke the next morning, hazy and unaware of what time it was - or where he was, for that matter. Last time he checked, he was in the back of Jeno’s car, studying. He sat up - realizing that he still had Jeno’s blanket. Yet, he was still in his own bed. His confusion carried him down the stairs, where his mom was cooking.

“Jaem, what’s wrong? Why are you awake?” She slightly moved the food in the pan around.

“I have to go to school..”

“You shouldn’t be up for another hour,” She hummed. “But I suppose that you should have enough sleep, after all. Jeno brought you home, because you fell asleep while you were helping him study.”

He raised his eyebrows when she adjusted the blanket that was still around his shoulders. “I need to give this back..”

“It’s Friday, so you can do that today. Since you’re awake early,” She stroked his hair before turning back to their breakfast, “What’s going on with you? You’ve been really closed off lately. Jeno says that you’ve been aggressive, and I know it’s not because of your medicine, since you stopped taking it yesterday and you have been much nicer.”
“It’s nothing,” Jaemin sat in a chair with his knees to his chest.

“Jaemin, I need to know what is going on with you.”

“I’m serious, nothing. I don’t feel anything, and I don’t do anything,” He shrugged. “Normal, just as usual. There’s nothing to worry about.” His chest tightened up as he rubbed his eyes. Simply thinking about opening up to his mother when she could possibly use anything against him, suddenly, made him not want to talk at all, even answer a ‘how was your day?’

“Please take care of yourself, Jaemin,” The look she gave him was the worst, and made his chest burn. It was the same one that his father used to give him when he said the same things. “Love you. Get ready for school, you still have an hour until you were supposed to be ready, so take your time.”

He stood up and rubbed his eyes. “Okay..”

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Jaemin used his extra hour to pace around his room nervously. In turn, he basically tore apart his whole room to make more change. He needed to get used to change, after all, since next year was senior year - aka, year of the biggest changes he would ever go through. His mother was already pushing him to start getting comfortable with being an actual person in society. End of junior year exams? The least of his stresses.

He stumbled out of the house, more stressed than ever. To an extent, being Jeno’s babysitter had been a distraction from the pressure building up on him. What else was Jeno? His bodyguard. Was
he supposed to walk around the school safely, now? There was no normal person to cover for him.

On his ride to school, he somehow popped a tire. Amazing. He was only a block from the school, and thankfully the time that he had shaved off gave him plenty to walk. To occupy himself during this walk, he put in his headphones. Currently, he was really liking slower, more melodic tracks - Palette by IU was at his top played. He scrolled through Youtube to see what was recommended. Jaemin hummed at the suggestion ‘top 10 plot twists in kpop mvs’. Maybe he would watch that later on.

His eye also caught on to a car that was slowly driving up to him, and he panicked. The school was within his view, but not yet any students. He stopped and scurried to the other side of his bicycle, in case he was to use it as a poor shield, or shove it forward as an obstacle.

“Jaemin,” The window rolled down, and Jeno leaned out on both arms. “What are you doing?” He found it amusing to watch him scurry around to the other side of his bicycle, and was trying to contain his laughter.

“I’m walking,” Jaemin looked down, ashamed that he had slightly made a fool of himself. “My tire popped.”

“You know the drill,” Jeno sighed and climbed out.

“What?” His grip on the bars tightened when he thrust his hands out.

“Give me your bike, so I can put it in the trunk.” The tone in his voice made it seem as though it was obvious.
“You don’t have to be nice to me anymore, I’m not your Scholar,” Jaemin glared at him and kept walking.

“About that,” Jeno caught one of the pegs on the back wheel with his foot. “I don’t think we should risk being late, so you should get in.”

Jaemin threw a slight tantrum and whined, stomping his foot. “Take my bicycle, I don’t care. You’ll pay for it. Literally.” As if Jeno would ever have the upper hand on him. He was already stressed, and bickering with the peanut gallery would only make him angry. His tantrum continued as he stomped away towards the school after shoving his own bicycle to the ground.

Jeno caught it before it could take any serious damage. “Jaemin!” He jogged up to him and pulled him back by the waist.

Maybe if he was quicker, he would have gotten the chance to actually pick him up. Those chances also would have increased if Jaemin wasn’t able to defend himself. He grabbed the arms wrapped around him and kicked his knee before using his shoulder to attempt to knock the wind out of his lungs. Jeno fell to the ground, disoriented. His techniques were weak and self taught, but effective on high school boys.

“Jesus fucking christ,” Jeno panted, lying a hand on his stomach.

“I’m sorry!” There was almost no apologetic tone in his voice. “You can’t just grab me like that, and not expect me to act on reflexes! You should know that I need to protect myself and if someone grabs me, I’m going to go off!”
“Let’s hope I can drive after this,” He stood up and took in a deep breath.

“You have less than a block, stop being so dramatic.”

“Stop being so aggressive,” Jeno grabbed his face between his thumb and pointer finger, squeezing his cheeks and shaking his head affectionately. It made him huff and tear his face away. The two of them proceeded to get in once he pushed his bicycle into the trunk.

Jaemin was now grumpy and slightly annoyed, as per usual being around Jeno. He glared at him while he drove into the parking lot. “You deserved that.”

“Okay, I get it, you live in a bubble and if I come inside, I’ll be the one to burst. Can I ask you something? Or, rather, suggest something?”

“What?”

“Uuum..” Jeno gripped the steering wheel and took a deep breath. “Can you be my tutor? Like, across the board, and not just for a week because the school told you so.”

“What?” He turned his attention fully to him. “Just get a tutor that the school can provide, or pay for one.”

“The thing is,” The car pulled into a parking space. Jaemin was thinking about just getting out, but he remembered that he had to be a little nicer. “I would rather not. I’m doing fine right now, and you’re tolerating me, considering that I just got here, near the end of the year, and in retrospect,
I’ve done pretty good this past week since you were my Scholar.”

Jaemin sat up and crossed his arms. Was he considering it? On a flattering level, yes. His tutoring skills were so good that he wanted to keep him? He’d take any sort of positive boost he could get. Yet, he was refusing it because he didn’t know what this entailed, and he still didn’t understand what the hell he was going on, being around him for. Not one reason popped into his head when he thought about him going to any extent that was nice. “Only because you’re nice to me. Turn on me and I’ll ruin your fucking life,” He raised his fist and Jeno flinched. Now you’re scared of me, huh? He wanted to blurt out. “You can text me anytime that you want to study and I’ll see if I can.”

“Thanks,” Jeno smiled at him as he hopped out of the car and rushed into the school.

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Chapter End Notes

ngl i was laughing so fucking hard writing this, jeno really tried it. also, was i listening to palette while writing this? absolutely i was. stan iu / gd.

thank u all for the nice comments and feedback on here, curiouscat, and twitter! it makes me heart warm even if its just a ’nice’ (yes, i've gotten comments on things saying just 'nice') and the comments yall leave make my heart burst <333
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

jaemin decides to turn over the piece of paper and see what’s on the other side.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Fast forward a week, and Jaemin was eternally confused. Jeno had asked him for academic help about every other day, and they would sit in the library for about an hour to study. Why was he confused? Between each question, or few questions, he would slip in something as if they were in normal conversation.

What’s your favourite food? ‘‘Burgers, thanks to you.’’ You’re welcome.

Have you ever been to the aquarium? ‘‘That’s a dumb question, Jeno, I don’t go anywhere.’’

What do you like to do in your free time? ‘‘Focus on the problem.’’

It was out of nothing but pure curiosity, he realized, because who wouldn’t want to know stuff about No-Face? Speaking of his ‘alter ego’, he hadn’t heard that name in quite a while, and received minimal bullying, Shocking? Yes. Guess they were too busy with tests to torture him.

He tried his best to answer his questions, even if they seemed a little stupid. Deep down, he hated to admit, he liked the attention. Ever since he had gotten off of his anxiety medication, he was more easily affected, but he hadn’t been. If anything, he was way more relaxed.
“Are you doing anything next Saturday?” Jeno tapped on Jaemin’s paper with his pen.

“You know me well enough to answer your own questions at this point,” He leaned against his hand with a blank look. This week was a few tests, so it was him who was working his ass off, just to ensure he knew the material. Jeno was tagging along, for whatever reason.

“You should be doing stuff, you have a bike now,” His voice feigned having a whiny tone. “Have you ever been to a costume store?”

“Is that a jab at me, Lee Jeno?”

“No, I’m curious. Costume shops are so fun, you can mess around, as long as you put everything back, you can buy stuff, you can do so much. It’s really fun, and I used to go to them all the time when I was younger with my mom.”

“I already have enough of a costume on. I’ve never been,” Jaemin resumed working in his workbook.

“You should come with me, next Saturday, to one that’s thirty minutes away from here.”

His anxiety began to rise and he looked up. “Why? What do you mean- I mean, what do you gain from bringing me along?”

“I just saw all the blood rush from your face,” Jeno rested his chin in his palm. “I don’t have anyone else to go with. You need stuff to do, and your mom says that you need to get out of the
“What, are you friends with my mother now?” Jaemin swallowed and blinked a few times in a row to fight back his completely unwarranted tears.

“You look scared.” After all, Jaemin’s head was lowered, almost on top of the pages of his book, and looked like he was cowering away from the conversation. “Very threatening. Should I withdraw my offer?”

“I still don’t see why I have any reason to come along.” He ran his fingers through the thick of his hair.

“It’ll be better than the restaurant, even if you didn’t even go inside ,” Jeno rolled his eyes. “You’d be surprised how nice the people there are. And if you’re scared about your eyes,” He pointed at each one slowly, noticing how he could see what would be his pupils were following his finger, “I bet they would just think you liked wearing contacts. You’d be surprised how many people there wear contacts, they might just think you like wearing the black out ones. It’s a costume shop .”

Jaemin huffed and continued to work on his problems. “I’ll think about it.”

“Maybe then you’ll tell me what your favourite color is, or accidentally reveal it,” Jeno smiled.

“You’re absolutely awful,” He groaned and rested his face against the book.
At the moment, Jaemin was curious as to how next Saturday would go. He was taking his time, riding home. The breeze was hitting his face, from both the weather and how fast he was whizzing along the street. Feeling the weather was nice and therapeutic for his stressful mind. Going outside was something that he wished to do more often, but didn’t have the will to do so. The second he approached his house, he sighed and slowed down. The delightful breeze ceased blowing, and his hair flopped back down into his eyes. It was messed up, but looks didn’t matter, in his case.

He pushed his bicycle inside and rested it against the wall, as per usual. The same old weekend cycle, getting ready to do nothing but study and sit alone while his mom bustled around the house.

“Jaemin!” His mother called out, her footsteps descending the stairs next to him. “I need you to come to the store with me.”

“What- You know I don’t like coming to the store,” He whined.

“You know I don’t like leaving you at home alone,” She reached the bottom step and slipped on her shoes. “I couldn’t get to the store today because they closed off the main road going that way, but they’ve opened it back up for a few hours. Come on, some fresh air won’t kill you.”

When he had asked for fresh air and therapeutic outdoor time, this isn’t what he meant. He groaned and moved out of her way so that she could grab her keys out of the dish.

“Your hair is a mess, you look like you went through a wind tunnel,” She shook her head. “Why are you wearing sunglasses? Where did you get these from?”
“Hey!” Jaemin grabbed onto the sides when she tried to grab them off his face. “I ordered them online. I got them for when I decide to go outside, of course. Since you want me to go outside more, I might as well get used to it and comfortable in some way”

She took in a deep breath. “Whatever floats your boat.”

“I can feel you judging me,” He held the door open for her. “At least I’m going outside more often than before.” Both of them were walking out the door, when it suddenly hit him and he remembered the (could he call him this anymore) bane of his existence, and the reason he was going outside in the first place, lately. “Can I go somewhere next Saturday?”

“Where on earth are you going on a weekend?” Suddenly, he was the one in front, being questioned.

“Jeno wants me to go to a store with him, or something like that,” Jaemin shrugged. “He says I’ll fit in, because it’s a costume store. A bit backhanded and rude, but whatever, I guess.” The way she was looking at him made it seem as though he had transformed into a completely different person in front of her eyes. “What? I know, I’m very skeptical of it, too, but it won’t kill me.” Even if he greatly thought that it would do so.

“If we’re in public, I have a great chance of getting help. Plus, I have my phone. I’m also able to defend myself pretty well. You have nothing to worry about, trust me. Since you and Jeno have been talking like nobody’s business, apparently.” Jaemin rolled his eyes as he sat in the car. For once, he was actually insisting on going outside. Another impulse decision. There was nothing for him to lose.

Previously she had been reluctant to let him go, yet encouraged it - hence her giving him his own form of transportation. Little did she know, and was still struggling to realize, that it gave him more freedom to be a typical teenager. “If you let me know the address and how long you’re going to be there, I might be fine with it.”
The mother and son slumped back against their respective seats, staring at each other. On both ends, they were hoping for the best for each other for the coming future. Jaemin, for developing and becoming not only a functioning member of society, but a functioning human. His mother, for having to cope with blatant fear in her heart for what could happen and how things were going to turn out for her beloved son.

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Chapter End Notes

im so excited omg omg omg

also i apologize if there's a lot of non - nomin content ,, it's really important to jaem's character development okay i promise (this is tagged slow burn though sooo)
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

friend.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

To put it bluntly, Jeno was a fucking plague. Ever since he realized that he was following him around, just as Jaemin was doing to him before, he noticed just how frequently it was happening - Along with why he wasn’t being bothered. Every time he walked out of his classes that were in a convenient area of the school, Jeno would regain his posture from sitting against the wall and take his place next to him on the way to their respective classes. Lord knows why he hadn’t noticed this the second he was doing it. For once, there were no attempts to make conversation; Jeno was simply there.

During lunch, he found that to be his only time alone. Jaemin presumed that was the time when he was hanging out with his friends, and his own time alone. He was finding it relaxing, and he was starting to become more relaxed and figure things out. Suddenly, he was facing several revelations about himself, now that he wasn’t having to worry about being bothered. In other terms, he was peaking.

He leaned back in the librarian’s chair with his headphones in. Nothing was looking entertaining in his YouTube recommended, so he tabbed over to his Watch Later. Guess he could finally watch that video he had added at least two weeks ago.

Along the line was Sherlock by SHINee, Lies by Big Bang, Ah Yeah by EXID.. All very simple and predictable whilst watching them. Some he hadn’t seen, but this still applied. Jaemin tabbed out of the video to scroll through his Watch Later in search of a new video. The video continued to play in the background, until it counted down to number one, which was apparently the best one. He pulled it back up and watched. Hm, finally one that he hadn’t seen before.

The song was beautiful, and he would most likely add it to his playlist. Despite the delightful
soundtrack, the music video was generic, a boy loving a girl, and that girl going off and marrying another man, and him toiling in his own sadness. He still wanted to hear the end of the song.

Jaemin’s eyes darted around the screen in interest as the wedding drew to a close. It was making his heart beat fast, and he was breathing heavier than normal, because it suddenly became enticing, somehow. Apparently, the two guys were friends, which just made the story that much more heartbreaking. That was cute.

He placed his finger on the video and began to drag it to the bottom of the screen until the video continued past the music. Jaemin watched as the guy who was driving the girl in the car sat, crying, and put the torn picture together. The two guys were suddenly seated next to each other as the video drew to a close.

They.. They were..

“Hey Jaemin.”

The boy jumped and his phone slipped out of his hands. His headphones were ripped out of his ears. In a desperate attempt to both collect his phone and sit up straight, he almost fell out of the chair. Upon turning around, he realized that it was only Jeno. Then again, it was Jeno, who was the last person he wanted seeing that he was watching a video like that, out of context. “Aren’t you supposed to be somewhere else?”

“Jiseok isn’t here today, and his group has scattered without telling me,” He bit the inside of his cheek and looked around. It was painfully obvious that he had caught a glimpse of what he was watching.

“So what are you doing here?”
“You’re the only other friend I have,” Jeno sat on the desk and drummed his fingers.

Jaemin swallowed and stared at him. Jeno considered him a friend? A great person? One that was delightful to be around? That was the highest that anyone - maybe even compared to his mother - had ever looked up to him as. He felt a lump in his throat and a tight feeling in his chest. Was he blushing? All the blood was most certainly rushing to his face.

“Do you.. Have any food?” Jeno waved his hand in front of his face.

“I do, I do,” He snapped out of his thoughts and pulled his lunch box towards him from where it was on the desk. “You should come around, so that nobody bumps into you or anything.”

Jeno nodded and swung his legs over the desk, rather than using the entrance to the back. “I remember seeing you here once, so I didn’t know if you still would be.” He didn’t bother looking for a chair and opted to continue sitting on the desk. “Are you allowed to eat in here?”

“I am,” Jaemin took a bite of the sandwich from his opened lunch box. “The librarian is scared of me. I offered to watch over the library while she’s eating with the other teachers, so it’s a win for everyone.”

“Isn’t that a little insulting?”

“Why do you think I offered to help?” He looked down at his phone on the ground. “It makes me feel less bad about the fact that this is out of fear.”
“I really like that song,” Jeno pointed to his phone on the ground, where the paused image of the video was displayed. “But I see your point. An eye for an eye.” He grinned and raised his eyebrows.

Jaemin pouted at both remarks as he picked it up. “Perhaps you have some taste.”

“Was that funny?”

“Not your joke. Your jokes are tasteless,” He smirked as someone walked by and slid a book onto the desk. “Your music taste. The song is really good, and it seems generic, but has a bit of heart put into it that makes it unique. The singer is really talented.”

The two of them slightly gazed at each other, ignoring the obvious disregard they were exhibiting towards the music video. Since Jaemin had been ignoring that for years, the video had only tacked on to his list yet another part of himself he had to discover and face, this being the most terrifying.

“Knowing the storyline of the video gives it the raw emotion that it lacks,” Jeno said in a hushed voice.

The black-eyed boy grabbed his drink in an attempt to possibly cool down his purely embarrassed blush. Surprisingly enough, Jeno wasn’t teasing him for it. “Y - Yeah.. I - I…. It..” He couldn’t find any words to define how it made him feel without outing his forbidden thoughts.

“Jeno!”
Jaemin and the other snapped their gazes over to a girl approaching the desk. It was one of Jiseok’s friends, more importantly, one that he was a little more handsy with. She looked like she had been running around in a frenzy, since her normally cutesy bob was sticking out in some places. “Jeno, I’ve been looking for you everywhere. I need to talk to you.”

“Aera, what’s wrong?”

Her eyes darted from Jeno to Jaemin, and back to Jeno. “I know we’re supposed to have the whole ‘haha No-Face’ agenda, but Jiseok is home for a reason- His mom kept him home because he apparently was talking to Daeshim-” Aera was rushing her words, and grabbed onto Jeno’s arm. “And he was saying that he was actually going to get violent- And I know that everyone else would be willing to join in, but I’m really not looking to be tied into this, as much as I am scared of you.” She looked at Jaemin.

“Violent? What do you mean violent?” Jaemin’s eyes widened.

“That he was actually going to hurt you, hurt you,” Aera looked him straight in the eyes, out of both pity and inquisitiveness at how she was actually seeing his eyes for the first time. “Jeno, I know you hang out with him, so he must not be that bad, and I’m not looking to ruin my reputation, y - you know? I have good grades, and I’m lined up to go to college, I don’t want anything bad on my record,” Her eyes teared up.

“Aera, shh, it’s fine, we don’t have to hang out with Jiseok anymore.” Jeno pulled her into a hug to keep her from crying. He made eye contact with Jaemin, sighing.

“A - Aera,” Jaemin cleared his throat. As suspicious as he had to be when it came to other people, this wasn’t a time to treat her as a suspect, since this was a serious threat to him. “Can you.. Hang out with him again? Just to see why?” He looked down. “He’s never felt inclined to threaten me
like this before, and I’m scared.”

The girl lifted her head and looked and Jeno for a bit, then at Jaemin. “Please don’t take this harshly, but I’m fucking terrified of you, and I have been for three years.”

“I wouldn’t expect anything else.”

“But if Jeno is fine hanging out with you, then maybe I shouldn’t listen to Jiseok,” She wiped her cheeks. “Especially if he’s like this, now. Maybe I should be open to considering you a friend, like Jeno does.”

Jaemin looked her in the eyes and nodded his head slowly and timidly. *Another* friend? 

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Chapter End Notes

did i just make this jaemin's true awakening of his sexual orientation? yes. bonus points if you can guess what song im referring to lmao

also i felt that a third friend would be a cute addition to the story, and yes she will add to the plot hehehe aera rights ! (even if jaemin doesn't consider her a friend yet)
Aera was a nice person. Jaemin determined that she was simply a victim of peer pressure and consequence. Previously, she would be one to laugh along to Jiseok’s jokes and tag along with them; What else was she supposed to do? Everyone hated him, and there was no way for her to be nice to him without being pushed away from a good reputation. Now, there was Jeno. His friend.

Consequently, Aera didn’t always hang out with them because she was still scared of Jaemin. When the three of them hung out, Jeno would be next to him, and Aera would be on the other side of him. She would catch herself staring at him and look away as soon as he also caught her. It was awkward, but she was getting used to it.

“Hey, Jaemin,” She caught him in the library, studying. “Have you seen Jeno?”

“I think he’s in the office, or something. Trying to convince them that he doesn’t need help, or another Scholar. Put a good mark on my name,” He shrugged.

“Um..” Aera tucked her bob behind her ears. “I was just wondering, because my schedule changed, and I don’t have anything to do right now.” Her gaze was shifted downwards.

“He has a class this period.” Jaemin looked up at her, blankly. “... Why?”
“Weell..” Her bag slipped off her shoulder onto the floor. “I hung out with Jiseok. Like you asked. And he basically is jealous? Or angry? Maybe both. He’s a confusing guy. Like.. You were supposed to be tutoring Jeno and for some reason you were hanging out with him- But then he realized that it was Jeno hanging out with you, and he.. I don’t know how to describe it.”

Aera really did talk like a teenager. Perhaps Jaemin just had an elevated sense of speech, but it took him a few seconds to understand what she was saying. “So.. Jiseok is jealous because Jeno wants to hang out with me? Because I’m not the big freak he thinks I am?”

“Aera, I want you to look me in the eyes and tell me that I’m a murderous psychopath.” Jaemin folded his arms over his book.

Her body was turned to the side, and took on a fearful demeanor. “I won’t turn to stone if I look for more than two seconds?”

“What am I, Medusa?” Jaemin scoffed. “Jiseok needs to come up with better things to tear me down. That’s ridiculous. He might as well spread that when I speak, I lure men in to kill them-”

“It was a joke. He says that your heart will stop, not that you turn to stone,” Aera looked up at him. “Why are your eyes even black in the first place?” She rested her head in her hands and oogled at how they vaguely shone in the library’s lighting.
“It’s not any supernatural thing. Just overpigmentation, that causes the rare and actually quite normal affliction of all - black scleric eyes.” His eyes darted around; Being stared at was uncomfortable. There was a possibility that it was even more so than others intentionally averting their gaze away from him.

“Does your mom or dad have them?”

“Y- Yeah.” He was hesitant to answer. As much as he hated sharing personal information, he needed to start getting used to it. A question that simply pertained to what his family looked like was nothing. “My dad did. I don’t know if any of his family had them, but I inherited it from him.”

“They’re actually pretty cool,” Aera tried to tear her eyes away, but they kept darting back. “Oh, hey, Jeno’s back.”

“Aw, Jaem, are you and Aera talking like friends?” Jeno sat next to him. “I told you he wasn’t that bad. He’s just a little boy,” He held his face in his thumb and index finger again.

“Hey, watch it, before I have to hit you again,” Jaemin scooted away. “Aera talked to Jiseok, and he’s jealous that I’m taking his friends away from him. You could say that I’m a threat to his reputation.”

“Oh my gosh! Imagine if you proved to everyone that you’re normal!” Aera gasped. “It would ruin him entirely. He’d be nothing but a liar and a bully.”

“We already knew that he was,” He rolled his eyes. “You’re right, but then again, how would we go about doing that? He’s got this entire school fooled, and I’m surprised that you came to your senses so quickly.”
“Jeno, duh,” She looked back at him. “He’s a cool guy. If he’s cool with you, then everyone should be.”

Jaemin flinched when Jeno rested his chin on his shoulder. “He’s cool, and also knows no boundaries. Did you know I beat him up because he was being an idiot and tried to pick me up?”

“I didn’t know you would flip out, I was just trying to get you to get in the car~” Jeno scooted closer.

“You are testing me, Lee Jeno,” He grumbled.

“Anyways,” Aera tucked the hair that had fallen into her face back behind her ears. “Are you coming with me and Jeno after school? He’s driving me home. I don’t know if he drives you home or not.”

“I ride my bicycle,” Jaemin noticed the time on the clock that was on the librarian’s desk. “Jeno just likes to force me to ride with him sometimes.”

“You enjoy not walking,” Jeno’s face was right next to his ear.

“Stop it!” He chuckled and pushed him away. “I’ll tag along if it means I can get some personal space.”
“I call the backseat,” Aera wiggled her eyebrows and smiled. “You’ve got the front seat.”

When he looked over, Jeno was peering at him, with a lot of curiosity in his eyes. Jaemin halted his actions, staring back at him. It was.. Odd. Aera sensed it, too. She got up and left as soon as the bell rang, only administering a quick goodbye. “Why are you looking at me, Jeno?” They weren’t as close as they were before, but it sure felt like it.

“I’ve never heard you laugh or seen you smile before,” He blinked. Most likely, he was able to see himself in the reflection of his eyes. It was scary, how close they felt right now. Jeno was right. He had never done so, not in school, not often, and especially not in front of him. Instead of pushing him away again and being rude, he gave in a little bit. It’s what his mother would want. Jaemin stared right back at him and turned up the corners of his mouth just a little bit.

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Chapter End Notes

omg omg omg its happening im so excited whos ready for this date YALL
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

damn it, jaemin.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jaemin took in a deep breath and shook his hair out. It had a bunch of bumps and waves it in from sleep, and it was annoying him. Wasn’t he supposed to look good when he went out in public? That’s the number one rule of going out: You have to look good. That dilemma only tied in more with the fact that he was bored of his wardrobe, and going to a costume shop in any of this would look awful. He grumbled once again at his reflected image and went over to his closet. All of the hangers were shoved aside until he found a hoodie that he never wore. It was orange, and had some darker orange text on it.

He pulled it over his head and stood in the mirror once again. “Whatever, whatever, I’m not going anywhere important. Why am I trying so hard to look good when I’m going to a store, a costume store.” His thoughts just came pouring out of his mouth. “Ohh.. Why do i bother.. It’s just Jeno, he’s probably not going to notice if I showed up naked.”

His mother called from downstairs. “He’s not even here, and he’s driving me crazy,” Jaemin rubbed his eyes as he made his way down the stairs. “Is he here?” He peeked around the corner when he reached the bottom of the stairs.

“No, but I just wanted to see if you were ready yet. My Jaeminnie is going out with his first friend,” She sniffled.

“Mhm.. And don’t be afraid to call me, or anything, and I will be back home before the sun goes down,” Jaemin walked over to her and gave her a hug. “I know you’re proud of me, but also don’t worry about me too much. Jeno isn’t a threat, and he’s pretty strong, so I’m in good hands.”
“You really trust him to defend you if you’re in trouble?”

“Do I have any other choice?” He shook a piece of hair out of his face. “Can you help me fix my hair? It’s getting on my nerves.”

“Did you brush it?” She ran her fingers through it to get the bumps out.

“No, and it won’t stay down anyways..”

“You already look better, and all I did was comb my fingers through it a little bit!”

The doorbell rang and he sighed. “Thanks.”

“Go upstairs and finish getting ready,” She patted his back and made her way to the door while he went back into his room.

Money, just in case, his shoes were downstairs, his phone was charged, he had his headphones.. There wasn’t much else to do. He sank down onto his bed as he realized that his heart had sped up quite a bit. Nothing was wrong, exactly, but he was nervous. Why had he even agreed - even fought - to go outside in the first place? Maybe Jeno’s friendship had buttered him up. Passing up someone who looked at him in a positive light and wanted him to stick around would be the stupidest decision he could make. He grabbed the chapstick sitting on his desk to keep himself from biting his lips.
“Jaemin, Jeno told me that you nearly beat him up,” His mother was holding back a grin.

“He tried to grab me and it scared me, so I defended myself,” He shrugged.

“Did you apologize?”

“I’m sorry. Goodbye, mom, we’re leaving,” Jaemin gave her a slight hug before grabbing Jeno by the wrist and leading them out the front door.

His mother called after them to have fun and such, as a mother would. He could only imagine how scared yet ecstatic she was, seeing him go out the door to have fun with someone. Jaemin gave Jeno a shove towards the drivers’ side and pouted. “Don’t worry my mom like that, she says that I’m getting better with my aggression.”

“She was obviously amused, you’re worried about nothing,” Jeno shrugged him off as he got in. “Have you eaten?”

“I have.”

“Are you still hungry?”

“Are you underhandedly insulting my mother’s cooking?”
“You know what, I’m sorry,” Jeno bit his lip and grinned as he felt Jaemin giving him the stare of death. “I wouldn’t want you falling asleep on me. Buckle up.”

“Yo- Agh! That was your fault!” Jaemin huffed and pulled the belt across his chest. His anger only caused it to get caught and his annoyed tugs did nothing to get it closer to the actual button, only make loud noises with each yank. Jeno let out an amused breath before reaching over and grabbing it, then letting it slip through his fingers with ease.

“Don’t break my seatbelt,” He scrunched up his nose. “I’d much rather you take that anger out on me than risk my parents getting angry at me for you taking it out on the car.”

They started pulling out of the driveway, and Jaemin’s face was sufficiently red. Somehow, he’d managed to embarrass himself before they technically were in public. He bit his lip and let him drive them out of the subdivision. After a while of him spacing out, mostly thinking about the outdoors and how lovely it looked somewhere other than the boring route to school, they reached a stoplight. Jeno turned to him with a smile.

“I see you’re not wearing your sunglasses.”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake, I knew I forgot something!” Jaemin groaned, inevitably pouting.

“Don’t be so upset, you look nice. Now I can actually see your eyes,” He chuckled and rested a hand on the other’s knee as a sign of comradery.

He immediately tore his leg away and cowered towards the window, a look of shock gracing his face. Something so harmless read to him as romantic, and the homophobia was seeping out of his
pores. Jeno had made his heart skip a beat in the split second that he had let it happen. It made him feel guilty. “What did I say about touching me?”

“Sorry, sorry.” Jeno clenched his jaw and shook his head. The green stop light flooded the car, making them drive once again. He couldn’t help but feel as though he had done something wrong, by forcing away such a blatantly chummy gesture. On the other hand, Jeno had a fair idea that he was not into that, and was avoiding it at all costs, so physical contact was off the table, to any degree.

The pair began to make their descent into the town after a few blocks. It may have just been him, but the air was particularly thick in the car. Jeno’s silence did nothing to deter his awkward feelings, and reflected that of when he walked beside him in school. “Where is the store?”

“Um.. I would say in the coffee center, but you don’t know what that is,” Jeno sighed. “We’re not too far. It’s an outdoor shopping center, and in the middle, there’s a coffee brewery that makes up for about 5 of the stores, so the entire place smells like coffee.”

“How do you know that, but I don’t.” He furrowed his eyebrows. “You’re supposed to be new.”

“Jiseok and his gaggle of idiots like blowing their money by going there to shop and eat. I’m clued in on a lot of stuff. They tried to convert me into one of them, and trust me, they lost it when they figured out that I had a car. Figured that I must be rich or something.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if you were.”

“You’re just as bad as them,” Jeno pursed his lips, gazing at him from the side as he merged into a lane going towards the small shopping district. “I’m not poor, if that’s what you wanna think. Sure, my family has a bit of disposable income. We came from the city, I used to go to a private school.
“Enough said.”

“No wonder you’re so weird, you went to a private school,” Jaemin bit his lip. “Why are you so nice to me, then?”

“It was an all boys school, and I got picked up every day, so don’t think about it too much,” He scoffed. “I’m assuming that you’re asking me that in the light of me being wealthy to some extent, so- I’m not inclined to any sort of status. This isn’t the 1920’s. My parents have money, not me.”

“That’s fair.” To be logical, he had been lower-middle class all of his life, so he just assumed that those who could afford things were on a pedestal. Jiseok flaunted more money than him, and look how rude he was to him.

“Welcome to the coffee center,” The car pulled into a cozy collection of stores, that seemed to go in a circle - most likely with the brewery in the middle, of course.

“This is nice, I might have to bring my mom one day. She would like these little cafes,” His eyes lingered on the passing outdoor eating areas. “It’s a shame that I’ve never been here.”

“You’re welcome. It’s my honor to be exposing you to normal people things,” Jeno pulled into a parking space. He hadn’t even noticed that they were driving around for a while, looking for a parking spot, because he was so enticed by all the establishments. Getting out and seeing them first hand would be even better. The doors were unlocked, and he stepped out. It was a nice day out, with the sweet smell of coffee and the blue skies. A tiny smile made its way onto his face. He really needed to go out more often.

“Let’s go.” Jeno nudged him a little bit.
Jaemin made a noise of acknowledgement and followed him onto the sidewalk. The store they were headed towards was quite obvious. “Popular store, huh?” He noted the full parking spots in front of and around it.

“Most of the cars parked in front of any shop are going to another shop, and are just trying to get a parking spot. Don’t let it fool you. But yeah, it’s a pretty popular store, considering it’s the only one open all year long, and not just during halloween.”

“Hm. How did you even think of this? Or find this store interesting?” He tried to avert his eyes from passerby.

“Well, good old Hallow’s Eve is coming up, and it’s pretty cool nonetheless. My kind of store, overall.” Jeno pushed open the door and he raised his eyebrows at how big it was. That, and it seemed like a whole different place upon entering, since it blocked out the sunlight.

“Do you really hang out in here?” Jaemin was slightly frightened by the display costumes next to the door, but still pushed on.

“Some of the staff isn’t nice enough to let me hang around, but sometimes I do,” He shrugged. “What catches your eye the most?”

“The fucking terrifying horror movie costumes.”

“Aside from those, you baby,” Jeno coaxed him through the aisles.
“Well, you said Halloween is coming up, so preferably some costumes.”

“Gosh, you are awfully snippy today,” He pulled out a box marked ‘clearance’ box and sat on the floor next to it. “Aera could probably do your makeup and make you look cool. She’s not the best at the special effects stuff, but she could certainly change up your face. Since you hate it so much.”

“I never said that,” Jaemin looked around and only noticed a few people, then ducked his head so that he was just bending down. “I’m extremely handsome, my eyes are the only problem.”

“Your eyes aren’t a problem. Good to know you’re not vain or anything,” Jeno let out a breath at his loss to find anything in the box. “Wanna see the back of the store?”

“What, is it filled with sexy costumes?”

“Not entirely. Why, are you being dirty again?”

“When have I ever been dirty? All you did was say something about being naked once, and I almost hung up on you,” Jaemin rolled his eyes.

“I hear the meaning behind your words, trust me,” He raised his eyebrows. “Now come on. Maybe we could find something for you that you’ll like. All the boring stuff is back there.”
Jaemin marched after him angrily. “Somehow your insults are more effective than Jiseok’s.”

“They’re not insults,” Jeno turned his back to the wall of costumes and held Jaemin’s face between his index finger and thumb again. “They’re friendly jabs. All untrue, and just meant to ruffle your feathers.”

He gave him a grimace as a response, since they all went to do just that. “You have an awful habit of holding my face like I’m a baby.”

“That’s because you are,” Jeno grabbed a golden leafed headdress from the rack and placed it on his own head.

“Are you supposed to be some sort of greek god?”

“Nope,” He grinned and posed. His weight was shifted onto one leg, almost like a model, as he raised his arms to flex his obvious muscles. “But a deltoid and a bicep, a hot groin and a bicep, make me, ooo-”

“What the fuck are you doing?” Jaemin covered his mouth when he smiled.

“Come on, you don’t know what I’m doing?” Jeno gaped. “Shake.” His shoulders did a little shimmy.

“No, and you look dumb, so stop it.”
“I’m making you watch this movie, one day. Unbelievable.” Still, he resumed his musical number. “Makes me wanna take Charles Atlas by the hand..” Jeno hooked their arms together. “In just seven days, I can make you a man.”

Whatever this was, it was amusing. With Jeno occupying his other arm, he could only cover his mouth so much. He giggled and smiled at his goofy song, much more than he usually would. There was just something about watching him act like a fool for no apparent reason. This must have encouraged his antics, because he then grabbed a horribly plastic boa that was shoved onto one of the racks and started dancing around to another number.

It was wrapped around his shoulders as Jeno hummed, and pulled him towards a mirror. He stood behind Jaemin promptly. “Don’t get strung out by the way I look ,” He poked Jaemin’s cheeks. “Don’t judge a book by its cover .” One of his fingers pulled one of his cheeks down so that the red of his eye was exposed.

“Quit it, you’re being dumb,” Jaemin was openly laughing now, because he was actually succeeding at doing so. He pushed his hand away from his face.

“I’m not much of a man by the light of day!” Jeno rushed to get out, squeezing his arms, poking fun at how they lacked muscles.

“That was genuinely mean, Jen, stop it!” He shoved him, but to no avail - most likely due to his skinny arms.

A teasing look came into his eyes as his friend bit his lip and wrapped the boa around him once again. “But by night, I’m one hell of a lover..”
Jaemin tensed up and pulled back. “Ohh, that’s weird, that’s weird!” His delightful laughter was replaced with nervous chuckles. Those stupid feelings were creeping back just by Jeno looking into his eyes and quoting a song that said something about love, and he was annoyed at it. Jeno shouldn’t be so appealing to him in *that* way for just acting silly. “Song over, song over, please, Jeno-”

“Good to see I made you laugh, you actually do look very handsome when you do it,” Jeno let go of the boa so that it rested on his shoulders. “I should take your word more often. Especially when you say you like your personal space. You’re so red, I can see the steam pouring out of your ears.”

He felt internally embarrassed; The redness on his cheeks wasn’t from anger. “I doubt that’s going to happen. And you must have been blind to see that I wasn’t handsome before. Like I said, my eyes get in the way.”

“They add to your look,” The other started walking through another aisle, and he followed. “If you look close enough, they look kind of silver, and they sparkle.”

“See what I mean? If you’re that close, you certainly won’t give me personal space. I only see that if I look at myself straight in the mirror.” Who knew that Jeno had even paid that much attention to him?

“Whatever. At least I have the guts to look you in the eyes, and then look away,” Jeno looked back at him with a grin, knowing that was true.

“Maybe that’s why I let you stick around,” Jaemin raised him that. “Are we leaving?”
“Oh, come on, you’re not just going to leave me on a cliffhanger as to why you hang out with me, and then just ask to leave,” He rolled his eyes. “If you want to. You haven’t even gotten anything, or showed interest in anything but me.”

“Oh, my god,” Jaemin covered his face entirely. Such a flirty remark made his face heat up even more. “I’m just not used to buying anything that isn’t online, or at all, really, since I only have twenty bucks on me.”

“You’ve got a rich friend, Jaem, don’t be afraid to ask,” Jeno bit his cheek, smirking.

“You’re good enough to me, I’m not asking you to buy anything for me,” He held his hands up and shook his head.

“Aw,” Was all he said. Just an onomatopoeia that could be interpreted in a million different ways.

“I’m hungry, though. Is there some good place around here that sells burgers?”

“Gosh, I have to introduce you to something else. They’re not the healthiest thing, you know.” They started walking outside. “We can walk around and see what there is to eat, if you’re comfortable with that.”

“That sounds okay,” Jaemin felt better walking with him than he was alone, and he was relying on the fact that people in public were constantly occupied to keep his low profile. “I can’t help but crave it when I’m with you. When else am I supposed to eat it?”
“Fair,” The weather was still nice, but had taken on a little bit of a breeze. Jaemin was annoyed, because it went to mess up his hair. “What about a grill? You know, where you sit down, and grill your own food?”

“I’ve never been to one. But they look good on TV.”

“Oh, you’re missing out. There’s a really good one here that has shrimp and chicken, and you can order it deep friend instead of grilling it yourself, it’s so good. My mouth is watering just thinking about it.”

“I’ve never tried anything deep fried.” He nodded, pleased at the sound of it all. “How long were we in there?”

“Not long, I’m guessing,” Jeno took his phone out of his pocket. It was a bit late, but he had just realized that he, too, was dressed different than normal. He wore a shirt with some words on it, and a light blue cover up. His jeans were blue, and his shoes were white, but still had some dirt on them from wear. It was handsome, and fashionable. That was harmless to think about, right? “A little over thirty minutes. Most of it was just me looking around.”

“Oh well,” Jaemin shrugged and gave him an innocent grin.

“Good to see you all loosened up and smiling. It’s like you’re a whole different person.”

“Quit mentioning it, it’s weird. I just never get to do anything, and I’ve never done stuff like this. In case it’s not extremely obvious-” Jeno held his shoulder and directed him into an open door. “I haven’t had any friends before, nonetheless anyone to hang out with except my mom, and she hardly ever takes me outside.”
“Well, that’s what friends are for.” He smiled a contagious smile. His eyes turned into happy little crescents. Jaemin nodded back with vigor.

“Mm, it smells good in here.” All of the restaurants and stores were quite sizeable, too, he was surprised. This area must be in a nicer neighbourhood, hence, why Jeno knew about it. He looked around at the other people talking and grilling and eating, and it looked so nice, like something that he could get used to.

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The line to get seated wasn’t very long, and neither was the wait to get their food, whether it was raw and to be grilled, or already deep fried. As much as it would disappoint his mother to hear, he was grateful that Jeno had given him meat to eat. It was delicious, and had so much flavor. Not to mention, it went great with everything. He was cautious to only eat as much as he could, and not overdo it.

While they ate, they talked quite a bit; Jeno took up most of the conversation, of course. He had an older sister, they lived the opposite way of the school, in a sizeable condominium style home, and the previous all boys school he had gone to was awful. As much as Jaemin wanted to ask, though, he never mentioned why he had left, or moved to a new one. His sister was already older, so the only reason they had to have moved was because of him. Why would they move when he was nearing his senior year of high school?

Jaemin did reveal quite a bit about himself, but there wasn’t much to say. He was pretty introverted, and liked to watch TV. School and his lack of exposure to the world made it so that he didn’t have many notable hobbies. Needless to say, he was happy that Jeno didn’t poke his nose as to why it was only him and his mother.
“Have you ever watched ASMR?”

“Hm?” Jaemin had stuffed his mouth with some fried shrimp. “Mm.. No.”

“It could calm you down. It’s really relaxing, and with an ad blocker, you could even fall asleep to it. I noticed that you get anxious really easy,” He idled while looking at him, poking the meat around the grill.

“Yeah, um,” His eyes darted around. “We’re friends, right?”

“I presume so.”

“It’s not a surprise that I have anxiety. I just.. We figured it would be good to take me off of the medicine I was taking, so.. Sorry for being so mean to you. Anger was a side effect, so I didn’t mean to.. I mean. If I look back on it now, I feel really bad for snapping at you so much, especially when you’re not the huge idiot I thought you were, but you’re actually really tolerant, and nice, and open minded.” He was mostly telling him this out of guilt, but he did hold him to pretty high regards.

“I can’t blame you for being that way anyways. Who was I, to come to your school, and approach you like it was nothing?” Jeno picked up the piece off the grill and stared it down for a second before holding it out towards Jaemin.

“Thanks,” He smiled timidly and took it with his chopsticks. “What time is it?”
“It’s about five.”

“Has it really been that long?” Jaemin’s eyes widened and he took a sip of his drink. “We should start heading out, since I told my mother that I would be back before the sun sets. It wouldn’t do me any good to upset her.”

“She said I could bring you back at nine,” Jeno furrowed his eyebrows. “Guess that one wasn’t discussed.”

“I - I still want to get back.” He didn’t take a moment to think about the fact that his mother was allowing him to stay out longer, on Jeno’s accord. “Are you going to go home?”

“That’s the plan. I’ll pack up- Ah.” The younger caught himself. “You can’t take meat home with you.”

“Well, I could hide it in my room, or something. It could be a nice midnight snack, since I stay up late a lot. I wouldn’t want to waste this,” Jaemin looked at him with wide eyes. “You’re always paying for my food.”

“Quit pouting, it’s fine. Food is one thing that the wallet is allowed to empty for,” Jeno called for a waitress to get a box or something like that. He looked a bit bummed out that he couldn’t keep him out before nine, but then again, he didn’t like being outside at night for a plethora of reasons. “You know, you pout too much to be older than me.”

“Gee, thanks.” They cleaned up the table as much as they could before leaving. It was sad, since Jaemin was genuinely having a good time. Then again, how long would it have lasted if they kept it going. He tried not to dwell on it too much and make himself upset.
“Do you know how to drive?” Jeno looked at him.

“Not very well, I only know the basics because my mother taught me. Just in case.”

“In case of what?”

“I don’t know, she just said in an emergency,” He shrugged.

“Useful, I guess.”

Jaemin sat in the passenger’s seat and took in a deep breath. “I’m tired.”

“I’m not carrying you inside again, so wait until I get you home,” Jeno checked all of his mirrors and such.

“You carried me inside? I thought my mother did,” He couldn’t help but wonder if he was heavy to someone like Jeno.

“I wouldn’t let her carry a carton of milk, give her a break. I’m not calling her old or anything, but she deserves credit for taking care of you and stuff,” His words were rushed. “All mothers do. I’m not saying you’re special or anything, but she did a good job.”
“Aw, how sweet. I’m sure my mother will appreciate that,” Jaemin smirked at him. “I appreciate you saying that I came out good.”

“I didn’t even think it was possible to be embarrassed in front of you,” Jeno groaned, then started to back out of the parking space.

“Good to know that I hold more power over something that isn’t fear,” He buckled himself in.

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By the time they were pulling into his neighborhood, he could tell that the sun was going to start setting soon. He was just grateful that his mother hadn’t called him in a panic for any reason. Jeno’s parents seemed much cooler about things, but that was most likely because he had been doing stuff like this his entire life, so far. Jaemin stretched when the car lights came on. “I’m starting to think you were right. Food is the way to my heart.”

“You were pretty happy before that, but you’re just quieter when you’ve eaten sufficiently,” Jeno handed him the box. “I’ll distract her while you take your shameful snack upstairs.”

“Shut up,” Jaemin took the box and got out. “You’re lucky she lets you inside at all.”

“She loves me. I’m like her second son,” He got out just as she turned on the front lights.
“Yeah, she always wanted a little girl.”

“I bet she wanted a baby, too, huh?”

Jaemin pushed him and reached down near the front door before looking up at Jeno. “Can you shut your eyes or something?”

“What? You think I’m going to break into your house or something?” Jeno shut his eyes.

“Just being extra cautious.” He picked up the key from where it was under his favourite succulent in the flower pot. “You can open your eyes, now.”

“Appreciate it. My family keeps a bunch in containers taped under some pinecones.”

“Now I know how to get into your house, thanks,” The door was pushed open, and he smelled his mother cooking something for dinner.

“Most of the front garden has pinecones, so good luck searching through all of them.” Jeno walked in first. “Hello, Ms. Na! I’ve brought your son home in one piece. He ran up to the bathroom, because he could hardly hold it on the way back!”

Jaemin glared at him as he ran up the stairs and into his room. It felt good to be back home, but his room felt oddly different. A day of seeing the sights really changed the way he looked at something as simple as his laptop. He would dwell on it later.
“I hope you haven’t been talking badly about me,” He yelled from the top of the stairs after hiding the box behind his laptop, then walked to the kitchen slowly, so that he didn’t trip over his own feet. They weren’t in there, but dinner was ready. It looked really good. Maybe he would eat a little more once he left. Next, he ventured into the dining room, but was greeted by their voices behind him, in the living room.

“You know, I ought to be talking badly about you,” His mother patted the seat next to her when he entered the room. “You haven’t been so nice as to invite him over, or even invite him to dinner?”

“We just went out together, who knows if I want him to stick around-” He chuckled under his breath, and she shook her head at the remark.

“It’s a joke, he’s kidding,” Jeno spoke for him. “Maybe I’m rubbing off on him. He could use a little boost of humor. If he won’t invite me, I’ll just have to invite myself. He doesn’t believe me when I say that I’m likeable.”

“Okay, come by whenever you want, but you can leave now,” Jaemin stood up and pulled him up from where he was sitting.

“He’s kidding again, that’s just how we joke around, promise me, he’s not actually being mean to me-”

Now, they were outside the front door, and Jaemin was slightly out of breath. “I felt like I was moving a cow, jeez.”
“It’s all this muscle, of course,” Jeno smiled, and spoke further before he could make another snippy comment. “Thanks for agreeing to accompany me. I would have been stuck with just Aera, and she’s a lot when we go out anywhere. Didn’t want my mom to think that I’m dating her, either. Before you say anything, I actually had fun, even if it was just me watching you oogle over the sidewalk tiles and different types of foods.”

“You know, I don’t know if I enjoy the fact that you actually had a nice time with me, or hate all the underhanded comments you just made.” Jaemin crossed his arms loosely. “I obviously had a good time. Thank you for paying for my food, again, and acting like an idiot for the sake of making me smile. At least you try. Have a nice night.”

Jeno bowed slightly at him before going off to his car. Jaemin went inside, because he didn’t want to make it awkward by watching him drive off. He took several deep breaths, trying to get his head on straight again. First, he should probably go upstairs and change his clothes, since he smelled like the grill and outdoors. A good smell, but not one that he wanted lingering around the house.

Whilst he was changing, he caught sight of the blanket from Jeno’s car; The one that he was supposed to return a week or two ago, and could have returned a million times by now. He just kept on forgetting, and it was simply just apart of his bedsheets now from when his mother had covered him up.

He pulled it out from where it was tangled in with his sheets and sighed.

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Chapter End Notes

i just started writing the date and i couldn't stop
i was going to split this but then what would have been the point yknow ??? either way i hope you enjoyed 5.2k words of the unofficial nomin first date ;)
jeno:
jaemin: *gay panic*

ALSO more bonus points to who can guess the references i'm trying to make like,, so iconic
Chapter Summary

time flies with happiness, and slows with sadness.

Chapter Notes

!! possible trigger warning !!

jaemin feels lots of strong internalized homophobia in this chapter. i tried to make it as undetailed as possible so that it isn't too upsetting

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It became a habit for them to go outside, since Jaemin liked seeing the sights, even if they were boring and plain to everyone else. These were things he had never seen before, (at least not in real life) so he was happier than usual. Knowing that these places existed and that he could go to them was a miracle. Jeno would drive him to random places and he would wander around timidly. His anxiety definitely was high when he left the house, but it acted as a sort of adrenaline boost. Even though Jeno wasn’t the best at keeping him calm, it was the effort that counted.

Jaemin hadn’t stopped wearing his sunglasses unless it was comfortable for him. When they would walk around the parks, he would take them off, and also when they were eating. As long as the time seemed, they had only hung out for about two weeks like this, with Jeno joking around and him laughing. He had, somehow, cracked the code to making him smile and laugh like it was nothing.

He felt guilty, because while they grew a bit closer, him and Aera didn’t. Aera definitely had something going with Jeno, and took a particular liking to him. Jaemin couldn’t blame her; He was open minded, and kind, and the most rational person at this school. Having Jeno as her boyfriend would probably be a dream come true for her, the girl who wanted perfect grades and perfect looks and a perfect life.

This was where he found himself, staring up at his ceiling and mulling over his thoughts. His guilt had formed into an indescribable monster that would claw at his emotions whenever ‘Jeno and
Aera’ came up. They were already close before, and she probably knew more about him. He wouldn’t be surprised if she had gone over and hung out at his house. Hell, them going out before could even be counted as dates. Jaemin knew that the two could be considered best friends, but how far did that go?

Hesitation overtook his body when he sat up and went down the stairs. He couldn’t handle this on his own, and most certainly couldn’t sort through feelings that he didn’t understand. “Mom..?”

“I’m upstairs.” Her voice was hushed.

Jaemin redirected himself up the stairs about halfway down and peeked into her room. The door was cracked, but it felt more shut than ever. Why did he feel so guilty talking to her about this? It was just some dumb feelings he had towards Aera.

“Oh, come in, honey,” She waved him into the room. “I’m just getting ready to go shopping this week.”

“I feel kind of.. Bad,” He looked down at the coupons on the bed.

“What’s wrong?” She set down the scissors and picked up a pen, still looking at him.

“Me and Jeno have another friend, and she’s really cool and all, but I feel weird when we’re hanging out with her,” Jaemin entered the room and idled near the edge of the bed. His body, however, was ready to get up and leave at any moment.
“Aw, Jaeminnie,” Her face softened. “It is perfectly normal to have a crush or maybe even just have sexual feelings. I expect nothing but that from you, as a teenager, and I am a bit surprised that I haven’t heard about this earlier-”

“No- No..” He blushed and shook his head. Sure, these feelings he had were strong and confusing, but he knew this wasn’t it. “I don’t have feelings for Aera. It’s- Like-” Jaemin swallowed and stood up in realization. His mother had hit the nail on the head.

“Jaemin. It’s okay. You’re well educated, so you can go be a teenager. Just think, if I wouldn’t like you doing something, then don’t do it.” She chuckled and shook her head in amusement at him. “I want to meet her, sometime soon.”

“Okay, thanks,” His throat went dry. “I’ll be in my room.”

He felt his face go hot and start spilling out tears before he could even get to his room. Hopefully she wouldn’t follow him in, or check on him any time soon. Jaemin sat in front of his mirror with his legs bent and his hands rested on his knees. Aera was Jeno’s friend before Jeno was Jaemin’s friend. Jeno didn’t have any particular obligation to hang out with him, and he was still unsure why he did it past the whole ‘Scholar’ thing. He had so many enjoyable moments with Jeno, because he made him laugh, and was nice, and was someone that he enjoyed hanging out with. Surely Aera felt the same way. Aera thought Jeno was a nice friend.

He may feel weird when they hung out with Aera, but he definitely didn’t have a crush on her. The last thing he felt when he looked at her was infatuation. That meant that he absolutely did not have sexual feelings for her. His mother had tapped into something though, because he felt something like that. Just not towards Aera.

Aera was a third wheel, to be frank. He didn’t like her being around Jeno. It was jealousy. Jaemin was jealous whenever Aera lingered around Jeno, or was a little too close to him, or the two of them were together.
His heart raced at the reality of him being jealous of Aera; There was something inside of him that was attracted to Jeno.

Jaemin was struggling to grasp on to this. He hated it. He didn’t want to be this person, and he had been avoiding it for the longest time. So many things continuously popped up leading to this moment, and he had shoved them down so deep that they wouldn’t resurface for a long time. Now was that time. Nobody he knew in his immediate life was like this, and he knew that he would get bothered at school. Jeno would bother him about it - He already had in the past. Most of all, he didn’t want to disappoint his mother. She thought so highly of him, and he was already a pariah in the world. What would this make him? She would be distraught to even know this. Not to mention he wasn’t even sure if she supported this kind of thing in her beloved son.

He looked up at his red, teary eyes in the mirror and wiped the tears that were falling down his face. The rest had created a damp spot on his sleeves. “No, I am not attracted to Jeno, I - I’m not gay,” Jaemin choked out. It was hard to even say that for two reasons: He knew that he was, in fact, attracted to him, and that he didn’t want to face the reality that he might be gay.

It was 12am. He spent so long toiling in his room in his emotions and hating himself for something that he knew that he couldn’t change, and it made him sick to his stomach. After skipping dinner and scrolling through his laptop, he accidentally found a corner of social media where lots of people were out, even if just on the internet. By ‘accidentally’ he meant scrolling through various forums that lead him to users that he would click on, and scroll through for several hours. He had an urge to jump in, but he didn’t want to expose himself, as in Jaemin.. It took him five minutes to shakily make an icongnito profile on his phone and join in on the conversation by talking, liking posts, posting on his own. He did this for at least another good hour. These people probably weren’t from the same area, thankfully, so they were awake and willing to communicate.

*Hey!*
Jaemin’s dry, scratchy eyes darted to the top of the screen at the notification that had popped up. He must look crazy, with only the dim lamp lighting his room, tucked under the covers with bloodshot eyes as he stared at his phone, filled with paranoia and guilt. It was just a random person, one that had popped up in his notifications a second ago. He clicked ‘accept request’ and typed back.

‘Yes?’

They responded almost immediately.

*I noticed that you were liking my posts about being out, and I saw your posts. Are you okay?*

He rolled over and felt more tears coming on, but the well was dry. ‘I’m having a lot of feelings and they’re pretty gay, to say the least.’

*Are you scared to come out?*

‘I’m scared to be gay.’

There were a few seconds where the three little dots came up, but then they disappeared. Perhaps he was just too excited to let out his feelings, and that it was off-putting. Was it rude to say that directly to someone who was gay? He set his phone down and contemplated even more. Who knows how long had passed before he felt his phone buzz again.
‘There’s nothing wrong with it, you know. I’m going to make this short and sweet, since I have to go to bed soon. If you’re christian, it’s not in the bible, just a fake verse. The man and woman stuff is just a suggestion. Otherwise, I think you’re just scared to disappoint. A lot of people I know aren’t out to people that it will upset, so they sort of just keep it to themselves. It’s just important that you accept it yourself. It’s not wrong, and it will do more harm if you don’t accept it. It might take a while, but don’t push it away.’

Jaemin wished that he could cry more, but he had to get his emotions out some way. ‘Thanks I’- What could he say? He had this in his head, and he would try to accept it. But also hide it. The previous message he was typing was erased. ‘Thank you. I don’t know who else to talk to, and I’m just really scared.’

Don’t be afraid to come back! I’ll be here, even if we’re not close at all, and I’m sure lots of other people are! There’s hotlines you can call if you want someone who’s actually experienced.

Didn’t Jeno mention something like that? He sucked in a breath at the first thought of Jeno after a few hours, and how it had instantly connected with a random thought. Maybe he was subconsciously more into him that he had thought.

- 

After his crisis and lack of sleep that night, his conclusion was to make an effort to accept it. There are endless ways that he could make it better, so as to not make it something that would ruin his life. Seeing Jeno the next day, though, was an out of body experience. Even if his feelings were small, they were still there, and bothered him at every corner he turned, and the short term sleep deprivation didn’t help. He could hardly pay attention to him as he talked, with the calm, lower register that he used when it was just them, or them and Aera. A foggy look loomed on his face, which sometimes was injected with affection (when he allowed it).

Speaking of Aera, he felt the intense rush of jealousy every time she spoke, now that he was aware of it. She was polite and civil as per usual, and, in fact, sat down with them at lunch and
complimented his sweater on Thursday. Did that stop him from mentally pushing her out of her
chair? No.

Later that week, he slumped himself over his bicycle with an exhausted sigh at the end of the day.
His mind was jumbled with a million conflicting thoughts all week, and he was struggling to keep
them together and in an order that made sense to him. He was definitely going to go home and have
a nice, long nap.

“Hey,” Jeno walked over and stood in front of his bicycle. “I’m not going to risk you pedaling into
traffic.”

“Thanks,” Jaemin smiled and got off while they walked to his car. His pace was slow, and Jeno
matched it.

“What’s got you so tired? Your eyes are so bloodshot, the veins are about to bust open,” He tucked
his hands away in his pocket.

Excuses wearily tumbled out of his mouth. “I just couldn’t sleep last night.. Or I chose to. I was just
got caught up studying and just catching up. It’s nothing too exciting, but it’s pretty stressful. I can
stress myself out quite easily.”

“I thought that you were all caught up. Don’t stress yourself out too much, it doesn’t do you any
good,” Jeno opened the trunk and lifted his bicycle in. “Do you wanna go somewhere?”

“No, I just want to go home and relax,” He was already sat in the front seat. “Thank you, though.”
“We can just drive around, then. You need to take your mind off things.” Jaemin nodded when he rubbed his back. “I like being driven around when I need to think. Or just walking, but I know you don’t exactly prefer that. I’ll even roll down the windows.”

“That sounds nice,” He laid back in the seat. “Can I have a blanket?”

“You know, I only have one,” Jeno reached behind his seat and set it in his lap, semi-unraveled.

“I keep forgetting,” Jaemin pouted. “It’s the last thing I think of when I leave the house. Maybe when you come over you can take it off my bed.”

“Just don’t take this one,” He teased before pulling out of the parking lot.

The hum and vibrations of the engine were more calming than he thought. Even though the voices of joyous teenagers off to have a weekend of debauchery were overwhelmingly loud when Jeno rolled down the windows, it began to fade into white noise. He sighed as the air hit his face and blew through his hair. Jeno was so sweet for driving him around to clear his mind, as per usual. He was sweet in general for doing anything for him, or voluntarily wanting to be his friend; That would never leave his mind. To be quite honest, he couldn’t blame himself for attaining feelings for him.

Jaemin opened his eyes and watched the people, cars, and buildings go by with the wind. Jeno was driving down the long main road where it was almost impossible to stop, and he could tell they were going to drive around the coffee center. It was his favourite place, and he had taken a liking to the costume shop that Jeno always took him to, and even more so to the place that they had eaten the same day.
He just found himself so comfortable around him, because he had some decency to be a normal human being. Jaemin, in short, had a tough shell to get through, but Jeno had somehow eased his way in by some secret means that made it melt away in an instant. It felt good to finally feel like a normal person around someone. This came at quite perfect timing, too, since he had felt so awful and upset no more than two months ago, and had reached rock bottom emotionally. There was nobody there for him, but he had Jeno, now. At least he wasn’t afraid to admit that to himself.

Jeno stopped at a red light, and he slowly shifted his head over to look at him. His eyelids were heavy, but he still kept his focus on him. The other looked back at him blankly, only taking a moment to blink and tilt his head so that he could check whether or not he was awake. “I’m so tired,” Jaemin smiled softly and looked down.

“I can drive you home before you get delirious,” Jeno cleared his throat, on cue for the light to turn green.

Despite him closing his eyes, he tried his best not to fall asleep to Jeno’s occasional sighs and the cool, calming wind blowing over him. It might be the delirium setting in, but he was content with it all at this exact moment. Maybe he was into guys. Maybe he was the slightest bit into Jeno. Maybe he was scared of ruining whatever reputation and respect he had built up for himself, in both society and in his mother. The bottom line was that this couldn’t just go away; Especially not when it made him happier than he had ever been.

+++  

Chapter End Notes

i hope that it made sense for jaemin to try to accept himself in that way, because it's VERY similar to mine, where i started to realize it, and i would stay up and scroll through social media for hours talking to people and looking at a bunch of things to find answers, and i myself would make a serious attempt to accept it. it seemed really fitting for jaemin, and i couldn't think of him handling it any other way (at least not rationally), as it came to my mind subconsciously and i just realized i mimicked my own acceptance lol

also now that events are starting to rise, the chapters will be longer than 1k ! excited noises
A few days after, filled with Jaemin’s anxious disposition, he had finally invited him to stay over. His mother was thrilled, and was more proud of him than anything. He had gotten the whole lament on how she was waiting for this day, how he was getting so far in life, and how much she loved him. Long story short, and a couple hours later, he had cried sufficiently and felt a little bit better about going off to do things by himself and with Jeno- Maybe a little less of that second one.

It was a weekday, so Jeno was driving them. He only had another small backpack with him when they met up after school, and seeing it made him even more anxious. “Hey, Jaem. You wanna pick up some french fries on the way there?”

“Yeah,” Jaemin let a small smile slip as they switched items, so that Jeno was guiding his bicycle and he was holding Jeno’s bag. It was a habit for them (Jaemin) to pick up some sort of snack when they were studying or going out. On more than one occasion, he had accidentally walked into the house with some sort of fast food, and had to scramble to hide it from his mother.

“Aera’s mad because we didn’t invite her.”

“She can be mad. It’ll be a while until she’s allowed to come over. You know this,” He opened the trunk for him. “How long has it been, and you’re just now coming over?”
“Woah, okay,” Jeno chuckled. “Guess you really wanted me by myself.”

“No, no!” Jaemin scoffed. That was entirely the case, and he wasn’t afraid to admit that to himself. Aera was around 99% of the time when they were in school, and it was only him and Jeno whenever they went out, studied, or Aera wasn’t there - and she was always there, with her perfect attendance and all.

“Don’t be a baby, and just admit it,” He opened his door for him, which Jaemin failed to notice.

He simply got in the car and shook his head at him. “My mother doesn’t want me around girls anyways, for obvious reasons.”

“Now I know you’re lying. Your mother would never say that, or discourage you from hanging out with anyone,” Jeno nudged him. “Don’t worry, you’ll have me for a whole twelve hours or so. She won’t intervene.”

“Ohh, you’re so embarrassing,” Jaemin leaned away, groaning.

Jeno’s consistent teasing quips had increased lately, and he couldn’t say that he hated it entirely. Sure, he didn’t like the fact that he was making him panic all the time and scramble to correct him, but it was sort of like.. Flirting. Lord knows that Jaemin does not know how to flirt, or what flirting even looks like, but to him, this was it. In a perfect world, this was Jeno was flirting with him.
“Ah, it feels good to be home,” Jeno threw himself down on Jaemin’s couch and sighed.

“Get up,” He sighed into his hands. “I regret letting you come over. Pick up your shit up off my floor. And, you’re messing up the couch.”

“Jaemin!” His mother called from a part of the house. After a few moments, she came swinging around the corner. “What did you just say?”

Jeno was looking away with a clear grin on his face, which was the opposite of his own expression. “It was just a joke, sort of. I mean it, but it just sounded a little more mean that intended.”

“It’s okay, he’s just a bit of an ass-”

“One of you curse in his house again, and see what happens,” She pointed a finger at both of them.

“Jaemin curses all the time, actually. He has quite a vocabulary.”

“Don’t you put that in her head. Take that back,” Jaemin snapped at him when her eyes widened. “I do not curse all the time. It just slips out when I’m really angry.”

“You’re really angry a lot.”
“Upstairs, now,” He pointed and sighed. “He’s teased me a lot today, don’t worry. It’s all in good fun until he upsets you.” His mother was certainly upset, so he hugged her. “I’ll make sure he pays for it.”

“You know, I don’t know what I expected when you finally made friends,” She pursed her lips together. “It’s good, though. All in good fun, clearly. I just haven’t seen you like this before. You are happy, and you have significantly changed for the better.”

“Mhm,” He nodded. If he was sure about anything, it was that he was happy and was a different person in comparison to before. “Maybe you can thank Jeno by telling him not to bully me so much.”

“I’m serious, Jaemin. I’m really proud of you, as much as I’ve said it lately.”

“You’re going to make me cry,” Jaemin swallowed and let go of her. “I’ll be upstairs.”

“Okay. Tell me if you two need anything, and I’ll let you know when dinner is ready.” She ruffled his hair and smiled before going off to most likely start cooking. Wonder what she was going to make for Jeno.

Jaemin turned around and made his way to the staircase, where he saw Jeno sat on the landing. “How long have you been sitting here? Why didn’t you go to my room?” He had heard pretty much that entire interaction, much to his embarrassment.

“I have only been upstairs and in your room ONCE, and that was to lay you down, you baby. At least I remembered to take off my shoes.” Jeno stood up and raised his eyebrows. After that, he simply followed him up the stairs and into his room. “That was cute.”
“What?”

“You know, your mom.”

“Yeah, yeah, don’t bring it up,” He rolled his eyes.

“I really wish that mine was that caring and sweet,” Jeno sat down on the bed. “As much as it sucks to say, you and my mom would probably hate each other.”

“Everyone who meets me hates me right away,” Jaemin swallowed. “I’m sorry she’s not super nice. Mine is just worried about me.”

“Was your dad worried about you?”

The last thing that he had expected was that they were would get serious so quickly, if at all. “Of course. He’s my father. I already told Aera, but I inherited my eyes from him. It was genetic, and it had skipped a generation before him. It clearly didn’t skip for me.”

“Oh.. That makes a lot more sense,” Jeno scooted over, so that he could lie down. “So.. Is it invasive to ask about him?”
“It is.. But I’ll answer,” Jaemin swallowed. “He had a tumor in his eye, and the doctors couldn’t get it out, because they apparently couldn’t identify it outside of an x-ray. I still think it’s bullshit and they just didn’t want to help him. I was twelve.” Jeno couldn’t identify emotions in his eyes - only his mother could do that - but he looked away in disdain. It was a short and sweet explanation, because he didn’t want to get too into it, full of hatred and spite.

“I’m really sorry.. My condolences, but I’m sorry that you get treated like this-”

“Don’t feel sorry for me.” His eyes snapped up to him with a lethal gaze.

“Let me finish. I don’t understand it at all. There’s people that walk around looking like idiots, and people that have silver eyes, and people that don’t even claim to be human. All you do is mind your business and try to get through life, and you get treated like shit. Your dad was probably doing the same thing, just trying to provide for his family. You look so normal, and you’re good looking, and you don’t try to attract attention to yourself. Everyone else is so rude and critical. To be quite honest, I just thought you were wearing contacts or something, and you looked nice enough. Then Jiseok started spewing all this bullshit, and I still didn’t get it. What, are we going to start bullying Hye because she has blue eyes? I just don’t get it, okay? What’s the point in discriminating for things that are perfectly fine?”

Jaemin was short of breath, because Jeno was genuinely angry. He looked back at him and smiled slightly. “I don’t even know what to say to that.”

Was it bad to say that his crush on Jeno had just grown exponentially?

“I know that you still don’t entirely trust me, but I consider you my best friend.” Jeno grinned back.

“No, no, I trust you. You, and my mother.”
“As of a few seconds ago, yeah,” He scoffed playfully.

“Okay, I just did, yes. But maybe there’s a chance that I subconsciously did before. I went out with you, alone, and let you drive me around, alone, and let you know where I live. I can’t do that to anyone or I’ll be in danger.”

“You’ve got a fair point,” Jeno laid back on his bed. “I’m just that great of a person.”

“You were really earning points for that conversation, you know. And even though you were being cocky, you’re not wrong,” Jaemin laid down next to him. The two of them were relaxed, looking up at the ceiling. “Wait.. Did you just call me good looking a few moments ago?”

“Yes,” Jeno turned his head. “Why? Did you like it?”

“Of course I did!” He started chuckling. “The only person who compliments me is my mother.”

Jeno laughed one of his loud, contagious laughs, and he turned his head so that they were making eye contact. His eyes were sweet little crescents, with his bright smile on showcase. He felt his heart skip beats seeing him smile in his direction like this. He was the sweetest person he had ever met, and he could call him his best friend.
Jaemin and Jeno hopped down the stairs when their mom called them for dinner, with the cliche, ‘Boys! Dinner’s Ready!’ Who knows how long she had been waiting to say that. Jeno was curious as to what she cooked, but was excited. “Mm.. This smells really good,” He said.

“Woah! What is that?” Jaemin’s eyes widened, and he looked up at his mom.

“Relax, it’s not chicken,” She picked a piece out of the bowl. “It’s tofu. It just looks and tastes like chicken. I wanted to try something new, and I presume that Jeno eats meat. It’s a good medium.”

“Thank you very much,” Jeno smiled and bowed his head at her. “I appreciate you thinking of me.”

“Only the best for my son’s best friend,” She smiled at him. “You’re so nice and polite. I still feel guilty for reporting you to administration to this day. All you were trying to do was be his friend. We just aren’t used to it, and you caught us off guard. I cannot stop apologizing.”

“As I told Jaemin, it’s okay. I completely understand. I sort of deserved it, for being so bold,” He shrugged. “Should I grab some cups, or plates, or anything?”

“You can just go sit down, we’ve got it,” Jaemin patted his shoulder.

“You know, Jaemin, he is awfully sweet,” His mother mumbled to him once he was in the other room. “I don’t know how you got so lucky. What are the odds that you bump into someone that accepts you and likes you for who you are?”
“I know,” He said, a little too dreamily. “I’m glad that I never tried to push him away.”

- 

After dinner, Jeno wasn’t as tired as Jaemin. He said felt full, since dinner was delicious for not containing any meat, but he seemed more energized that fatigued. When they walked back up to his room, he excused himself to go to the bathroom. Jaemin took this opportunity to change; Lord knows that if they changed in front of each other, he might spontaneously combust. Who knew that muscles could be attractive? Upon his return, he was already lying in bed, exhausted.

“Aw, come on, you’re boring,” Jeno laid down next to him above the covers. “You wanted me all to yourself and you’re just going to sleep at the prime hangout time.”

“I can’t help it… I always go to bed after I eat. I’m so sleepy,” His eyes were glossy and hazy. Jeno’s figure was a little blurry, but he could still see him. However, he would probably forget anything that was happening right now. “Wait.” He sat up and leaned forward. “You’re wearing glasses..”

“Yup. I wear contacts on the daily. Glasses are a hassle,” He grinned.

“You look much smarter, and hotter,” Jaemin’s eyes widened. “I didn’t mean to call you hot! I meant it, but like- like..-”

“No homo?”
He bit his lip. God, did he just want to admit that he fully and sincerely meant it. There was the opportunity for him to do so, so why couldn’t he? Jeno had just a few hours ago. He was just too scared to show any emotion towards him that might tip him off. Jaemin patted the pillow next to him to tell him that he could climb under the covers.

“No homo.”

+++  
Chapter End Notes

this is truly the slow burn part of the fic... two gays, on the path to get together
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

there's a possibility.

!! trigger warning for violence and homophobia !!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At the end of the day, he could say that he was closer to Jeno than he was to his own mother. There were plenty of obvious things that he never shared with her as a teenager, but it was his thoughts and feelings that created the gap between public and personal. Jeno understood what it was like to be in his shoes, in a sense. The bullying and outcasted parts were the only exception. Aligning with this was his crush. All he craved in life was to be understood and accepted, and Jeno was giving him that and more. Aera understood it, and accepted him, but she did just that. Jeno appreciated him, and praised him, and treated him like a person. He caught himself swooning over him more every day. Each day seemed to melt together, even when Jeno wasn’t there. Jaemin wasn’t the type to be devastated because he wasn’t there, instead just looking forward to him returning. Besides, they would text otherwise.

Everything was the same, pretty much. Their hang outs would consist of them going out somewhere, or going to his house and stopping by somewhere on the way. They would study between breaks, and only at his house when necessary. His house quickly became the culmination of their relationship, or rather, friendship. Aera started to tag along on their trips to the coffee center, and once or twice to his house to drop him off. She also started seeing a guy, from the neighboring school - truly neighboring, as it was just down the block - and she started getting more into makeup to play it up for him sometimes. It was really cute to see, but he was also envious.

It was so easy for her to show that she liked him, and for him to reciprocate, even if he had never seen them together. She could impress him, cater to him, and draw him in. He wasn’t sure how it would go if he tried to appeal to Jeno. The worst part was that he couldn’t simply ask what he liked, because he would basically be outing himself.

Today, he was feeling anxious because Jeno had been extra - as if he was initially - protective over him. He was walking in front of him, rather than beside him, and was looking both ways at every corner as if he were crossing the street. Aera was the first to catch on to his suspicious behavior.
and ask during lunch.

“No reason.”

“Am I not at least allowed to know?” She pouted and shoved him.

“There’s no reason, I’m just walking around.”

“Maybe then it would be safe for you to not walk in front of Jaemin like a bodyguard,” Aera switched spots with him. Jaemin wasn’t opposed, but he was also curious. The three of them continued to walk to the library, as per usual. They took a different route occasionally, coming from the courtyard rather than the hallway. While they were walking, and Jeno and Aera were caught up in conversation, he was yanked backwards. Whoever was grabbing him was too quick and his yelling was muted, and his attempt to grab Jeno’s arm was foiled by the distance that Aera had created.

Dragged around the buildings and shoved harshly into the wall, he should have known that it was Jiseok. Thanks to Jeno, and slightly Aera, he had been able to avoid him and be protected from him. At his one vulnerable moment, he caught him.

“Jeno- Ugh!” He tried to scream, but Jiseok kicked him in the stomach.

“You think you’re so high and mighty, huh?” Jiseok kicked him again. “Stealing two of my friends, trying to convince everyone you’re something other than a freak? You thought you could avoid me forever. Thought. And what? You want Jeno to save you?”
“Jen-” Just as he caught his breath, he was cut off when he pinned him down and punched him in the face. It stung, and he could already feel it throbbing.

“You’re such a plague,” Jiseok spat in his face. “I hope he breaks your queer little heart and you’re knocked down to the level you belong.”

Jaemin tried to use a leg that felt loose to get away, but it was pinned down by one of Jiseok’s sneakers. He had quite the grip on him, which only made it easier for him to throttle his shoulders and backhand his face even more. It hurt so bad, and he had never been assaulted to this extent before, with months and months of hatred that had built up being spilled out in the form of his own blood.

There was an aggressive sound of stomping and squeaking of shoes that faded into his hearing when Jiseok punched him in the stomach for the umpteenth time. “Jaemin!”

His eyes darted around, and saw Jeno sprinting across the courtyard searching for the sound of Jiseok’s voice. Jiseok’s hand flew to his mouth to keep him from responding, but he hardly had the energy to, anyways. Thankfully, this failed, and Jeno spotted them.

Jeno’s strength prevailed, and Jiseok was torn off of him and thrown to the ground. He pinned him down, this time, and looked back up around the courtyard while he squirmed under him. Aera came running into the courtyard, and quickly increased her pace in the direction of the office. Jaemin finally had time to breathe, and he was thankful. Who knows how long that would have gone on if Jeno hadn’t ran in.

He let his aching body relax as much as it possibly could while Jeno and Jiseok spat insults at each other and Aera presumably got someone from the office. To be completely frank, he hadn’t felt this low in months. Jiseok had certainly taken him down a peg and reminded him who he was to the rest of the world. What hurt him most?
I hope he breaks your queer little heart.

Was it that obvious? Was it so clear that he had a big, fat, suffocating crush on Jeno? Not to mention, it would most likely end that way. There would be no gratification in his crush, only heartbreak, because Jeno didn’t like him like that whatsoever.

“Jaemin!” The office staff had arrived, along with a security guard, and Jeno was free to let Jiseok go. He appeared in his line of vision, eyes scanning all over his face. “Oh, you’re bleeding, your cheek is a little.. Cut. How much does everything hurt?”

“I’m just really tired.. I’ll feel it later, trust me,” Jaemin sighed.

Jeno swiftly - it was impressive, really, and even in this situation, attractive - picked him up and carried him with a hand on his back and one under his knees. They were headed to the nurse, without a doubt. He wanted to wrap his arms around his neck, but there were two things stopping him - His body ached and he didn’t want to move, and it wasn’t his place to cuddle him close like that. He settled for resting his head onto his chest and closing his eyes.

Thankfully - he was saying this word far too much today - the cut was only tiny and not nearly wide or deep enough to require stitches. He let the nurse fix him up, with touches that stung and hurt and medicine that had no taste. Eventually, he was able to convince the staff to let him rest and not call home just yet, then allow him to go home at the end of the day. Two hours to himself, just resting, with no stress to deal with at the moment.
After his prolonged nap, he took his time making his way to the parking lot, where Jeno was waiting for him. The two hadn’t exchanged many words, but a lot of this was mentally pre-agreed upon. His bicycle was already missing, most likely in the trunk of his car. He smiled at him and got in the passenger’s seat.

“Can I hang out for a bit?” Jeno was looking down. “I just wanna make sure you’re okay.”

“Sure. My mother is going to thank you eternally for this,” Jaemin sunk into the seat. “I will, too.”

Jeno sighed and pulled out of the space. “I’m sorry I couldn’t stop this from happening. I should have yelled at Aera, or tried harder to make it clear that I wasn’t just standing next to you for no reason.”

“It’s not your faul-”

“I knew this was going to happen, and I was trying to keep you safe.” He swallowed. “When me and Aera were hanging out, she was asking me to take pictures for her, and Jiseok texted her. It’s burned into my mind. She hasn’t texted him in forever, so it was sudden. He was going on and on about how horrible she was, and how awful I was, and how you would pay for our actions. I deleted that text immediately so that Aera wouldn’t freak out. I was trying to keep this from happening and protect you.”

He felt his chest start to burn again, and his eyes tear up. Jeno had gone out of his way to protect him without making a big scene of it. That’s what he would have wanted, too. He knew that it wasn’t his thing to make a mountain out of a molehill and make everyone worried. “Aera is s- so fucking dumb,” Jaemin choked out some tears, and chuckled.
“She would have figured it out in a second, and we both know that,” Jeno couldn’t help but smirk. “She can be overbearing sometimes. Scary, even.”

“Don’t tell her this, or I’ll be the object of her affections for the rest of my life.”

“I’ll make sure, don’t worry.”

Jaemin turned his head and kept his gaze on the gear stick. “I really can’t thank you enough for trying, now. You’re not a sappy person, but I cannot express how lucky I am to have not driven you away.”

“I’m an empathetic person. I try my best to see through everything, and not be hateful, because that gets you nowhere,” Jeno hummed. “You know that best.”

“Hm?”

“The world is hateful and all its done is hold you back. You’re not too bad, and now you’ve got a good personality, and friends, and a trusting mother. Who’s the good guy here, you know?”

Jeno and Jaemin walked in the door, where Jeno stopped after taking off his shoes, and Jaemin continued walking in search of his mother. She was on the couch, as per usual, waiting for him to return. The way that her expression turned from happiness to heartache indicated that the school hadn’t called her yet.
“Jaemin, what happened…?” Her voice was hushed as she pulled him in for a hug.

“That idiot Jiseok. Who else?” Jaemin broke down and sobbed. “I hope we’re able to press charges, because I don’t want to see him ever again.”

“I’m sure that you both are of age, so you can, and we will. Nobody is going to get away with this for this long,” She shook her head and pulled away to hold his face, wiping his tears away. “You will never see his face again, as far as I’m concerned.”

“H - Hi, Ms. Na,” Jeno wandered into the room, and he turned around.

“Jeno, sweetie, I know you’re worried, but you have to leave-”

“It’s okay, he just wanted to see if I would be okay, and drove me home… He also saved me from more damage. Pretty much salvaged the whole situation and is the only reason that I’m walking right now,” Jaemin took in a deep breath. “You two can talk while I go to the bathroom. I haven’t looked at myself in a mirror for quite a while.”

He left, already hearing his mother rapidly firing questions at his best friend. It stressed him out to see her so upset, so he was praying that he would put her mind at ease. Jaemin did as he needed in the bathroom, and only looked at his reflection for a second. That’s all he needed to assess the damage, because more was done internally than externally. He was still in disbelief that it actually happened.
Jeno and his mother were still talking away when he returned, and unlike Jeno, he didn’t want to intrude. Jaemin went up to his room and lay down in his bed. That’s when the pain started to sink in, invading his resting body. The whole thing made him feel even more distant from everyone, because he was reminded of it all. Jeno would never love him. The world would never see him in a positive light. There was no way in hell that things would go good for him. How much worse could things get?

His mind and body were in limbo, trying to heal themselves and get over this whole day.

After a long while of this state, Jeno came up to his room. “Hey… We were waiting for you. A lot of unanswered questions sitting down there.” He sat on the corner of the bed.

“I already have to get questioned by the school, and then the police, so I would like some time where I’m not getting badgered to relive that experience.” Jaemin sat up and took in a deep breath.

“You should at least let her take care of you.” Jeno lunged forward to catch him.

“I’m not going to fall over, stop it.”

“I’m not risking it…” He bit his lip. “Don’t you feel sad?”

Jaemin’s dry eyes were alleviated in an instant. “Of course I am. I just got beat up for no significant reason.”

Jeno pulled him forward so that he was also on the edge of the bed, but also in his arms. He was
hugging him. “I heard everything he said to you. It was awful.” By now, Jaemin was sobbing all of his feelings out onto his shoulder. “I really tried my best to help. But my best wasn’t my best. He’s a horrible person, and he even hit your insecurities, Jaem, I - I don’t even know—”

“You know that most of what he was saying wasn’t t - true…” He swallowed. “Right?”

“I heard you calling me.”

“Jeno,” Jaemin pulled away slightly so that he could look at him. “What he was saying wasn’t true, those awful things, I’m n - not-”

“Stop thinking so horribly when you think of being gay. It’s not awful, or disgusting. Sure, Jiseok uses it as an insult, and you know what? He’s being hateful and prejudice and homophobic. There are people out there who actually are, and you might not be one of them, but don’t be that person, Jaemin. I’m your friend and it sucks to see you be so horrible even though you’re a great person.” Jeno tightened his grip on him and buried his face in his shoulder. “Don’t degrade my community like that.”

Jaemin could pass out. He was pretty sure he just did. Literally. Jeno was shaking him and saying his name a few moments later. “You can lie here, and I’ll get your mom.”

He was now alone, to swim in his deep abyss of thoughts, from Jiseok’s words, to the chaos that was to ensue, to Jeno just coming out to him. It was all swirling around in a whirlpool that he couldn’t quite handle. Maybe it was the shock of yet another big event that had caused him to momentarily faint, and he couldn’t handle it.

His mother bursted into the room a few minutes later with her normal ‘nurse’s bag’, and Jeno tailing her, holding some other things. “Gosh, they couldn’t have at least wiped the blood off of the
other parts of your face…” She was at work, almost as if she were a surgeon, cleaning and bandaging him up whilst she politely asked Jeno for what she needed. Afterwards, he was 100% sure he wouldn’t be able to feel his body until the next morning.

“I’m going downstairs to make you some food, sweetie, okay?” She kissed his newly cleaned cheek and smiled. “Jeno can stay for a bit, but I want you to get some rest and recover. You’re definitely not going to school tomorrow.”

“Thanks,” Jaemin sighed.

Once she left, and a few moments passed, Jeno sat down in his desk chair. “So.. Were you so blinded by homophobia that you couldn’t take it?”

“No, idiot,” He bit his lip. “I don’t think you understand that we go to high school, and I am trained to say that things aren’t okay. Like that. We also live in a society,” Jaemin mumbled. “I might have said some pretty unsupportive things but I never meant them.”

“Good to know that I have your support behind closed doors,” Jeno rolled his eyes.

Jaemin patted the bed next to him, and scooted over when he sat down. “You know, that is such a high school boy insult. I would expect something more from someone who’s of age, and is about to be a senior.”

Jeno laughed and shook his head. “I’m pretty sure that he isn’t smart enough to think of anything else.”
He chuckled, and scrunched up his face. “Wow, it hurts to laugh.”

“Maybe you should be using the ice pack with the rub thing she gave you.” The blanket was pulled off of him as he swiftly grabbed said ice pack and held it on his stomach.

There was a possibility that Jaemin was loopy and delusional from the combination of having his brain knocked around and medicine shoved down his throat, but this felt a little intimate. It sent chills through his body - literally and figuratively - having Jeno look at him in a caring manner whilst taking care of him. He could feel his warm fingertips on the edge of the ice pack slightly touching his stomach, making his heart skip beats.

Thanks to some sexuality shifting event, he might actually have a chance with Jeno.

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Chapter End Notes

CAN WE GET A HELL YEAH FOR THIS CHAPTER !! NOW THE REAL SLOW BURN LOVIN CAN START (lots of apologizing ahead btw) sorry if there have been a lot of tws on the chapters lately, i promise it's actually crucial to the plot and structure of the story.

my apologies if the events seem like they're speeding up a lot, because even though this is slow burn, it's not MEGA slow burn, and i'm not the type of writer to put in filler of them hanging out and such when we've got the gist of it. also, sorry i haven't been uploading right on fridays as i usually do, i haven't been feeling up to life as of lately so the process of making these chapters has been slower, but writing makes me happy :) all your comments and support make my heart BURST <333
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

jeno opens up his heart.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Not only had he not returned to school the next day, but also for the rest of the school week. His mother was hovering, rightfully so, and heeding his requests to have time for his mind and body to rest. Despite the fact that he had little trust in her before because he felt like he was being forced out of his shell, he was comforted by the realization that she was encouraging him. She didn’t want him to be stuck where he was, and sink into a hole of despair. Him and Jeno were in contact, of course, since he was the one doing damage control while he was absent. Thank god Jeno had deleted that text, because Aera couldn’t spill the details of it all. She was just as clueless as everyone else.

At one point, he had even stopped by and brought him the work he had missed out on. It was so sweet that he had done that for him, and only made his heart flutter even more. That took effort, and knowledge of his schedule.

His return was just as expected, whereas he and Jeno were ushered to the office to answer questions that the school administrators had. Jeno had to hold out on the crucial information that was the text that only existed in Jiseok’s phone until things had blown over, and Aera wouldn’t be able to tell everyone. As great of a friend as she was at times, she had a big mouth.

It was agonizing how slow the process was. Overall, it seemed easy; Jaemin was physical proof that Jiseok was a bully, and Jeno had heard it all. The whole ordeal was drawn out for a week until it reached a court. Each day had made Jaemin angrier, and the more he and Jeno spent time alone to calm him down. Within the first two days, he had taken in more fast food than he had within the entirety of their friendship. For now, his crush was taking a hiatus because his mind was so muddled.
Another week was swarmed with legal obligations after Jeno snapped. He revealed the texts, which commenced with the search and seizure of Jiseok’s phone, and somewhere along the line, Jeno’s own parents had gotten involved. Apparently, they were suing the school for endangering their son because they weren’t able to contain one of their students and monitor him properly. They were wealthy and notable, which encouraged the court to get this over with. A case that would normally take months - especially for Jaemin - was now over in less than a month.

That’s where Jaemin was, now. The court situation had ceased; Jiseok was on probation, as a high school junior, and a restraining order was put in place. It hardly applied when doing something like walking around the halls, but did when they were at lunch, or out in public, as per usual. He was exhausted, and left to catch up on the work he had missed. As much as the school tried to act like they care, tearing him away from his work near the end of the first semester expressed the exact opposite.

“I suggest you actually get to eating,” Jeno came up behind him, rubbing his shoulders.

“I would, if psych wasn’t so harshly graded,” He scooted the rolling chair over so that Jeno could get behind the rolling desk, slightly reluctant. A massage from Jeno would be lovely right now. “You’re lucky that you get extensions because of your parents.”

“As much as I hate them, I have to thank them.” Jaemin’s pencil was pulled out of his hand. “I’d rather you lose sleep tonight than not eat lunch.”

“Gee, thanks,” Jaemin leaned back and set his lunch in his lap. “Like you aren’t?”

“What I do at home is my business,” Jeno unwrapped a sandwich he had picked up when they drove to school. “I lose sleep over more than just school, you know. We all lose sleep over tons of stuff. Life is life. You need the fuel to lose sleep tonight, so eat up.”
He pouted, stuffing his mouth to prevent complaining. It concerned him, and made him wonder, however, what kept Jeno up at night. The whole ‘rich kid’ who has no problems but actually does is always a cliche, but he could hardly see on the surface what could possibly be wrong. Jaemin hardly understood his best friend on the inside, who had put in more than enough effort to understand him.

“Hey guys,” Aera slumped herself on top of the desk. “I’m in a pickle.”

“Mm, I see,” Jaemin nodded. “Why are you in a pickle?”

“You are such a good friend, and I appreciate you as a person, wholeheartedly,” She rested a hand on his shoulder. “Mark figured out that you and I are friends, and you know how that whole deal goes.”

“So, where are you going to start sitting?”

“I don’t want to sit anywhere else!” Aera crossed her arms. “I’d ask you two to meet, but I don’t want another incident. So my solution is to just lie. We’re not friends, and I no longer am apart of your life, as you aren’t apart of mine. I guess that includes Jeno, since you’re a package deal.”

“How are we supposed to hang out, Aera? You didn’t think this through,” Jeno scoffed.

“We’ll figure it out! Mark isn’t even that bad of a guy-”

“Yes he-"
“No he’s not!” Jaemin sat up straight. He’d better interject before Jeno went off. “This is normal, and he’s still a great person. He’s just like every other person in the world that doesn’t like me! She doesn’t want to be seen with me, and that’s fine. It’s for the sake of her relationship.”

“Jaemin…”

“Yes?” He looked at Jeno.

“Are you okay?”

“We’ve known each other for too long for you to do this,” Jaemin held onto his shoulders. “This is nothing new. I am fine. In the end, it will benefit her. I don’t need to meet him, anyways. Okay? You don’t need to worry about my feelings.”

“Gosh, I’m such a third wheel,” Aera grimaced and pulled out her phone.

“Huh?” Jeno turned to her when he dropped his hands.

“You two are so close, and keep me out of the loop, and it always comes down to you two, especially after the whole incident. I’m not saying that it’s bad, but as much as you two have gone through, I exist.”
Jaemin and Jeno looked at each other. With her and Mark’s fight, she was lacking attention, and needed it more than ever. This previously had not been a problem, and wasn’t. She just needed a little boost. Overdramatic, as per usual. “Sorry we’re close?”

“Jeno, that’s not the answer,” Jaemin shoved him. “We’ll include you more.”

- 

After gorging himself on his mother’s wonderful rice, he was stuck at his desk and slaving over psychology assignments that overlooked sleep deprivation and its negative effects. He hadn’t stayed up this late since he had battled his personal turmoil of being gay. Speaking of that and his everlasting crush on Jeno, it was easy to deal with it. Him and Jeno were close, so they already were, in a sense, dating. Things were serene and satisfying being his best friend. The craving for the gratification that a real relationship would bring along hadn’t overcome him yet, thankfully. As for the whole social media ordeal, he was on and off, and it kept him grounded and not completely caught up in his own head. It was enlightening to know someone was there for him, fully and truthfully.

Jaemin had migrated over to his bed once his legs began to fall asleep on him and refused to fully wake up. It was a sign that he should probably relax soon. His calming music on bluetooth was interrupted by a brief ding. He reached over to pick up his phone next to his backpack.

‘are you still losing sleep?’

It was Jeno, as expected. The text had prompted him to finally look at the time and realize that it was just passing midnight. No wonder his body was giving out on him. He sighed and lingered, staring at the text. Jaemin was glad to have a smidge of company, but still thought about the circumstances. They both, presumably, had nothing better to do at this time, so he found himself hitting the facetime button.
“Ahh, your room is so bright,” Jeno mumbled, squinting his eyes as the screen lit up his face.

“How else am I supposed to see my work?” Jaemin smiled. He turned around to lower the lights in his room while thinking about how tired and handsome Jeno looked, lying down on his stomach and looking into the camera.

“I can’t believe you actually took my word for it.”

“Well, I’m trying to get it out of the way as fast as possible. I’m so tired, though,” He groaned. The phone was propped up on his pencil bag as he continued working. “Are you? Didn’t you also say something earlier that makes this situation ironic?”

“I stopped a few hours ago,” Jeno adjusted his head and glanced over, most likely at his books.

Jaemin idled for a few seconds before his curiosity got the best of him. “What’s keeping you awake?” He stayed silent, and he looked up at him. “Should I-”

“You don’t have to listen, since it’s kind of serious,” Jeno spoke into his blanket, quieter than before.

“Lord knows I owe you the world, and it would make me an awful friend to not listen. You’ve endured my endless complaining and upsetness for the past two weeks and comforted me, and even helped me get past it. The least I can do is hear you out when you can’t sleep.” Jaemin dropped his pencil and put all of his books into a pile, along with the rest of his stuff, and let them sit on the floor at the end of his bed. “You have my full undivided attention.”
“Don’t fall asleep,” He grinned, but failed to hide the harsh gulp that followed. “I’m just worried about the future again. I always worry. My parents want me to go places, and will send me there if needed. I’m put to a very high regard, and if I fail them.. It’s over. If I even want to think of doing so, I need to start planning for that now. I have no idea where to start, though, because I know I don’t want to stay with my family. As much as I’d love to be babied and spoon fed my entire life, it’s not worth sticking around people like this.”

Jaemin had reclined himself, with the phone rested against his lamp as he laid on his side, slightly turned to look at him as he spoke. “You could go far, so that’s not the problem… It’s so much pressure to become an adult, I know,” He took in a breath. “What’s so bad about them? You always bring that up, but I want to know.”

Jeno’s eyes wandered around his room until he rested his head on his covers. “They’re pressuring. I was supposed to be the perfect kid. My sister is the best, in their eyes, and has exceeded the expectations. But I’m not exactly living up to that. Especially since I made my one condition the one thing that makes a child successfully raised in their eyes.”

“What is that?”

“I’m not going to marry a woman.”

His throat went dry. For a brief moment, he had forgotten. “Your parents know?”

“Yeah,” Jeno clenched his jaw momentarily. “You know how I said I went to an all boys school?”
“Yes?”

“Those places are a breeding ground for sheltered homosexuals. It’s difficult to not find a student that has a crush on another one. That’s where parents send their children to be around other fellow structured men and be masculine. The opposite takes place, of course. Do you know how many... How many guys I made out with...?” He breathed out. “It’s all fun and games until you invite a guy over and are in the middle of messing around and your strict, bigoted parents walk in.”

Jaemin was speechless for countless reasons. Jeno, talking about his sexuality, talking about being involved with other guys, talking about kissing them… He might as well be fueling his daydreams.

“I know, it’s a lot. Let’s just say I’m at this school for a reason,” Jeno lifted his head. “I had to tell them that you were charity work, and that the only reason I had tried to save you was to look good.”

“O - Oh,” He shifted uncomfortably. “I wondered why they were helping me in the first place.”

“I don’t want to lose a friend over my- my- fucking awful parents,” Jeno grimaced. “I can’t even be around another guy without sparking a game of twenty questions. It keeps me up at night, Jaem… Just knowing that I’m seen as a failure, and that there’s a possibility my life will go downhill, that my parents don’t even love me, and that I can’t rely on many people.”

“I can relate to almost everything you just said,” Jaemin pursed his lips. “Worst case scenario, I’ve got you. My mom would jump in front of a train to save you, the person who made her son happier than he’s ever been and gave him validity in the world.”

“Stop it, you’re so emotional,” He rubbed his eyes. “Your mom is a saint.”
“I’m being serious. We can even share a bed, as per usual.”

“You won’t have to worry about your room being crowded, because my family will most likely keep all of my stuff.”

“Ugh, Jen, it’s pointless to be upset over that. Sure, they all bought that for you, but I bet you would feel better having your own possessions. Start fresh, the way that you want to live.”

“Is this a plan, then?” Jeno raised his eyebrows. “When my life goes downhill, we move in together?”

Jaemin’s heart was going to fall out of his chest. He was surprised that Jeno couldn’t see his breaths speeding up and the redness accumulating on his cheeks. “Agreed. But let’s not pray on your downfall. How about you brainstorm scenarios, and I listen until I fall asleep…?” It was a win-win situation; Jeno would be thinking about his future and setting his mind straight a bit, and he would fall asleep to the sound of his soothing, sweet night time voice.

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Chapter End Notes

lmaoo im making aera so annoying but she's just a big personality (to be fair she has the right since she is dating the one and only mark lee) ,, anyways jeno isn't the most sentimental guy, but he will pave a road of gold for jaemin, trust me. also, i really felt jaemin being head over heels for jeno and he's not even my bias
For the following randomly selected handful of nights, they would facetime, in which a game of twenty questions would take place. It was quite literally twenty, until they would get too tired or run out of questions. He learned a lot about Jeno, and how he was managing to hang out with him so much. Aera was being a great friend, covering for him, and she even had Mark in on it at the threat of something that he refused to say. Jeno had his fair selection of excuses, like studying, or looking for a job.

He had revealed a fair amount of information about himself, such as his hobbies, and desires. His fears were obvious, but sometimes Jeno would let him talk until he started to get embarrassed. It was official, that he was the closest person to him in the world.

And god, did he love him.

He was in love with him.

Jaemin knew that facing it would snap him out of this whole thing. The flow of good times would be interrupted. When he was with him, it wasn’t obvious, and didn’t affect anything immediately. Times just felt better, and made him happier. Like he kept telling himself, this was the relationship. Besides… He was insecure. There was no doubt in his mind that he was handsome, and fitting for a relationship, but not as much as those guys. Guys who went to those kinds of schools were absolutely gorgeous. Jaemin couldn’t compare at all. The thing about those guys, and Jeno, was that they were experienced beyond belief. He had done stuff with these guys, and was in one or two unofficial relationships. Someone with so much experienced wouldn’t want to be with a closeted freak-
“Oh, god,” He let out a harsh breath. Everything that he was told was ingrained into his own mind, so much that he started to believe it. It was a shame that he was much more affected than he thought. The insecurity and inferiority was normal, but the self hatred was something else.

It was a good thing that he let his problems bubble at night, because then he could go right to sleep.

“Hey, Jaemin,” His mother swung into the room when he began shuffling through his backpack again, looking for the last of his back work.

“Mhm?” He huffed when he pulled it out and pushed his backpack to the ground.

“I bought some more ingredients, and I think I bought too much, so maybe we could have a bigger dinner, with more people.”

“Okay, Jeno’s probably fine with coming over.”

“What about your other friend?” There was a look of hope on her face. She was still under the impression that Aera was a love interest, as he had never spoken otherwise of her. It was Jeno that he had feelings for, but of course Aera took the form of them in his mother’s eyes. Nobody would expect their son to be in love with another guy.

“Jeno can drag her along, then,” Jaemin nonchalantly answered. If he acted indifferently towards her, there was a chance that the whole nod to romance between them would disappear.
“Why doesn’t she ever come along?”

“She is with us, sometimes. Jeno prefers to drop me off first, so she is in the car sometimes. You’ll meet her, okay?” Wonder how she would react when she mentioned her boyfriend.

“Fair enough. Let me know when she gets back to you,” His mother smiled and closed the door. Oh, dear.


The two of them pulled up to Jaemin’s driveway, with Aera in the backseat. His mother had asked Jeno, and partly Aera, to get something that they wished to eat, since she wanted to watch a movie with them after dinner. He looked over at Jeno and sighed. “I’m gonna get embarrassed.”

“Again, I’m here!” Aera poked her head between them. Her hair was growing out a bit, and becoming wavier. It looked nice, but often found its way into his face.

“Okay, Aera, we’re going inside,” Jaemin groaned and quickly made his way out of the car and to the front door.

“Hey, hey,” He felt hands on his waist, slowing his pace to unlock the door. “Calm down. Aera will be fine. Your mom might be excited to finally have a girl to talk with. It’ll take some weight off of your shoulders.”
Jaemin smiled back at Jeno. He briefly opened his lips to speak, but he realized he couldn’t say what he wanted. He desperately wanted to let out his worries about Aera being paired next to him romantically, but he couldn’t. It pained him that it came so easily to let out his problems to Jeno, and that he could trust him… This was something that he wanted to keep to himself, however.

“Jaemin,” His mother swung open the door. “You have your key, don’t you?”

“Yeah, sorry. We’re waiting for Aera.”

“There’s no waiting,” She pushed past Jeno to stand next to Jaemin. “I dropped my stuff in the back seat. I’m Aera, nice to meet you.” He was already feeling sad that Jeno’s hands weren’t on his waist, protectively, but there was no ‘Jeno and Jaemin’ when Aera was around.

“It’s so nice to meet you,” His mother smiled. “I’ve already finished dinner, so I hope you’re hungry.”

All of them took off their shoes at the door, Aera taking a while to take off her boots. “I’m going to help my mom set up the table, okay?” He rested a hand on Jeno’s arm and smiled at him. Not a second was wasted before he was in the kitchen, helping her along. There was no room for regret for agreeing to this if he just occupied himself.

Jeno and Aera soon entered, with him pointing to different areas around them and telling her what they were. “Ooh, this is really good. It’s cauliflower, but it’s basically chicken.”

“Wow, really?” She sat down. “Are you vegetarian?”
“We are!” His mother set down some plates of sides in the middle of the table.

Jaemin and Jeno looked at each other, then at Aera. She had seen Jaemin eat meat countless times, and was praying that for once, she would keep her mouth shut. “My entire life. All we do is eat things that don’t contain meat or meat products in this house.”

Aera nodded at him before turning to his mother. “I’m a vegetarian, too! It keeps my body clean, you know?” Everyone started to dig into the food when his mother sat down. Delicious, as per usual. Plus, it kept small talk away.

“This is delicious, Ms. Na, you’re going to have to give me the recipe,” Aera chuckled.

“I’m sure Jaemin could give it to you. He helps me cook all the time, when he’s not got his nose stuck in schoolwork.” She rubbed Jaemin’s shoulder. “Jaemin’s a pretty useful son. Tons of good qualities.”

“God, mom, please…”

“It’s true,” She shrugged. “Good qualities are key in a man.”

“Yup, agreed,” Aera nodded. “It was such a miracle to find someone as great as my boyfriend. Wonderful guy, haven’t found a flaw in him. He’s the best man I’ve ever met.”
“Oh?” His mother perked up. “You have a boyfriend?”

“Mhm. He goes to one of the neighbouring schools, and we usually hang out without these two, for, you know, obvious reasons.”

Jaemin wanted to die where he sat. His mother was probably devastated for him, that he had a crush on one of his best friends that already had a boyfriend. Plus, her son wouldn’t be getting a nice girlfriend anytime soon.

“That’s so sweet,” She smiled at Aera. “Congratulations.”

Jeno nudged one of his legs with his foot. He discreetly looked over at him and raised his eyebrows. Well, he had caught the message. There goes the last bit of his chances to ever be with him.

Lord, was it difficult to not turn this movie session into a cliche. Aera and his mother were talking away on the other couch - whilst he prayed nothing significant came up - and he and Jeno were on the other couch, actually watching the movie. “You know, we still have yet to watch that movie I was talking about.”

“Which one?” Jaemin unconsciously leaned toward him when he spoke.
“The Rocky Horror Picture Show. The songs that I was singing at the costume shop.”

“Oh, yeah. Maybe we can do that soon. Preferably when Aera won’t be there to talk throughout the whole movie,” He smiled. His hand slid towards him, and he immediately retracted it in a panic. Some part of him was trying to flirt with Jeno, desperately. All today, he had not gotten enough attention from him, and needed it more than ever.

“Are you okay?” Jeno lowered his voice.

“I’m just nervous, and all over the place. I’m not used to having her over.”

“Does your mom.. Think you like her?”

He swallowed, and winced internally. “Yeah… I misworded my feelings, and she took it the wrong way. Don’t worry, I definitely don’t like her that way. No offense, but she’s not my type, either.”

“Well, it’s no big deal. That’ll go away, especially now that Aera has gushed about Mark about a million times tonight,” Jeno scooted closer to him and rested a hand on his back. “You’ll be fine. I’ll bring you some mochi tomorrow to make up for it, and you’ll feel better.” He gently rubbed his side with his thumb.

Jaemin’s heart was exploding, and he felt nothing but fireworks going off in his brain. This, along with the waist grabbing, was much more attention than he had expected when he said he was attention starved. “I would prefer some. Thank you,” He smiled.
“Jaem, can you help me clean up the table a little bit?” His mother got off of the couch.

“Yeah,” He stood up and stretched. Thank god he would be going to bed early tonight.

They were alone in the kitchen, and he was hating it. He just knew that she would say something, and it would be something that he didn’t want to talk about. “Jaeminnie, are you feeling alright? You’ve been quiet tonight, and I saw you talking to Jeno.”

“Yeah, yeah,” He walked over to the sink to rinse off some of the plates. “Aera’s just a big personality, and she makes me nervous sometimes. Her energy is really difficult for me to handle.”

“She’s quite the woman,” She chuckled. “I’m so sorry she has a boyfriend, sweetie. These things happen.”

“It’s no big deal, I got it over with a while ago,” Jaemin nodded, not turning away from the sink.

“You can send them home if you feel overwhelmed. I don’t want you getting upset when I just wanted to have your friends over for a good time. I’m sorry if I forced this on you. I’m just excited to see you living your life,” She rubbed his back up and down, in a motherly way. “I love you.”

“I love you, too. I have to get used to it, and I’ll be fine,” He sighed. “Let’s at least finish the movie, first.”

When they returned, Aera perked up. “Jeno said you have a portable charger, but he couldn’t find it in your room. Can you find it and plug in my phone?” She held it out to him before he could sit
“Yup,” Jaemin grabbed it. He didn’t mind Jeno in his room, going through his stuff, since he had nothing to hide. He’d been in there a million times, and it was nothing new that he would go through his things to look for something. The trust was there, after all.

After looking around his room, he realized that he had kicked it under his bed. He sat up straight and plugged it into the jack. Aera’s phone lit up, with 10% left on it. The lock screen was her and Mark, of course. Handsome guy, really. Jaemin stopped his own thoughts before things got out of hand. His eyes caught on to a notification that looked similar to one he would see on his own phone, and furrowed his eyebrows slightly. He read the tag, and the title, and the nature of it, and set the phone down.

Jaemin looked around in confusion. He was utterly flabbergasted. There was no way that this could be reality. He had probably fallen asleep on the couch, and was dreaming this. Maybe Jeno had carried him up to his room, and that’s why he was dreaming about being in here. He grabbed his phone from his desk and turned it on, logging on to the site where he kept his homosexual sanity. His conversations were opened, and he scrolled until he had reached one that was left on read. Jaemin typed something of no consequence into the text box and hit send. Aera’s phone lit up and piled on to the previous notification.

He threw his phone onto the bed and buried his face in his hands. Surely, there was no way that she knew it was him. He was anonymous, and he also hadn’t disclosed anything too personal. She was messaging a stranger, for all she knew, and he wanted it to stay that way.

Just as he was about to get up and return to give her the phone, he had a realization. Nobody he communicated with was straight… Was Aera secretly-

Jaemin jumped out of his skin when the door opened. “Am I interrupting something? Snooping, maybe?” Jeno shut the door behind him.
“Did my mom send you up here?”

“No. I just wanted to make sure you weren’t having a breakdown up here. Aera wants her phone, you know that she has to text Mark all day, every day,” He sat down on the bed next to him. “What’s got you all worked up?”

“You can tell?”

“Mhm. Your eyes are all sketched out, and your breathing is all slow-”

“What?” Jaemin leaned away from him in disbelief. “What do you mean my eyes are all sketched out?”

“They’re wide, and crazy, and curious. Like you’ve been overthinking.” His tone was neutral.

“How can you tell?”

“I don’t know…” He pushed his lips out inquisitively. “Same way I can tell when you’re happy, or sad, or tired.”

Jaemin felt like he was going to pass out again. He could actually read his emotions, he could see how he felt without asking… See the pure emotion in his eyes. Make that two people who knew how to read him. “Interesting.” He ran his hands through his hair. “I found the charger under the bed.”
“Hm, interesting,” Jeno mocked him. “So, Jaem, what’s got you all worked up?”

“I’m just…” He looked down. “I’m overwhelmed.”

“Everything is going fine, and nothing has gone on. This has gone about as smoothly as you could ever dream. Minus the whole liking Aera thing. Cheer up! You get to go to sleep once we leave.” He nudged him. “I promise I won’t badger you with questions tonight.”

“Gee, thanks,” Jaemin shook his head before opening his arms for a hug. Jeno obliged, as per usual. “Seriously, though.. Thank you,” He mumbled into his shoulder. Despite no response from him, he knew it was because he thanked him far too much. Jeno’s sudden silence made it less awkward, and warmed him internally. “Good luck taking Aera home when she’s talking your ear off.” Jaemin felt him laugh into his hair.

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Chapter End Notes

its 3am when im posting this haha im so tired bc im sick

i had yall FOOLED didnt i? yall all thought jeno was the one on the forums but its AERA. we love a good twist
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

going closer.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At every turn, something was gay. It could be something simple like a rainbow cast in the sprinklers, to a gay flag flying somewhere in the world where he could see it. The most taunting was when his music would switch to that one song he had listened to when Jeno was around, or when he was thinking about Jeno. The world was giving him so many signs to just come out, but he was ignoring every single one of them. He was at war with the gay gods of the world.

Meanwhile, him and Jeno were at a sweet spot in their friendship. It would last, but he was dwelling in it for the moment to keep his mind off of everything. For example, his newly adopted sickness. He had somehow caught a cold, and it was making him into a puppy dog that needed attention. His mother wanted to keep him home, but he insisted that he still go to school, and that he had already fallen behind enough before.

Jeno was treating him like a baby, and he wished he could say that he hated it. There was a chance that it was because he was gay, and gay people were much nicer and more hospitable, but he was letting him lean against him, rubbing his back, petting his hair. Of course it did nothing to make him feel better physically, but at least he was focusing on keeping his heart rate down instead.

Aera was talking their ears off lately because of how Mark was taking their relationship up a notch, which meant public displays of affection and the works. Jaemin’s stuffy mind was swimming, and her words were just white noise for him to try not to fall asleep to. One time, she was going on about Mark’s most recent gesture, and he was leaning against Jeno’s shoulder whilst he held him up by wrapping an arm around him. They were at the coffee center, so no schoolmates should be there to bother them. Whilst she was talking, he felt Jeno gently stroke his cheek. Without a doubt, he had felt his heart speed up, and his face heat up more than it already had.
He was extra affectionate and protective of him because he was sick, and if it didn’t do damage on his body, he wanted to be sick all the time. “Are you staying over?” Jaemin asked him when they were driving to Aera’s house.

“Yeah, your mom said she’s taking an earlier shift, so she needs somebody to take care of you,” Jeno said nonchalantly. At this point, they communicated on a regular basis. Who knows when the two of them even exchanged phone numbers.

“Thank you, Jen,” He smiled.

“I have to get gas first, Aera, so we’ll be a few minutes behind.”

“My parents don’t mind,” She shrugged, leaning on his shoulder from the back seat. “You aren’t the type of person to kidnap me or be irresponsible.” As much as it would have bothered him before when she did something as little as this, Jeno was out to them, so she didn’t have a chance at his heart.

Jeno and him separated when he had to go inside and pay for gas, as well as surprise Jaemin with something. What a sweetheart. He felt like this might be the only time ever that he would have with Aera. Public wasn’t the best place to talk to her, because she would hardly spill a secret with other ears around. He was still very timid to ask her anything, or talk to her online, because of that whole situation, as well as not answering her messages. This wouldn’t come easy, since it was a sensitive subject to be closeted. “Aera…?”

“Mhm?” She looked up from her phone and scooted to the edge of her seat to hear him better.

“Are you…?”
“Am I… What?” Aera was clueless.

“Aren you in the closet?”

“W - What?” She furrowed her eyebrows and scoffed intensely. “Jaemin, I have a boyfriend, I’m not a lesbian.” Her words were sharp, and made him nervous that she was going to tell Jeno what he was suggesting.

“But that’s not what I asked,” He swallowed. “Are you in the closet?”

A look of pure disgust and offense came onto her face, and faltered when Jeno came back and started pumping gas. The conversation was ended abruptly, but now it was on the table for discussion. “Here you go, Jaem,” Jeno leaned into the window and handed him an icy drink. “Maybe it’ll help you cool down.”

“Thank you,” He drank it, and instantly forgot about Aera because of how good it felt to drink something so cold. Sickness trumps all. Jaemin melted into the seat while the car was refueled, and continued to do so when they were driving her home. The gas station wasn’t too far from her house, so they were there in no time.

“Bye Jeno,” She said, perky as usual. Then, she turned to Jaemin with a spiteful and unsure, yet still cheerful look on her face. “Text me, okay?” Her fingers dug into his shoulder.

“Mhm,” He said, fearing his life.
“Is she okay? That was really passive aggressive,” Jeno watched her walk inside.

“I asked something about Mark, and she got weird about it. I don’t know,” Jaemin shrugged. “Not a good subject, I guess,” He laughed nervously. The last person that needed to know about this was Jeno. Sure, he was the openly gay person in their friend group, but it would also unleash the whole load of secrets that Jaemin was holding. He was already struggling to do that on his own.

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His mother had already departed by the time they returned to his house, so he was glad that Jeno had convinced him to get food on the way there. It wasn’t fast food such as burgers and fries, so it wasn’t entirely bad for him. He let Jeno unlock the door with his key and he started up to his room upon entering.

“Jaem, where are you going?” Jeno set the bags down on the table and waved him over. “Don’t be a bedbug, baby, come eat in the living room.”

“Stop treating me like I need extra attention because I’m sick, don’t call me baby,” He whined. Now that he was sick, his blush was almost nonexistent when it came around. “You’re asking too much of me, baby .”

Jeno grabbed his hand and dragged him into the living room, where he laid down on the couch. “You’re going to have to move over, or I’m going to have to cuddle you.”
“Your funeral, idiot.” Jaemin buried his face into the side of the couch. “Quit threatening me with your gay, I thought we’ve been over the fact that I’m not homophobic.”

“Who said it was a threat?” He rolled him over onto his back. “Seriously, sit up, though. You can’t eat lying down.”

“Try and stop me.” Contradicting his words, he sat up and leaned against him.

He was convinced to stay out of his room to prevent his germs from accumulating, but they eventually migrated up to his room per his whiny requests, and that continued in his efforts to go straight to sleep. “Jeno, just turn on the TV! I’m tired… You can stay up, I don’t care. You’re not the sick one, here.”

“Yeah, but I’m here to hang out with you, too,” Jeno huffed. “I-”

“Who’s that?” His phone was ringing, so their quarrel was put on hold.

“Aera.”

“Oh, god, I forgot to text her,” Jaemin scrambled to grab his phone.

“Hello- Oh jeez.” He could hear Aera already interrupting him through the phone. “Yeah, he’s right here. It’s for you, Jaem.”
Jaemin grabbed the phone and stood up. “I’ll be right back, Jen.” He held it up to his ear when he left the room. “I’m sorry I forgot to text you, Aera, I can’t remember anything these days. I’m too sick to function.”

“Jaemin, this is serious,” She lowered her voice. “What leads you to believe that I’m gay?”

“Well, um…” He hadn’t thought this through. Telling her the truth would consist of him revealing his online identity, and a whole situation that he wasn’t ready to deal with just yet. He moved into the dining room so that his voice didn’t echo through the house. “I saw something on your phone. I didn’t mean to look, it just popped up, I promise I wasn’t snooping.”

“I should have hidden my notifications, god… Damn it,” Aera whimpered. “This isn’t something people need to know, okay? Just like Jeno, nobody needs to know. But… It’s not that I’m a lesbian or anything. Yeah, I like girls… But I like guys, too. Obviously.”

“That’s… Bisexual,” Jaemin hummed. “Does Mark know?”

“Of course he knows. It’s vital to a relationship that we know things about each other, and definitely something as big as this. He’s a straight guy, of course, so he doesn’t understand this.” There was a pause. “Does it ever bother you to be around the both of us? We’re both gay, to an extent, and it must be awkward.”

“No. I’m not homophobic. Me and Jeno pretty much already had this conversation- Wait a minute, you know that Jeno is gay?”

“Yeah, he told me like… A few days ago. I think it’s because I asked why he was being all mushy
“O - Oh,” Jaemin bit his lip. “Well, what did he say?”

“He said it’s because he’s a dumb, lonely gay and that he needs somebody to cuddle up to. You’re sick, so you can’t fight him off for the time being. And you don’t look like you hate it, so it’s benefitting you both for the time being.”

“Sorry for making this about me, I just wanted to know,” He was smiling to himself, because all this attention wasn’t just pity. “Sorry if I outing you, since nobody else knows. I promise that I won’t tell anybody.”

“You’d better not.” Jaemin could see her demanding expression through the phone. “Go accompany the lonely gay.”

“Okay. I’ll see you later, then,” He hung up the phone and lingered in the dining room for a while. The gay gods were throwing him in the best position possible to be open about his sexuality, and he was frustrated beyond belief. Two people would be there to indefinitely support him, but he still found himself scared. Jaemin let the guarantee of cuddles carry him back up to his room. “Sorry the call was a bit long. Me and Aera stuff, you know?”

“Yeah. It’s whatever.” Jeno was lying down. “On a second thought, I’m tired. You took so long, I tired myself out.”

“Good,” Jaemin laid down next to him and buried himself in the blankets. “Goodnight.” His brain needed to rest from the day. As much as he wanted to say that his sickness was the thing that was tiring him out, it was the combination of school, Jeno, and Aera. He closed his eyes happily at the thought of it all from another perspective that, in essence, showed that he had a life. A smile found its way onto his face. He quickly was swimming in sleep, hardly conscious of the atmosphere.
around him, and paralyzed with fatigue. Jeno was still awake and shifting next to him. His borderline sleepy state was gently disrupted by a sudden overwhelming start to a dream. A gentle kiss was placed on his cheek by Jeno, followed by warm, loving caresses that made him fully slip into a peaceful slumber.

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Chapter End Notes

the little situation at the end was not, in fact, a dream, it was really jeno kissing him and cuddling him in case it wasn't obvious (i probably didn't make it obvious) !! i regret making this slow burn jaemin is the most clueless person ever like omg jeno loves u bro just come out already (just kidding i know its not that simple as i am also a fellow gay but you know what i mean) bi rights !! im not bi, but i did present as one for a while (long story) and i know how hard it is for yall so aera bi icon
It was interesting how their friendship dynamics worked in a normal school environment when they weren’t at lunch or simply hanging around one another. As when they had first met, Jeno had so gracefully stolen his partner in culinary. That still continued, and it was unbearable from his side of the spectrum. Jaemin would kill to hang out with Jeno during class and work with him, but that is not how things worked in the real world for him. Of all things, he was glad that he was able to dwell and get his work done while being able to look over at Jeno. Everyone knew that they were close friends, but it did not register fully in their minds. Jeno was a cool kid, and many others thought nothing more of it. His charisma and charms temporarily washed away Jaemin’s existence until they reunited during passing period.

“Are you good over here?” Jeno leaned against Jaemin’s desk while he cleaned up his work area.

“What are we talking about?” He raised his eyebrows.

“I mean… Does it still bother you to be by yourself? I know it bothers you to be by yourself.” The look on his face was sweet, and curious.

“You know how I feel,” Jaemin bit his lip. “You and Aera are such great friends to me, so it feels odd when I’m by myself. It might be nice to be alone sometimes, since you won’t always be there.”

Jeno silently watched him pack up, most likely out of curiosity. He noticed lately how there was a lot of awkward silence, which he credited to himself. His crush made it easier to talk to him, and
his comfort around him let his tongue slip more often than it should have. Jaemin enjoyed the relief he felt, but the awkward aura that he accidentally created him haunted him.

“I was thinking that I could head off campus and get us something good for lunch, since Aera isn’t here,” He smiled at him as they walked out of the classroom and across the courtyard. As bad of a memory as they had there, his mind was always diverted otherwise.

“Protein?”

“You baby me too much. I appreciate it though, and I’m excited.”

“Maybe I’ll find a loophole, and get out of my parents’ conditioning. I’ve just been cautious, lately. As much as I love hanging out with you, I can’t tick them off too much. Aera can only cover for me so many times, and I can only lie so many times.”

“I get it. My mom gets it too, don’t worry, Jen.” He leaned against his shoulder and gazed up at him innocently, infatuated with him. More than ever, he wished things were different on his end, because Jeno was the best person he had ever met, and did not deserve a family like that. “You know, you’ve been making me forget to take my detour. I could get Jiseok in trouble for forgetting to stay away.”

“Let him,” Jeno wrapped an arm around his shoulder. “He can suffer, and I can enjoy my time with you.”
“He does deserve it, but I’m not trying to spark another fit of rage despite the legal reparations,” Jaemin huffed. “I’ll be seeing my way to class, now, Jen. I’ll see you.” He walked down a connecting hallway, a shorter and more convenient detour to his class.

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Jaemin was waiting at the gate for him, and he never did this. The routine when he would grab food for them was that he would wait in the library until he would come around, then they would commence eating. Today, he felt extra clingy to Jeno, so he was stood at the gate, waiting for him. He spaced out in his Jeno - centric la la land of cuddling and holding hands as the other began pulling into a parking space, thus he did not notice his concerned look.

“What’s wrong?” Jeno balanced the containers in one hand, and he held Jaemin’s forearm with the other.

“What do you mean?” He tilted his head, while also basking in the physical contact.

“Why are you waiting outside? Did something happen?”

“Oh… No,” His tone was shaky. “I just wanted to wait for you… I’m sorry if I made you worried, I didn’t mean to. Aera isn’t here, so I don’t know… I just…”

“It’s fine,” Jeno let out a breath of relief. “I’m not used to seeing you waiting for me… You really know how to worry me, Jaem.”
“I try my best,” He grinned and grabbed the bowls from him. “You scare easily. I know we’ve been on thin ice, lately, but don’t worry. Calm down a little. Should I back off a little bit, too, so that you’re not so on edge?”

“I would worry even more if I didn’t see you.”

Jaemin’s heart skipped a few beats. He could hardly follow when he went along and they started walking back to the library. Clearly, it was in his best interest as his best friend to make sure that he was okay, and as someone as the straight target of bullying and danger, that bumped it up a notch.

“Jaem!”

He jumped and stopped in his tracks. “Huh! Huh?”

“You almost tanked that corner, god,” Jeno covered his eyes. “I swear on my life, you’ll be the death of me.”

Little did he know how much he made his heart stop on the daily. “You love me, stop it.” He was slightly teasing, but at the same time, he loved to hear it and know that it was to an extent. There was never a single ‘I love you’ exchanged between them, at least not explicitly. The love between them was expressed through the fact that they were so close, and that he trusted them more than anything.
Jeno sat down behind the desk on the floor, unlike usual. This day was extremely offbeat compared to the rest of their days, and it was not just because Aera was not here. “Can we study maybe... Thursday morning?”

“Yeah. I haven’t really woken up and been in the school early in a while, so it would be nice. Just like before.” He smiled warmly at him. Recently, he had been down because of things from his parents, to the future, and he wanted to make him feel better - as much as he did worry him every hour on the hour.

“I’m so stressed,” Jeno set his bowl down. “I shouldn’t be ranting right now, but we’re pretty much alone right now.”

“Go ahead,” Jaemin scooted closer to him. “It’s all safe with me.”

His head rested against his knee. “Gosh... I don’t even want to decide want I want to do with my life right now. It’s so much pressure from my family, and it only makes classes harder. You tutor me for a reason, thus I’m trying my best to at least get by. I’ve been so stressed out and worried about where my life is going. I just... I want to relax.”

“No homo... But...” For a moment, he paused, before resting a hand on his head and awkwardly caressing his hair. “It’s like that. There’s a lot of pressure on you from all sides, and I’m surprised that it didn’t get to you sooner. At least it’s not the end of senior year yet, huh?”

“You have a point.” He perched his head up on his thigh. “I hate that I have ingrained my sayings into your vocabulary.”

“I love that I have you using words like ingrained.” Jaemin playfully pulled on a strand of his hair before resuming his lunch. You could tell that since they had been around each other for months
now, that they were starting to adopt the others’ mannerisms. Jeno’s vocabulary was expanding and consisted of less slang than normal, meanwhile his own speech patterns were becoming more relaxed. They were both things that they found annoying in each other when they first met, but it took on a charm the closer they became.

“We’ll see what happens when you start acting like me,” Jeno smirked at him before eating.

“Fair enough, but I’m too structured for that,” He rolled his eyes. “One of us has to have the brains here, and it’s definitely not you.”

“I have an excuse, at least.”

“And what would that be?”

“I’m too gay to function.”

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Chapter End Notes

this counts as filler but i really wanted to note how jaemin and jeno are getting that thing where they start to adopt each other's mannerisms bc its cute, and i also wanted to give insight (slightly, since this was different than normal) on their hangouts bc i glaze over them. just some details i felt were cute to include. not to mention that ending was GOLD, giving myself a pat on the back for that one

(also,, setting up for the next few chapter's events.... heeheeehehe)
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

(jaemin’s) realizing that it’s not a choice.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There were many ways that Jaemin could face his problems. More often than not, he chose the way that caused the least chaos and ended smoothly. However, could his ‘problem’ concerning Jeno end smoothly? Could it stay peaceful? He had been telling himself for the longest time that he could deal with just this, and was content with it; But his plate continued to pile up, and he was overflowing with emotion. Much like that of his emotional gay breakdown, he was bursting at the seams with love for Jeno. The craving for the gratification that a real relationship would bring along had finally overcome him, and he was suffering. The real struggle in it all was how he would go about this. Not only was he seriously considering coming out to him, but the road from there was split. Come out, and straight up say, ‘I’m in love with you’? Jaemin was near the point of that.

He felt beyond guilty during dinner, knowing that his mother would be affected sooner or later. His mother was his lifeline, and the only person he could fall back on - Jeno excluded. “I’m going to go to bed early. I just want to lie down,” Jaemin sighed. “I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Goodnight, Jaem,” She moved from where she was standing at the counter to reach over him and grab his plate, then rub his back and kiss the side of his head. “Feel better, baby.”

Jaemin trudged up the stairs heavier than he ever had, and flopped down onto his bed. He had just seen Jeno a few hours ago, and hung out with him for hours the day before. This sudden onslaught of information would definitely be a shock to him. Psyching himself up was difficult when he couldn’t find anything about this to be proud of.

It was obvious that Jeno was the only person he could call, which only made it that much harder. He laid down on his bed, feet at the pillows with his head hanging off the edge of the bed. His phone screen stared back at him on the floor, waiting for him to reach down and dial Jeno’s
number. Jaemin hoped that lying down would calm his shaking, but he still shivered as if the room was below 50 degrees. Eventually, he brought himself to dial his number.

His body nearly jolted out of composition when he realized that he had hit the facetime button, and was back to full anxiety levels when he picked up. Jaemin’s face was only halfway in frame from the eyes up, with the rest of the frame being the end of his bed.

“Hi Jaem,” Jeno smiled back at him. “It’s late for you, why are you awake?”

“I can’t sleep,” The tips of his fingers slid into frame as he twiddled them. “Are you okay to talk?”

“I can barely hear you,” He scoffed playfully. It had no mean intentions, since he could tell when something was wrong, but rather meant to lighten the situation. Jeno popped up a few seconds later with his headphones in. His face lit up momentarily as he turned up the volume and the taskbar came down his screen, and then disappeared. “Okay. What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know how to say this,” Jaemin tried not to hide his face. “What if everyone was right about me?”

“In the sense that you’re a monster?”

“In all aspects. Just… Everything that everyone has said about me, or implied. What if some of it turned out to be true?”

“Jaem, I assure you that nothing is true,” He propped his head up. His eyes looked right at his,
telling by the way they had become so attentive. “All those bad things aren’t true. None of them. Everyone can attest to that. You’re not a bad person on the inside, either-”

“Y - Yes I am-” Jaemin’s eyes began to spill out tears as he further hid his face and fisted the blankets.

“Tell me what’s wrong. What’s going on in your head right now?” Jeno propped his phone against something so that he could sit up straight. “Don’t cry, Jaemin. I don’t like seeing you so upset.”

Jaemin swallowed and bit his lip. Before he even spoke, he knew his voice was going to be shaky and quiet. His gaze lingered away from the phone until Jeno was but a slightly moving blur in his peripheral. “I- I…” Jeno wouldn’t judge him. He wouldn’t go around telling others in order to hurt him. Nothing that he had to fear for would happen because he had called him in particular for a reason, after all. It was just harder when he was looking right at him. “I think I might be gay.”

It was silent for a few seconds. He kept his eyes off of the screen until his anxiety got the best of him and he looked back at him. Jeno’s face was neutral yet unreadable. “You think?” He had lowered his voice. Jaemin furrowed his eyebrows to stop himself from crying. “You know.” Jaemin nodded and sniffled. This whole phone call existed purely to talk about it, so he had to break the ice sometime.

“You should put in your headphones, Jaem. I can hardly hear you,” Jeno softly smiled.

After his heart skipped a beat, he reached over and pulled them out of his bag from where they were hanging. They fell along with the blankets, not blocking his face. The white noise from Jeno’s side of the call filled his ears when he put the buds in his ears. “When did you know you were?”
“That’s better,” He chuckled to himself and looked down. “I always knew. I thought that it was okay. I’ve always looked at some guys and thought that they were attractive, and if someone were to ask me, I probably would have told them the truth. I figured that girls just weren’t my thing. My sister liked guys, too, of course, so it was fine. Until something was said while reading the bible aloud as kids threw me off.”

“So you just… Hid it?”

“If I didn’t want to be crucified, yes. You know how well I did at that.” Jeno looked up and scanned his face. “When did you know?”

Jaemin’s face turned red, and he was thankful that he couldn’t see that he was already embarrassed before answering. “The beginning of this school year.” Since Jeno had explained himself, he would do the same. “I thought Jiseok was really cute… It was just him, at that moment, and I was like ‘oh god, really?’”

“It’s no wonder he said all those things to you.” He was holding back a smile. “I just can’t believe that you liked him at one point.”

“It was just a tiny crush-!” Jaemin pouted. “When you see someone who’s attractive, you can’t help but think that. It’s not my fault that he’s an awful person. I didn’t know that looking at him would create even more problems for me.”

“Do you still think he’s good looking?”

“He’s become way uglier now that I know him,” He rolled his eyes. “Have you thought he was cute?”
“No,” Jeno chuckled. “Why would I ever think that?”

“You hung out… And he has friends, so, maybe you thought some of them were cute?”

“Of course I didn’t. Just because I hung out with them, doesn’t mean that I thought any of them were cute.” He grinned. “Do you think I’m cute?”

Alert. Alert. Jaemin bit his lip and shook his head furiously.

“Oh, right, it’s probably a little too early to make jokes like that. I forgot for a second.” Jeno sat back in his desk chair. His voice was so quiet, and gentle, he loved how it sounded in his ears. It made his heart beat faster, knowing that he was normally loud and proud and that this voice was only for him. “You can ask me anything, you know. I want to make you feel comfortable with this.”

“I don’t know what to ask,” He rested his cheek against the bed. “Whatever you think could help me.”

“Well, for one, you don’t need help. You just need cheering up. What if I told you some stories?”

“Fair enough,” He sighed.
“When I had first arrived at the prestigious academy that I used to go to, I apparently gave off energy that I was attracted to guys. They weren’t wrong, but it was surprising. I only knew about… Three guys? I would say three- That weren’t gay. I also, apparently, blended in. Some guy caught me while I was in the bathroom- Oh, I should mention some things. There were like, motions, that would say if you were down to do something. It sounds like a dumb porn cliche, but that entire high school was a big orgy. It’s a miracle I didn’t catch anything. Maybe because I never went all the way-”

“Jeno, oh my god,” Jaemin curled into himself, now out of his view and lying in the middle of the bed. He covered his mouth in embarrassment and had to catch his breath. “Sometimes I hate you for being so comfortable.”

“You’re such a baby. We’re friends, you know that. At least I’m not going into detail.”

Just the thought of that made his mind go crazy, and he laid on his back, chest constantly falling and rising from how hard he was breathing and how much he was trying to hide it.

“If you don’t like that, then you’re not going to like this story.” He could hear the smile on his face in his voice. “I’ll continue anyways. A little gay panic won’t hurt you. So, the handicap stall, if you weren’t handicapped, were for hooking up. It was a whole system, it was crazy. I was just waiting in line to go to the bathroom, and apparently I was leaning against the sign, because some guy stood next to me and squeezed my ass-”

“Lee Jeno!” Jaemin’s whole body was probably flushed by now. “Are you really telling me a story about the first time you hooked up with someone???” He whined with wide eyes.

“I thought it would be funny and interesting. I assume that you’ve completely lost it, and you’re bright red, from the fact that I can’t see you.” Jeno scoffed quietly. “Since topics of my own choosing aren’t cutting it, you suggest something.”
Jaemin was silent.

“Are you curious…?”

Jeno’s voice had suddenly dropped another octave and he could tell that his dumb sweet grin had turned into a dumb sweet smirk. *I love you, I love you, I love you*, raced through his mind. He was so confident, it felt like someone had dunked him in a tub of ice-cold water. More than anything, did he want to kiss him. He had been shaking out of nerves before, and he had thought that couldn’t get any worse. Jeno proved him wrong. “Yes.”

“You sound so shaky,” Jeno hummed. “Fire away. You’ll get more comfortable talking about everything eventually, even if that time may not be tonight.”

It was funny, how the questions that he wanted to ask had been brewing ever since Jeno came out to him. “How many guys have you hooked up with?”

“Define ‘hooked up’. I’ve made out with a fair amount, and done other stuff with less than that, of course.”

“What other stuff?”

Jeno chuckled. “Listen. You can let your mind wander as much as you want, but as much as I love you, I’m not having phone sex with you right now.”
“That’s not it! Jeno, you fucking idiot, I-” Jaemin grumbled in a mix of frustration and embarrassment. “I just wanted to come out to you, I’m not-”

“Gosh, I’ve sent you into a fit of anger,” He laughed out loud. “Gay panic isn’t a good look on you, then. How about I just give you some advice? You still seem conflicted about it, Jaem.”

“That would help much more than what you’re doing now…”

“Come back. I know that I’ve got your blood rushing to your face, but I’m going to be serious for a second,” He took in a breath. “For once.”

Jaemin crawled back to the end of the bed and hung off a little more than he previously had been. “I’m listening.”

Jeno had leaned back in his chair, and was calmer than before. “You make it seem like it’s the worst thing in the world. It’s not something you can defer, or change. Look how long you’ve tried to do that, and it’s gotten you nowhere. You’re the perfect example, Jaem. You were born with these fascinating eyes and I’m not sure if you hate them or not, but I’m sure you used to. You walk around like they’re nothing, you’ve learned to like them, or at least not care. People obviously can’t see this from the outside, but it’s not something that you have to wear on your sleeve. Not everyone needs to know that you like guys. I guarantee you that soon enough, it won’t bother you anymore. Sure, you might never be proud of it, but you also won’t be ashamed of it. You’re a good person, and it doesn’t make you bad. If you’ve been like this all this time, would it make a difference now? You’re still the person that me, and your mother, and Aera, love.”

He had begun to tear up and sniffle at his words. His crush, his support, and his relationships aside, what he was saying was true. Jaemin had been scared into a hole of isolation by all of these prejudices - which, in this situation, was the closet. He had never gotten out of the hole that he was shoved into for his eyes, but he surely could escape the dark place that was his own internalized homophobia.
“If anyone would like to challenge that, and your strong but fragile soul, I’ll be here,” Jeno smiled.

“I’d say that I don’t know what I did to have it this good,” He sniffled. “But I’m apparently a good person.”

“That’s the spirit~” Jeno threw his hands up in victory. “I’m glad it’s all finally sunk in. Let’s sleep on it, okay? Your eyes don’t need to be red when you wake up, and now you have no reason to stay awake. It’s off your shoulders, partially.”

“I’d say the same for you, but you better be studying,” Jaemin wiped his eyes. “Just not too late.”

“I can sleep in,” He shrugged. “It’s the sacrifices I have to make if I want to go to college one day.”

“You know that you can make it. It’ll just take a while. That situation we can deal with another time, maybe next year. Enjoy this year while you can.”

“We?” Jeno raised an eyebrow. “I’m not dragging you into my mess.”

“What happened to our plan of being roommates, then?” Jaemin rested his head on top of his arms. “That we’ll both get jobs, and go to college after 2 years? And that you wanted a dog, and we’d have to budget around that?”

He smiled to himself bashfully. “That doesn’t mean that you have to be dragged into my mess.”
“Well, then I choose to be. To help and be involved. If I can do anything, I can be fully aware and active and be able to support you 100%. Who else will, aside from me and my mom?” Jaemin laughed. “Like I said, we can worry about that around the time that this comes.”

“Thank you…” Jeno sighed. “It’s good to have someone there for me.”

“Now you know how I feel,” Jaemin smiled at him. The air was silent for a while as his eyes flickered on and off of him, lovingly.

“Don’t try and make me blush, it won’t work.” He sat up, shaking his head. “Go to sleep.”

“As someone who just came out about… 30 minutes ago, I didn’t think I was capable of getting close to that.” A burst of confidence surged through him. “You think that I could, if I tried hard enough?”

“Go to sleep, you fucking dumbass,” Jeno laughed into his lap.

“Goodnight, Jen,” Jaemin picked up the phone and smiled.

“Goodnight, Jaem,” He huffed one last time before he exited out of the call.

Jaemin let himself flop back into the pillows and boy, did he feel like the biggest schoolgirl. He’d already had his sappy moment of realization, so now it was time to freak out and think about how
cute Jeno looked that entire call, how caring he was, how much he loved him. It was a step closer. He gasped to himself and his eyes widened. Jeno was gay… He was gay… Would he make advances? Would it lead to anything? Would their friendship turn into more? Could it? His heart was beating at the possibilities.

“Aaah- Oh my god,” He sat up and closed his eyes when his door opened.

“I didn’t mean to scare you, sorry if you were asleep, Jaeminnie,” His mother pushed the door open. “I brought you some ice cream, in case you were starting to get the hints of a cold.”

“Thank you,” He swallowed. “I’m exhausted, and I was just lying down to try and properly sleep.”

“At least it’s not too late. Make sure you rest, because we can’t have you missing any more days of school, or spreading any more germs.” She set the bowl down on his bedside table and kissed his head before leaving.

It would be for her own sanity, not to know. Even if he and Jeno did get together, she could still see them as friends. They were closer than ever, now, and he assumed that it wouldn’t change in the future. He loved her too much to hurt her like that. Jaemin picked up the bowl of ice cream and started eating some to cool himself down. Monday sure would be interesting, and he was looking forward to it.

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Chapter End Notes

HELLOOO EVERYONE im alive! a fair few of you follow me on twitter but ive been super tired and busy and stressed and i just caught up on sleep,, this was a rollercoaster to write wow,,, it warms my heart i love it so much and yall are going to
love the fic from here on :) i love all of you so much and i just cry thinking about yall and reading your comments / messages aaaa i can't thank you all enough <33333

(also i SWEAR if anyone gets this reference i will scream)
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

teenager things. (pt. 1)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jaemin thought that seeing Jeno after coming out to him would be much more dramatic, or much more awkward at the least. It was normal, and he picked him up like it was nothing. For some reason he thought that things would be completely different, but Jeno was right about it being as normal as it was before. The awkward parts came afterwards, scattered throughout the week. There was one time when they were sitting in the library, eating lunch with Aera, and Jeno rested his hand on his shoulder from where he was sitting on the desk, and Jaemin was sitting on the floor. He shifted a bit, and it started to slide around his shoulders; Thus, he panicked and pushed his arm away harsher than necessary, followed by an apology.

It only got worse when he had started to talk after getting out of class, and somewhere along the lines he was staring at Jeno so intently that one of his feet stopped working. His other foot tripped over it, and Jeno tried his best to catch him. He only ended up falling on top of him. At least that time they both scrambled away from each other. There was a point when he was leaning over to look at something Jeno was working on at his desk and - this might be the most chaotic - he unconsciously held his bicep with one hand and his wrist with the other. It didn’t end there; His body felt so comfortable that he felt his muscles a little bit. Jeno didn’t tell him, and Jaemin only made a noise when he realized it.

The list went on and varied on the ‘Straight Mistake’ to ‘Gay Advance’ spectrum, on both of their parts. Jaemin wasn’t scared of it, but he was scared that Jeno would be onto him already. He was trying his best to hide it, and his subconscious wanted to climb him like a tree.

Today, they were going on a double date - he wishes. It would be him and Jeno going to some restaurant with Aera and Mark. He’d never formally met Mark, so this would be interesting. In fact, he hadn’t even seen any pictures. Hopefully he wasn’t too handsome. Mark was able to drive, so he would be escorting Aera as Jeno would be escorting him. It gave off the aura of a date, and he was dying on the inside.
All of them met, and Aera looked really pretty, but different. School was a different scenario, but maybe it was the 5’9” homme fatale that she was clinging onto. He was gorgeous. Of course, Jeno was too, but everyone was beautiful in their own ways. Jaemin shifted closer to Jeno in a panic. Jeno’s eyes shifted towards him as they walked up to them.

“No,” He whispered. “Down, boy.”

“Shut the fuck up,” Jaemin said through his teeth, nudging him.

“Oh, seems like we’ve caught the dynamic duo while they’re bickering,” Aera crossed her arms. Mark wrapped his arm around her waist. “Kiss and make up, and I’ll introduce you.” The phrasing sent Jaemin further into an internal panic. “This is Mark. Jeno, you’ve already met. This is our friend, Jaemin.” Mark furrowed his eyebrows and scanned Jaemin’s face. “... Do you know each other or something?” Aera chuckled nervously.

Jeno covertly rested his hand on Jaemin’s back. He liked it, but he was confused by the motion. He looked at him for some answers. “Do you want to go?” He whispered.

“Why would I want to leave?” Jaemin looked back at the other two and saw them talking. Mark was talking to Aera, but he kept on looking back at them - more specifically at him. He stared down at the ground in what could only be described as disappointment. Mark hadn’t met him before, and he wasn’t even sure that he knew of him. If so, he’d forgotten, which was nothing new. Mark was a normal person that he would meet in the halls. He saw him as a freak, and was scared? threatened? intimidated? - by him. Jaemin had gotten so used to being around people that loved him and accepted him that the possibility of that not happening with Mark went over his head.

Suddenly, Aera grabbed him and pulled him towards Mark. It was just like with Jiseok: He thought he was cute, but he was met with another person who didn’t like him. “Shake hands,” Her voice was angry and stern.
Mark gave him a fish handshake, while he gave him a real one. “So, what’s up with your eyes?”

“Mark Lee!” Aera slammed her fist into his side, making him let out a groan.

“They’re genetic,” Jaemin grimaced at him and yanked his hand away.

Jeno and Aera pulled back their men as if they were trainers to angry dogs and walked inside. It was an ‘american style bistro’, the sign outside read. Jaemin’s favourite food to indulge in, thankfully. He could eat away his feelings of intolerance towards Mark. Who knows why any of them thought this was a good idea.

As expected, Mark set next to Aera and Jeno sat next to Jaemin. To avoid angry stares over the table, Aera sat in front of him. A server came up and asked if they wanted drinks, and the waiter was soon to return with them. Mark, being the seemingly blunt person that he is, spoke first. “Is this your boyfriend, Jeno?”

“Don’t be rude,” Aera grumbled.

“I’m not being rude, I’m actually asking,” He put his hands up. As in any heterosexual relationship, he was scared of her.

“No, no, he’s not, don’t get it wrong,” Jeno calmed Jaemin’s nerves. “He’s straight.”
“Way to assume any guy is his boyfriend,” Aera mumbled loud enough for everyone to hear.

The waiter returned with their drinks, and would come back soon to get their orders. Jaemin scooted close to Jeno so that they could look over the menu and converse. “Are you going to get a burger?”

Jaemin nodded with a smile. “Do you have any recommendations?”

“Anything that’s different from a normal burger is really good. Flavorful,” He rested a hand on his thigh while he leaned over to look at the list of burgers on the page that Jaemin was on. His mouth went dry at the contact. It felt nice, and secure, like a hug, but hidden. Jaemin drank his drink to avoid freaking out any further. “#4 looks like you would enjoy it. Do you want to split some loaded fries?”

“What are those?” He looked over at his menu.

“Lots of stuff on them, like bacon, and cheese, and onions. They’re delicious,” Jeno pointed to them.

“Yes, wow, my mouth is watering just looking at the picture,” Jaemin set his drink back down on the table. When they put their menus down, Aera and Mark were hardly looking at the menus, and maybe let out a mumble or two. He didn’t want to make it awkward by making small talk with them or Jeno, so he settled for silence. Jaemin rested his hand on his thigh, playing with the fingers that were there—Wait a minute…!

He was about to go into cardiac arrest. Jaemin looked over at him with the least amount of alarm in his eyes that he could manage. Jeno simply grinned, and squeezed his thigh twice. If it weren’t for the fact that he could compose himself so well, he would melt on the spot. However, he tried
not to get his hopes up, and concluded that this was to calm him down and make him feel better about Mark not liking him.

Aera and Mark had gotten back to flirting on the other side of the table. She decided to get a hot dog, and they were making obscene comments on the other side of the table. “Straight people, am I right?” Jeno whispered in his ear. He chuckled and smiled to himself. It was a little secret between the two of them, which he quite enjoyed.

“What are you guys getting? Jaemin’s getting a hamburger.” Jeno asked once they had all put their menus down.

“I’m getting a hot dog,” Aera giggled and shoved Mark. “He’s getting a burrito. What are you getting?”

“I’m not entirely sure. It’s some type of meat that I can’t pronounce wrapped around asparagus with some sides. It looks good, though.”

Jaemin looked over at what page he had open. “Prosciutto?” He hummed. “Not your fault. It’s an Italian word. Fancy, though. You’re a man of taste.”

“Clearly,” Jeno rubbed his thigh a little bit. “What’s it even doing at an American bistro, then? That doesn’t make any sense.”

The three of them listed off what exactly an ‘American style bistro’ entitled and what foods were served, while he tried to shake off his dizziness. What the hell was that supposed to mean? Why did he rub his thigh like that? It felt like Jeno had put him into a chokehold and let him go before he passed out. Don’t get him wrong, it was out of such intense feeling that he didn’t know how to react. He was so utterly thrown off at that. The second occurrence today, that definitely fell
on the ‘Gay Advance’ end, all the way there. As far as he was concerned, that was more than just comforting. Or was he overreacting?

“Jaemin got a burger. They’re his favourite,” Jeno snapped him out of his overthinking.

“Aren’t you supposed to be a vegetarian? I never asked you about that,” Aera poked his arm from across the table.

“You can thank Jeno for that,” He huffed. “I was, my entire life, and I still really like the food. Jeno fed me fast food from that place down the block from the school, so now I eat it. It’s not bad, and I have nothing against it. Plus, Jeno always pays for it. It makes it taste better.”

“Fair.” She ceased the topic so that Mark didn’t seem suspicious.

The waiter returned, and took their orders. Jeno was the last. He made sure to include their shared order of fries. When he was ordering, his fingers skimmed the hem of his jeans along the inside, next to his knee. Is this what it felt to want to kiss someone? More than just thinking about it? He felt so inclined to love him outwardly. It felt weird, however, because he wasn’t sure why he was doing this.

“What are the fries for? You said you got a whole plate of food,” Mark rested his elbow on the table, with his other arm around Aera.

“They’re for Jaemin,” He folded up his menu and handed them to the waiter.
“What? Jen, I thought we were sharing them.” Thinking about it now, it would be ridiculous to eat them when he had ordered such a plentiful meal.

“Shh, I know that you’re hungry. I’ll just eat a fry or two, and you can eat the rest,” Jeno nudged him. His hand was still on his thigh. He was so considerate, every time they went to eat. It was him who would order an extra fry, and give it to him, or let him have what he knew he wasn’t going to eat.

“You’re paying for you two, so that’s fine,” Aera shrugged.

“Are you sure you’re not dating?” Mark joked. Jaemin wished that he could answer and say yes.

“Please,” Jaemin scoffed and rolled his eyes, looking at Jeno for a split second. “Even if I was, he’s not even my type.” Just to make sure that he wasn’t completely ruining the existence of a hand on his thigh, he hooked his pointer finger around Jeno’s.

“Rough,” Jeno held his heart.

“Again, not being rude,” Mark held his hand up. “How did you guys become friends?”

“Do you want the short version?” When Jaemin leaned forward, Mark cowered slightly. It was odd how even someone who had not heard a single rumor about him was intimidated. “Jeno became my friend, and then Aera. Jeno was cool with me.”

“What a character you are, Jeno.” He raised his eyebrows.
“It’s a wonder that you two get along,” Aera leaned against the wall of the booth, with her legs propped up on Mark’s lap. “Mark is so manly, and he is intimidated by anyone who comes near me. Even you, Jen.”

“Who isn’t intimidated by Jaemin?” Jeno pouted at him.

“I get that I can be mean,” He pursed his lips. “But you guys put up with it.”

“You just have a sharp tongue. You’re sarcastic,” Aera added on. “It’s not like you’ve ever hurt any of us.”

“I beg to differ.”

“Yup.”

Jaemin looked at Jeno, and then at Mark. Mark, he could care less about. Of course he’d hurt his feelings. He’d meant it. “I’ve hurt you before?”

“Hmm.. Let me think.” Jeno leaned towards him. “Yeah. The one time you basically beat me up and then body slammed me into the sidewalk.”
“We don’t talk about that!” He laughed at Mark and Aera’s shocked expressions. Jeno laughed back and mocked him. “Stop it! You’re such a child! You’re extremely muscular, so it’s your fault that you let me beat you up, conversation over.” He sighed and leaned against the booth. Aera was staring at both of them like they were idiots - and they were. Maybe it was because the conversations they had with and around Aera were more tame, but she seemed a bit interested. This is how they argued all the time when they were together.

Once again, the waiter was back, and brought their food. She set it all down and rested a hand on Jeno’s shoulder. “Your food is almost ready, and I’ll be back with it soon.”

Jaemin started eating his food, and while Aera and Mark were occupied with theirs, he innocently glanced over at Jeno. He used the hand that had previously been wrapped around Jeno’s to push the fries towards him. In return, he got a small smile as he started eating some. Sometimes, he wondered if people actually noticed these chivalrous acts they made towards each other. They were obvious, and open. Being such close friends, you think that more people would pay attention to them, but it just diverted focus instead.

Jeno’s food came soon enough. If the meat wasn’t a crucial part of the meal, it looked like something that his mother would like. They were fairly silent, considering that they were eating, and it was nice. Mark pretty much faded away for him, because there was no reason to pay any attention to someone who didn’t like him. Somewhere along the lines, the fries were pushed back over to him and he unconsciously started eating them.

“Hey, do you want to sleep over?” Jaemin nudged Aera from under the table.

“Huh?” She choked on her food. “Me?”

“Yeah.” The dish that Jeno had made him think of his mother, and he felt guilty for… Living his life, apparently. Aera and his mother weren’t the best of friends, but it was something. “So… In?”
“Mhm! It sounds fun,” She smiled. “I’d have to stop at home for a bit, but I’m down.”

“How are you getting there?” Mark wasn’t happy about the notion of her staying overnight with two guys, even if one of them was openly gay. It was an asshole move, but he expected nothing less in his presence.

“I’ll drive, it’s no big deal,” Jeno ate the last portion of the prosciutto dish. “I can just drive her from here and we can make the rounds, Jaem never minds a long drive. He likes it.”

“Way to make me seem like a puppy,” He laughed nervously, trying to keep the tension between Mark and Aera from spreading.

“Okay. I wouldn’t want Mark to drive me all the way home and back to your place anyways. I know how you like to keep it on the low, and all that. It’s fine. I honestly think that would be best,” Aera shrugged it off.

“Nice,” Jeno nudged him.

“You know what? I think that I should foot the bill,” Mark cleared his throat. “You all can get a head start on leaving, and I’ll just explain the charge to my parents. It’ll be fine.”

“Thank you, baby,” Aera kissed him on the cheek, despite how bittersweet it looked. Him and Jeno also thanked him. Mark wasn’t the happiest camper right now, but at least he was being a good sport to two out of three of them. They ended up leaving while he paid, and were on the road to Aera’s house soon enough.
“Okay, I’m going to say it. Mark was being a real asshole,” She crossed her arms from where she was in the back seat with him. “More than I expected. He’s like… Really stubborn with you guys, on things that didn’t need to be argued. He was so forward with everything he said, and I don’t understand it.”

“Welcome to my world, Aera,” Jaemin rubbed her shoulder. “Sure, you figured he would just ignore it. Unfortunately the world feels an inclination to bully me.”

She sighed in defeat, uncrossing her arms. It was surprising that it had taken her this long to see it, even if she had been around for less time than Jeno. Her mind was more straightforward, and very structured to what she saw on the outside. Aera was perfect, and on the track to live a lovely life, so the fact that people could be so horrible to someone who had never done something to them had probably never occurred to her.

“Nobody told you to bring a whole bag, Aera. What the hell did you bring?” Jeno looked over at her, now in the passenger’s seat.

“One bag is a perfectly acceptable quantity, and is less than most girls bring,” She shrugged. “It’s for good purpose. Jaemin, I’ve been dying to put makeup on you, and see what fits your face. It seems interesting. Plus, I’ve been wanting to practice since I’ve gotten into it recently.”

“Wait, what?” He raised his eyebrows when she grabbed his face.
“Don’t worry, I’ll do Jeno, too, so you’re not left out,” She looked him in the eyes.

“What are you going to do, put black eyeliner on him?” Jeno laughed.

“No, I have a sensible ideas and he’ll look great. You can contest for that, soyboy.”

“Shut the fuck up, Aera, before I kiss your boyfriend,” He narrowed his eyes at her, to himself.

“You two are going to drive each other crazy, along with me,” Jaemin rolled his eyes and pulled his face out of Aera’s hands to lean against the seat. This was the peak of normality. Going out to eat with friends, getting flirted with (which was not yet decided to be anything more than comfort), and goofing off before they stayed up and had a sleepover at his house. It was all he could ask for in life.

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Chapter End Notes

the second half will, obviously, be the sleepover and how it goes. it pained me to write this (not really because it’s cute) but this is how gays really be, so panicked and gullible. for once, this is not a long paragraph, i am only here to call this cute and to say stream fine line
hehehe this is kind of shameless but i wanted to recommend my other fics, which have a similar aura (or dont, it depends on what you read), and give a tease as to new ones i’m going to post! you all are such wonderful readers, and it fills me with joy not only to update but just to write this story. ohhh i could gush forever, really, but i won't. maybe when the story ends. i’ll try to organize these in order from what is closest to sclera to what is farthest so as to encourage the utmost fulfillment while reading. enjoy, and i’ll see y'all friday!

"fiend infatuation" - doyoung meets succubus jungwoo and falls in love with him. (7 chapter mini fic)

"doll parts" - jaehyun is a living doll, who just wants love from the world. johnny may or may not be willing to give it to him. (recurring fic)

"starlight" - mark can't keep his mermaid boyfriend, donghyuck, away from the ocean, but at the same time, donghyuck can't keep himself away from mark. (sort of angst in the middle, oneshot)

"bloom bloom" - as one of the tags says: 'the dojae as disney fairies au literally nobody asked for' (oneshot)

"1+1=0" - donghyuck is in love with mark, and taeil is always there to be his shoulder to cry on; which only contributes to the complications. (4 chapter mini fic)

"warming up (on the inside)" - jisung confesses his love to chenle the best that he can; and it turns out that he was worried for nothing. (2 chapter mini fic)

"i’m falling" - a chronicling of johnny and jaehyun's memories together, from when they met to them moving in together. (short story with a surprise ending + bonus chapter)

"ID: taeil is the best hyung" - aka marcie gushes over taeil and donghyuck's friendship in 1034
"limitless" - a sweet oneshot where jungwoo surprises doyoung about his pregnancy. (yes, it is abo, and yes, it has mpreg)

"nct oneshots!" - my collection of oneshots, fluffy and smutty, with various ships. (1k words per chapter)

"dry my eyes, bring color to my skies" - doyoung cheers up his recently laid off boyfriend, taeyong, on their anniversary. (longish oneshot)

"lover's exchange" - domestic life with johnny and ten; also an excerpt from a fic that i will never post bc it was bad idea (oneshot)

"gates to heaven" - sicheng is an omega that has been hiding as an alpha for his entire life, but yuta is hot on his trail. (recurring fic, sort of)

"ID: the skies have been gloomier" - taeyong laments about the reality of being a leader. (angst oneshot, set in the idol universe)

UPCOMING

dowoo hanahaki fic (has a title that i will not reveal) - when separated by friends, one may fall ill. (hehehehe...)

johndo drag au (no title yet) - whereas johnny and doyoung are drag queens. that is all. (oneshot)

(this is just what i have written i have so much more ;) )
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

a night in with the gang.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I’m glad that you let Aera come over,” His mother popped a piece of popcorn in her mouth. “She must feel excluded sometimes, since you’ve only let Jeno come over. It’s good to have some women in your life, you know, a diverse pack of friends.”

“You know I’m never going to have a pack of friends. I don’t want one, this is fine enough.” Jaemin took out another bag of popcorn to dump in the large bowl he’d found. “You know I have boundaries, and I just didn’t want to let her in the house and she doxx me and then we have to move. She defended me while we were with Mark, even though he hates me, you know?”

“You say ‘you know’ a lot when you’re getting defensive,” She chuckled. “I just think it’s good that you’re putting yourself out there. Have fun tonight, baby.”

Jaemin bit his lip in embarrassment. Before he could sneak a thought in, Jeno walked in. “Jeno!” He dropped the bag and covered his face with both hands to hide himself from Jeno’s topless body. “Go upstairs, now, you fuc-”

“On it.” His feet shuffled out of the kitchen, and Jaemin opened his eyes.

After he collected himself and picked up the popcorn, he went upstairs and knocked on the door. Aera opened it, with some makeup already in her hands. He looked around for Jeno and quickly found him comfortably lying on the bed. Jeez, was he really muscular…
“I’ll send you a picture so you can look longer,” Jeno sat up. “I need a shirt, and I didn’t want to just grab one, because you are much tinier than me, in body mass. I didn’t expect you to send me upstairs for walking around your house without a shirt. Good to know instead of panicking, you’ve begun to resort to anger.”

Jaemin rolled his eyes and set the bowl down on the bed. “I am muscular. Just because I don’t have huge biceps like you, doesn’t mean I’m not muscular.”

“Oh, really?”

“Stop it, Jeno. I didn’t come over to witness ‘Muscular Twink Turns Straight Boy’ when my hands work perfectly fine and I have access to Pornhub,” Aera pulled Jaemin forward and switched spots with him, so that he was sitting in the desk chair. “Just get a shirt and don’t cry if it fits you like a medium.”

He had already begun cackling, and Jeno looked like he was offended as ever. The irony of it all, which he was sure they both recognized, was that he was already turned and that Jeno wasn’t the one to do it. “She couldn’t have said it better,” Jaemin grinned.

Jeno occupied himself with finding a shirt in his closet, while Aera maneuvered her way around his face to size up it. “You don’t have a lot of acne, I’m jealous. You’re really fuckin’ handsome, you know that?”

“I’m aware,” He raised his eyebrows. “You know you can sit on my lap instead of craning your neck and breaking your back to do things?”
“I have a boyfriend,” She put her hands on her hips. “Get a boner and I’ll kill you.”

“If I liked you like that, you would know.” Jaemin opened his arms.

Jeno turned around just in time to see Aera sitting in his lap and Jaemin loosely wrapping his arms around her to get comfortable. “Perhaps Mark has a right to feel threatened.” He flopped down on the bed and ate some of the popcorn. “What about a game of twenty questions?”

“Jeno’s favourite game to play,” He scoffed, letting Aera do whatever she wanted. “Ow! Aera, did you just rip out my hair?”

“Yes! I’m plucking your eyebrows,” She protested, as if it were nothing.

“Before you start scratching each other’s eyes out, I’m taking a picture,” Jeno pulled out his phone. Aera wrapped her arms around his shoulders and pressed their cheeks together. He reciprocated, hugging her torso and scrunching up his nose. “Okay, can I get a normal one? Make a face like you’re posing for a magazine.”

“I’m always posing,” Aera pushed her hair behind her shoulders. They slightly changed positions, and Jeno looked pleased by the result.

“We don’t take enough pictures,” He tossed his phone behind him. “Especially when all of us are handsome as hell.”
“I’m handsome?” She scoffed.

“Handsome, yes. It can be applied to women, saying that they’re powerful and hot.” Jeno took some more popcorn. “As gay as I am, I think you’re wonderful, and I probably would have liked you if I was straight.”

“But you’re not. You called Jaemin handsome, and I’m pretty sure if he wasn’t straight, you’d go after him in a heartbeat.” Suddenly, she perked up. “First question! Would you? Like, if he wasn’t straight, would something happen, or would you try to at least hook up with him?”

Jaemin was very curious. In this sense, Aera was basically confirming what he had been dying to know, and sure as hell would save him a lot of time. Not only that, but whether or not he would treat him like one of his old friends and just use him as a way to let out a load every now and then.

“Well, as someone who is lonely, I’d go for anyone who’d give me the time of day. I’m sure something would happen, but since I’m a gentleman, it wouldn’t be up to me. Since I have had my fair dip in the pool of hooking up, I don’t think I would just be like, hey, let’s fuck around, you know?” He propped his head up on his arm, and was thinking hard about it. “I could think about it, but to answer your flat question, yes.”

“Spicy,” She raised an eyebrow. “Don’t make that porn that I made up come true tonight, please.”

“I’m pretty sure that exists,” He pursed his lips.

“Only you would know- Oh, I have another question,” Jaemin squinted his eyes as her eyeliner came dangerously close to one of his corneas. “Sorry, Jaem. Mark is a baby, and will not give me insight to the habits of men, please do. Is it true that guys do it all the time?”
“No.”

“Yes.”

“I don’t, so count me out of the census,” Jaemin scoffed. “Jeno has muscular arms for a reason, duh.”

“It explains why you don’t,” Jeno tossed a piece of popcorn at him. “I do have something related to that to say. I heard that you’re bisexual.”

“Where did you hear that?” Aera rolled her eyes, huffed, and swallowed all at the same time.

“Mark. He said that he proposed a threesome and you turned it down and was complaining to me.”

“God, he gets on my nerves sometimes, I will strangle him,” She crossed her arms. “Yeah, it’s true, don’t go spreading it around, blah blah blah. He’s getting his ass kicked for telling you that. Not to mention that he can’t keep it in his pants when I’m slightly younger than him and don’t want to do that right now…!”

“ Seems like you’re always mad at him,” Jaemin piped up.
“It’s just like he’s getting worse and worse the longer we date. Like, on the inside. I like him if he’s not being entirely himself. I shouldn’t say that, but you guys are my friends. I’m frustrated, because one more thing will send me over the edge.”

“Aw, Aera. We will be here if it all crumbles,” Jeno walked over with a handful of popcorn and put a piece in her mouth.

“Thanks… How am I doing, though?” She leaned back and gestured to the makeup.

“It looks good, it’s like his eyes are sparkling,” He leaned over her shoulder. More than ever did he want to lean forward and kiss him. “It’s no wonder you look so good all the time. You really know beauty.”

“I’m almost done, anyways. It doesn’t even take that long, considering that I’m not going full out. I just wanted to see how good he looks and stuff. Plus, I never get to do makeup on anyone else. It’d be easy to do it on you, so Jaemin is the real good time.”

“I’m not sure how much I like that wording,” Jaemin poked Jeno’s cheek. “Can you feed me some popcorn, please?”

“Mhm.” It was now blatantly clear that Jeno had been staring the whole time. The shirt that he grabbed did, actually, fit like a medium, and his muscles were filling out the sleeves of his shirt, as well as the chest. “Do you think that you’ll date someone soon, like Aera?”

Jaemin wanted to either squint in anger at him, pout to receive pity, or eagerly jump at the chance to flirt. “Aera’s taken, sorry Jeno. Don’t pray on her downfall,” His mouth saved him from embarrassment.
“Have a little more faith in yourself. There are more fish in the sea than what washes up on the
shore,” Jeno fed him another piece of popcorn. “I’m gonna take a picture, she’s almost done.” He
grabbed his phone off of the bed.

“Here we go, Jaemin all made up. Looking like he should be a model,” Aera held his face and
turned it to Jeno after she smeared lip gloss on his lips.

“Nice,” Jeno scanned his face and looked him in the eyes. “I like it. Has my badge of approval.”
He leaned in with the two of them, so that they all fit in the frame. At first, all three of them were
separate, but then Jeno had leaned in even more and gently pressed their faces together. It was less
intimate than how Aera had done it, but still made his heart beat faster. “I would say that it’s unfair
that I’m the only one without makeup, but I think I’d rather not take that road.”

Aera was much calmer when she was tired, and certainly added to the fact that she acted differently
when it was just them. Jaemin was brushing her hair out while she took off her own makeup, prior
to his. Jeno was relaxing and trying to find something that they could fall asleep to and let turn off
by itself. “The movie channels aren’t too loud, and they play a lot of movies.”

“I do not want to wake up in the middle of the night to porn, thank you very much,” Jeno had
settled himself in the center of the pillows. “How about we just go to sleep while talking? Voices
are relaxing.”

“I can speak personally that mine is,” Aera tossed the brush into her bag and cuddled up to Jaemin.
“I’m really tired, that made no sense.”
“I’ll be right back. Put Aera to sleep, she’s delirious.” He was most likely off to the bathroom, and was going to come back soon. Soon, he would be squished up against Jeno, which meant that any sleep position was possible. Sure, they always slept in the same bed, but it was different when the proximity was significantly decreased.

Jaemin sat on the bed and decided to lie next to Aera. “I regret not inviting you over sooner. You’re really fun when it’s just us.”

“Yeah,” She rested her head on his shoulder. “I’m much calmer, I’ve heard. I don’t try as hard. Plus, you guys are like, the realest people ever. I almost passed out when you asked me to come over.”

“What an honor,” He smiled. “Also, don’t listen to Jeno. I don’t really want to date you, because we’re friends. I’m not up to that, as beautiful and cool as you are.”

“Not because I have a boyfriend?” Aera mocked him. “You deserve the best, Jaemin, trust me. I don’t care if you have to wait a million years to find someone who will treat you like you deserve. I’d prefer it to be sooner, though.” She sat up and kissed his cheek.

“Thanks. If all goes to hell with you and Mark, I wish the same for you.” He embraced her. It was sweet, and friendly, and extremely liberating to know he had someone else there for him. “Excluding my mother and father, thank you for being the first person to ever kiss my cheek.”

“Sorry for taking your cheek virginity,” She repositioned herself next to him. “If you cuddle me, I’ll be asleep in minutes.”
“Get over here. The sooner you’re unconscious, the better.” Jaemin let her lay on top of him. After all, he didn’t know how to cuddle someone. She did fall asleep very quickly, but the real question was, what was taking Jeno so long? Had he gone to the bathroom? Was he talking to his mother? Either one he wouldn’t mind, but he just didn’t fancy him walking in on the two of them asleep, with Aera straddling him.

A few moments later, he’d say, he came back. “Oh, you’re awake. Aera’s made herself comfortable.” Jeno did him the service of lifting her up and putting her on the opposite end of the bed so that he could lie in the middle.

“Jen, since when do you have glasses?” Jaemin pushed them up by the bridge.

“I usually wear long lasting contacts, but I ran out the last time we hung out. My next refill isn’t for another week.” He was blushing. “I’ve pretty much always worn glasses.”

“I’m going to make you come over every day for the next week.” He liked the way they added a glint of light over his eyes, even if he wasn’t looking at a light.

“How about you hand me my phone?” Jeno held his hand out. “Commemorate this occasion.”

Jaemin leaned into the frame, over his shoulder, when he pulled up the camera. Aera would probably get angry despite the fact that he looked like an angel when she slept. He saw Jeno reach behind him and squeeze his cheeks in his hand. There was no holding back his smile as he took the picture.

“Okay, it’s bedtime now,” Jaemin yawned. “Goodnight.”
Around an hour or two later, he woke up. Jeno had moved up and was leaning against the headboard, spaced out. It concerned him, how he lost sleep sometimes, but comforted him to know that at least he got a few hours later on. Jaemin never really experienced it, firsthand. Whenever he came over, he would sleep soundly and wake up in the morning.

It was night. Maybe he would think he was delirious, or just trying to get him to sleep. Jaemin grabbed a few of his fingers and tugged on them while still looking down. Jeno wrapped his arm around him and massaged the base of his neck with his fingers. His neck snapped up to look at him out of habit.

“Go to sleep,” He whispered.

“I can’t go to sleep if you don’t, dumbass.” His words were sharp, but he looked at him needily. Jaemin tugged his hand again. Jeno pulled himself back under the covers after a few moments. He was satisfied, and let his head flop back against the pillows.

Jeno pulled him closer by the waist and whispered against his ear, “Don’t worry, I’ll fall asleep soon.”

He was nearly going into shock from this sudden, bold movement, and how good it felt. So close to his lips, touching his waist. If this was a dumb teen romance movie, he could confess to him now and kiss - if Aera wasn’t here. Though, even if she wasn’t, he wouldn’t do shit. Jeno couldn’t know that he liked him. “Y - You’d better,” His voice was shaky, and again, non - threatening. “Or I’ll kick your ass.” Jaemin had his head propped up on his shoulder, and was holding onto his forearm.
“Goodnight, Jaem,” He moved his shoulder, so that he was lying against his chest. It took him several moments to slide an arm under him and assuredly hold his side. For the first time, he could feel hesitation in his movements. Was that a good thing?

Jaemin still had his arms bunched up to his chest, but was playing with the hem of the shirt Jeno was wearing. He knew he was fucked. His heart was beating fast against him, and his breaths were short and heavy. It was the opposite of panic; It was excitement. Either the gays were giving each other fanservice, or Jeno might think he’s a little bit cute.

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Chapter End Notes

EEEEEEE ITS HAPPENING !! what a great way to end the last update of 2019. sappy time! i'm so happy that i start this fic, and it really keeps me sane, as school and people drive me crazy (also did i ever mention i got into college??? i got into college for psychology i have such a big brain). you all are the best, as i always say, and i appreciate every single one of you! every comment, curiouscat, tweet, or dm that i get genuinely makes me smile and tear up. i have big plans for this fic in 2020. i will see y'all next friday! have a happy new years babies! ~ ^_^
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

bubbly boys.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Aera was now the biggest third wheel of all time. Jeno had always been both of their friends, and now he was their shared friend. As of the other night, they were more than friends… Right? Or at least he wanted to be. Jeno was always the indifferent type, just as when he had been asked whether or not he would date Jaemin. Aera wasn’t a threat, nor would she ever be, and he had to keep reminding himself once again as they all hung out.

“Did you guys hear?” Aera walked up to them. “There’s some party going on next week. I was invited.”

“Of course we didn’t.” Jeno raised his eyebrows. “Why was this so urgent that you needed to tell us first thing in the morning? You’re usually studying, or something.”

“And you guys used to do that, too,” She scoffed back. “My point is, we should all go!”

“Aera…” Jaemin groaned. “I’m aware that everything is sunshine and rainbows in your head, but I can’t even walk through the hallways by myself. I’d rather stay in. And before you start preaching, it’s for my own safety.”

“You have to get the high school experience in! Drinking, dancing, sneaking out of the house…!” Her best attempts to woo them were failing almost immediately. “Don’t make me look dumb by going by myself.”
“Okay, listen. I know for a fact this is a senior party, and you’re not a senior. Not only that, but all this debarchee-”

“Debauchery.”

“...That you’re talking about is not the high school experience. The high school experience is going to classes and hating it, and meeting different breeds of people. You won’t look dumb, and you won’t be going by yourself, because you’re not going. Besides, we’re the only ones here who can drink.”

“Jenooo, you’re the worst. Why can you guys even drink in the first place? We’re in the same grade level.” Aera crossed her arms.

“I can speak for both of us when I say we were held back for a small amount of time,” Jaemin chuckled. “We’re not that old, though. Only a few months, I’d say. Jeno’s also a few months older than me.”

“You guys are the worst.”

“You’ll thank us later,” Jeno wrapped his arm around her shoulders.
Jaemin sunk into the bed, exhausted. “Aera’s home safe?”

“Youp. I drove her home and told her parents to check up on her, since she isn’t feeling well,” He nodded proudly. “We won’t be seeing her post about the party whatsoever.”

It was the night of the party, Friday, and she still insisted on going. The two of them cared about her too much to be the friends that say ‘it’s your life, do what you want, I can’t control you’. He smiled fondly and yawned. “I don’t think I have the energy for a party, anyways. She probably does.”

“You have energy for a small kickback,” Jeno sat at the end of the bed. “When does your mom leave?”

“In a few hours,” Jaemin squinted his eyes at him. “Don’t tell me you’re trying to sneak me out.”

“No, I want to have a small kickback.” His heart nearly stopped for a moment in what can be described as a mixture of fear and anger. “Just me and you.” He pulled out a bottle of beer that you would find at the bottom of the shelf at the store.

“You’re such a bad influence on me,” Jaemin sat up, smiling. “Don’t tell me you’re trying to get me drunk and hook up.”

“I’m not trying to turn you into an alcoholic. There’s only five for each of us, to get us sufficiently satisfied, and test our tolerance. I’ve never drank before.” Jeno laid on his stomach beside him. “I would never, a), try to get you drunk, or b), ‘hook up’ with you. First of all, you’re a virgin, and second of all, you’re better than that.”
“That would have been so sweet if you didn’t call me a virgin.” He rested his head on his back. As of lately, the two of them were really teetering on the edge of physical contact. Wrapping an arm around him could be friendly… Or not. Resting his head against him was platonic… In most cases. It only ever went over when they were sleeping, and their hands would caress each other in a way that couldn’t be given a straight explanation. Things between them were all fun and games right now, since Jeno didn’t know he had the biggest crush on him.

“Coming from another virgin, it’s still sweet.” Jeno let out a prolonged exhale.

Jaemin wished he could say that he wasn’t eagerly waiting for his mother to leave so that he could taste his first sip of alcohol. In no way was it a rite of passage, but it was something that just made his heart race in excitement. He was sitting at his computer when she opened the door to tell them the obvious, then leave.

Jeno blocked him from reaching into his bag. “We have to wait a while. If she comes back, you won’t be able to explain why you have a beer in your hand,” He pushed it away.

“She never comes back…” Jaemin pouted.

“Fine. But it’s your funeral.”

They weren’t too cold, but they still made his hands chilly. Jeno was able to go into the kitchen and find a bottle opener after he realized the entire premise of opening a beer bottle had slipped his mind. “It smells strong.”
“I can already tell you’re a lightweight,” Jeno politely pressed his bottle to Jaemin’s lips. He held his chin with the other hand, and tilted his head back. That certainly was new; It was no secret that alcohol makes people brave, but he hadn’t even ingested any yet.

He hummed and licked his lips once he swallowed it. “It takes like ginger ale.”

This sounded like good news, so Jeno filled his mouth. “Agh.. It has a bitter aftertaste.”

“I just think that it’s sweet. Like sour apples.” Jaemin took the first sip from his own bottle. “I have nothing to drown out, but I could get addicted to this. It tastes good enough to draw me in.”

Jeno grinned and leaned forward boldly. His face hovered for a bit, until he poked his cheek. “You had an eyelash.”

“You don’t have one,” He pressed his finger against his cheek and let it drag down. The dynamics of tonight were to odd. It wasn’t the alcohol giving him all this confidence and cheekiness, but rather the fact that it just felt right in his moment. “Am I forward?”

“Not all the time. You’re just truthful. Even in your actions. Why don’t you put on something? It’s really quiet in here. It’s sad to drink with each other in silence.”

“Mhm. I found some really good music the other day,” Jaemin hooked his phone up to his speaker. “Heize. Her music is the best.”

“Interesting. It sounds calm, so maybe I can listen sometime.”
“Or you can listen now.” He felt a blush starting to come on, so he took a bigger swig of beer than his last. “Why don’t you dance with me?”

“Oh, but the last time I danced you called me an idiot,” Jeno teased. “You’re not the dancing type, either.”

“I am when I’m listening to music that I really like. Like Heize.” Jaemin drank some more of the beer. It was calming his nervous heart, since this was his first real attempt to try and be flirty, or initiate something. This needed to happen, or else he’d die. Possibly. The universe - or, rather, Jeno - had given him and opportunity to be bold, and there was no way in hell that he wasn’t going to take it.

Jaemin finished his first beer much quicker than he’d like to admit (2 songs in), and started to feel looser than he ever had halfway down his second bottle. He felt Jeno come closer. “I see you have a preference for music. Very smooth - sensual, even.”

“Sensual…?” He raised his eyebrows and looked up at him, with his chin resting on his chest.

“You are already flushed and blushing,” Jeno ran his fingers across the apples of his cheeks. “You are a lightweight.”

“Well of course I am! I’ve never drank anything before.”

“That’s not how that works, Jaem,” He stroked his hair with his free hand. This was his second
beer, too, if he remembered correctly. Who knows; He wasn’t paying attention to that. “You’re born with low alcohol tolerance or high alcohol tolerance. And I’m sure that we both are on the latter end of that scale.”

“You’re more composed,” Jaemin grumbled. “You’ve always been more relaxed, and even when you’re drinking you are.”

“Don’t be so upset. It’s cute to be tipsy, sometimes. I can’t tell if you are or not, yet.” Jeno rubbed his back. “You’re being really loose, so maybe it’s the liquid courage. You’ve already suggested that we dance, and you’re not having any issue in trying to touch me.”

Jeno pulled on one of the more rebellious strands of his hair lightly, and he lifted his head. He wasn’t hesitating, and that was a good thing. It was going to benefit him to learn how to be bold; Jeno was confident, and he was sure that he would like him back if he was the same. Jaemin took another gulp of beer and felt it shoot through his veins. It felt like he was starting to get drunk, based off of how he was feeling different than usual.

“Hello? Jaemin?”

“Sorry, did I space out?” Jaemin pushed himself forward. Jeno held his waist with one arm, and his cheek with the free hand to stare right into his soul. “What are you doing…?” His heart was leaping out of his chest.

“I’m looking into your eyes. You’re definitely tipsy, because your eyes are getting foggy,” He waved his hand. “Yeah, your reaction is a little delayed.” There was a giggle in his voice. “See, it’s cute that you’re tipsy.”

“I don’t feel cute, I’m embarrassed.” There was a pout on his face. “You’re just super sweet, okay?
I’m not cute in the sense that what I do is cute. If anything, I’d be physically cute. Just take out the eyes, and I’m adorable.”

“Jaem, don’t be like that,” Jeno had kept him close and hugged him. “I think you’re cute, and your eyes are nice. They’re not bad to look at, and they’re very sweet and lovable. Your eyes aren’t ugly or scary, so don’t put your looks down for them.”

“You say so much good stuff about me,” Jaemin’s voice was muffled as he rubbed his face in his shirt. “If I didn’t know any better, I would start to accept and reciprocate your compliments.”

“You know, that would be nice. A little positive energy, encouragement to live and all. It would be even better than nice to hear you compliment me, since I don’t think I’ve ever heard you compliment on anything other than my muscles.” Jaemin huffed and threw his head over his shoulder so that he could take another drink. There goes another drink. “You can’t drink me away, or escape this.” He whispered in his ear.

“You’re making me nervous...But I’ll do it.” His face was red, but it was mostly from the alcohol, and buried in his shoulder. “I think that you look really nice in your glasses, and that you should wear them more often. I like them.” He cleared his throat.

“I think that you’re just drunk,” Jeno pulled away to open another bottle.

“I’m not drunk, I can walk straight.” Jaemin reached out to grab it. “Stop patronizing me, I’m fine. We can’t all be calm and collected like you.”

“Who said I’m calm and collected? Who says that my heart isn’t beating a million miles an hour right now?”
“Well, you look it.” He rested his ear against his chest. “What is your heart beating so fast for…?”

“No particular reason,” Jeno pulled him close again and wrapped an arm around his shoulders. “I’m surprised your heart isn’t beating fast. Have you overcome your gay panic? Are you okay with me touching you now?”

“Shut up.”

“I’m serious. It’s a serious question, I swear.” They swayed back and forth to no particular rhythm. “I wanna be able to make your heart flutter without you physically freaking out about it.”

Jaemin pulled away with narrowed eyes, pointing at him. “Why would you wanna do that?”

“No reason.” Apparently, that was a good enough excuse to anything right now, because he deterred having to explain himself yet again. “You’re drunk, Jaemin.”

“I’ve only had three beers or something, that’s not enough. That’s not nearly enough,” Jaemin crouched on the floor. “You should be drunk too, then, or almost drunk. I’m not drunk…!”

“I’ve got a nice buzz going,” Jeno sat down on the floor in front of him. “You have had four, Jaemin, and that’s enough for a ligh.” He gasped and pulled Jaemin forward when he started to tumble backwards. “Jaemin, jesus christ…”
“I’m surprised you haven’t sworn, since I scare you so much,” Jaemin curled up and laid against his thighs. His words weren’t slurred, but they were mumbled. “Would it be a bad thing if I wanted to cuddle you…? I really… Really… Want to cuddle with you…”

“Me?”

“Don’t act surprised,” Jaemin wrapped his arms around his waist. “You’re muscular, and it’s like a teddy bear, or better. I like… You don’t cuddle me right, and I think if you did, you would be like a teddy bear.”

“I don’t cuddle you.”

“Yes, you do! You hold my waist and let me lay close to you, but I want you to…! Closer, do it closer.” He grumbled.

“I didn’t know you liked to cuddle,” Jeno played with a few strands of his hair.

“Don’t make me do it myself,” Jaemin held himself up on his shoulders, and began to swing one leg over his lap. “Jeno- no- Ah!”

Jeno grabbed him and lifted him up, holding him like a baby. “God, you’re so drunk, Jaem. I think it’s time to go to bed.”
“Jeno, you know you’re really nice to me,” He let him walk to the bed, and lie down, before clinging onto him for cuddles. “I’ve never met someone so nice, and so sweet, and the thing is, you’re so handsome. You’re so handsome, and it makes no sense that we’re friends. Why are we friends? Why do you even talk to me and want to be my friend?”

“Maybe I’ll tell you another time, when you’re not drunk.” He swallowed.

“Are you nervous?” Jaemin managed to get a leg over him and sat up, two hands on his chest. He looked at him with a puzzled look on his face. The Jeno he normally saw was confident, and calm, and unbothered. This one? It made him feel… Butterflies. More than usual.

“Yeah. You’re asking some really deep questions, and making it seem like it’s nothing. It’s not nothing.”

Jaemin tilted his head and stared him down. Sure, this might be easy to interpret, but he was drunk and tired. All of this was colliding in his head and he couldn’t understand the mess that it made. “I feel stupid, am I missing something?”

“Yes. It’s fine, though, we can just go to sleep.” Jeno locked his arms behind his back.

“Okay,” He was satisfied with that explanation, once again. “I’m not tired, though, and I wanna talk. It’s quiet, and awkward, and the music isn’t Heize anymore.”

“I can tell you that I really liked your eyes. They’re really nice, and I love the way that they sparkle. Your eyes are so pretty, and big, and I don’t know how anyone could find them scary. I could look into them all day. Everyone else just sees these blank orbs, but I see your eyes. You have normal eyes. They’re just… A little different. It’s so cute, and attractive. I used to stare so much, but I couldn’t help it. They’re so captivating, and I just love them so much.” He stopped his
“You really like my eyes that much?” Jaemin lifted his head and pouted.

“Don’t cry, please, I don’t like seeing you cry,” Jeno held his face.

“I - I can’t help it- You j - just-...” He was trying not to look ugly, but was letting thick, hot tears run down his cheeks. “You can’t tell me not to cry when you just said something that is nicer than anything I’ve ever heard or said in my entire life, Jen!”

“How about you cool down and sleep, okay?” One hand was holding his chin up, and one was petting the top of his head. “We’ll talk when you’re sober. Let’s hope you remember all of this.”

Jaemin was still silently crying when Jeno pulled his head towards his chest and let him lay down once again. All of these thoughts were swimming around his head, but he couldn’t seem to catch onto just one. Jeno thought his eyes were gorgeous… But he had just been crying… What if he’s just drunk, too… Would he sleep tonight, too?… How many drinks had he had?... He eventually stopped crying and continued his thoughts in blurry silence. His eyes kept on closing, but he continuously forced them open. Jeno needed to go to sleep, and he wanted to make sure of it.

“Go to sleep,” He yawned. His finger gently stroked his nose, and it worked perfectly. That simple motion lulled him into a sleepy state, where he felt Jeno shift to cover them with the blanket. At least, at the end of the night, they were both sleeping in each others’ arms.

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Chapter End Notes
hey guys i don't know why i didn't update last week i just didn't finish the chapter and i was exhausted. i'm feeling good, however, as this is the rising point of this part of the story and i'm :) my life is well aside from the fact that it's getting a little tiring the closer i get to graduation but we're making it. writing is the only beneficial thing keeping me grounded muah love u all for reading as per usual :)
Jaemin wasn’t stupid. Jeno had said previously that he was a ‘lonely gay’, and had taken advantage of his sickness to cuddle up to him. Each and every move that he had made then, and was making now, was completely homosexual; And that’s what was driving him crazy. It had only been two weeks and he had gone home and thought about doing things that would make his heart race but his dreams come true.

First, it was on Tuesday. The two of them were hanging out in his car after Jeno picked up a few job applications in person - to give a good impression, he said. “So, are we going to my place, now? I’m tired.”

“Yes, baby,” Jeno teased. They pulled out of the parking lot, and he turned up the radio. Jaemin smiled; His music taste was starting to rub off on him, and it made him ecstatic. He’d even started getting into Heize. Jaemin was sitting in his seat, humming along, when they stopped at a red light. “Your door is open.”

“Oh,” He opened it and quickly shut it.

“Hold on, lemme get it,” Jeno leaned over him to open it and shut it sharper than he had.
“Thanks, Popeye,” Jaemin relaxed again. However, it was short-lived, since he tensed up. Jeno pulled back from the door and rested his hand on his knee. The last time this happened, he recalls losing his shit and getting angry at him. The two of them looked up at each other and stared cautiously.

The awkward moment that ensued was something that he could only describe as insufferable, and he couldn’t thank the inventor of stop lights enough when it turned green and Jeno had to turn back to the road.

After that, it was on the preceding Wednesday. This wasn’t something that really made a difference to their usual dynamics, but it was still making his heart flutter to this day. After school, Jeno came over to actually study.

“Jaemin, no-” Jeno grabbed him from behind the second he entered his room.

“It won’t take that long, come on!” Jaemin squirmed until he could get out of his arms and flop onto the bed. “I’m exhausted.”

“Your naps take forever,” He groaned, with no persuasive effects, as Jaemin just turned over.

Jaemin wasn’t feeling the greatest today, as an effect of the Fleeting Sadness Syndrome. Jeno might have noticed, but he was acting like normal. It was the same for him, so he was sure it was to make sure he felt normal. He closed his eyes and fully rested his head into the pillows.
“Hng…” Somewhere along the lines, he dozed off. The only reason he had awoken was because he was briefly lifted and pulled backwards, then settled back down warmly. He lifted his head and looked around - at the arms around him, the knee in between his own. Jaemin shifted and turned to look at Jeno. “You woke me up…”

“I didn’t mean to.” His eyes wandered away for a few moments. “You seem tired, and you told me to cuddle you correctly.”

Ever since the night he had gotten drunk, they had hardly cuddled (an arm around him wasn’t a cuddle). He remembered everything from that night, even what he had said and done, and it made things more comfortable between them. Just because it was more comfortable, though, didn’t mean that Jaemin was any more confident. “This is… Better.” Jeno moved a hand to his chest, and he pushed his hand away in a panic, so that he wouldn’t feel his heart beating so fast.

“Are we going to study, now that you’re awake?”

“I wasn’t done with my nap…” Jaemin sighed.

Nonetheless, they proceeded to study on his bed. The entire time they were cuddling, and the tense atmosphere faded delightfully fast. The notebooks and textbooks and laptop were constantly being switched out on Jaemin’s lap. Whenever Jeno had to get up and do something, he returned and pulled him back into his arms, and whenever Jaemin had to get up and do something, he returned and crawled back into his lap. It was a new experience, but he had already grown too used to it; Spooning in his room was the new norm.

Since they were so used to physical contact, Jeno was growing to be sneaky. His mother, as well as Aera, and their fellow students, could not be clued in to their newfound intimacy, so he would catch him slyly sneaking touches around other people, and strategically being bold when they were alone.
On Saturday, he nearly thought unholy thoughts - Scratch that. They all flooded through his mind for hours straight. In his entire life, he hadn’t thought in a way that was sexual towards someone, not even when he had a crush on Jiseok.

They had taken a trip out to the mall just to walk around and get food, and Jaemin was exceptionally clumsy today. While they were in BoxLunch, he tripped over his own feet. Jeno - being the strong, muscular, quick-willed guy that he is - grabbed him by the waist and pulled him up before he could even get close to hitting the ground. ‘Good?’ Jeno adjusted the sunglasses on his face and smiled. He had been walking behind him, but now he was really walking behind him. When he stood up and regained his composure, Jeno went the extra mile, by not just holding onto his waist, but hooking his fingers into his belt loops. Each step he took, he felt a tug either up or down on his pants.

When he got home, he went to bed almost immediately.

All of these events progressively advanced each day. On Thursday, he was being extra touchy.

“Jen?”

“Mhm?” He looked up from where he was lying on his bed, working on something on his laptop.

“Are you doing okay right now?” Jaemin looked down at the keyboard of his computer.

“I’m fine,” Jeno cleared his throat. He heard him stand up, and then felt his arm around his shoulder. “What are you working on?”
Jaemin knew better than to leave it untouched, in any sense; Jeno would never do that to him. He pondered for multiple seconds, before risking falling out of his chair. His chair spun - for once, thankfully, since it was pretty old and never wanted to do so for him - and he wrapped his arms around his torso.

Jeno looked at him, shocked, but still wrapped his arms around his shoulders and sighed. His body was warm, and resting against his chest like this was more comfortable than ever. “Can we cuddle?” There were tears in his eyes when they made eye contact.

He adjusted his body and held him tighter as a ‘yes’. They went back to his bed, pushing the papers and books and electronics aside, and warmed each other up under the blankets. Their voices were quiet as he tried to comfort him.

‘Why are you crying?’ Jaemin hardly ever saw him cry - next to never.

‘My parents are concerned that I’ve been spending so much time out. They don’t believe that I’ve been trying to apply for jobs and do adult things. They think I’m slinking around with guys in my car. They called me so many horrible things, Jaem.’

“I can’t imagine anyone calling you anything horrible.’

‘I’m sure you’ve heard all the slurs; we go to public school. Faggot. Fairy. Queer. Fruity.’

He flinched at those words. He’d never heard them spoken, not in that sense. As much as Jiseok
bullied him, they, surprisingly enough, never left his mouth. ‘I don’t think the last two are slurs. Fruity? What if a drink tastes fruity?’ He tried to make it lighthearted and make him less upset.

Jeno chuckled and wiped his cheeks. ‘True, but anything is a slur if you make it.’

‘Yeah…’

‘You’re sweet. I’m sorry if I’m being a downer. I appreciate you being here for me, even if you’re really awkward and don’t quite know how to handle it.’

‘I can handle a lot.’

‘You can take a lot. But on the other end, you can’t handle it. I’m fine with that, as long as you just do what you usually do, listen, and give me the added bonus of cuddling.’

‘You know, that was my thing. I wanted you to cuddle me.’

‘Well I’m sorry to rain on your parade, but you’re not the only sad, lonely gay here.’

Jaemin simply shook his head and cuddled up to Jeno. In all honesty, he didn’t feel like he was lonely. Not with Jeno by his side. Even the presence of sadness could be questioned with him here. The only thing he felt, through and through, was gay as hell. Nights like these were special, just like the rest, but he cherished the ones that made him feel like a normal teenager. Almost.
+++

Chapter End Notes

i said it on twitter and i will say it again: y'all are gonna hate me for these next few chapters, gays are so chaotic yet useless.

also !! a very important question, that was brought back to my (very short term) attention: i wanted to know if i should, in the first place, include smut. it's not the main meat of the story, but it would be sweet to add in. and, if i do so, would i include it in the chapter? a separate chapter? make a whole separate work? i just don't want it to draw away from the plot. i'm just indecisive and want y'all's opinions hehe love y'all
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

i wanna be.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Somehow, their schedules began to fall together like a deck of cards. Even if Jeno was busy, he would find a way to pick him up, or come over, or keep him company. Jaemin couldn’t say he got busy, but there were schedule conflicts with his mother or with studying, which counted. Today, him, Jeno, and Aera were all scrambling to hang out tonight, before midterms stressed them out. That consisted in a lot of frantic driving and quick stops.

Jeno was picking up an application or two, Aera was at Mark’s house and had to meet Jeno and Jaemin halfway to get picked up, and Jaemin had to jump in the car after school so that they could beat traffic and get to the grocery store for his mother in time.

“Woah, there’s no rush!” His mother stopped them when they all busted in the door and shoved the groceries onto the table before running to go grab more.

“You have no idea how much of a rush things have been today, mom,” Jaemin sighed before grabbing a bag from Jeno.

“I wouldn’t understand. Don’t stress out, any of you. Especially you.”

“I know, I know. Once we’re done with this, I’ll go upstairs and let out the breath I’ve been holding,” He ran to the car.
“Aera insisted on getting the rest of the bags.” She bumbled her way through the doorway, both hands grasping bags and bags of groceries. Him and Jaemin walked out to get whatever was left in the trunk. “I got this.”

“No,” Jaemin lifted the case of water and glared at him. Things were a bit on edge, so he had been extra mean today. That entitled him to make snarky remarks, snatch things, and give him dirty looks. He could be very cold at times, so that only scratched the surface.

His mother gave him a hug when he came back inside, and he groaned and went into his room. Aera and Jeno equally flopped down onto a piece of furniture with a sigh. “I wish you guys would let me drink.”

“Aera, we’re never going to let you drink. Not even when you’re of age.”

“Jeno, I’m not putting them in for you if you don’t shut the fuck up.”

“What?”

“You have such a big mouth,” Jeno scoffed. “You’re lucky that Jaemin ate and he’s not entirely angry right now. Let’s just go.”

“Am I missing something? Hello? I’m still here,” Jaemin stood up.
“We’ll be right back,” Aera grabbed her purse out of her backpack and left the room with Jeno.

The two of them? Of together? It could only mean chaos. His mother was still home, so he hoped that the bounds of this only went so far. He went downstairs to help his mother with the groceries, in the meantime.

“Oh, baby, you don’t have to help. Go relax,” She rubbed his back.

“Aera and Jeno are doing something that I’m not aware of, so I figured I would make myself useful.” Jaemin shrugged. “Are you working this weekend?”

“No. Don’t think I forgot about your request to eat out. How could I forget?” A little over a week ago, he offered to get her out of the house and go to the coffee center with her. She seemed ecstatic; So much so, she cancelled all of her weekend shifts for this week in favor of spending time with him.

“Aera!”

Jaemin and his mother shot a look in the direction of the stairs. “I’m concerned.”

“I think I have more of a right to be. Jeno and Aera are really close.”

“Mom, I can assure you that Aera is not cheating on her boyfriend with Jeno in my room.”
She threw her hands up and opened the freezer. “What are we doing for winter break? Any plans then?”

“Well, Jeno will be with his family, so no buddy for you. Same for Aera. She’ll probably only make time for her boyfriend. But hey, I’m okay with going out, if you’re okay with the crowds. I surely would like to avoid them, but I would endure them for you.”

“Aw, you’re so sweet. Maybe we can just hang at home, then. Catch up. School and work have been so hectic, I hardly get to talk to you.”

Jaemin looked down. “Yeah, I know. It sucks, but that’s just how it is. Don’t worry, mom, I’ll make sure to fill you in on all the important stuff.”

“You never used to call me mom bef-”

“Jaemin!”

He sighed and looked up. “Maybe some time apart from them would be good.” Jaemin chuckled before he headed back upstairs.

Aera was stood in the middle of his room with her arms crossed and sighed. “We told you to wait! It didn’t even take that long.”

“Yes it did, whatever it was. I helped put away almost all of the groceries while you two were
“Screaming your lungs out up here. My mother was very concerned with the fact that you were doing so—”

“Shut the fuck up, listen,” She turned him around. “Go in the bathroom.”

Jaemin started to panic. As soon as she said that, he realized that Jeno was not in the room, and was in the bathroom. Millions of scenarios were flying through his head, both sexual, and non-sexual. Why would Jeno be waiting for him in the bathroom?

He swallowed and pushed the door open. “Jeno? Are you okay?”

His best friend was sitting on the toilet, his head in his hands. “Yeah. Just stand in front of the mirror and close your eyes.”

Odd request… Jaemin walked over cautiously and closed his eyes. After a moment or two, he heard him move, and felt him wrap his arms around him and pull him into his embrace. Of course, he obliged and held his forearms as he relaxed back into his chest. His breathing sped up, because as exciting and comfortable as this was, what the hell was going on?

“Open your eyes.”

Jaemin opened them, and jumped for a second. Then, he relaxed, but still stare at Jeno intently.

“Is it bad? Insensitive?”
“No.” His voice was small. The reflection from the bathroom lights bounced off of Jeno’s eyes, which were now… Like his. He brought one of his hands up to his mouth. “How did you do it?”

“I told you, people think that you’re wearing contacts. I got a pair of contacts from the costume shop, and I told them that I wanted them to match yours.” Jeno smiled, and they nearly disappeared. “I thought you would like it.”

“I like it…” His eyes were rimmed with tears for a reason even he couldn’t identify. “I’ve just never seen anyone else aside from my dad have them in a way that wasn’t a costume. It’s nothing bad.” He got a feeling of overwhelm looking at him, but it was good. At the same time, his feelings grew even stronger for him.

“Maybe I’ll wear them out with you one day. It’ll be nice.” Jeno rubbed his stomach. “You’re looking at me like others look at you.”

“They do look a bit fake. Very blank, and reflective, and perfectly opaque.”

“Hey, listen. They’re contacts,” He poked him a bit, making him giggle. “We can’t all have perfectly even, sparkly, pretty eyes like you do. The plentiful beauty of your eyes can’t be… Replicated.” His cheeks turned a bit pink at his break in articulation.

Jaemin chuckled. “I get why you were yelling now. It must take a lot of contact to cover your eye like that, and it probably hurt even though you wear contacts.”
“Oh, yeah, Aera sucks at putting them in. She was trying to shove them under my eyelid, and I was trying to tell her to just set it on my eye and let it swim around and adjust, but she hardly listened.” He took in a deep breath, then reached in his pocket to pull out his phone.

They had never really taken a picture of them being intimate in any way, so he felt himself grow shy. Jeno held up the camera, only slightly adjusting it. “Smile.”

He had never smiled so wide that it made his cheeks hurt, or that it crinkled his eyes like Jeno’s. There was no point in it, and even when he laughed, he felt self conscious about it. Who knew what his eyes looked like when he did? Jeno, however, didn’t care. So, for once, he smiled with a smile full of happiness (at least, the best that he could when he felt shyer than ever and was slightly blushing).

+++ 

Chapter End Notes

description is key's song, stan key. i've had this idea ever since i started this fic and honestly ? perfect. i'm happy with its execution. might be one of my favourite chapters solely bc of how important this is ;)

(psst... you should contact me on my twitter for info on how to get a fic of your own :) )

End Notes

Hi! I'm Marcie! If you want to follow me / talk to me / stalk me / roleplay (i rp bts and nct pls rp with me lmao) my twitter is here, my curiouscat (to leave me feedback and suggestions) is here, and my kakaotalk is marciexbam! :)

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