we should be dancing in the sun

by flushed

Summary

“One Jungkook music video and you’d be eating your words, you know,” Seokjin says matter-of-factly. “There is good yet to be discovered, Jimin-ah, and it’s got a six pack and dimples.”

Jimin huffs, mouth quirking in amusement. He stretches his feet, assuming a ballet arch, toes two sharp points. To the room at large, he says, “It’s cute that you think I know who that is. Not on my radar, never will be.”

Notes

for the prompt idol jungkook/choreographer jimin working on jungkook's upcoming album together, with a splash of tension + intimidation. i hope this fic lives up to all of your wildest dreams! it was a monster to puzzle together, but so fun and so rewarding in the end.

additional tags: greek mythology as a metaphor for being gay, character study, romcom-level hijinks and minimal angst, hopeless romantic jungkook, 40,000 words of jimin worship, gay people are gay, jjk1 stans this one goes out to you, self-indulgent to the max.

See the end of the work for more notes.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/moonchild_Entertainment
moonchild Entertainment

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**moonchild Entertainment, Co.** (Korean: 문정 공) is a small South Korean entertainment company established in 2015 by former underground rapper Kim Namjoon. Min Yoongi joined the company shortly thereafter and has since signed on as co-CEO. He is known to many as Kim Namjoon’s musical right-hand man. The company currently manages soloists Chee Sungho and Jeon Jungkook, both “salvaged from the wreckage of sunken ships.”[1] After breaking contract with his previous company, Jeon Jungkook made headlines for accosting Kim Namjoon in the middle of Lotte Mart on a chance encounter. A contract with moonchild was drafted and signed within the day.[2] Although both acts have put out a number of small projects under the auspices of moonchild Entertainment, including various mixtapes, EPs, and SoundCloud covers, only Chee Sungho has released an official full-length album. As of yet, no moonchild idol groups have been formed, though Kim Namjoon has expressed interest in interviews.

**Artists**

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**Soloists**

- Jeon Jungkook
- Chee Sungho

**Producers**

- Kim Namjoon
- Min Yoongi
- Jung Hoseok

**Choreographers**

- Jung Hoseok
- Park Jimin[^citation needed]

**References**


Jimin pauses with the toe of his Chelsea boot on the threshold—a welcome mat that reads COME BACK WITH SOJU!—and fires off a quick text to Taehyung. It goes as follows: *i'm here please*
don’t be having sex or at least tell me if you are so i can remove my contacts and plug my ears first. Taehyung’s reply arrives seconds later in the form of a tongue-lolling Tannie selca.

Jimin’s mouth twitches. It’s his first real smile of the night.

He uncovers the spare key, jams it into the lock, and shoves. There’s a moment of perfect relief, where the roar of the idol world fails to close in, where there’s just a bassline of quiet, the buzz of the sodium bulb above Jimin’s head, the miraculous presence of a moth on the twenty-fifth floor. Where there’s just Jimin, standing in the doorway of Taehyung and Seokjin’s apartment, key already replaced under the fiddle-leaf fig plant named for Seokjin’s favorite romcom actor, Rae-won. Rae-won is terribly underfed in typical Seokjin fashion, a forgotten accessory to an otherwise gorgeous piece of real estate set away in the heart of Seoul. If not for Taehyung and his workout water bottles, the leaves would be brittle and brown by now.

Jimin dumps the dregs of his own bottle into the pot before stepping inside and closing the door, lock clicked shut. He lets the sounds of the apartment wash over him like a welcome embrace: the skitter of Tannie’s excited little paws against hardwood, the faint rise and fall of a movie soundtrack on low, Seoul traffic pressing in through the floor-to-ceiling windows. Home away from home. He bends down to greet the dog, smiling in full now.

“Jiminie’s here and hopes we’re not having sex.” Taehyung announces from the direction of the living room.

“I think the floor below us would agree, judging by the number of noise complaints we get,” says Seokjin.

Taehyung tactfully ignores that, calling out, “Jiminie, how was your day?”

Jimin looks up from lavishing Tannie with love, suddenly remembering the source of his fury and the reason for his impromptu drop-in. “I’m never going back there!” he bursts out, a songbird’s bleat. Musically miserable, more force than necessary, too much for Jimin’s small body to carry comfortably. It’s all bubbling over now, like champagne froth let loose.

“Oh,” Taehyung says, taken aback. “Okay. Do you wanna talk about it?”

“No. Kind of. Yes, a little bit,” Jimin says, and sets Tannie back down after imparting a bit whispered praise, and one last kiss to the crown of his furry head. “I’m going to talk your ear off, Taehyungie. Prepare yourself.”

“I’ll be like Van Gogh!” Taehyung chirps, because he is an unreformed art graduate with no sense of propriety whatsoever. Severed ears, that’s the height of avant-garde to Taehyung.

“Too soon,” says Seokjin.

“He died in the year 1890.”

“1890 years too soon.”

“That’s not how the passage of time works,” Jimin says.

“Time is a social construct!” Seokjin yells. “What do you know?”

Jimin sets off for the living room at a clip, the sharp clack of his heels ringing out like gunshots, then halts when he catches sight of himself in the entryway mirror. He puts his tantrum on hold to fix a blond cowlick sticking past his scalp, bean sprout-yellow. He looks like a chick that’s
escaped the coop.

“I look like a chick that’s escaped the coop,” Jimin murmurs to his reflection, since it needs reaffirming.

He’s due for a re-dye, or a shade change. Something darker, something approaching golden hour-blond, an apricot, autumn-inspired, cider sort of blond. Fall is looming and Jimin turns winter-pale during Seoul’s coldest months. Platinum washes him out and his freckles fade to nothing, barely-there constellations. There are no beaches here to brush away the bite of winter.

“A very cute chick!” Taehyung loudly interjects from the next room over.

“Ah—I’m never going back there! Taehyung-ah!” Jimin shouts, resuming his tantrum with a fury. He kicks his boots off and strides into the living room on sore, socked feet. “Seokjin-hyung! You can’t make me! I mean it!”

“I am jotting all of this down,” Seokjin says from their sectional couch, with all evidence of interest. He then proceeds to burrow more tightly into his blanket burrito, eyes glued to the television screen. “‘Cannot make Jimin-ah go back there.’ Got it.”

“Where, specifically, is ‘there?’” Taehyung says, muffled into Seokjin’s sweatshirt where he’s currently spooning him like an oversized puppy.

“The retail section of Saint Laurent? The grocery store for milk? The womb? The possibilities are endless,” Seokjin says. A hand emerges from his blanket-nest to seize the TV remote from the coffee table and covertly turn the volume up.

“I can see you,” Jimin says.

Seokjin shoves the remote down the back of Taehyung’s bathrobe, not without some struggle.

“Jiminie doesn’t do our grocery shopping and you’re lactose intolerant,” Taehyung points out, after fishing the remote free and tossing it somewhere out of sight.

“And Saint Laurent doesn’t have a retail section,” Jimin adds. “If they did, I would know by now. I’m on their mailing list.”

Taehyung perks suddenly. “Wait. Are you offering to do our shopping? If so, I need you to promise me you won’t murder my boyfriend with dairy and/or chili powder.”

“I only know how to make ramen for one! The measurements confuse me!” Jimin exclaims. “And you two eat enough for a family of five. One trip would bankrupt me!”

“We’re strong, growing boys,” Seokjin says.

“You’re like two hundred,” Jimin says, which earns him a yell of outrage and a throw pillow to the face. Tannie yips happily from the floor, fanning the flames of a potential pillow fight.

“Respect your elders or I’ll send you back to the womb where you belong!” Seokjin squawks and is placated only when Taehyung begins covering his face with kisses through his hysterical laughter. Seokjin settles back in, ears pink. “I am lightly seasoned. Salt and pepper style.”

“If you’d let me finish,” Jimin says. “I was saying that you’re immortal. You don’t look a day past 1890.”
“Yah, you little—!”

“You do have vampiric energy, Jin-ah. It’s kind of sexy,” Taehyung says and Seokjin’s mouth snaps shut. Reluctantly, he preens.

“Dropping honorifics in front of me is a disgusting display of PDA,” Jimin says. He pads further into the living room, pillow hugged to his chest, to pout where everyone can see.

Taehyung hums, using the swell of Seokjin’s shoulder to readjust his eyeglasses. He says to Jimin, “Now that I’m seeing you up close, I think you look less like an escaped chick...more like a sad kitten.”

“You look like you’re in love and therefore my mortal enemy,” Jimin says.

“You’re prejudice against sexy couples will get you nowhere,” Seokjin says primly, “you bitter little walnut of despair.”

“I’m not a walnut of despair!” Jimin says mournfully, pout deepening, even as he knows it’s true.

He is only a walnut of despair because it’s been a bad day—week, year, millennia—and his support systems are beginning to fray. Taehyung and Seokjin are just the icing on top of the terrible cake, through no fault of their own. Together, their energies carry the weight and ridiculousness of a nuclear fusion response, wild and reckless and well-matched, like brazen heat blowing forest fires bigger. It’s a love that warms Jimin to the bones, at the same time that it curdles inside of him like spoiled milk. Not because he’s lost two friends. No—because, in clinging to them, his own loneliness is thrown into sharp relief, jagged and needy.

Jemin can’t shake the suspicion that he’s intruding, elbowing his way into the middle of something intensely private, and no amount of cuddle pile invitations has ever done away with that suspicion. They’ve only made him more reluctant to accept. More aware of his own hollow parts.

It might have been different, if he’d come to love Seokjin slowly, through osmosis, the cool boyfriend and accomplished actor attached to his best friend after three major motion pictures and a supporting role in a K-drama produced by a veteran TV director, on top of a slew of variety show appearances that have done well to solidify him as South Korea’s Most Charming One-Man Act (source: Soompi). But Jimin has grown up with them both, gone to battle with them arm-in-arm, seen them through broken hearts and post-breakdown bangs and awkward college phases involving high water jeans and GANGSTA snapbacks and karaoke videos he prays never see the light of day. They were his before they were each other’s and now Jimin is the interloper, cutting in on their alone time by asking for entrance into their lives. This is no longer his domain. It’s their life together, every successive moment bringing them closer to farther away. He can’t compete with a love like this. He won’t measure up—not ever.

He toes their shag rug and tries not to look as sad kitten as he feels. Later, when he steals away to his own apartment in the late hours of the night, this sense of displacement will follow him. No part of his life has been spared. Work, family, friends. His sorry excuse for a lovelife. Busan, so out of the way as to be unreachable—a four hour drive in a car Jimin doesn’t own and couldn’t operate even if he did. The KTX journey home is an indulgence only afforded to him during the holidays, twice annually. Work has made him into a menace and a machine, devoid of feeling.

This must be unhappiness, he thinks. At the first sign that something isn’t right, we will bundle you up and bring you back home. Whatever you need, we will make happen. I love you. That’s what his father had messaged him before he’d touched down on Seoul at fifteen, before he’d been swept up in the roar, a world of worship that had little to do with the temples of Jimin’s childhood.
Seoul is claustrophobia. Sweat, snow run through with dirt, the startling arc of the sun over skyscrapers. Illegitimate belonging, bred into him after years spent paying his dues and carefully climbing the ladder, from almost-idol to backup dancer, then teaching assistant, then dance instructor, and now part-time K-pop choreographer. It’s so beautiful it burns, like the spit of flames. Jimin loves and longs for it. He hates it deeply, with everything in his body. He wants free, wants deeper, wants more. Later, like ritual, he’ll ask himself: have I earned my keep? Did I do enough to deserve to be here? Is there anything left for me—anything at all that I have yet to find? Anything at all to excite me? If so, where is it?

Where is it hiding?

Jimin doesn’t say as much. Laying every part of his pain bare has always felt a little selfish, like dumping a 500-piece puzzle in front of friends and asking them to systematically assemble it while he watches. He doesn’t like requesting an audience, not unless he’s on a stage, colored incandescent by LED lights. Mostly, he wants a Spotify playlist and a bubble bath. He wants his best friends to want him here. He wants back the belly-deep fizzle of waking up and itching to get to work, to dream up a new dance routine, to drum his creations into a room full of eager students.

Taehyung stares at Jimin with deep and unadulterated best friend intuition, a wordless exchange of anguish. “Jiminie,” he says simply, soft and tender as a bruise.

Jimin’s lower lip wobbles dangerously. He blinks and turns for the bathroom.

“Ah, ah,” Taehyung says, and before he can bat an eye, Jimin’s been immobilized, two feet hooked around his ankles—one Taehyung’s, the other Seokjin’s. They hold him firmly in place, preventing an escape. “These here are the best shoulders in the business and if you need to borrow them for a little crying, they’re yours for the night. Just talk to us.”

Jimin dabs at the corners of his eyes with his sweater sleeves, like he’d practiced in the bathroom mirror when he was fourteen and acting out his MMA award show acceptance speech.

“You’re not a bitter walnut, Jiminie,” Seokjin says, with such immediate and effusive remorse that Jimin bursts into laughter on instinct. “You’re a beautiful pecan of wanton desire! You’re a pecan capable of widespread seduction! All the other pecans want you!”

Jimin giggles into his sweater paws.

“And you know what—! We’re going to find you a nice, muscly movie star to grope your butt and carry your groceries up five flights of stairs for you,” Seokjin says, gaining momentum now. “I have contacts in every corner of this industry. All I have to do is snap my fingers and they come running. C’mon. How tall is too tall? Long hair or short hair? Are tattoos a deal-breaker?”

“I’m tattooed,” Jimin says.

“Yes, but yours is a classy little tramp stamp, unknown to the world at large,” Seokjin says. “What about minor identity theft? Is that a deal-breaker?”

“What! How can that be minor—!” Jimin flaps his sweater paws with feeling. Taehyung and Seokjin each take a sweater paw in hand and begin herding him in the direction of the bathroom. “I’m not dating in this industry! Absolutely not! I want a nice, normal man with a nine-to-five job and no connections to the mafia! No movie stars or K-pop boys with butt injections!”

“That is weirdly specific,” Seokjin says. “What has been going on in your dating life, Jimin-ah...”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Jimin says.
“Celebrities are not Pokémon, Jin-ah,” Taehyung cuts in. Then, after some thought, he adds: “Or demons. You can’t summon them by name.”

“They are exactly like that and yes I can,” Seokjin says. He pulls Jimin to a stop at the mouth of the bathroom and begins divesting him of his clothing, clinical as a doctor, while Taehyung flips the overhead light on and bends to run a bath. “All I need to do is tell them I have a petite dancer on the line—blond, tattooed, can hold his liquor and giggles like a maniac at everything that moves. If the competitive environments of college have taught me anything, it’s that Jimin is everyone’s type.”

Jimin lifts his arms above his head for Seokjin and smiles, touched.

“Which is why we need to be selective with who we set him up with,” Taehyung counters, darting a hand under the stream of water pouring into the basin and pursing his lips. “There needs to be strict parameters in place. Criteria, compatibility tests! Favorite foods, desired number of babies, five year plans! Things like that!”

“I already gave you my criteria,” Jimin says, in the nude now and completely unembarrassed by it. He itches at his ankle and sighs wistfully. “I want an armful of babies and kimchi jjigae. As for five year plans...I don’t really care, so long as I’m with someone who has ambitions of some kind. Just...I’d like them to match me in passion, if possible.”

Seokjin emerges from behind an open cabinet bearing a stack of monogrammed towels fit for royalty. “No offense, but your criteria is boring. I know you’re going through a dry spell right now and have unreasonably low standards as a result—”

Jimin splutters, offended.

“—but you deserve better. What’s wrong with a little industry arm candy? A nice K-pop boy would do you some good.”

“That is an oxymoron, hyung,” Jimin replies and delicately dips a foot into the water, testing the temperature for himself.

A soft noise of contentment escapes him. It’s perfect. He lowers himself fully into the scalding water until it’s kissing his chin. His thighs fall open, toes wiggling. Taehyung knows him too well. Jimin’s overworked body is already beginning to unknot. Nothing quite compares to a boiling bath after a long day of dancing.

“It could be a fun fling!”

Jimin dunks his head. When he reemerges moments later, sopping wet, he says, “No idol in their right mind would enter a heterosexual relationship at the height of their career, much less a gay one. It’s self-sabotage.”

“More and more gay idols are cropping up these days,” Taehyung points out. “And it wouldn’t have to be public.”

“Please point me to them,” Jimin says, not serious in the slightest, and when his best friends open their mouths to answer, lips already forming names, he dunks his head a second time, the world around him warped by bathwater.

The sound of sloshing rushes in, river-like, overtaking everything else. It drowns out Taehyung and Seokjin’s voices, distorts them to the point of incomprehensibility. Jimin sits with it a moment, the sounds of his childhood, of fretful bodies of water, of beaches and lakes and puddles, that slow drip
of longing. He holds his breath until he can’t anymore, eyes closed in appreciation. Then he surfaces, shoving his wet bangs from his face and gasping. His eyelashes are clumped together and there’s now a song filtering in from a nearby speaker, hot pink pop. *I can be the one...* 

Taehyung and Seokjin’s master bathroom is pure magic, the thing of fantasies come alive. Eggshell white, with limestone tile and copper adornments. Their bathtub has become a honeypot for Jimin and his sore body, the most flawless vessel known to man: cast iron, claw-footed, with an English faucet and three spray settings (rainfall, high pressure, and massage). This room, like their lifestyle, reflects a startling understanding of their own celebrity. Another point of harmony between them: they share a love for the luxurious—Seokjin, distinguished actor-on-the-rise, and Taehyung, darling of the art world.

The room around Jimin has been adorned with stalks of incense, hothouse orchids (fake, fronds a shiny plastic), tinned macarons sealed with silk ribbon from some European designer tailoring custom trench coats for Taehyung’s fall wardrobe, the remnants of PR packages not yet put away. Taehyung picks through a little wicker basket set off to the side, brimming with all manner of bath products. Bubble bars, essential oils, gels and bath bombs and body scrubs.

Jimin turns over onto his belly, arms folded across the lip of the tub, to select his favorite. Scented bubbles are promptly added to the bathwater. The faucet is shut off and the water calms, lapping at his bare shoulders. He floats serenely, lower back tattoo showing through a blanket of shimmery bubbles. Seokjin isn’t wrong. It is a hidden gem, a single word spelled out in the English alphabet. *SERENDIPITY*, in scrawled typeface, broad strokes of black ink. His attempt at courting luck wherever he goes.

Jimin lays his cheek to his forearm and flutters his eyes shut, tingling happily. “Taehyung-ah. Seokjin-hyung. Thank you. For letting me use your bathtub. For...everything.”

“Bad days are made better by bubble baths,” Taehyung says. “A wise man once told me so. And ours is open to you always.”

“He sounds cute,” Jimin teases.

“Very,” Taehyung agrees, a smile in his voice.

“Hey, maybe you can date him,” Seokjin jokes.

“Hyung, I can think of nothing I want less.”

“Ha!” Seokjin says and when Jimin cracks his eyes open, he finds him perched on the closed lid of their toilet, playing with a thread coming loose on one of his fancy KSJ towels. He’s wearing Taehyung’s fuzzy slippers. His sweatshirt advertises an old, obsolete college theatre club. “So nice K-pop boy isn’t last on the list! Jimin on Jimin is!”

“Jimin on Jimin would be hot,” Taehyung muses, to which Seokjin hums in thought, then nods decidedly.

“Nice K-pop boy is number ninety-nine on my list, right after the barista by my house who always gets my order wrong and makes it a point to tell me that I have a girl’s name,” Jimin says. “Honestly, hyung, I wouldn’t date in my industry even if my life depended on it.”

“Even if—”

“Even then,” Jimin says.
“But what about—”

“Nope.”

“Consider for a moment—”

“I am immune. This I believe firmly,” Jimin says, capturing a large bubble between cupped hands and blowing on it until it winks out of existence with a soft pop. “It’s a cold, dark world out there and I’m never going back. I’m sick and tired of spoiled celebrities thinking they can walk all over me and get away with it. I’ll just go back to teaching seven-year-olds how to point their toes and twirl around in leotards.”

“No one is going to challenge you like a bratty idol,” Taehyung says, reclining one-handed beside the bathtub and playing idly with Jimin’s wet hair.

“Ignore that,” Seokjin says, with the good grace of a boyfriend well-accustomed to redirecting Taehyung’s unblinking intensity. “Those are his sex fantasies talking.”

“Unfortunately I can’t say I share them,” Jimin says dryly.

“I’m not suggesting you spank your idols,” Taehyung says. He then pauses to consider himself. “Or am I…”

By way of apology, Seokjin says, “I’ve deprived him of sex for too long.”

“Yes,” Taehyung says, nodding sagely, “you have.”

Jimin groans into his arms.

“Jimin-ah! I’m serious!” Taehyung says, sitting up straighter. “I know you. You’ll miss it. You’ll miss all of it—the blood, the sweat, the tears, the kicking and screaming, gossiping with the makeup noonas, being filmed for behind the scenes content, leading dress rehearsals on a big stage surrounded by TV cameras. This isn’t an addiction you can kick with a remedial ballet class. You need to be near a stage. You need to have professionals around you or your pretty head will explode.”

Jemin angles a look at Taehyung from behind his arms, lashes spiky-wet. “My remedial ballet class bakes me brownies and compliments my calves. They listen. They bring me stability and workable schedules,” he says. “Bratty idols aren’t the draw for me, Taehyung-ah, especially not the self-absorbed adults that I work with. It’s—the concepts and creativity, the talent, the music. And I know—I know there’s something in me that still…”

“…that still yearns for the stage,” Taehyung finishes, deflated.

“Yes. But I think it’s time I give that dream up. The world isn’t worth it anymore. I thought...maybe, if I worked hard enough, kept my head down and just danced, if I put up with all the ugly...then eventually...the good, the magic, it was bound to find me, right?” Jimin sighs in resignation. “It turns out it doesn’t exist. The well must be all dried up because there’s nothing left for me. Nothing remotely worth my time.”

“Hm.” Seokjin rubs pensively at his chin, eyes narrowed. “You’ve become jaded and cynical. And not without good reason, but if you ask me...you need to find some fresh blood. Something a little indie, something a little experimental. Start smaller. More subversive. Music for the music and not for the money.”
“Subversive.” Jimin weighs the word on his tongue. “And where am I going to find that?”

“One Jungkook music video and you’d be eating your words, you know,” Seokjin says matter-of-factly. “There is good yet to be discovered, Jimin-ah, and it’s got a six pack and dimples.”

Jimin huffs, mouth quirking in amusement. A Donna Summer song comes on over the speakers. He flips over onto his back with a triumphant splash, belly bared. His hair floats around him in the water like jellyfish limbs. At this angle, the bubbles catch the light, glimmering faintly, and Jimin feels invincible, one-hundred percent certain of himself and his anti-idol decision. He stretches his feet, assuming a ballet arch, toes two sharp points. To the room at large, he says, “It’s cute that you think I know who that is. Not on my radar, never will be.”

“This is me adding a dash of chili powder to the words that you’re about to eat,” Seokjin says, then mimes the act of seasoning an imaginary plate of food.

“Hyung, I’m not hungry.”

“Heed my advice, child. You find yourself a hot idol with a little passion, let him sweep you into his arms Dirty Dancing-style, and you’ll walk away with inspiration and a twinge in your lower back.”

Jimin blinks at that. “A twinge in my lower back...?”

“In the words of some of my greatest predecessors,” Seokjin says, sending Taehyung a meaningful look, “art dick just hits different.”

“Wha—! No one says that!” Jimin yells, whipping a hand out and sending a lash of warm water flying in Seokjin’s direction, who ducks behind his towels and howls with laughter. “Hyung, I’m breaking up with the idol world! For now if not forever. I need some time and no amount of Jungkook music videos are going to lure me back! And you can hold me to that!”

As it turns out, it’s hiding in moonchild Entertainment HQ, in the form of a six pack and dimples.

“One week. It hasn’t even been one week, Jimin,” Taehyung yells and when Jimin’s only response is a hollered, “I have an air-dominant birth chart!” he sticks his head into the living room to watch Jimin dart around, throwing together a bag of his belongings, all the personal effects he’s accumulated over the course of the week.

Jimin is too busy digging between the couch cushions for his lost lip balm to sense Taehyung’s approach. One moment he’s alone and the next there’s a tall man in a paint-smeared smock behind him, menacing as a shadow. Jimin yelps, tries to jerk away, and Taehyung latches onto him by a fistful of his t-shirt.

“Hey—!”

Taehyung says, “This is me holding you to your breakup.”

Jimin changes tact immediately. “Taehyung-ah,” he says, affecting a satoori whine. “Leave it. And —hey, let me turn around so you can see the look on my face right now.”

“You can’t break me,” Taehyung says, with confidence.
Jimin tosses a look over his shoulder, mouth impossibly pouty.

“Stop that,” Taehyung says, with less confidence.

Jimin can’t help the laugh that comes out at that.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t let you go,” comes Taehyung’s grave voice. “It’s in the best friend bylaws.”

“You can bend them.”

“I refuse.”

“I’m trying to get out of your hair!”

“Why, so you can go dye yours again, traitor?” Taehyung says. “Who’s bribing you with expensive dye jobs, huh? It’s not worth it, Jiminie. They’re making you false promises.”

Jimin flutters a hand over his new honey blond hair with a huff. “This is an old friend.”

“Older than me?”

“In age?” Jimin asks. “Yes.”

Jimin can hear Taehyung harrumph. “But not cuter.”

“No, not cuter. You’re a first place cutie, Taehyungie.”

Taehyung sniffs, silently pleased. “I know.”

“Okay, now let me go.” Jimin tries to twist free, t-shirt riding up his tattooed back. “You have to be sick of me by now! Just let me get out of your hair.”

“Jin and I like you in our hair,” Taehyung says. “You’re like a little butterfly clip. Without you, our bangs are too long and we can’t see anything.”

“I don’t want to keep imposing!” Jimin twists in the opposite direction, to no effect. “Taehyung-ah, it’s been a week-long sleepover!”

“To impose you’d have to be obstructive and you’re tiny and convenient and fit in my pocket,” Taehyung says, leaning sideways to find and extract Jimin’s lip balm from the couch cushions with the ease of an expert hand. “Look up the word ‘portable’ in the dictionary and you’ll find your picture underneath it.”

“Seriously, stop being cute to me right now!” Jimin shouts. “It’s making me want to cuddle you to death!”

“No!” Taehyung shouts back. “Stop being sneaky! You’re colluding with the enemy!”

“What—?” Jimin splutters.

“You’re leaving to fall in love with a hot, unnamed idol so you can leave us forever,” Taehyung says. “If they’re dragging you back there, it’s because they’ve made you a deal you can’t resist. So he has to be either hot or talented, but not both, because if he’s both then you’re dead in the water, Jiminie. If he’s hot and talented and his company promises you complimentary dye jobs on top of that, you don’t stand a chance. Not in heaven or hell. And if you don’t stand a chance, then I’ve already lost you forever. You’re going to move to Sweden to get gay married and adopt an armful
of blue-eyed babies where I can’t see.”

Jimin’s next laugh comes out high and disbelieving. “I’m not leaving to fall in love with an idol! And I’m not moving countries to adopt babies! And—and I don’t even know what he looks like, okay! I haven’t had time to do any research because certain people who I won’t name have been forcing me to partake in movie marathons every night.”

Taehyung hums. “I like the sound of these people.”

“And anyway, you’re the one who was saying I won’t be creatively challenged teaching ballet to kids!” Jimin reaches backwards to snatch his lip balm out of Taehyung’s hand. He uncaps it, pouting at nothing in particular. “I thought this was what you wanted!”

“That was before I had assessed the situation and ruled it a threat.”

“To who? What?”

“To you, and to our friendship, of course. This company could try to steal you away and you promised you’d be at my exhibition in December,” Taehyung says. “So tell me the idol’s name. If you don’t have time to do any research, I will.”

“That is—” Jimin flounders, face heating.

He dislikes being wrong. He dislikes fateful encounters even less—by which he means, he hates how magical they make him feel, like he’s part of some larger, unseen scheme being orchestrated by great big cosmic forces. Jungkook isn’t just a name anymore. No—now Jungkook carries weight, and meaning. He’s significant. He’s been spoken into existence. Forecasted, like a lunar eclipse. He has to be good, or there’s no hope left for Jimin and his career as a choreographer will die a sad little death, never to be mourned again.

Jeon Jungkook is the silver lining in the far distance and today Jimin is going to meet him.

“Classified information. That is classified information,” he finishes, patting his cheeks to dispel any leftover warmth. He won’t give Seokjin the satisfaction.

“If you don’t tell me, I’ll just follow you around in a trench coat and hide my face behind newspapers like in those old American noir movies.”


“So he is hot!” Taehyung accuses.

“No! I don’t know!” Jimin applies a coat of clumsy lip balm to his mouth and angrily caps it with a snap. “It doesn’t matter! I’m going to be choreographing for him and I need to go! Do you want me to be late?”

“I want you to be happy. Seokjin wants you to be wrong,” says Taehyung. “And you’re not even letting him bask in his victory. At least wait for him to come back from his casting call.”

“Kim Taehyung!” Jimin swats at his best friend’s arm, which is huge and impressive and connected to shoulders rivaled only by Kim Seokjin, resident linebacker in body and not mind. “I’m going to be late and if you make me late, I will fall in love with the idol I’m meeting out of spite. Is that what you want? Hm? What if he’s ugly? What if he hates Coldplay?”

“Don’t threaten me with Coldplay. You know they’re one of my weaknesses.”
“My future husband is seconds away from stealing me away to Sweden…”

“Jimin-ah, you are chronically late,” Taehyung says. “You will be late to your Swedish wedding and to your deathbed and we’ll all expect and excuse it. It’s one of your charm points. This is the natural order of the universe.”

“I’m going to break up with you next if you don’t let go,” Jimin says.

“You can’t break up with your soulmate.”

“Watch me.”

“That’s like saying you’re going to abstain from water. Or exist without oxygen. It’s not possible.”

“I’m leaving. Feel free to follow me,” Jimin says dryly, as he starts off in the direction of the front door, towing near-two hundred pounds of pouting artist behind him. Each step occurs in slow motion, like he’s swimming against the tide, or treading quicksand.

“Tell me his name and I’ll let you go.”

“Chris Martin.”

“Not funny.”

Jimin laughs.

“Tell me the company name, at least.” Taehyung tugs Jimin to a stop two feet from the door. “Or the old friend running the company. I promise not to tell Seokjin until he bribes me with sex and no earlier.”

Jimin groans, but it’s half-laughter. It’s defeat against a greater adversary. “Namjoon,” he says into his hand, already bracing for all the gloating he’s going to have to endure from Seokjin. “His name is Kim Namjoon and he wants me to come work for him.”

☽

As it turns out, Jungkook is both hot and talented.

☾

seokjin-hyung

before you say anything

i didn’t watch any of his music videos

tell taehyung i’m moving to sweden

to marry jeon jungkook?

that seems a little presumptuous, considering you haven’t even seen any of his videos yet

at least get to know the guy a little

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09011013KM
Kim Namjoon is the character in a book who never wavers.

He’s the one who sets you on the right path, discloses some vital piece of information or makes an unlikely offer in the nick of time, bomb-defuser, safe-cracker, big man in suit and tie, intrinsically altering the course of your life and sending you skidding towards true love or a dream job—or, better yet, both, a two-in-one package deal—without really meaning to. He’s a blue moon with miraculous timing, the good scholar of great libraries of knowledge, the alchemist behind a number of critically-acclaimed albums, a ghostwriter by rumor and Midas by touch.

He’s all of this and none of it, not to Jimin, who knows him not by his prestige but by the exact angle of his elbows when folded across his chest just so and also by his tendency to melt away into nature during moments of stress. It doesn’t feel fateful, sitting in Namjoon’s office for the first time, Jimin folding his hands neatly in his lap and waiting to be wowed. Mostly, it feels boring.

Namjoon isn’t the wicked-quick CEO of a glittering indie idol company, he’s Jimin’s old college crush and clumsy sunbae, creator of a literary magazine that lived and died during Jimin’s lifetime, author of harrowingly embarrassing love poetry by day and underground rapper by night, the only other student who holed up in the library with his headphones and textbooks as religiously as Jimin did. Two sides of the same coin, cast off in search fountain wishes.

After Jimin had already given up on his dream of debuting, Namjoon discovered one of his high school dance tapes, watched it in full, and then promised to sign him someday. When my company takes on life and leaves the atmosphere, he’d said. He’d been a nobody talking to another nobody then, about hopes and dreams and longings, and there was something sacred in that. Something kind.

Now, Namjoon slips his suit jacket off, wool blend, and drapes it across the back of his chair. He’s so tall he never seems to fit comfortably anywhere, like a toy soldier crammed inside a dollhouse. His hair is platinum blond and has been swept back from his forehead with product. Jeon Jungkook is the absolute last thing on Jimin’s mind today. The first: Namjoon fills out his button-down like a dream. And also: his office is furnished funnily—not the sleek whites and dark woods of corporate stock photos, but the inside of a novelty gift shop or modern art museum. Warm, folksy, dressed up in deep earth tones.

“You’re probably wondering why the sudden contact,” he says, after lowering himself into his chair with a small sigh. “I don’t think I gave much of an explanation in my initial email.”

Jimin bows over the desk, smiling faintly. “It’s good to see you after so long, hyung.”

“Please, sit,” Namjoon says, gesturing. “I’ve missed your face.”

“In particular?” Jimin says with a short laugh.

“In particular, looking up over my book and seeing you fast asleep across the table. I was always grateful you kept me company in college.”

Jimin sits, then scoots in closer, until his knees are brushing maple wood. In his freshman year, Namjoon drank to excess during a birthday party and had to be dragged home by his tiny hoobae and when he woke to Jimin dozing on his futon the next morning, they shared an awkward, close-lipped kiss that promised minimal romantic chemistry and that they never spoke of again. The
memory is so old it’s become moth-eaten, but it still makes Jimin smile, in remembered embarrassment.

“I hope you’re not still pining away after all these years, hyung-nim,” he says, eyes disappearing into his smile.

Namjoon’s laugh is a loud huff of air. “I suspect you would let me down gently, if that were the case. But no, although that would make for an interesting story, wouldn’t it?”

“And what stories are we weaving today, Namjoon-ssi?” Jimin props his chin in his hand, almost curious enough to wonder. “It will take a lot to tempt me.”

“I was hoping you’d say that,” Namjoon says. He tugs contemplatively at his tie, straightening the knot until it sits at his throat just right. Then he steeples his fingers. “Once upon a time, you came to work for me.”

Jimin laughs, the sound startled out of him. “Not very tempting.”

“I’m only making good on an old promise,” Namjoon says and glances sideways as though paying particular attention to the memory of it. “I said I was going to sign you someday, didn’t I? Or did you doubt that I’d make it this far?”

“No, hyung, never doubt. I always knew this is where you’d end up,” Jimin says, tapping a finger to the slope of his cheekbone, dimly amused. “But you don’t know me very well anymore, do you?”

“I saw a video of you,” Namjoon says, now with more urgency.

Histories repeating, like decalcomania, Jimin thinks.

Aloud, he says, “Ah.”

“It came up on Naver,” he adds, unnecessarily. “You were dancing.”

“I see,” Jimin says, head tilted. “Yes, I do appear to do that from time to time.”

A smile breaks through that cool exterior and Namjoon shakes his head, with approval or exasperation. Maybe both. “You’ve grown into your humor.”

“Was it ill-fitting before, do you think?” Jimin wonders.

“Not so much ill-fitting as…” Namjoon pauses, deliberating. “Well, you didn’t used to think of yourself as funny, from what I remember. But I always felt that you had a natural gravity about you. Something that sucks everyone around you in. It’s like that when you smile, or laugh, or mimic someone’s voice just right. When you dance, especially.”

Jimin holds in a laugh. “So I’m not actually funny, then, and you really are in love with me. Is that what I’m hearing?”

Namjoon lets out his laugh, like the sound is rising up from within, buried belly-deep. Jimin recognizes it as genuine by the goofy snort that closes it off. “Come dance for me,” he says.

“Hyung,” Jimin says, with a huff. “This conversation is getting more and more sexually suggestive with every passing minute. Ask me to undress next, okay?”

Namjoon smiles, a quick flicker, undeterred from his objective. “I have an idol I think you’ll like.”
“That seems unlikely.”

“He’s very good,” Namjoon says.

Jimin hums, noncommittal.

Namjoon purses his lips, turning his chair at a new angle. “After the Naver encounter last week, I started doing a bit of digging on you, just to get a sense of where you’ve been for the last few years. Attempting to piece together your story. The narrative...the timeline...all the unknowns and secrets surrounding you, everything you’ve let free...it all seems very miraculous to me. Failed idol turned K-pop choreographer. Mastery of multiple dance styles, after quitting a company trying to squeeze you into a hip-hop group. That seems a little cosmic, don’t you think? Very full circle, I thought.”

Jimin takes a moment to gather his bearings, eyes lowered to cover his surprise. He becomes aware of his eyelashes, then forgets them, in the span of a few seconds. He traces the dull edge of his thumbnail across a divot in the desk. He wonders what he’s doing here, for just a moment. To sit and have his history rehashed by an old crush, embarrassingly. “Next time I’ll be sure to link you my Wikipedia page.”

“Tell me,” Namjoon says, soft. “I never knew that you—why only one company?”

“It soured the experience for me. And at fifteen, it was a bad environment to be in,” Jimin murmurs, not looking at Namjoon. “I had self-image issues, on top of no money, and I went about things in...very extreme ways, at times. I didn’t know how to be normal when everyone wanted me to be perfect. I couldn’t take the constant criticism, the restrictions, falling asleep and waking up on an empty stomach. I spiraled. I—slowed. Eventually, I stopped. Everyone says slow and steady wins the race, but I always felt like I came in dead last. I told myself if it was meant to be, it would be, and instead I hated myself and all of my teachers and managers. And so it wasn’t. And the world kept spinning.”

“None of that is your fault. Jimin, that is the furthest thing from failure. Or—if it is, it’s not yours to claim. That company failed you,” Namjoon says, with feeling, leaning in now, his elbows folded over the desk at exactly the angle Jimin most remembers from blurry college nights spent in the campus library. “You were a victim of malpractice and NOIZE Entertainment got what it deserved.”

“But did its trainees?” Jimin asks, finally looking up. “Did all of its idols?”

Namjoon sighs and something about the line of his mouth seems conflicted. “Some more than others. But that’s a discussion for another day and one I hope we’ll get to have,” he says. “Listen, Jiminssi, I’ll get to the point. I think you’re brilliant. You’ve only been choreographing professionally for around a year and you’re already collecting awards. You have an idol’s palate and an idol’s range of motion. Your work is immaculate. This world would benefit from more of your direction. To put it shortly, it’s a direction I believe my company would also benefit from and in particular, my maknae. He’s slated to release his first full-length album sometime in the coming months and I want him dancing your routines.”

Jimin sits back to take that in, at a loss for words. He doesn’t know what to do with his hands, so he uses them to nervously smooth a wrinkle from his jeans. He opens his mouth and still no sound comes out—only a confused gust of air. Immaculate. He stows that behind his tongue, to be examined at a later date.

“I’ve flattered you,” Namjoon says, brow furrowed. “I hope?”
“Just a little,” Jimin says, choked up.

“You deserve to hear it more and it’s a shame that you don’t,” Namjoon says, after clearing his throat and shuffling a stack of papers seemingly at random. “You know me. We don’t operate like the rest of the industry here. You have nothing to fear from me or my company. Nothing at all, especially not—not as it pertains to sexuality. But that’s a given, of course.”

“Of course,” Jimin says, for lack of something more intelligent.

“Tell me what would sweeten the pot for you and I’ll see what I can do. My partner and I are willing to negotiate terms if it means convincing you to sign a contract with moonchild, even if it’s something short-term. We’re slightly crunched for time and hoping to debut our idol’s album on an M Countdown special episode early next year.”

Jimin jerks his head up, shocked. “Partner? Are you…?”

“What? Oh! No, no! That’s not—” Namjoon babbles, face coloring a bright red. “No, no, I meant my business partner—co-CEO—Min Yoongi!”

Jimin’s surprise thaws, like melted ice cream, that same sweet chill. He laughs into his hand until he can’t see much beyond the blur of his eyelashes. Can’t hear much beyond the happy pitter-patter of his own heart. “This maknae of yours…”

“Yes,” Namjoon rushes to say, visibly grateful for the subject change. “Yes! I have a little sample for you to listen to. No NDA necessary—moonchild’s gift to you. Think of it as a gesture of goodwill.”

Jimin waves Namjoon into action and waits.

A thirty second soundbite is enough—just a tiny taste from the upcoming album, like a shot of spirits. A spoonful of honey. Jimin thinks: fairy tale bright. The curling boughs of a tree. Through the speakers hooked up to Namjoon’s laptop, the voice hits a note like rainfall into a river. It’s enough to dry Jimin’s mouth, to heat him up from the inside. He recognizes the recording as essential and timeless, something which fits into anything, the sort of voice that is universally beautiful, like bells or birdsong. He can place it and also fails to fit it into the larger landscape, too magnificent, too melodic to compare. It’s the sort of voice that sparks jealousy and joy in equal measure. The sort of voice that, when felt from inches away, raises goosebumps up and down the arms. The color is cashmere and the texture ocean waves.

Jimin takes a moment to think about not thinking about it. It would be so easy. Cut the recording, slide from his seat, and head for the exit.

Then he thinks about it, letting his mind unfurl. He has to sit through the impulse to pick up a pencil, or get to his feet, to arrange his limbs to a certain end in front of a studio mirror, counting out beats—five, six, seven, eight. Before Jimin dances he dreams and before he dreams he finds a song to carry him out into the current, warm and waist-deep. This is one of those songs. It must remind him of home in some small corner of his brain, because the urge to hear his mother’s voice rises in him out of nowhere and then vanishes just as quick as it came.

Namjoon hits pause and silence envelops the room around them.

Jimin’s ears buzz, sensing danger or magic or some degree of both. He can’t be sure that this is a safety net and not a snake pit, but these are the rules of the game. You roll the dice and wait for your fate to set in. You take the highwire one foot at a time and you never look down, not for
anything. You follow the sound of a silver voice to see where it leads. Soft. Serendipitous.

“Yes,” Jimin says, suddenly certain. “Write me a contract.”
turn our eyes to Jeon Jungkook, wedged against a rainy window with his face buried in his food, in a black crewneck three sizes too big, relaxed cargos, and sneakers so bulky they can’t be functional—or the lives they lead. The classic K-pop model fails, in many ways, to recognize the artist as a human being. We try to combat that here. Morals are imperative to moonchild, don’t get me wrong, but Jungkook isn’t a muzzled dog. He does what he wants.”

“Namjoon-ah,” Yoongi says, gesturing at Namjoon in a way that says, can you believe this guy? “He’s like my walking footnotes.”

“It needed clarifying!” Namjoon says. “These are things we try to keep in mind when building a company from the ground up. Jungkook comes from chaotic beginnings—he shot to stardom at fifteen, far before he was ready for anything of this magnitude—and he’s learned the hard way that his world is one of...of tightropes and tigers, I think. He found Yoongi and I at eighteen, after breaking contract with a corrupt company, and signing with us was one of the first real ways he got to exercise his freedom as an adult. What happens to the inner child, in that scenario? Do they die a slow and painful death? Do they go into hiding until it’s safe to come out again? Are they gone forever, or do they reemerge years later, like a second self? These are all questions he had to ask himself during the creation of this album.”

Meteoric beginnings, more like, and beginnings oft-discussed by K-media, who still today regard Jeon Jungkook as something of an anomaly, and a threat to industry order. Jungkook is slated to address all this and more with the forthcoming release of his (currently unnamed) debut album, now two years in the making, which Min Yoongi calls, “achingly absolute, in every way. The sound is...it travels, I think. Between Earth’s core and Earth’s stratosphere. It’s molten. Ultraviolet. No stone is left unturned and every song stands on its own. Pop, R&B, rap, rock. Expect all of it.”

The Jeon Jungkook—of tightropes and cage-fed tigers, child-star made man, now living somewhere on the moon—who bows over my hand upon meeting me and says, earnestly, “Thank you for having me,” as if I’m welcoming him into my world and not stepping into his, calls his songwriting process counterintuitive, like trying to sap a tree barehanded. His smile is quicksilver, transforms him in an instant, sweeps him backwards in time to the little boy who had wrestled his way out of an illegitimate contract with the now-defunct entertainment company NOIZE, brought to trial for tax fraud, money laundering, and other unethical business practices. Most of all, he’s elusive, his public appearances stunning in their unpredictability. I wonder who, if anyone, really knows Jeon Jungkook.

Netizen accounts place him in wholesale fishery markets at dawn, slouched beneath tented street stalls, or midnight movie showings of the latest arthouse horror flick. He currently hails from central Seoul, in Jongno-gu, notorious for its Buddhist temples and gay bars. The district borrows its name from one of its major streets, which translates to “Bell Street,” and if you ask Jungkook, hopeless romantic that he is, he’ll tell you that this is the sound—bells—he hopes to hear when he sees his soulmate and future spouse for the first time…”

Jimin nearly loses his lip balm a second time flagging down his bus. His little leather crossbody bag thumps repeatedly against his thigh during the jog over and as he boards, Jimin thanks the driver, his lucky stars, the lower back tattoo, and also the approximate angle at which the sun is smiling down on him, hot cider on a summer day. All wrong, all right. it’s fall!, he texts Taehyung, who he had to peel from his back with promises of updates exactly four minutes ago.

we’re all going to die in an ecological collapse, Taehyung texts back, somehow managing cheerful even through KakaoTalk.
thanks for that, Jimin replies, then sends over an outpouring of heart stickers and crying kittens to offset the sarcasm.

you’re going to be so late your idol will never want to marry you for fear of being stood up at the altar, Taehyung texts. i’ll be very sorry to your sad little swedish babies.

my babies are going to be very happy, thank you, Jimin replies.

and probably not swedish! he adds, after some thought.

that’s if your idol even wants any, Taehyung texts back. and i would know if he did by now if you’d given me a name.

Jimin doesn’t dignify that with a response, mostly because his first instinct had been if he doesn’t want babies, he won’t be marrying me! Flustered, he shoves his earbuds in and hits play, alone for the moment with the silver voice. First order of business: stop feeding Taehyung’s marriage fantasies. Second: sketchbook.

Jimin’s boarded his bus near Hanyang University during the lunch rush, so wading down the aisle to find a seat brings him into close contact with about thirty sweaty bodies. He hustles his way to the back and sets up shop in a window seat, squeezing past an orange-haired girl flipping through a calculus textbook. Jimin resists the urge to try solving equations over her shoulder, puts pencil to paper, and begins. He doodles aimlessly until Park Hyatt Seoul rolls into view, a glass tower four blocks from moonchild, and then he’s stumbling back out into the sunshine, twenty minutes late on the dot.

“Oh no,” he says morosely and works up to a sprint, phone clutched in hand, high-top Converse pounding concrete.

Heat sticks Jimin’s shirt to his chest like a second skin as twin glass doors close in. He pushes through them and stops to pick up a laminated ID bearing the name PARK JIMIN and a little pixelated headshot he’d emailed to Namjoon with his new honey blond hair parted over his forehead. Security accompanies him to the halfway point, down a few white-walled corridors, then bows and retreats.

Jimin waits until they’ve turned the corner to let himself sulk. He’s so late it’s embarrassing. He’s so sweaty he’s begun to drip like an ice sculpture and he spends a moment worrying at his appearance in front of Namjoon’s office door, locked in a staring contest with a wavy-haired idol on a framed magazine cover, fashionably slouched, dangly earrings brushing his shoulders. He’s got eyes like whirlpools. Jimin moves closer to get a good look at the magazine’s fine print and then the flicker of his phone’s lockscreen catches his attention.

Two messages from Namjoon. He fumbles the phone open and presses the icon for KakaoTalk expecting a scolding. Instead, he gets this:

jimin-ssi! please excuse the unprofessionalism, but yoongi-ssi and i are currently taking lunch in myeong-dong with a few producers and our meeting has evidently run overtime. we should be back within the hour. please, make yourself comfortable. you’re free to any of the studios, couches, and/food you find. jungkook should be lurking somewhere in the building if he’s not still asleep (long night in the recording studio), but don’t feel like you have to hunt him down for formal introductions just yet. we’ll be back soon to talk creative direction. thank you!

and we look forward to working with you!
Jimin’s eyes rest on the frosted glass obscuring the view into Namjoon’s office. The relief that runs through him feels gifted from god, heaven-sent somehow. It relaxes his shoulders by slow degrees. *that’s okay! i’ll be waiting*, he replies, ten minutes late even to his own text threads, and turns back the way he came, the soles of his sneakers squeaking quietly against the laminate flooring. His earbuds are still in, he realizes belatedly, and Jeon Jungkook is crooning in his ear about blue dreams, the ride home, the rush of sea breeze air.

After so many repeat listens on the way over, Jimin finds himself humming along, cleaning up his email inbox out of habit, knamjoon@moonchild.com starred and archived for safekeeping. He saves the raw .mp3 file to his music library, oh so secret without an album cover, and wanders the corridors until a cat the color of storm clouds cuts across his path out of nowhere. It darts after a shaft of sunlight, gold bell glimmering around its throat. Jimin follows it through a nondescript white door without thinking.

“Ah,” he sighs as he steps inside, greeted by a cold front created by an AC unit on high. “Thank you.”

The cat flicks its tail in reply and dashes under a conference table, bell bouncing. Jimin follows, lets himself flop forward on top of the table, bent over double and not bothering with the chairs. He feels unreasonably out of breath for having sprinted only four blocks to get here. Parked in front of the vents, he pillows his cheek against his crossed arms and drinks up the cold airflow like a panting puppy. A happy exhale escapes him.

It’s nice to be alone with the silver voice and the silver cat. Jimin arches his back, catlike himself, until his belly leaves the table and his t-shirt gapes open, sweat cooling down his chest. Jeon Jungkook sings: *I race the rivers home / The ocean lives in my ears / Breathe me in / Like a blue dream / So slowly / So slowly.* Jimin sways with it.

He thinks he could fall asleep to Jeon Jungkook’s voice. He thinks about the slow turning of the arms of a clock, of the glissade preceding a leap, toes pointed, of sunlight through silk and of his father’s yukgaejang on rainy days, red-hot against the roof of his mouth. Of home. His mind loops back around a second time, circles drawn in sand. Jimin drifts, blond bangs in his eyes. He contemplates his phone—would Mom pick up right now if he called?—then checks the line of his tinted lip balm in its cracked reflection, thumb rubbing thoughtfully. He pops his lips, sticky with balm, once, twice.

“Ah, pretty kitty, come here,” he whines into his arms when the silver cat finally emerges from beneath the table.

Jimin follows it with his eyes until it comes to a stop between two long legs. He stares, blinking slowly. Then he jerks up onto his elbows with a small noise of fright, heart leaping into his throat. His gaze collides with a pair of dark, caught-out eyes watching him from the kitchenette in the far corner.

Jimin’s belly tightens until he matches the face to the magazine cover—wavy hair, strong nose, delicate mouth—and he realizes.

In his ears, Jeon Jungkook is a sustained high note. In real time, Jeon Jungkook is a bunny startled into a stupor. He looks like he’s been backed into a corner, one hand frozen over a box of pastries. Behind him, a coffee machine is burbling a dark brew. He has a pair of pastel pink airpods in and the mussed hair of an early morning. Jimin wonders how long he’s been standing there, if he’s delayed Jeon Jungkook’s breakfast by making himself at home on top of this table. If he should feel sorry for doing so.
Jimin isn’t sure what to say, so he says nothing. For a moment, neither does Jeon Jungkook. Jimin’s song ends, then restarts again from the beginning. Jungkook’s, he corrects. Jungkook’s song. Owner of the silver voice, with a silver cat threading through his ankles. His stare is so intent it could cut steel.

Slowly, Jimin pushes up off of the table, readjusting his bag and feeling around for his lip balm like a good luck charm. Or a weapon. He considers chucking it at Jeon Jungkook’s head, just for a second, just to see what happens.

Before he can do so, Jeon Jungkook has snapped out of his trance and thrown himself into a deep bow. His hair flops over into his eyes. He rises, then bows again for good measure, hanbok fluttering with the movement. Jimin moves to mirror him, caught between bemusement and laughter. It’s a laughter he tries and fails to contain, when Jungkook picks up the open box of pastries and thrusts it in Jimin’s direction, an offering.

Jimin shakes his head, trying to convey a wordless no thank you. He moves towards the opposite end of the room, hiding a smile behind his shoulder. When he reaches the windows, he turns, tugs his earbuds out, and says, “Namjoon-hyung says he’ll be back within the hour.”

Jungkook stares at Jimin’s mouth, realizes there is sound coming out that is not connecting, and yanks his airpods out. He looks sleepy, and startled awake, like he’s been tossed forcibly from a dream. “Sorry?”

“Namjoon-hyung,” Jimin begins.

“I’m Jungkook,” says Jungkook, with very wide eyes. He points to himself to make his message more clear.

“What?” Jimin looks up from shrugging his bag off, barely holding back laughter. “No, I know that. I wasn’t referring to you, Jeon Jungkook-ssi. I was saying Namjoon-hyung will be back within the hour.”

Like a child who’s been delivered bad news, Jungkook goes bright red. “Oh,” he says, then swings around without another word and goes back to picking through the pastries like he’s resolved to ignore Jimin.

The silver cat sends Jimin a baleful look from the floor that he thinks is completely undeserved.

While they wait, Jimin perches, legs crossed delicately, in the sill of a window letting in the worst of the light. Snow is looming, he can sense it, but for now the sun has it beat. It flushes him and turns his hair to caramel, the sticky sweet of the approaching holiday season. Jimin pushes it back from his forehead, aware now of all of Jungkook’s movements, his paper plate loaded with donut bites, the coffee poured and cooling nearby, the finger dunked and yanked from the dark liquid in an instant.

“Ah,” Jungkook hisses, shaking his index finger out. He shoots Jimin an embarrassed look.

Jimin pretends not to notice. He tugs his sketchbook from his bag and lays it open over his thighs, flipped to a page bursting with messy public transport doodles—the crook of an arm caught in a hanging strap, a baby mid-cry, an ahjumma gingerly holding a bag of perishable groceries. He turns his mechanical pencil over in his hands, lead elongated, and allows himself a brief look at Jungkook, who bends to sip carefully from his coffee, gaze averted.

There’s something stupidly symmetrical about him, brought into being by his apparent
awkwardness, the incongruity of his grace. Clean lines, Jimin thinks. Harsh lines, making hairpin turns, bicep rising into shoulder rising into throat. Apollo and Dionysus at war: calm against chaos. It makes Jimin’s fingers twitch with the desire to draw.

He twirls his pencil and studies Jungkook, shameless now in his sharp appraisal; Jungkook, less so. No, Jungkook is the furthest thing from shameless. He sizes Jimin up in stolen glances, played off as casual examinations of the room at large. Eyes wandering, landing on Jimin, springing away, then returning again a moment later. Only whistling would make him more obvious at this point.

Across the room, Jungkook dusts the powdered sugar from his fingers and starts humming to himself. He purses and unpurses his lips, darting Jimin another look. Away again, when he’s caught.

Jimin stares, appalled.

Jeon Jungkook is soldierly and soft, all at once. Something gentle to temper the rough edges, the tendrils of tattoo escaping past the sleeve of his hanbok, the muscle mass and broad shoulders, granite jaw and thick neck. He’s a perfect paradox: soft edging into harsh, masculine and feminine fused, big but slender, with the tiniest of waists, a fact revealed to Jimin when the heat of his coffee proves to be too much and he sheds the outer layer. He’s got on a long-sleeved t-shirt underneath. V-neck, like Jimin. He’s pierced and tattooed, also like Jimin, although Jungkook’s ink is far more involved than Jimin’s, a sticker sheet of art mapped out across his hand, too detailed to unpack from this far away.

Jimin has seen few idols tattooed and even fewer tattooed somewhere so visible the general public can give their opinion on the body art. It’s one of the reasons why his little SERENDIPITY lives along the dip of his back, right between two dimples. If he were braver, he’d shout it to the whole world: THIS IS MY BODY AND I’LL DO WITH IT WHAT I WANT. Jungkook must shout this wherever he goes, with the knuckles of his right hand all inked up.

As Jungkook drains his cup of its final dregs, Jimin finds himself staring at that big hand curled around cardboard.

Jungkook glances up, cup paused near his mouth. There’s a question on his face. Jimin leaves it unanswered, returning to his sketchbook without comment. Jungkook is single-minded, though. He can neither sit still nor disguise how intensely he needs to stare at Jimin. He’s all eyes, gaze like a gold thread wrapped around Jimin’s wrist twice over. It’s a tug growing tauter.

Jimin looks up from outlining a jagged mountain range to find those dark eyes back on him. The part of him that preens under attention like a spoiled kitten is already tilting into it, like a face given to the sun. Old habits are hard to kill and all that.

Jungkook breaks the stare to gather up his garbage and throw it away. He shakes his head at himself, looking agitated, and begins pacing up and down the tiny dance studio.

Jimin swings his legs and turns to a new page in his sketchbook, smoothing a hand across bright white. “Jeon Jungkook-ssi,” he says.

Jungkook stops mid-step, head turned in Jimin’s direction. “Huh?”

“Was coffee such a good idea, considering?”

“Considering, what?” Jungkook says.

“Considering it all immediately went to your brain.” Jimin nibbles at the end of his pencil, warns:
“When you crash, you’ll fall.”

“I don’t fall,” Jungkook says, firmly.

“Do you mean that literally or metaphorically?”

“Both,” Jungkook says, more firmly.

“Ah,” Jimin says, with amusement. “Well, I only meant mine metaphorically. Caffeine highs can’t exist without caffeine lows. Though I do find it a little hard to believe that you don’t ever fall, with shoes so big.”

Jungkook drops his head to stare down at his bulky sneakers, eyebrows furrowed. He looks up suddenly and says, “What’s your—?”

Jimin tilts his head. “Hm?”

“Um,” Jungkook says, eloquently. “You have small shoes.”

Jimin kicks out his yellow Converse to corroborate this claim, humming in agreement. “Normally, I don’t, but I thought I’d play it safe for today.”

“Do you fall, then?”

“Yes,” Jimin says, after some consideration. “Sometimes, although that’s less the fault of my feet and more the fault of the rest of my body.”

“How…” Jungkook says, gaze fixed on Jimin with something almost incredulous. “How can you fall without using your feet?”

“Like this,” Jimin says, then demonstrates, giving a loud, fake laugh—an exaggerated ha ha ha! sort of laugh—and flinging his body backwards, legs kicked up in the air. “And then I don’t catch myself quick enough and I end up on the floor.”

“Oh,” Jungkook says, with all the wonder in the world. He starts to turn away, thinks better of it, and twists back around, mouth opening. Closing on a caught sentence. There’s a look of great concentration on his face when he resumes pacing, like he’s thinking about how to word something.

Jimin has come to understand idols by what’s been left unsaid, the cards kept close to the chest. Hearts tucked safely inside hidden pockets. Jeon Jungkook wears his through his earlobe like a dangly earring, displayed without shame or secrecy. He broadcasts his art and his unrest to the whole world, body one big message board. An open book, and little illustrations to go along with it. It’s—almost refreshing.

Jimin tugs idly at his earlobe and lets his right hand drift across the page almost without thinking. A strange silhouette takes shape under his pencil, crosshatched in dark grays. He shades a mop of messy hair, mind already twirling in ten different directions. He thinks: châiné turn, classical application of the supporting leg, the bridge before the chorus. Blue dreams. He’s heard Jungkook’s title track for a total of maybe forty minutes. He’s looked upon Jungkook for even less. Still, he can sense a dancer, in all the angles, the broader brushstrokes, the eyes.

Jimin hunches over his sketch, heart kicking up a notch.

A throat is cleared.
He glances up through his blond fringe.

“So, ah,” Jungkook says, arm awkwardly crooked behind his head. “Are you one of my backup dancers?”

The affront feels physical. Jimin narrows his eyes into catlike slits and, with great delicacy, shuts his sketchbook.

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5 Dance Performances to See in Seoul This Weekend

By Kim Hyo

Published Sep. 12, 2019

Our guide to dance performances happening this weekend and in the week ahead.

PARK JIMIN (Sep. 13-15, 7:30 p.m.) at Seoul Arts Center. Noryonhan Dance Company celebrates its 50th anniversary with the return of a suite of solo pieces based on Mozart’s “Requiem In D Minor, K.626,” performed by principal artist-in-residence Park Jimin. Jimin has earned the moniker “three-headed dog”—better known as Cerberus, Hades’ hell hound—among the Korean dance establishment for his ability to seamlessly blend the styles that have formed the foundations of his dance education. Poised beneath a pool of white light, with nothing in the way of props aside from a single strip of black fabric secured over the eyes, Jimin draws on hip-hop’s urgent pulse, ballet’s purity of movement, and the long, flowing phrasing of contemporary dance to tell a story of acute struggle.

His is a performance audiences have likened to the myth of Helen “the face that launched a thousand ships” of Troy. The suite opens with a courtship, as he flits from suitor to suitor, each more invisible than the last. Like Helen, whose admirers poured in from all parts of Greece, Jimin is indulgent and dreamy in doling out his rejections, finally settling on an unseen lover—Menelaus, perhaps?—for whom he bestows a series of playful pirouettes and caresses. He floats through the choreography in this manner, barefoot, a swan stretching its snow-white wings.

By the second part of the suite, however, the romance has rapidly melted away. It fragments the body like a beating and the score darkens, buoyed by opera-like wailing. Jimin tosses himself through the air, thrashes mid-flight, catches himself in a back shoulder roll, feet perfectly pointed. Here, the abduction of Helen begins to set in. He fights the blindfold and ultimately fails, the balletic lash of his limbs growing in intensity, speed, and precision. A fan kick brings him to his knees. In moments, his vision is stolen and he’s brought to heel. As the violins of “Requiem, K. 626: Lacrimosa” swell with a vengeance, Jimin gives a final, fruitless struggle, then falls limp, a casualty outspread in an open field.

The third and final piece in the suite seems to describe the fall of Troy, spawned by Helen’s unearthly beauty. The war is long and hard-fought. At its center, Jimin blooms. Close-up confirmation isn’t needed for audiences to come to the conclusion that he’s well-suited to the role; fate has already decided he’s fit for the part. He dances on the edge of androgyny, so lissome as to be fairy-like, his silhouettes soaring. Every body line mesmerizes. Restraint through movement might seem paradoxical to some, but Jimin is adept at holding his body in absolute control. With the ease of experience, he illustrates unlikely angles and leaps inhuman heights, his body an oil painting rendered lifelike. Each shift expresses absolute surrender, at the same time that it declares defiance. No longer is he a casualty of a Grecian war.
He falls out of a high, sweeping kick with flawless accuracy and lands in the solo suite’s final pose: arms extended to break his fall, knees against the floor, his blindfold slithering free. His first glimpse of freedom he directs at the audience, lips parted on a gasp of relief, a canary emerging from a coal mine.

“Be honest.” Jimin pauses for effect, arms crossed. “Do I look like a joke to you?”

“You look very sexy,” says Hoseok, who has grown into his wavy hair and doubled up on glittery jewelry since Jimin saw him last, which was when they were dancing backup for Chae Soo on a MNET award show stage and swearing never to do a live television stint again. His sneakers and nails are covered in flower decal. He bites brightly into a blood red apple and juice drips down the line of his jaw.

Jimin didn’t realize how much he missed him until now, like a piece sliding perfectly into place, whole again. The puzzle complete. Faced with Hoseok’s full cheeks and pearly smile, Jimin gives himself over to the drama of his first meeting with Jungkook. Hoseok has always given him the reactions he’s wanted, has laughed at Jimin’s jokes harder than anyone, can be trusted to deliver the best and warmest bear hugs.

Jimin says, “But not like a backup dancer, right? Do I seem inexperienced? Dumb…? Am I the maknae to your company maknae, hyung? Is that what it is?”

Hoseok squints, then takes a more reluctant, heart-shaped bite out of his apple. “I don’t know what’s going on right now and it’s starting to scare me.”

“It’s just funny, is all,” Jimin says, twisting a ring around his pinky, overly-casual.

“What’s funny?” says a new voice and then Namjoon is sticking his head into the studio like an eavesdropping ahjussi.

“I’m going to make your idol run laps around the building,” Jimin decides on impulse, then thinks, with a stab of sudden guilt: is that an abuse of power?

Namjoon lifts an eyebrow. “Okay?” he says, after a pregnant pause. “I think he would enjoy that. Why, did you want my permission or something? He’ll tell you if he doesn’t want to do something and you can always take it up with his physical trainer if you need to.”

Jimin’s shoulders sag, all the fight leaving him at once. “No, thank you,” he says with a slight pout and Namjoon shrugs, handing a pair of borrowed Beats to Hoseok and slipping from the room again without another word.

Hoseok crunches cheerfully on his apple and starts constructing a makeshift work station on the floor, back against the wall of mirrors. He pries his laptop open, unpacks his lunch of stir-fried noodles and vegetable broth, and plugs his headphones in to charge. To Jimin, he says, “Did Jungkook drop honorifics with you already? Because, if so, he didn’t mean it and he’s very sorry, you just look tiny and fresh out of college. Take it as a compliment!”

Jimin groans and sinks into one of the computer chairs at the opposite end of the room. “There’s nothing wrong with being a backup dancer. Hyung, why am I so offended? We all start there, don’t we?”

“Probably because you’ve fought your way up here,” Hoseok says with a careful snap of his wooden chopsticks. “It would sting any experienced dancer, to be brought back down so swiftly.”
Jimin lays his cheek to the desk, mouth squished into a pink pucker. “I’ll just let it pass, I think.”

“Wise of you,” says Hoseok. “If I let every minor comment around here get to me, I would have strangled Sungho by now.”

“Is your idol cute?” Jimin wonders aloud.

Hoseok clicks his chopsticks in warning, making a tch sound with his mouth. “No trading, Jiminie.”

“I don’t want your idol,” Jimin says, because he doesn’t and wouldn’t make a trade even if the option were available, backup dancer comment be damned. “I just want to know if mine is cuter.”

Hoseok laughs at that, a high, happy sound. “Didn’t you just try to punish yours with physical activity?”

“Yes, but only because I think he deserves it.”

“Well,” says Hoseok, after capturing a clump of noodles with his chopsticks and holding them up to the light, “think of it this way: it’s not a competition. Sungho and Jungkook are on the same team and—”

“I bet mine would beat yours in a fight,” interrupts Jimin, imagining it now.

Hoseok choke on his noodles. “You haven’t even seen mine!”

“I have faith,” Jimin says.

“You’ve known Jungkook for a day.”

“His biceps are very persuasive.”

“I’m gonna tell him you said that.”

Jimin throws a pen cap at Hoseok’s head and watches him crack up.

In the wall of mirrors, Jimin bends his body into impossible shapes. His muscles tighten and flex. They hold firm. They uncoil as directed and Jimin goes pliant against the floor like a wicked body of water. He’s chipped away at any and all resistance over the years and now his legs know how to correctly carry and disperse his weight, how to guard against choreographed falls and flips, how to hold far-fetched stretches for the pure fun of it. For a while, he considered giving up on leggings altogether because they kept tearing at the seams whenever he fell into a split or performed goddess squats during warm-ups, but then Taehyung gently reminded Jimin that men like them who are well-endowed in the ass area sometimes have to shop in the women’s section to find something that fits.

Jimin hasn’t looked back since.

Today, he’s looking up at Jungkook and Namjoon. His bangs obscure the view, casting a blond veil over two tall men outlined in a doorway. Jimin eases into a straddle split, arms extended and palms pressed flat to the floor, and raises an eyebrow at them. He’d hoped to have a little alone time with Jungkook’s title track this morning.
Silence rings out.

The sunlight is coming through the studio windows a wet white, almost beachy. It reminds Jimin of Gwangalli’s golden sand dotted with umbrellas. Beneath it, Namjoon is light and middle values at work, entirely unshadowed, an ice prince of unlikely height. Jungkook is his opposite, slinking out from behind him like an embarrassed shadow. They draw a contrast: Namjoon in starched white, Jungkook in baggy black, with big shoes to match. Jimin wonders at his tattoos, all covered up under long sleeves. He breathes his way through the sudden urge to draw.

“Well,” says Namjoon, after an uncomfortable pause has passed and they’ve stood staring in silence at Jimin stretched out over the studio floor. He clears his throat and avoids looking anywhere incriminating. “I thought I’d formally introduce you to my maknae, Jeon Jungkook, before we get to work.”

Jimin smiles with his teeth and points his toes. “It’s nice to meet you, Jeon Jungkook-ssi.”

“Nice to meet you,” Jungkook says weakly.

Namjoon nods, oblivious to any lingering tension. “Jungkook, I’d like you to meet Park Jimin,” he says, fists to his hips. He radiates pride in both directions, like a parent arranging a perfect marriage. “He’s a prominent dancer in and out of the idol world and he’s had extensive training in multiple genres, including martial arts. Mastery of the human body is his specialty. I’ve known him since college, so I can personally vouch for his abilities.”

Jimin folds his arms serenely. He sets his chin on top of them and issues Jungkook a look of pure and penetrating calm.

Jungkook nods, one quick jerk of his head. “Hi.”

“Hi,” Jimin says, gently mocking, and Jungkook’s neck goes pink.

“I look forward to working with you,” Jungkook says, sounding unsure of himself.

Jimin laughs and slides out of his split. He lifts into an upward-facing dog, back arched. “I look forward to watching you work with me, Jeon Jungkook-ssi,” he says, with just enough of a challenge to make Jungkook stand up a little straighter in his platform sneakers, like he’s been informed very suddenly of some hidden threat.

Jimin takes a moment to think of himself in these terms: a threat. The apparent likelihood of danger or destruction, something or someone which promises to unfold chaos. There’s a certain beauty in that—in being small and dangerous. Not the underdog but the dark horse. Not fearsome but formidable. A dancer that daunts, without really meaning to.

It feels strange and new.

Jimin knows intimately the well-lit studios of entertainment companies, all the secrets enclosed within. He’s been the student and the teacher both. The mirrors are an old friend and an ancient enemy. He’s prepped his body for performances in rooms like these. He’s shaped dancers out of clumsy idols, like hands to a hunk of clay. He’s poured body and soul into his work only to watch it wisp away.

It doesn’t get any easier. He’s still overlooked. Sometimes outright scorned. When the idol world closes ranks, Jimin is left the anomaly and all because he wears the mark of an outcast. It reminds him of a portrait series by Taehyung called, simply, *Stigma*. A 35x16 triptych depicting abstract faces mottled with dark, dripping stains. Sin, sinned, sinner. How to wear your desire without fear
of disgust.

How to dance without bracing yourself for the first lash of disapproval, from everyone watching.

If only it could be so simple, Jimin thinks, and on Jungkook’s face, it is. He’s got a bright look in his eyes, like Jimin is tiny and terrifying. Like that’s somehow exciting. Like—like a child sticking a hand inside a cookie jar, or a tiger’s cage.

Jimin wants to laugh, but doesn’t. He wants to float away with it, with the look on Jungkook’s face. He feels his belly do something—chemical or magical, he doesn’t know—and it reminds him of his first few days in Seoul, at fifteen. Unmoored and full of hope, like anything could happen. Like anything would happen. Inevitably. Invariably. Like he could dance and the world would bow at his feet.

Jimin wants to say, you are a worthy adversary, Jeon Jungkook, but doesn’t.

Namjoon says, “Perfect,” and claps his hands together, loudly and with purpose. “I think you two will find you have a lot more in common than you think. I can sense something here already and it promises very good things. There’s a chemistry in the air!”

“That might just be the vents,” Jungkook says. “Sometimes they smell like burning dust.”

Jimin snorts and Jungkook sends him a startled look, then smiles, small and slow. “Hyung, you’re a mad scientist,” he says to Namjoon. “But I like it.”

“Madness begets magic,” Namjoon says, philosophically, and Jimin and Jungkook share a look that they haven’t known each other long enough to give.

“If introductions are over,” Jimin says, and settles himself into a seated position, legs stretched out in front of him. He faces the mirrors and folds himself in half until he can freely touch his toes. “I want a little time to get some ideas down.”

“Right, right,” Namjoon says. “Let’s reconvene after lunch! Jungkook?”

Jimin catches Jungkook’s eye in the mirrors. “You’re welcome to stay and watch if you want.”

“Can I?” Jungkook asks, then seems a little embarrassed by his own eagerness.

“You look like you’ve decided you’re ready to dance, so I thought I’d offer,” Jimin remarks and smiles not with his teeth but his eyes.

“You stretch like licorice,” Jungkook blurts and Jimin buries a laugh between his thighs. “How do you do that?”

“Do you want me to show you?”

Jungkook nods, less a quick jerk of his head, more a resolution of wills.

“Well, okay, then…” Namjoon says to no one in particular, because Jimin is currently urging Jungkook to the floor and talking him through a little stretching, applying light pressure to the place between his shoulder blades, and Jungkook is groaning dully, going, “Does learning to touch your toes really help with dance?” and Jimin is saying, “Of course! Flexibility is a dancer’s greatest weapon. And besides, stretching is good for the soul—although we should avoid straining so you don’t pull any muscles. It might take some time for you to get comfortable because you have so much bulk, but that’s what practice is for. Start incorporating stretching into your daily
“You’re built like a tank, Jeon Jungkook-ssi,” Jimin says cheerily. “Like a castle with a moat and a drawbridge! Fortified for the winter ahead!”

Jungkook groans louder. “I box.”

Jimin brightens. “We can use that!”

“Well, I watch Game of Thrones, Jimin-ssi?”

“I prefer One Piece for fight fantasies, actually.”

“Ah,” Jungkook says, “a man with taste,” and Jimin laughs brilliantly.

Namjoon takes that as his cue and slips quietly from the room.

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Out

The Out100 Artists of the Year

Park Jimin

Park Jimin expands his dance portfolio with performances recognized for cultural merit, civil merit, and services of excellence in art. His recent induction into Seoul Ballet Theater’s Prima Ballerina Gallery — where portraits of performance excerpts will be displayed for viewing through the holidays, including Jimin’s well-loved pas de deux with Bak Dongwoo — reflects a marked shift in South Korea’s cultural landscape. More than transfixing audiences with his fluidity, Jimin is upending the dance canon and challenging long-held beliefs about masculinity, sexuality, and power.

Despite industry pushback and attempted blacklisting following his coming out in early 2018, Jimin has become a fan favorite of the dance world and the realms beyond. His choreography work with the idol troupe Blu Island brought him to the forefront of K-pop this year and eyes have been following him closely ever since.

His signature — legato phrasing — isn’t much of a signature at all when you realize he never keeps to one single genre. Jimin comes from humble hip-hop beginnings, boasts a formal contemporary dance education, and continues to disrupt the status quo by fusing these styles with his stockings and pointe shoes. He’s worked extensively with notable hip-hop choreographer Jung Hoseok, an artist-in-residence often commissioned and called on by Noryonhan Dance Company for galas and exhibitions, and on his off days, he likes to collect polaroids and teach beginner’s ballet to low-income art students in Seoul.

“Someday, I want to retire by the beach back home,” he says. “But I still have a long time before my legs give out on me and I have a lot of reason to believe I can do better. Actually, I don’t ever want to stand still. I want to be like the ocean. I never quit moving.” He then adds, with a delighted giggle: “And people stop by to dip their toes and tell me I’m pretty.”

☾
Jimin meets Chee Sungho for the first time while poring over a stack of Pantone swatches in shades of blue. He’s bent over one of the studio desks, index finger to his chin. On it sits a computer monitor, a keyboard, a pile of old magazines, and little more. Namjoon is beside him, perched on the furthest corner of the desk. He’s giving his own analysis of Jungkook’s unreleased album, long legs swinging. He makes expansive gestures to illustrate his points and uses words like *interiority* and *chronology*. Jimin tunes him out.

“Ah…which one…” he murmurs.

Jungkook peers over his shoulder like an eager puppy and watches him hold the cardstock up, torn between two colors for stage concepts—midnight blue or mauve?

Yoongi, who is nocturnal by nature and unhappy to have to show his face while the sun is still shining, hunches over in his big coat. He hides the bottom half of his face behind its collar, like he’s bracing himself against a chill, and watches Namjoon’s hands at work. “There’s a lot about the album that feels blue,” he says, “but purple seems like a stretch to me. No offense, Jimin-ssi.”

“You said space is a recurring theme throughout the album and space calls to mind purple. If you look up supernovas online, that’s the first color you’ll find,” Jimin says, sliding the mauve shade back into the center of the stack, an outlier he’s included because he thought it was pretty, and because parts of Jungkook’s title track remind him of the nightsky quilted above the ocean. “Or—think of the beach at night.”

“I don’t know,” Yoongi says. “‘Blue dreams’ seems pretty overt.”

“Too overt,” Jimin argues. “Why not be a little different?”

“I get the sense that the album is more of a dialogue between two binaries—black and white, yin and yang, good and evil, that kind of thing. Juxtaposition of opposing images,” Namjoon offers. “Jungkook deals a lot with the idea of reconciling polar opposites. There’s conflict! Layers to unpack!”

“But what lives between black and white?” Jimin tries.

“…Gray?” Namjoon says.

“Yes, and gray is boring,” Jimin says, which makes Jungkook laugh.

“Black is the absence of all color,” Yoongi interjects. “And white is the presence of all color. They do capture a binary.”

“Not totally true. Do you know how black paint is made?” Jimin says and Yoongi squints inscrutably at him.

“Hyung, he’s right. Combine all the primary colors and you’ll get black,” Jungkook says and Yoongi mutters something under his breath that Jimin can’t quite catch.

“We can argue semantics,” Jimin says, “but that’s not my point. I just don’t think black and white are eye-catching enough for a televised album debut, especially if we’re focusing our energy on a title track. For many, this will be their first encounter with Jeon Jungkook-ssi and his music.”

Yoongi seems to consider that, then nods. At the look on Namjoon’s face, he shrugs, the patchwork of his coat pulling across his shoulders with the movement. “I think I agree. A monochromatic palette can be limiting and Jungkook’s title track is very bright. The bluest of blues.”
Namjoon wilts like a sad beanstalk. “We’ll keep brainstorming,” he says and picks up one of the old magazines from Nylon Korea’s backlog, thumbing through photoshoots for inspiration.

Jimin plucks at a periwinkle shade, squinting. He sees, at the very edge of his field of vision, Jungkook’s tattooed hand reaching for a turquoise swatch from the top of the stack. Jimin swats at him with his periwinkle and Jungkook retreats sullenly.

“Here,” Jimin says, knocking the stack over. He spreads all the swatches out, arranging them randomly, opening up the color spectrum for Jungkook.

“Jimin,” Jungkook says.

“-ssi,” Jimin finishes. “Park Jimin-ssi.”

“Yes, that’s what I meant, sorry,” Jungkook says, looking not very sorry at all.

Jimin moves on to baby blue. He holds it up to Jungkook, right beside his wide, dark eyes. Rules it out and replaces it with something duskier.

“Jimin-ssi,” Jungkook says, more insistent now.

Jimin hums. “Yes, Jeon Jungkook-ssi?”

“Ah,” Jungkook says, quietly, a noise of abject exasperation and also of a student suffering the humiliations of his teacher’s continued punishment.

Jimin lowers the cardstock, finally focusing on the slight pout to Jungkook’s lower lip. “What is it?”

“I don’t like that shade,” Jungkook says under his breath.

“Sorry?”

“I said I don’t like that shade,” he says, louder, enunciating more clearly.

“Which one?” Jimin palms through some of his favorites, outspread like the brilliant blades of a handheld fan.

Jungkook must take this as an invitation to touch, because he pushes off of the wall he’s been leaning against and edges closer to Jimin, their shoulders brushing along the way. He touches the tips of his tattooed fingers to the lightest blues, the colder, electric shades, saying, “These, I don’t really like.”

“Warmer?” Jimin wonders, hand drifting off to the left, towards the deep, rich blues of a nearing nightfall.

“Yes,” Jungkook says, with something almost like relief. He nudges his hand in that direction, slow as syrup and feeling his way across all the colors. He stops at the midnight blue, his pinky grazing Jimin’s. A jolt of electricity not unlike static shock jerks Jimin’s hand away, but Jungkook doesn’t seem to notice, too intent on all the colors laid out. “This shade that you were looking at. I like this one.” He taps his index finger to the swatch, one, two, three times, and looks over at Jimin for his opinion.

Jimin hums to himself, trying to surreptitiously massage all the tingles from his fingers. “I like that one, too. I think it goes well with your lyrics.”
“Maybe even something like…” Jungkook starts to say, except that Chee Sungho waltzes into the studio they’re using right then with Hoseok on his tail, looking for all the world like a king reunited with his castle.

Jimin glances up long enough to confirm what he’s already concluded about Sungho, then thinks, almost pleased: Mine is cuter. Sungho is handsome, though it’s the handsome of careful cultivation, of too much gel and flowy button-downs. He’s not wearing his rap persona on his sleeve like Jimin expected, has heavy, dark brows and a wide mouth. His cupid’s bow is deep and wicked. He’s left his shirt unbuttoned at the throat and his only physical triumphs over Jungkook are his height and his brawn.

Satisfied, Jimin turns back to the Pantone palette he’s begun building according to Jungkook’s wishes.

“What’s all this?” says a voice that must belong to Sungho. “Are we celebrating the arrival of a new baby?”

“It’s a boy,” Hoseok jokes.

“Delivery date unknown,” Yoongi adds.

Namjoon flaps the magazine he’s been flipping through. “We’re brainstorming for Jungkook’s album.”

“And who’s this?” Sungho says, in a way that’s obviously intended to draw Jimin’s attention. “Ah, the new choreographer?”

Jungkook glances at Jimin, like he’s checking for a reaction.

Jimin glances back and flashes a royal blue at him, eyebrows raised.

Jungkook’s mouth rises up into a tiny smile and he nods his approval.

Jimin hip-checks him and he hip-checks Jimin back, gently, his hand wandering towards the royal blue cardstock for a closer look. Jimin holds it up and Jungkook readjusts his wrist so he can see, fingers curled around Jimin’s knuckles. Jimin almost misses his introduction fretting over the reappearance of those stupid tingles.

“Jimin,” Hoseok is saying, “Chee Sungho. Sungho, Jimin. Jiminie here is going to be working with Jungkook for the next few months.”

Jimin half-turns, giving a nod of acknowledgement along with a little bow. “It’s nice to meet you. I’ve heard good things.”

He knows even before he’s risen out of his bow that it won’t be enough to satisfy Sungho, who strikes Jimin as the type to pick at scabs to pass the time.

Sungho cocks his head. Then he makes it a point to stroll up to the desk where Jimin and Jungkook are still playing with the swatches. He leans in for a better look and halfway into the lean he turns his head to gaze up into Jimin’s face, eyes probing. It’s a move brazen enough to raise Jimin’s hackles.

Jimin returns the stare, unshrinking.

Sungho smiles and it softens his features, if only slightly. “Ah, am I interrupting?”
Beside him, Jungkook drops Jimin’s hand and goes back to sorting through the colors.

Annoyed for reasons he refuses to examine, Jimin pointedly picks Jungkook’s hand back up, slides the royal blue cardstock between his fingers, and says, “Would you care, if you were?”

“Were...?” Sungho says.

“Interrupting.” Jimin clarifies, after letting go of Jungkook. He turns to blink up at Sungho, who has to be pushing six feet, and Sungho lets out a loud, impressed laugh.

He shakes his head. “I didn’t mean to be rude,” he says. “It’s just that I heard Jungkook mistook you for a backup dancer the other day and I wanted to see you for myself. For the record, I think you look worth your salt.”

Hoseok titters nervously in the background and Yoongi intervenes with a rolled up magazine thwacked to Sungho’s head. “Stop sticking your nose in other people’s business,” he says.

Sungho yelps, hands held protectively to his gelled coif. “Hey! I just wanted to say hi!”

Yoongi thwacks him again.

“What was that for!”

“That one? That one was just for me,” Yoongi says, with a self-satisfied smile.

Jimin coughs to cover up a laugh and turns to catch Jungkook’s eye, but Jungkook is pink-eared and bowed over the swatches like he’s trying to earn his way into their good graces, which is even funnier because he should be trying to earn his way into Jimin’s good graces.

Sungho rubs mournfully at his forehead and says, “So we’re doing album colors?”

“Jimin and Jungkook are doing album colors,” Yoongi says. “The rest of us are chiming in.”

“If I may,” Sungho says.

“That one?” Hoseok says, and steers him towards one of the computer chairs while he groans in complaint.


Jungkook looks up from his swatches, wide-eyed.

“Are you very embarrassed?” Jimin asks, biting back a laugh of pleasure.

Jungkook’s eyebrows lower over his eyes in an almost-glare. “You’re laughing at me.”

Jimin shakes his head, smiling into his hand. “Your face is funny.”

“Oh, Sungho-hyung is annoying,” Jungkook mutters and droops forward, forehead to the desk.

Sungho licks his lips, but it does little to diminish the stupid smile he’s got on. “You’re making me want to laugh, Jeon Jungkook-ssi.”

“Go ahead,” Jungkook says into the swatches. “I deserve it.”

Jimin pulls him up to his full height, charmed down to his toes. “And now you’re contaminating
“Sorry.”

“I never asked,” Jimin says.

“What?”

“What color do you see?” Jimin inquires. “When you listen to your title track?”

“Me?” Jungkook gazes into Jimin’s eyes, like he’s lost in the memory of blue dreams and sea breezes. For a moment, he says nothing, his eyebrows knitting in deep thought. Then: “I see pink.”

“Pink,” Jimin repeats. “What kind?”

Jungkook hums, head swiveling, searching out the shade he’s imagining, trying to locate it somewhere in his natural environment. His eyes come to a stop on Hoseok, who’s wearing dyed overalls the shade of cherry blossoms. Almost baby pink. “Like that,” he says, nodding at Hoseok. “The sunset over water. You’re just thinking a little later into the day than me.”

“Oh,” Jimin breathes, awestruck. “Oh, I like that.”

Jungkook turns to stare at Jimin, his expression surprised. “You do?”

“It reminds me of home,” Jimin says.

“Oh. Me too,” Jungkook says, with the strangest look on his face.

“There’s this village back home built into the side of a mountain, with lots of little colorful houses,” Jimin explains. “So many of them are pink. And blue, and green, and yellow, mostly in pastels. And there’s all this art. It looks beautiful at sunset.”

“Gamcheon-dong,” Jungkook supplies.

Jimin pauses. “You’ve been there?”

“To Busan?” Jungkook huffs a laugh. “Yeah. That’s where I was born.”

“Oh.” Jimin stares up at Jungkook as if seeing him for the first time. It shouldn’t feel so wondrous, given that Busan is one of the largest port cities in South Korea, with a population of over three million, but something about the sameness makes Jimin feel warm, and seen. “Me too.”

“When did you leave?”

“Fifteen.”

“Me too.” Jungkook’s mouth opens, like he’s looking for more to say. He settles on: “No one who works here is from Busan.”

They both turn to look at the group of moonchild men scattered around the room, like they’ll be able to smell it on them, their distance from Busan, some essential quality to betray their old home cities. Jimin can’t sense where they come from anymore than he can guess where they’ll go, but now, between him and Jungkook, there’s a little link, shiny gold and improbable somehow, like a chain binding their wrists together. It glows—glass against flame.

Across the room, Hoseok is cooing, “Ah, are you cold, hyung?” When he doesn’t get an immediate
response, he wraps Yoongi up in a smiley embrace, hands clasped over Yoongi’s belly.

“’M not cold,” Yoongi mutters, withdrawing further into his coat.

“Because I’m so warm and bright, right?”

“Yeah,” Yoongi says dryly, “that’s why.”

“I’m like a space heater,” Hoseok sighs into Yoongi’s ash blond scalp.

“Hey, I could have helped with that,” Namjoon interrupts, sliding clumsily from his perch on the desk and slinging his long arms around Yoongi from a different angle. “I’m warm, too.”

“Yah, what’s all this?” Yoongi complains, but Jimin can tell there’s no real heat behind it.

“Agh, Namjoonie,” Hoseok says on a groan of contentment. “Do me, too.”

In answer, Namjoon awkwardly extends his arms, setting one large hand on Hoseok’s shoulder, and Hoseok, who only needs the lightest of touches to turn into liquid happiness, hums and closes his eyes with a big smile. Yoongi glares out at Jimin from between Hoseok and Namjoon, except, sandwiched between them like the sweet filling in a cinnamon-flavored hotcake, he only manages to look like a very surly, very satisfied kitten.

Jimin stifles a giggle against his hand and turns to begin sweeping all his swatches into a stack. Once organized, he gathers them to his chest with one hand and snags Jungkook by the front of his hoodie with the other.

He tugs him off in the direction of the door, saying, “Jeon Jungkook-ssi, let’s relocate elsewhere.”

Jungkook follows after him readily enough. “Where should we relocate to?”

From somewhere inside the room, Jimin hears Chee Sungho hurriedly sit up in his computer chair and go, “Hey! Don’t leave me here with these three! Guys—!”

Jimin tugs Jungkook harder, upping the pace, and Jungkook lurches forward from the force, bumping into Jimin from behind. Jimin allows it, no comment, if only because it makes them move faster.

“Come, come,” he says. “I don’t want to have to look at them any longer.”

Jungkook, inflecting his voice with Hoseok’s flirty cadences, says, “Hyung, are you cold?”

“Well,” Jimin grants, “I am your hyung.”

“Ah.” Jungkook stands up a little straighter, blinking. “Are you?”

Jimin sends him a look over his shoulder. “Yes. Did you really think I was younger than you?”

“I only wondered. Although it did seem unlikely…” Jungkook admits. “You—look small.”

Jimin resents that, given that their difference in height is so minuscule as to be unnoticeable, even if Jungkook has him beat by a large margin in the shoulder and muscle department. And because it had, for a moment, also crossed his mind during their first meeting that Jungkook looked older, by just a little. Jimin blames the tattoos and biceps. Jungkook also had help from his platform sneakers.
“You have a baby face too,” Jungkook adds. “If that helps.”

“I do not!” Jimin whines. “And that doesn’t help at all!”

“You’re pouting,” Jungkook says, with a laugh. “Kind of proving my point.”

Jimin consciously unpuckers his lips. “That’s just my mouth!” he says.

Jungkook leans over to peer into Jimin’s face like he wants to verify this claim for himself. He takes the same angle that Chee Sungho had earlier, except that this carries none of that same invasiveness, and it doesn’t make Jimin’s hackles rise, only kickstarts another wave of attention-greedy neediness, like from before, when they’d just met and Jungkook couldn’t cut down on all the intense staring and Jimin kept inviting more of it. The difference seems immediately clear.

Nothing about Jungkook feels presumptuous, or impolite—only doe-eyed and curious.

Jimin surrenders to Jungkook’s staring, turning his head an inch or two to offer him a better view.

“It’s your eyes, too,” Jungkook decides, after falling back. “You have big eyes.”

“You have big eyes!”

“And they get very small when you smile,” Jungkook goes on, ignoring Jimin.

Jimin’s face heats at that, for some reason. “You haven’t known me long enough to notice something like that, Jeon Jungkook-ssi.”

“Well, I have,” Jungkook says. “And I know because you told me that you fall over when you laugh, which would make sense if you can’t see while you’re doing it. Laughing is just smiling with noise, isn’t it? Though I haven’t seen you laugh much, the principle should be the same.”

Jimin makes a noise like a scoff to distract from how spot-on Jungkook is.

“I’m right, aren’t I?”

“You’re too observant for your own good,” Jimin allows, steering Jungkook down a different corridor.

“The big eyes help,” Jungkook says, and a laugh escapes Jimin before he can stop it.

He releases Jungkook to slap a hand to his mouth, eyes going wide.

Jungkook falls into step beside him, pressed shoulder-to-shoulder. The smile on his face is almost a smirk. “That’s what I thought.”

“Shut up,” Jimin says and fastens his hand back to the front of Jungkook’s hoodie.

“Hyung, you’re going to stretch my sweatshirt out. And you’re leading us to the entrance. Are we moving outside?”

“Should we?” Jimin purses his lips, thoughtful, as moonchild’s glass doors slide into view.

“There’s a good ramen place nearby,” Jungkook says casually.

Jimin pulls to a sudden stop and Jungkook smacks into his back with a quiet oof. “It’s Jimin-ssi, not ‘hyung.’”
“But, hyung,” Jungkook says automatically, then makes a noise of embarrassment and rubs furiously at his neck. “Ah—sorry. I call everyone hyung.”

“Is the whole world older than you?” Jimin teases.

“Well...not everyone,” Jungkook says, visibly flustered.

“Now who’s the baby?” Jimin says, and laughs at the disbelieving look on Jungkook’s face. Beyond the glass doors, moonchild’s manicured lawn stretches out in vivid greens. “Come. We can sit in the grass outside. The weather is pretty today and I want to hear a little more of your album, if that’s okay.”

“That’s fine,” Jungkook murmurs and follows Jimin out into the morning sunshine.

He learns moonchild Entertainment in increments.

The building is nestled away in residential Daechi-dong, near luxury hotel chains and cold noodle restaurants that only take reservations from certified celebrities. Just across the street sits an upscale cupcake shop owned by a sweet old ahjussi who likes to ply Jimin with free samples—frosting taste tests on the house, buttercream galore, merengue and fudge and cream cheese—and a Chanel he can’t help peeking inside during the walk to work. He can never justify the splurge a purchase would require of him, but he revisits a pair of ₩5,313,375 pearl earrings in white gold over and over again like a besotted schoolboy.

Namjoon’s brainchild is two levels, parking not included, a great cement structure inset with tinted glass. This suits Jimin just fine, seeing as he’s unlicensed and partial to Seoul’s public transport system. The RKive studio is off limits at all times, unless Jimin is feeling extra persuasive and liberally exercises his pout, in which case the RKive studio is his favorite haunt and the place where he gets the most planning done, draped across a velvet loveseat and surrounded on all sides by Namjoon’s strange, beady-eyed trinkets. Yoongi’s studio is always unlocked, dark and cavelike, but he’s the most unreceptive host on this side of South Korea and interrupting his quiet time delays the creative process by days, so Jimin leaves him be. On the days when he’s made a sudden musical breakthrough, struck gold in his studio out of nowhere, he receives guests with gusto and the room takes turns listening to his newest track.

The men of moonchild each perform a specific function. When together, the cogs begin to turn. Yoongi is the erratic storm to Namjoon’s steady calm, the unpredicted violence of a lightning strike set to the rhythm of a heavy rainfall. Their talents, side-by-side, are a kind of cosmic union only grounded by Hoseok, the metronome-like heartbeat he brings to everything that he does, solid earth above shifting plates. There’s gravity to the way that all three of them move. Pattern of movement. A periodic pulse. It piques the dancer in Jimin.

Yoongi and Namjoon orbit each other like an old married couple rediscovering the flavors of love. They orbit each other like Hoseok is the answer to a waning sex life, like he’s the new flame, the third player admitted into their master bedroom. It’s all very mystifying, but Jimin thinks sex is probably on the horizon if it hasn’t already dawned between them.

He comes to expect either deathly silence or explosions of sound. The first is lazy, contemplative, the quiet of catnaps and daydreams and laptop trackpads. Often, this means procrastination. More often, it’s Yoongi catching up on sleep after a bout of jet lag and/or insomnia. The second is the desperate workday of an approaching deadline, last minute cramming, Namjoon and Yoongi’s mixing and mastering blending together to create a wall of discordant sound, the whip-quick rush
of Hoseok delegating and dissecting, standing in for an artist on a sample track or making last minute adjustments to lyrics.

Most pressing of all: there’s an infestation of cats.

Yoongi, weak to big glassy animal eyes, calls them instrumental to the writing process. Jimin can’t tell if he means Jungkook or the cats. He glimpses them by the twos and threes—shorthair, tabby, ragdoll—strolling the halls, tails swishing, lapping at water dishes laid out at odd intervals. Jimin develops a favorite and is immediately devastated by the knowledge that she’s also Jungkook’s and they are therefore competing for a cat’s attention.

Jimin likes to think of himself as something of a cat whisperer, despite a chronic allergy to the contrary. He draws them by the cluster in cafes, is well-loved by all of his friends’ felines, has been followed home on more than one occasion by overeager strays who liked the smell of his coconut rice cake shampoo. Among the cats of moonchild, however, Jungkook has Jimin beat. He tries not to feel too sulky about it and thinks he probably fails.

His favorite is, of course, the silver cat from his first day. She’s a plump little thing with striped fur and jewel-like eyes—a jade green. She only sheds minimally and likes laying high up in patches of sunlight, paws dangling. Jimin finds her in the most unlikely places, belly bared to the warmth. There’s something knowing in her gaze, something balletic in her gait. Cats don’t dance, at least not by human definitions, but if they did this one would be a prima ballerina.

Jimin bides his time trying to earn her trust from afar. He refills her most frequently visited water dishes. He smiles at her when they make eye contact. He flicks her glances to find her gaze already fixed on him from doorways and window sills. He’s patiently waiting for the day that she decides she likes his company of her own volition and trails him into an empty studio to laze away the hours while he draws or dances or holds meetings with stylists and set designers under the autumn sun. Jimin starts to think it won’t ever come.

And then he glances up from his sketchbook one afternoon and finds her seated by his messenger bag, tail curled casually around her hind legs. She’s watching him closely. The bell-like chime of her collar always announces her entrance, but Jimin’s missed it this morning listening to Jungkook’s title track.

He sits up at the sight of her, lit up with triumph, and says, “Oh—! Hello!”

She blinks languidly. Then she turns her head to watch the dust motes swirl turbulently under a ray of sunshine. It’s a gesture of dismissal. Jimin doesn’t take it to heart. He’s already won her over.

At that moment, though, Jungkook strides past the open doorway on his way somewhere else, singing a low note under his breath that is as light as air and so beautiful it turns heads. Well, the only two heads in the room—which counts.

The silver cat slants him a look and her tail gives a happy flick, like she’s considering following after him.

Jimin sees his title of cat whisperer flash before his eyes and without thinking, he’s yanking his earphones out and clambering to his knees a little clumsily, fueled by an intense desire to make contact. He thinks: I will not be usurped by a hot, talented idol with a six pack and dimples!

“Sheh-shh,” Jimin whispers, crawling towards her on all fours with one hand outstretched. His boots knock gently against the floor.
In the blink of an eye, she’s taken off down the hall.

“Wait!” Jimin cries, not yet ready to admit defeat. He pushes to his feet and rushes after her, clicking his tongue the way his brother taught him when they were drinking a weekend away in Sicily for his wedding.

_Cathedral cats are daring_, he’d said. _They come when called_. Then he clicked his tongue just so and the flaming Bengal turned and ambled over, allowed Jimin to pour a measure of water into his brother’s cupped palms, and lapped gladly from them with a sandpaper tongue. It was like magic.

Idol cats are fat and spoiled rotten, Jimin thinks, with gloom. And they are lured places by pretty voices! This thought briefly sends Jimin into a tailspin, because he’s been lured here by a pretty voice, and is he a spoiled cat drinking out of Jungkook’s tattooed hands?

Jimin clacks his way down the hall at a brisk jog, too stubborn now to turn back, and watches a silver tail disappear inside a doorway.

“Why,” Jimin whines, hurrying after her. “Wait, please. You’re being unnecessarily difficult. Just let me pet you and we’ll call it a day.”

“What?” a voice says and Jungkook swivels around to face Jimin in a wheeled computer chair. Lunch has been laid out in front of him on the desk he’s using—what looks like sashimi and soy sauce—along with the trappings of idol music-making. A laptop with the lid shut, the tangle of headphone wires, a notepad opened to a page filled with doodles of sushi rolls and tiny dogs. “Pet me?”

“Yes,” Jimin says. “Roll over for me, puppy.”

Jungkook blinks.

“I was talking to the cat!” Jimin says, when his joke goes ignored.

The cat in question darts between Jungkook’s legs, somewhere under the desk, looking like—like a cat that got the cream.

Menace, Jimin thinks, and says to Jungkook, “Don’t mind me, puppy,” with what remains of his sense of humor. Then, feeling incredibly put on the spot by Jungkook’s stare, Jimin gets down on his knees and tries again. His title is on the line here and he’s in too deep to give up now.

“Do you whisper to cats, Jeon Jungkook-ssi?” Jimin says.

“Usually, I just use my normal voice,” Jungkook replies, with bewilderment.

Jimin sighs, dismayed. Beady green eyes track his progress across the slip-resistant floors. “Does this one like whispering, I wonder? I’m just going to take her off your hands for today, okay? She’s made an enemy of me and I need her to apologize for her wrongdoings.”

“Eun,” Jungkook says down at Jimin.

Jimin pauses in front of Jungkook’s chair, on his hands and knees like an idiot, and glances up through his bangs. “What?” he says. His heavy knit sweater is dragging against the floor, likely collecting dust bunnies and dirt. He tugs at it, trying to adjust the way the plunging collar sits at his chest to save himself from an accidental nip slip in front of a Spotify-verified singer.

Jungkook stares down at Jimin, blankly. Then, quite suddenly, he’s whirling around in his chair to
return to his food. He clears his throat and in his distracted state, his swinging feet nearly collide with the cat. She leaps out of the way right before his sneaker can connect.

“Her name is Eun,” Jungkook is saying into his raw fish, “for the silver fur.”

“Jeon Jungkook-ssi!” Jimin gasps, surging forward to neutralize his restless feet. He’s got on chunky Fila sneakers with too many ridges today. Jimin clamps a hand around either ankle, holding him still. “Be careful of the cat! You’re wearing weapons of mass destruction.”

From above, Jimin hears, “I’m wearing what…?”

“These shoes should be outlawed,” Jimin says. “They’re safety hazards.”

“You could gouge a man’s eyes out with your heels, Jimin-ssi,” Jungkook says and Jimin hangs his head guiltily, giggling into his sweater collar. “You laugh because you know I’m right.”

“I’m not laughing. I’m…breathing musically.”

“Ah, in that case, I’d like to offer you a feature on my next album,” Jungkook says, and Jimin giggles harder. “I think your musical breathing could bring a lot of color to my music.”

Jimin smiles. Eun watches him placidly, her tail kicking up dust and cat hair. Jimin’s sinuses start to tingle and his smile fades. Oh. Oh no. He tries desperately to delay or deflect it, but too late he’s sneezing into Jungkook’s sneakers.

A beat. Then: silence.

Jimin can feel himself blushing.

“I,” he says, for a moment too embarrassed to speak. “I’m so sorry. Oh my god.”

“Jimin-ssi,” Jungkook says, sounding extremely pained and also on the verge of laughter. “I’m sorry!”Jimin repeats, tugging at his sweater sleeves and using them to furiously scrub the dampness from the sneakers. Eun’s eyes follow the rhythmic movement of his hands. Her tail taps out something mischievous, like she’s plotting destruction. “I’m allergic to cats.”

“If you’re allergic, why…?”

Jungkook, not yet alert to all of Jimin’s contradictions—the way he scarfs down spicy food even though it brings him snot and tears, how he can’t be alone unless it’s with his own anguish, his neurotic need to be productive and perfect at all times coupled with the way he wastes long stretches of time adding and removing items to his cart, contemplating the colors of scarves in airbrushed fashion ads, watching rescue videos featuring hobbling, three-legged dogs and cats with matted fur—seems surprised. Jimin doesn’t say, sometimes we do what we love even though it cuts us up inside, because that’s just a more melodramatic retelling of sneezing over a cat allergy.

Instead, he summarizes himself with the sentence, “They’re cute.”

Jungkook hums above him. “That’s true,” he says.

“They’re like a traveling mafia,” Jimin goes on. “I want to win them all over.”

“I feel that way about my fanbase,” Jungkook says, and Jimin laughs.

“You’ve already won them all over, though. That’s why they’re your fans.”
Jungkook says, “But at any moment I could disappoint them all and they’ll disappear.”

“Oh, Jungkook-ssi,” Jimin says, with sympathy, thinking: maybe we’re all cocktails of confusion, and contradictions, and then Eun, the little trickster god, starts slashing at Jimin’s sweater paws out of nowhere with her needlepoint claws. Jimin rears back in shock, bumping his head against Jungkook’s knee. “Hey! Stop that—!”

Eun tilts her head. Then she takes another playful swipe at his sleeve, like Jimin is a willing opponent and they’re trading blows. He yanks his arm back a moment too late and her claws catch, hooked through the cable-knit of his sweater sleeve. Jimin goes down on his elbows with a gasp, back arched uncomfortably. Above him, Jungkook makes a noise that suggests he is either supremely endeared or supremely close to murder and his legs very suddenly vanish.

“Jeon Jungkook-ssi, it’s okay, really,” Jimin says nervously. “I’ll just—”

“Jimin-ssi, be quiet,” says Jungkook and Jimin has to suffer through the embarrassment of all that limber muscle shoving into the tiny crawl space with him and a devilish cat.

Jungkook’s body heat is immediate and overwhelming, like a furnace on full blast. Jimin can feel his breath on the nape of his neck, the press of his chest. He jams his shoulders at an unfortunate angle and Jungkook’s chin clips him on the head. There’s a huff of laughter from one or both of them, the knife-edge of awkward. One of Jungkook’s big, tattooed hands closes around Jimin’s wrist, more gently than Jimin had treated his ankles. The other carefully removes Eun’s claws from Jimin’s sleeve.

“Thank you,” Jimin says, freed at last, and tries to crawl his way back out in a hurry. He slams into Jungkook’s—thigh? “Aish—!”

“Hold on. Jimin-ssi.”

“Your thigh is blocking me in,” Jimin says, a little desperately.

“Yes, hold on,” Jungkook says, in a voice of pure and profound patience. It’s a voice that says he is aware of the placement of his thigh relative to Jimin’s ass and that he was hoping Jimin wouldn’t comment on it.

Jimin panics and says, “You smell like sea breezes.”

Jungkook huffs. “Thank you.”

“That wasn’t a compliment,” Jimin says. “Merely an observation, like ‘the sky is blue,’ or, ‘I breathe air.’ I didn’t say I liked the scent, although I do think it suits you, being that you’re from Busan, and it isn’t too harsh on the senses, which is nice, it means you’re not going overboard on laundry detergent—”

“Jimin-ssi.”

Jimin quiets at once. “Yes?”

“You can come out.”

Jimin laughs a little hysterically at that and almost but does not say, I already have, where have you been, Jeon Jungkook-ssi? Instead, he crawls out from underneath the desk and slumps over onto the floor like a deflated balloon.
Jungkook is smiling, leaning back on his hands with his legs spread lazily. He’s the picture of perfect calm with his dark, disheveled hair and laughing eyes. “Have you given up on cat-taming already?”

“Yes,” Jimin says into the floor. “I’m retiring and taking up a life of...I don’t know...flower-picking? Have you ever noticed, Jeon Jungkook-ssi, that you don’t need to earn a flower’s trust? It’s implicit. And they’re always pretty and sweet for you.”

“Until they die,” Jungkook says.

Jimin makes a noise of annoyance and kicks out with his left foot.

Jungkook catches a heel between his hands and says, “Take these off.”

“What?”

“Your boots,” Jungkook says.

“Oh, I thought you meant my pants,” Jimin says with trace amounts of sarcasm.

Jungkook laughs. “Dirty hyung.”

Jimin tries to kick him again.

Jungkook says, “If Eun doesn’t know you well, loud shoes are likely to scare her away. C’mon. Off.”

With a little groan of displeasure, Jimin rolls over and sits up to remove his boots. He gathers them up in one hand and sets them off to the side, where they can’t gouge a man’s eyes out or scare fat cats under desks. Beside him, Jungkook unlaces and discards his sneakers, either in a show of solidarity or—more likely—to press his socked feet against Jimin’s and laugh over their difference in size.

Jimin presses back, toes wiggling, and then, like magic, like Sicilian skies framed by cathedral spires and arches, Eun the silver cat leaps into the diamond shape made by his and Jungkook’s spread legs, and she even noses at Jimin’s kneecap, a purr starting up in her belly, and it’s so wonderfully satisfying that Jimin bends over at the waist and touches his and Jungkook’s toes together like a very triumphant gymnast, and in doing so, noses Eun right back.

In the early mornings, sunlight suffuses moonchild like cool milk.

He learns that Hoseok favors the westward-facing studios and he the east, two halves of the sun’s slow arc. He starts bringing his own tea sachets to work and makes regular use of the paper cups Namjoon keeps stocked in the tiny kitchenette where Jimin had met Jungkook for the first time. His daily uses prompt plenty of cup replenishments, something Jimin is sure Namjoon never thought he’d have to factor into the company budget, so Jimin decides on a whim to keep one of his own mugs in the cupboards instead, hoping to hope no one steals or chips it. It’s small, ceramic, and designed to look like a marshmallow, has a white face with blushy cheeks and crescent-shaped eyes, seven lashes to each. An old Christmas gift from his brother back home.

Per Taehyung’s recommendation (because Taehyung is a consummate coffee hater), Jimin opts for a Chinese blend—black, made with rose petals, citrus fruits, and honey to top it all off—so sweet Hoseok starts partaking too, a recent tea convert. He swings by the break room every morning to
watch Jimin boil and steep the water, then makes off with his own cup, humming his happy way back to his studio.

“Something about this is magical, right?” says Hoseok on one such morning, peering suspiciously into his paper cup. Jimin hands him a cup sleeve so he doesn’t burn himself and dunks his own tea bag into his marshmallow mug. “Maybe it can’t be proven, but I think tea has healing effects of some kind. Detoxification properties? I feel like my pores have definitely opened up. Or is it my sinuses? If nothing else, my hair has gotten shinier. Jiminie, explain!”

Jimin smiles, blowing on his tea. “Magical sounds right to me.”

“Thought so,” Hoseok says and hums into his first sip.

“Bring your own mug from now on,” Jimin says, and Hoseok does.

For a period, Jimin becomes absorbed in choreographing, so obsessively absorbed that he grows sick of listening to Jungkook’s title track over and over again and switches over to track three —“Sorry (I Love You),” the only other song on the album that Jungkook swears by so far—to cleanse his palate and then he falls in love with that track too and ends up accidentally choreographing a completely new routine to it, unprompted and unnecessarily. This incites a series of company-wide meetings wherein Yoongi and Namjoon debate the pros and cons of a one-song album debut versus a two-song album debut while Jimin calmly sips his black tea and reads romance webtoons under the table, mostly to distract from the knife-worthy sexual tension in the air.

During this period, backup dancers are cast with swift efficiency and then Jimin devotes an easy few weeks to overseeing all six of them until they can perform his routines blindfolded (which Jimin sometimes still does, during live performances). Jungkook temporarily goes into hiding in order to put the finishing touches on his album—which Namjoon says means frantic rewrites and rigorous re-recording sessions, the likes of which seem never-ending to a Virgo with no true concept of ‘good enough.’

Jimin doesn’t see him, or if he does, it’s only ever in snatches: a dark head disappearing down a white corridor, quiet lyrics caught through a closed door, the thump of big Balenciagas on laminate flooring, there and gone again in an instant. Missing doesn’t register, because Jimin doesn’t yet know Jungkook well enough to long for him, but his absence is unmistakable, and also a little annoying. He pretends not to notice.

In the mornings, Jimin warms his hands against his hot tea and sits in window sills like a sleepy cat, coming slowly awake to the distant sound of the coffee machine babbling—Jungkook’s morning ritual superimposed over his own, dark brew against Jimin’s cloudy brown. Sometimes this—the sound of coffee being made—is Jimin’s only way of telling that Jungkook still inhabits the halls of moonchild, like a caffeine-addicted wraith. By eight-thirty, the light dazzles too brightly to be ignored and Jimin is awake enough to work.

For those initial few weeks, there’s little to no overlap between them. Jungkook lives, breathes, and sleeps in the studio and Jimin is caught in the planning stages of a televised album debut, of set and costume design, of music video concepts, and of backup dancers prepared and subsequently set free. He coops up with his tea and his sketchbook and thoughts of Jungkook—his lyrics and his harmonies, tempo and transitions, the likelihood that he’s getting enough sleep and not burning himself into a waxy little candle stub. Jimin cleans up his choreography. He consults the higher-ups (in other words: Namjoon and Yoongi). He listens to the coffee machine down the hall, always out of sync with his tea brewing.
Slowly, Jungkook’s voice begins to seep into his dreams. It transforms nightmarish landscapes into the beaches of Busan. He wishes, for just a moment, that he could break contract and share a snippet with his father. He catches himself humming Jungkook’s melodies while he’s blotting concealer onto his face in the mornings. He almost uses a lyric in an Instagram caption, then deletes the app from his phone in a fit of mortification.

By his thirtieth day with moonchild, a chill has swept through Seoul, stripping the trees bare. Jimin huddles in his fuzzy cardigan and waits by the pot of water he’s heating up at the stove, watching closely for bubbles. He’s so engrossed in his task, watching the blue flame lick at the pot, that he fails to pick up on the presence of someone else beside him until they’ve opened and shut a cupboard.

Jimin glances out from under the brim of his newsboy cap expecting to see Hoseok, then double-takes at the sight of Jungkook, finally released from the prisons of music-making. His nose is pink with cold and his hair longer than Jimin last remembers it. He has on an oversized crewneck and sweats. No shoes, just black socks.

Jungkook wrinkles his nose, peering into the stack of coffee filters he’s holding. “This tea is yours, right?”

“It’s good,” Jimin says defensively, slightly embarrassed to be found out. He finds that stashing his tea here is far easier than having to remember to pick up a sachet from the silverware drawer before work each morning.

“It looks like dirty lake water,” Jungkook says.

Jungkook blinks, fingers frozen over his coffee filter.

“Don’t say that in front of them,” Jimin mutters.

“Will they be offended if I say I prefer caffeine to plant soup?” Jungkook asks, peeling a filter free from the stack and carefully crimping its edges.

“Plants are sensitive,” Jimin snaps, aware that he’s being silly and unable to stop. “My dad says tea absorbs the moods of those around it. Talking to it makes it taste better. Happy people make happy tea. Happy tea feeds happy people. It’s—symbiotic. And—and you might think it’s stupid, but I like pretending, okay?”

Jungkook blinks, fingers frozen over his coffee filter.

“You’ll make my tea taste sad,” Jimin mumbles forlornly. “And I share it with Hobi-hyung, so you’ll make him sad, too.” He looks down at his mug, at his small ringed fingers clutching it like a
lifeline. At all the unused sachets, recommended to him by his best friend. Something in Jimin feels raw and cracked open. Without looking at Jungkook, he shuts off the burner he’s using and turns on his foot. “You can use my water.”

The next morning, Jimin is gingerly dunking his tea bag and drizzling honey to his heart’s content when Jungkook appears for his daily caffeine fix, like he’s decided to purposely readjust his schedule according to Jimin’s. He heads straight for the coffee machine, filling the water reservoir and prepping a paper filter without a word.

Jimin ignores him. He’s transferred his stash of tea sachets from Jungkook’s coffee filters to Namjoon’s styrofoam cups, in order to avoid further incident. The sleepy marshmallow face stares up at Jimin as he mixes his milky concoction with a stirring stick. He blows on the bright liquid until his glasses have fogged up with steam and the room around him smells vaguely floral.

“Good morning,” Jungkook says, minutes or moments or seconds later.

Jimin glances over, almost petulant enough to pretend he hasn’t heard, but Jungkook isn’t looking at him.

He’s looking at the little tea bag Jimin is dunking.

Jimin turns his head a full ninety degrees. He can feel his eyes and mouth growing round with confusion.

Keeping his gaze on the marshmallow mug, Jungkook bends down and, very deliberately, nods at Jimin’s drink. “Nice weather we’re having,” he says.

“It’s storming,” Jimin points out, a fact which should be abundantly clear to someone with rain-slick windows in their immediate line of sight.

“Shh,” says Jungkook, “I’m having a conversation here.”

Oh, Jimin thinks, as it clicks finally and firmly into place, and his cheeks flare up with startled, tingling heat. Oh. Jimin feels very pink all of a sudden. He touches one of his earrings nervously, cool metal against warm skin. It might actually be more embarrassing watching an idol indulge him and his childhood customs—more embarrassing, even, than almost crying over an idol unknowingly insulting said childhood customs. But Jungkook is nothing if not determined and it appears he’s resolved to woo Jimin’s black tea.

“Jeon Jungkook-ssi,” Jimin says, embarrassed beyond words.

“Park Jimin-ssi, if you could leave me and your tea to it, I’d really appreciate it,” Jungkook says, with utmost seriousness, and Jimin bursts into baffled laughter. “What’s funny?”

“Really, stop,” Jimin says, pinkening up further. He brings a hand up to his mouth on instinct, giggling helplessly, like a pipe has burst and it’s all suddenly pouring out of him, stupid streams of laughter, a terribly wonderful tension release. “Whatever you’re—stop, Jeon Jungkook-ssi—”

“Jimin-ssi,” Jungkook says in deep, authoritative tones and that just makes Jimin laugh all the harder, pitched over the counter like he’s bracing himself against the pain of a bellyache. “Just one minute of your tea’s time. That’s all I’m asking for here.”

“Stop,” Jimin gasps, clutching at his sides, his ribs tight from the force of his laughter. “Please,
please—"

“Will you be very offended if I ask for your tea’s number?”

“Jungkook—!”

“If I want to take your tea home—” Jungkook breaks off suddenly, eyes wide and dark.

“No more,” Jimin giggles.

“I can see now why you have a habit of falling over while laughing,” Jungkook says as he guides Jimin upright with a hand to his lower back, right over the scrawl of his secret tattoo. “Hey, hyung. You called me Jungkook...”

Jimin wills his giggles down and says, “Jungkook is your name.”

“Yeah, but you never call me by it,” Jungkook says. “You’re so formal.”

“My tea is happy now,” Jimin says, in lieu of answering Jungkook’s unspoken question. “Thank you.”

Jungkook withdraws his hand from Jimin’s lower back and moves to pour himself a paper cup of coffee. “You’ll have to taste it to be sure.”

The loss of his hand lingers like a phantom touch. Jimin tucks his fingers through the handle of his mug, sleepy still and full of confusing, new-old warmth, and glances up at Jungkook. He’s better put together this morning, though still touched by sleep in places—the under-eyes, mostly, dark and bruise-like. His hair is wet and wavy from a recent shower and his tattoos look stark under the rainy day’s diffuse lighting.

Jimin stares, heart skipping a beat. It’s his first time seeing them without long sleeves in the way. A river bordered by blooms of flowers wraps around Jungkook’s bicep, becomes a cobra’s unhinged jaw somewhere near his inner forearm. A skull cracked open and surrounded by pirate’s riches. A realistic rendition of a human heart, veined and valved like something alive. Something frenetic.

“Jimin-ssi.”

Jimin startles, eyes shooting up guiltily. “Ah? Oh, yes, okay.”

Jungkook is smiling, eyebrows raised. He brings his cup up to his nose and takes a long whiff, sighing happily. At no point does his gaze leave Jimin’s face.

Jimin’s cheeks warm, stupidly. He says, made suddenly shy by all the attention, “We’ll take our first sip together.”

“Not me,” Jungkook says. “I’ll wait for you to go first.”

“Me? Why me?” Jimin says, unreasonably whiny.

Jungkook laughs and Jimin registers the presence of that wretched dimple. “So my coffee has time to absorb our moods.”

Jimin narrows his eyes. “Now you’re making fun of me.”

Jungkook grins and holds his cup out to Jimin, like he wants his coffee wooed. Jimin can hear his
voice saying the principle should be the same. He glares, riled into responding, and has the brief thought that he wants to shock Jungkook right back, electric and unexpected. Then he’s leaning in and gently pressing a kiss to the edge of the warm paper cup. He peers up through his lashes, pulls back with a wet smack. His tinted lip balm leaves a sticky little mark, the memory of a pair of puckered lips, like a napkin from a French lover in a black and white film.

Jungkook stares. His eyes are stuck on the place where Jimin’s mouth has just been, like he can’t quite fathom what’s just happened. He flexes his mouth open. Shuts it, shell-shocked.

“Happy?” Jimin hums and smiles into his first sip of black tea.

Jungkook twitches wordlessly.

“Legally, I think I’m now married to your coffee,” Jimin says, just to be funny, and leaves Jungkook standing at the little kitchenette with a dumb look on his handsome face.

☽

The next morning after that, Jungkook and Jimin carry out their morning routines in tandem, almost without meaning to, shoulder-to-shoulder and silent in the little kitchenette. Not because there's no other choice, and not because the body of water between them has dried up, and not because they're wild with what not to say. Just because. Because it's so early the light comes down a dark Pantone blue, and Jimin is still the drowsy of a misremembered dream, and Jungkook is rubbing his eyes while the coffee machine makes indecipherable noises and. It's nice. It's nice not to have to fill the silence. It's nice not to have to flinch back in fear of an encroaching awkwardness. No tiptoeing.

The room around them is a comfortable quiet.

Jimin picks up his mug of hot tea and takes it with him to the conference table, his sweater sleeves swallowing up his cold hands. By the time he’s opened his laptop and logged in, Jungkook has joined him, paper cup placed beside Jimin’s marshmallow mug.

“Does your tea taste happy today?” Jungkook asks, over a half-eaten muffin dotted with blueberries.

Jimin kicks him gently under the table.

Jungkook kicks back, though the effect is lost without any shoes.

“Jeon Jungkook-ssi,” Jimin says, grown used to the name on his tongue like honey rising to the roof of his mouth. "Are you going to have breakfast with me from now on or something?"

“When are we going to start dancing?” Jungkook asks instead, around his next bite of muffin.

Jimin hums, sipping from his marshmallow mug. “When you decide your album is done.” And also: “When Namjoon-hyung makes you.”

Jungkook groans. “That’ll be never, then.”

“You’re putting yourself in purgatory,” Jimin says, scrolling mindlessly through his email inbox. He trashes a few spam messages, slows his swinging feet to sift through a series of digital coupons for knit sweaters.

Jungkook says into the comfortable quiet: “There’s no way of telling when something is finished.”
“There’s no way of telling when something is about to begin,” replies Jimin, “until you decide that
you’re going to make it begin, right at that moment. The principle is the same, Jeon Jungkook-ssi,
for finishing something. You decide that it’s done, and it is—not because it’s an empirical truth,
but because it lies in your control, and you’ve said so.”

Jungkook sets his cheek in his hand and watches Jimin, gaze softly fascinated. “Can it really be that
simple?”

“Probably not for people with brains like ours,” Jimin concedes. “But that’s because perfectionist
personality types tend to fixate. We find it hard to let go. The hardest part now will be deciding that
you’re finished.”

“And what if I’m not? What if I say I am, then realize I’ve made a huge mistake much later?”
Jungkook says, picking at his muffin wrapper with anxious plucking motions.

Jimin closes his laptop with a quiet click and looks up at Jungkook. He pushes the sleeves back
from his hands until they’ve been bared and he can comfortably clasp them above the table. “Jeon
Jungkook-ssi,” he says very seriously.

Jungkook sighs, but it’s almost fond-sounding. “Park Jimin-ssi.”

“It will never feel done to you,” Jimin says truthfully. “But after a point, it will feel right, and that
has to be enough.”

“Ah...”

“Our pasts are riddled with mistakes—big and small—and that’s okay. We need them. They give us—texture, and character, and wisdom. And, yes, they’re embarrassing, believe me I know, but I
really don’t think you’re going to listen to this album in five years’ time and cringe.”

“If I do, you owe me six thousand won,” Jungkook says, with a playful little half-smile.

Jimin kicks him under the table again.

In an instant, Jungkook has Jimin’s ankle pinned, caught between two of his socked feet.

“That’s if we even know each other five years from now,” Jimin says, trying in vain to wriggle his
Chelsea boot free.

“I think we will, hyung,” Jungkook says, with a gravity Jimin finds hard to understand. “Can I ask
you something?”

“Go ahead.”

“Has it always felt like enough? For you?”

Jimin looks up, mouth parted on an exhale of frustration. He feels caught, in more ways than one,
pinioned like a bird with its wings clipped, but something in Jungkook’s expression compels him to
answer. “No. Never,” escapes him on automatic, too honest. It’s the physical extreme between fall
and recovery in modern dance, a hummingbird’s heartbeat, the muscles contracted, and then
released. A spill to the floor, followed by an immediate rebound.

“But this...” Jimin says, quietly, shyly. “Being here feels right and that’s enough for me, now.”

“Oh,” Jungkook says, and takes a moment to mull that over in his mind. Once he has, he turns his
gaze on Jimin. Something in it is warm, and weighted, the gravity constraining a glowing ball of gas. “Then stay with us for a little while longer,” he adds, greedy and childlike with it.

Jimin laughs, moon-eyed, and says nothing, which means, I can’t see you but I can sense you, and also, I’m thinking about it, I promise, and also, you’re warm and weighted, Jeon Jungkook-ssi, like a glowing ball of gas, and, most of all, you’re nothing like what I expected.

☽

“Jiminnie, did you forget to make my tea again?” Hoseok loudly laments when he walks into the break room a week later and finds, for the fifth time in about as many days, Jeon Jungkook and Park Jimin giggling over coffee and tea at the company conference table like two children with not a care in the world. And, at Hoseok’s entrance, Jimin leaps to his feet and rushes over to the stove, apologizing profusely, while Jungkook hides a quiet laugh behind his cup.

☽

The day after, they start dancing.

☽

Jimin pokes his blond head into Namjoon’s office.

Namjoon looks up over the wire frames of his glasses, donned during the late hours of evening when contacts begin to chafe like bad eye irritants—Jimin knows from experience—and no one is around to tell the difference. His hair lays rumpled over his forehead, flat from too many hands raked through it over the course of the day. Beyond his sprawling windows, the moon is one big wafer, hemmed in by a hundred pockets of light.

Jimin holds up an electric tea kettle in mint green, hot plate included, his eyes very wide. Its black cord dangles somewhere by his thighs.

“Um,” Namjoon says, with a confused squint. “Thank you? But I don’t drink tea?”

“You can make hot chocolate in it,” Jimin says unhelpfully.

“Oh.”

“And coffee,” Jimin adds, a little giddy now.

“Okay? Then, thank you—”

“Oh, it’s not for you,” Jimin says.

Namjoon squints harder, fingers twitching against his keyboard.

“I just wanted to ask if you had bought it?” Jimin leans further into the office, his eyes big and glossy and beseeching. “A nice amenity for the break room, maybe?”

“Unless I went on another drunken online shopping spree, no,” Namjoon says, slowly. “And if I have, I’ll be dead by morning and you can blame it on Min Yoongi, who will have murdered me in cold blood for irresponsible spending.”

“Thanks, hyung, I’ll be sure to avenge you!” Jimin chirps and darts out of the room like a catnip-drunk kitten.
“Okay,” Namjoon says to the empty room.

Twenty seconds later, Jimin reappears, visibly winded, as though he’s just remembered a missing detail to a murder mystery. He says, “Do you think Hobi-hyung bought it?”

“I wouldn’t know,” Namjoon says, patiently. He then jogs his trackpad and pretends to go back to very important, very time-sensitive business, except Jimin would bet money he’s been solving brain teasers for the last hour and debating whether he should order hot takeout or head home.

“But if you were Hobi-hyung, would you?”

Namjoon opens his mouth. “Is that a trick question?”

“Hyung-nim,” Jimin whines, gaze doleful.

Namjoon, whose patience runs wire-thin during late nights at the office and who also believes Jimin embodies everything good and pure in this ugly world, calls upon his final reserve of patience and says, “If I were Hoseok, I would probably have more pressing concerns than tea kettles. Concerns related to Chee Sungho’s 2020 comeback. Other dance-related business. Hypebeast shopping sprees, spreading good cheer and petting puppies, things like that.”

“Never mind,” Jimin says impatiently. “Do you have Jeon Jungkook-ssi’s number?”

Namjoon sighs, though, really, Jimin can tell he wants badly to laugh, and that’s the best part about having an old friend for a boss.

☽

jeon jungkook-ssi

who is this?

wait

why am i asking that

park jimin-ssi

is that you?

hehehe yes

you have my number?

i asked for it from namjoon-hyung

oh

was there any reason in particular?

yes i wanted to ask you

? well, i would have asked you in person, but i think i missed you by 20 minutes or so
by any chance did you buy an electric tea kettle recently?

an electric tea kettle?

um yes

for the break room?

what does it look like?

oh

never mind! it must have been hobi-hyung!

sorry for bothering you!

like this, maybe?

https://bit.ly/2rc7Nm6

ahhhhhhh jeon jungkook-ssi!!!!!!!!!!!! it was you!!!!

kekekekeke

park jimin-ssi you are incredibly gullible for someone so sly

in that case

i was hoping i would be able to use it sometimes

if that’s okay with you!

it looks much easier than boiling water in a pot!

and it’s a really pretty color 😊

kekeke yeah you can use it whenever you want

ah, thank you so much! i really appreciate it!

considering it’s for you

wait what

i ordered it for you

oh

wait

you did?

yes

wait

but why
i saw it and thought you’d like it

but i do!

jeon jungkook-ssi!!!

i do! ahhhhhhhhhh!

seriously?

ahhhhhhhhhhh!

kekeke jimin-ssi

thank you so much! you really didn’t have to!

i promise to put it to good use!

and i can make you coffee in it whenever you want!

haha hyung that’s okay

use it for yourself

if it doesn’t work, let me know and i’ll exchange it for something else

okay!

thank you again, jungkook!

you must be very thankful, to have dropped the -ssi

yes i am very happy and now my tea will be too thank you hehe

i’m going to be very tempted to steal it for my apartment

i can always get you one for home too

no!

jeon jungkook-ssi! that’s too much!!

and he’s back

Funny hyung

i’m not funny i am very serious

okay i’ll just have to pass along the news to santa

do not even try it

it’s okay, jimin-ssi, santa isn’t real

you think you’re so funny
i think you’re very funny even when trying to be very serious with me

i am serious and scary

i thought so too

until you started pouting and giggling all over the place

i bet you’re pouting right now

i am not!

want to prove it?

good night, jeon jungkook-ssi

kekeke good night, park jimin-ssi

☽

A few days later, Jimin is waiting outside the break room door with his small, ringed fingers curled carefully around a black mug. He ordered it online immediately following a text message conversation with Jeon Jungkook concerning the mysterious appearance of an electric tea kettle. The mug only just arrived in his mailbox last night.

Earlier, he had snapped a picture of it sitting beside his marshmallow mug, liking the contrast in colors very much—a dialogue between binaries, as Namjoon might say—the detailed etching of a human skull and crossbones next a soft white face with blush-marks and beaming eyes. After, he felt silly and sentimental. But he didn’t delete it. And he hasn’t posted it, either. No, this is just for him. Just for Jimin.

“Hyung,” comes Jungkook’s warm voice, and Jimin startles.

He’s missed Jungkook’s entrance staring down at the little black mug in his hands, which is hard to do, mind you, when Jungkook’s choice in shoes alerts everyone within a five mile radius that he’s entering a building thirty seconds before he actually does. Jungkook is wearing a puffy black overcoat and a long, trailing scarf today. Also black.

“Hi,” Jimin says, watching him make his way down the corridor.

“Aren’t you cold?”

“Me?” Jimin looks down at his fleece pullover and black jeans, casual in comparison to Jungkook’s elaborate winter wear. He has on leather harness boots and fuzzy socks just barely visible around the ankle. His heels are almost enough to give him a height advantage over Jungkook. “No, I’m fine. Walking to work warms me up.”

“You walk to work?” Jungkook slows, coming to a stop in front of Jimin, and pins him with a disapproving look.

“Well, not the whole way,” Jimin says. “I only have to walk a few blocks to get here from my bus stop.”

If anything, Jungkook looks more disapproving. “You take the bus?”

“And sometimes the subway, if you can believe it.”
“Hyung, don’t joke. You could catch a cold in weather like this. Public transport during the holidays is one of the worst times for germs. Do you carry hand sanitizer and face masks with you?” Jungkook says, sounding so fiercely protective it brings Jimin to the edge of laughter.

“You can catch murderers in any weather, Jeon Junkook-ssi,” Jimin says. “But we the wider world continue to live our lives as desired anyway.”

“Do you desire public transport, Jimin-ssi?” Jungkook says, archly.

“Very much so,” Jimin says. “I desire public transport so much that I’m hoping marriage is imminent. Maybe even babies. Little tiny buses and subways to bring to work with me.”

“Not funny,” Jungkook says, then undermines this by laughing loudly. His eyes crease at the corners. “Do you want me to tell Namjoon-hyung you need a company car?”

“If that’s in the budget, please also inform Namjoon-hyung that I’d like a bit of beachfront property back in Busan.”

Jungkook is grinning, gaze hooked on Jimin like something riveted and hard to remove. “You’re being extra funny today, Jimin-ssi.”

Jimin turns his pink nose up to the sky, bangs falling back. “It’s the cold!” he mourns, clicking his heels for emphasis. “It makes me funnier!”

Jungkook says, “One house and one car coming right up.”

“Ah, a nice thought, but the car would just go unused.”

Jungkook tilts his head, apparently puzzled by that. “Why?”

“I can’t drive.”

Jungkook looks aghast. “Legally? Did you get your license revoked or something?”

“No,” Jimin says, blinking owlishly. “I’ve just never taken the test.”

Jungkook blinks back, long lashes flickering. Then he dissolves into laughter on the spot.

“Alright, get it all out,” Jimin says. “Ha ha ha, Jimin can’t drive.”

Jungkook is still laughing when he says, “Should I become hyung’s chauffeur?”

“I don’t know, is hyung expected to pay for your services?”

Jungkook’s eyes sparkle with mirth.

“You’re really annoying, you know,” Jimin says, not meaning it one bit.

“Maybe,” suggests Jungkook, “you should call me ‘hyung’ from now on, Jimin-ssi.”

“Oh, is that the only form of payment you’ll accept, Jungkookie-hyung?” Jimin says. Then: “Okay, wipe that look off your face.”

Jungkook laughs. “What look?”

“You enjoy watching me suffer.”
“I don’t think calling me ‘hyung’ counts as suffering.”

“Well, it was a once in a lifetime occurrence, so I hope you enjoyed it while it lasted,” Jimin says, then adds, “Hyung,” just to watch Jungkook laugh harder, head thrown back. “And driving is not a sign of age, brat!”

“It is,” Jungkook insists. “If you can’t do it, you’re either too young or so old you’re going senile. Therefore, I’m your elder in experience.”

“Okay, Jungkookie sunbaenim,” Jimin deadpans, but Jungkook is starting to look entirely too gleeful over the prospect of an honorific role reversal so Jimin shoves him and says, “No more!”

“Jimin,” Jungkook says, with great relish, “ah.”

Jimin gasps, face flooding with heat. “Jeon Jungkook-ssi! Take that back!”

Jungkook’s laughter is contagious. It floats down moonchild’s halls, lifted and carried like autumn leaves in wind. “Your face is so red it’ll probably keep you warm through the winter,” he says and Jimin flushes hotter, wordlessly outraged. “As for your hands...I’m less optimistic. I think we should invest in some mittens for you, Jimin-ssi.”

Jimin tucks that away for later—we, jointly—and watches as Jungkook goes to take Jimin’s hands in his, perhaps to demonstrate his point, then stops when he’s impeded by the presence of something small and bulky and ceramic. Shiny black.

Jimin turns the mug over in his hands like a very precious jewel, art facing out.

“What’s this?”

“For you,” Jimin murmurs, made quiet by shyness or uncertainty, maybe even self-consciousness in the face of a gift so miniscule when compared to a pastel, plug-in tea kettle. “Your coffee, I mean.”

“Ah, Jimin-ssi…” Jungkook says, soft, revelatory in the gentle cadences his mouth creates, like he’s speaking in song, or singing in words.

The mug pairs well with his skull tattoo, Jimin likes to think. Not a perfect match, but a close attempt at capturing that same hyper-realistic art style. Under the etching sits the word **POISON**, in cautionary Hangul. Gently mocking. It makes Jungkook laugh. He layers his hands over Jimin’s and they stand staring down at the small kindness, heads bent close together like a secret shared. That’s how Chee Sungho finds them.

“What are you two doing?” Sungho calls out, coming down the corridor from the opposite direction.

Jungkook, who has by now grown comfortable enough around Jimin to let his guard down, who no longer goes skittish at the idea of Sungho embarrassing him in front of industry professionals, says only, “Nothing, bye,” and begins shepherding Jimin through the break room door, mug transferred from one pair of hands to the other.

“Hey!”

“If we pretend he’s not here, maybe he’ll get bored and leave,” Jungkook says into Jimin’s ear, ticklish and secret still.
Jimin fights a laugh. “I think he likes the sound of his own voice too much for that, but it’s a nice thought.”

Sungho is as annoying as a gnat and just as harmless. He takes great pleasure in sticking his fingers where they don’t belong and where they do belong, beautiful music erupts, bolstered by rapid-fire lyrical verse. He is a sharp writer. He is a less sharp speaker. He is, Jimin is sad to report, very talented at what he does and when he’s not peacocking like a desperate bird, he’s even a little charming.

“Coffee, coffee, coffee,” Jungkook chants, and steers Jimin towards the carafe.

“Wash your mug first. Always wash new dishes before using them,” Jimin says, bending over the basin to run the tap and locate the soggy sponge Namjoon periodically forgets to replace. He has it in his hand when a sudden splash of sink water hits him square in the face and he gasps.

Jungkook takes advantage of the current look on his face and aims for Jimin’s open mouth on his next try.

“Jimin-ssi, I come bearing good news,” says Sungho from somewhere behind them.

With a burst of sudden noise, Jimin wrestles Jungkook’s wrists behind his back and tries to shove his head under the running faucet. Jungkook snickers like a little kid, dodges to the left, and in a fit of impatience, Jimin collects a handful of cold water between his palms and sends it flying at his face. Retribution, he thinks, tastes so sweet.

“Which is that I could be persuaded to make an exchange, if you want to hand over our misbehaving maknae to Hoseok,” Sungho continues, with that barb-sharp sense of humor of his. “Consider me yours. Hey, you two...”

Jimin thrashes in Jungkook’s arms, but he’s laughing his head off, can’t tell whether he’s crying with it or just dripping wet, hysterical and hot-faced, half-mad with laughter, and when Jungkook pins him to the sink, wedged between his body and the counter, Jimin just laughs harder, because he knows what’s coming, goes pliant in preparation for it and watches with weak-kneed resignation as Jungkook grips his wrists, jerks his hands under the tap, and uses them to fling water at Jimin.

Jimin closes his eyes and takes it, except that Jungkook puts his mouth to his ear, whispers, “Watch,” and when Jimin blinks his wet eyes open, he gets to watch with stunning clarity as Jungkook pretends to misfire and sends the next handful of flung water in Sungho’s direction.

Sungho leaps back with a shout and Jungkook lets go of Jimin immediately.

“Jeon Jungkook!”

Jungkook falls into a bow of apology without hesitation. “That was my fault, hyung,” he says, perfectly composed. “I’m sorry. I didn’t realize you were standing right there.”

Sungho stares at Jimin and Jungkook in furious incredulity. “How do you two ever get any work done?”

Jungkook rises to his full height and smiles sheepishly. Jimin peeks over his shoulder, then ducks back out of view to snicker quietly into the nape of his neck.

“Jimin?” Sungho says, like he’s expecting some semblance of seriousness from the choreographer, if nothing else.
Jimin dutifully pokes his head past Jungkook’s, eyes wide over Jungkook’s shoulder. He says, “I’ll be sure to discipline your misbehaving maknae for what he’s done.”

“Yes, see to it that you do,” Sungho says. “This shirt is Armani!”

Jimin and Jungkook bow in unison, and, when finally Sungho has flounced off to find a new shirt, they explode with quiet laughter.

“Very clever,” Jimin says. His eyelashes are beaded with water and the front of his sweater is dark and sticky where it’s suffered a more unfortunate fate. “You’ve gotten rid of Sungho and probably given us a cold in the process.”

“Hyung,” Jungkook says, pushing the wet bangs back from Jimin’s forehead. His eyes are inky and gleaming, water without light, and when he gets a finger under Jimin’s chin, Jimin obediently turns his face up like a kitten on its best behaviour during bathtime. Jungkook follows a drop of water down Jimin’s temple with his thumb, then gently swipes it away. “If you want to exchange me for Sungho-hyung after that, I won’t hold it against you.”

“No thank you. I think I’ll keep you for now,” Jimin whispers, and tries not to flush under the slow spread of Jungkook’s answering smile.

Jimin starts Jungkook out with basic floorwork to get the blood pumping.

It captures both the crisp edges of breakdancing and also the decadence of modern dance, two forms he thinks Jungkook would do well to inhabit as his M Countdown stage nears. They demand very different body lines; one exactly accurate, muscles and joints put to rigorous use, the other the sinuousness of sex, dark and pleasure-driven. Both valuable starting points.

Basic floorwork doesn’t last very long because what Jungkook lacks in flexibility he more than makes up for in practical knowledge of the working body, how to push it to its absolute limits, then watch it nosedive off the edge of a cliff. His natural inclination for breakdancing Jimin learns comes from a childhood spent joyously b-boying on cardboard cut-outs back in Busan, tiny and snapbacked. Jungkook shows him pictures, pre-puberty with terribly cut bangs and big front teeth. It’s embarrassingly endearing. Jimin laughs himself onto the floor, almost crying with it, until Jungkook loses patience and launches a tickle war that spans the entire building and, ultimately, ends with Jimin cornered by the front desk while a harried receptionist named Hyeon watches the chaos unfold from behind her rectangular reading glasses.

The damage is minimal. Jungkook hugs Jimin threateningly from behind until he concedes the war and pulls out his phone to find some of his own childhood snapshots. They bend over the glowing screen solemnly, Jungkook’s chin hooked over Jimin’s shoulder.

Jimin hurriedly combs his photo album for the least embarrassing option, which is none of them because they’re all awful and deserve to be erased from the collective memory of humanity. He settles for a picture taken at Gwangalli Beach. Jimin, twelve and flushed with happiness, has cheeks too round to be real and is wearing a Pororo the Little Penguin towel like a Little Red Riding Hood cloak. His hair is jet black and long around the eyes.

He covers his face in mortification while Jungkook vaults between cooing and laughing himself breathless.

“Why can’t we be more like them?” Sungho says on his way out to lunch.
Hoseok, beside him, says simply: “Because you’re annoying.”

Jungkook swipes to the next photo without permission, landing on sixteen-year-old Jimin in a leotard and tights, snapped days after his first ever box-dye attempt. His roots are obscene. He looks like the most unhappy blond on planet Earth.

Jimin yells and yanks the phone out of Jungkook’s hands, then makes Jungkook run laps around the building as punishment, which Jungkook performs with all the enthusiasm of a kenneled puppy. He smiles the entire time. Jimin imagines his tail is wagging during the walk back inside, when he’s glimmering with sweat and scraping the dark, damp hair back from his forehead like a very vivid, very lethal ad for sunscreen, or deodorant, or maybe a dating app. Download to swipe left on your next soulmate!

After that: pins-and-needles fittings, rehearsals filmed by the camera noonas for behind the scenes YouTube coverage, album promotion preparation.

On a whim, Jimin and Jungkook spend one whole studio session playing around with body isolations, the early popping Jimin practiced in windows and mirrors growing up. He switches on a Chee Sungho song for its percussion breaks and beat mixing, that very distinct meter of movement. 4/4. Jimin watches Jungkook work, and then watches him devolve into silly freestyling, head spins and jackhammers against the floor that make Jimin fall backwards with laughter. He pulls his phone out to record, until his storage is full and he has to delete a few favorites from his cute animal album to free up space. They switch off when Jungkook is too sweaty and spent to continue, collapsed to the floor with a groan of great exhaustion.

He says, “Your turn,” and Jimin smiles.

In front of the mirrors, Jimin bursts forth like a throb of lightning—rapid, razor-sharp, calling on the fundamentals he’s picked up from his days of hip-hop with NOIZE. It should ache, old wounds revisited, but instead Jimin burns, lit up beneath Jungkook’s dark gaze. There’s a strange sense of shared connection. It stretches out between them like a strand of honey. Propelled and released—doves set free. It says: I know you from a dream. And: I burn back at you. And also: my hurt is your hurt.

Jimin tucks and twists, offers a front aerial with unbent knees that makes Jungkook sit up and whistle. It’s too easy, then, to start popping to his laughter, making a dramatic spectacle of it, pulling funny faces in the mirrors and hitting every beat in a Top 20 Sungho song. He slips unthinkingly into an old routine drilled into him during his pre-debut days and performs it to glittering completion. Jimin doesn’t realize what he’s done until he’s settled into the final pose—feet parallel, hands clasped, head lowered as though in deference, or dismissal.

Jungkook says, “I know that routine.”

Jimin looks up and the world contorts, carnival-dreamy. Unreal somehow. “What?”

“Did you dance with them?” Jungkook murmurs and Jimin knows immediately, the way the lungs know oxygen after asphyxiation.

He stares. Feeling rushes through him like wind up the pant leg, or rain down the shirt. “Did you?”

“Yes,” Jungkook says, slow and significant. “My group even debuted.”

“No, we missed each other by two years...” Jimin says, eventually, numbly. “I was only with
NOIZE for six months. I was—fifteen.”

Jungkook shrugs, as easy as anything, and with finality, with a cloud of dust that says, THE END, the book is shut. It says: it doesn't matter now. And also: your hurt is my hurt. And moreover: we're still dancing, aren't we?

“But you found your way here, in the end,” Jungkook says, bright, savage, like it’s that simple.

And maybe it is.

Jimin laughs, a little wildly. “Yeah, Jeon Jungkook-ssi, I found my way here.”

He has a moment of cognitive dissonance, of finally connecting a name to an old, repressed story. He thinks: the disgraced dancer beside South Korea’s comeback kid. Golden boy, winner of the Trojan war, maknae to end all maknaes. Jimin feels wild with it. Just a little. Just slightly. Like fate arranged it, or nudged him towards it, laid out a trail of breadcrumbs and waited patiently for Jimin to follow it into an outcropping of trees. Except, of course, it wasn’t fate, in the end. It was Jeon Jungkook’s silver voice, and Jimin’s desire to dance to it.

That’s when he realizes something is missing.

He adjusts his initial assessment of Jungkook’s title track, which he’d originally outfitted with too many jazz lines: flea slides, compass turns, a rhythmic contraction and expansion of the body, chest puffed out and lengthened heavenward. Playing at ballet—something gentle and pink to accompany the sun setting over Jungkook’s blue dream beach.

Jungkook manages to be not just passable, but exemplary at what he does. He’s eager to learn, no ego, and steadfast when applying old to new. He puts in more hours than he has and less than he believes he should. His strength and conditioning is top notch, and he has no trouble keeping up with Jimin, a fact which thrills. From there, it’s memory as the motivation for all movement. Recognition through rote. Floor and foot work, parallel first, balance corrections. Jimin saying, “Step, ball of the foot, change,” and, “Hold the pose! And—right, left, right!” Jungkook teasing him for all the little noises he makes while he’s teaching.

He pokes Jimin in three separate places—back, belly, cheek—and for each jab, says, “Ta, ta, ta!”

Jimin pretends to strangle him using the drawstrings of his hoodie.

“Boom boom,” Jungkook says, hitting two beats with his body. “Bah, bah, bah!”

Jungkook is beautiful when elongated and comfortable when falling into the pulse and jerk of hip-hop, so Jimin tries to strike a comfortable balance between the two, offering the sprightliness of something soft, then puncturing it with sharp, speedy hand and wrist isolations, mirrored by six backup dancers like ripples in water. He makes and demonstrates his changes, adds a few stylistic alterations for the music video version of the routine, and the end result, performed by one Jeon Jungkook, is, in Jimin’s humble opinion, exquisite.
Listen to Jeon Jungkook’s New Song “I’d Rather Die than Live Without Passion”

The Busan soloist’s single arrives along with his debut album’s long-awaited title and track list

Jungkook shares a new track, “I’d Rather Die than Live Without Passion” — along with the title and tracklist for his forthcoming full-length album. The single is produced by Jung Hoseok and Min Yoongi and comes complete with a music video choreographed by prima ballerina Park Jimin.

According to a press release, the album — titled “I’d Rather Be Dead Than Cool” — is predicted to drop sometime in late December or early January, depending on what suits Jungkook’s fancy. moonchild Entertainment CEO Kim Namjoon says Jungkook is meticulous when it comes to musical releases and, in keeping with his perfectionist personality type, always finds himself working down to the wire. Late Friday afternoon, Jungkook sent out a grainy car selfie to Twitter captioned, “please look forward to the album soon!” that sent fans into a tizzy.

We’ll be patiently waiting.

Track list:

1. Decalcomania
2. Sorry (I Love You)
3. Euphoria
4. Golden Closet
5. Noiseless
6. The Boy And His Kingdom
7. Day by Day
8. Darkroom
9. Still Searching
10. Man on the Moon (ft. RM)
11. 13

Read the 2019 feature “The Voice That Launched A Thousand Companies: Jungkook of moonchild Entertainment.”

When Jimin turns into the break room ferrying a set of Tiffany blue pastry boxes, it’s not Jungkook in all his recently-released musical glory that he finds waiting for him, but Chee Sungho heating up leftover pork cutlets on a paper plate, with a new line-up. There are parallel slashes through the dark hair growing down his temples now. He has a 7-song album scheduled for release in early 2020, sometime after “I’d Rather Be Dead Than Cool” drops, so Jimin supposes he has just as much of a right to celebratory cupcakes as Jungkook.

He sets the boxes down on the counter with a soft thunk and says, “Congrats on finishing your album, Sungho-ssi. Seven features is very ambitious.”
Sungho looks up from prodding his steaming cheese-stuffed pork with a chopstick. “Thanks,” he says, mouth turning up at the corners. “Much appreciated, although I have a feeling Jungkook is going to finally swallow me and my music up with all the recent album buzz. That boy is blowing up big time.”

“It’s a nice shadow to get to live in,” Jimin says, like the kind created by unscalable trees or wrap-around porches, the cool, impenetrable black of intercepted sunshine.

Sungho’s eyebrows hover somewhere near his hairline

“I’ll be sure to light a lantern in your honor, when you’re dethroned by Jungkook,” Jimin adds, tastefully, and Sungho barks a laugh.

“You, Jimin,” says Sungho, approvingly, “are very prickly. Like a spiky little porcupine with huge eyes and tiny, tiny hands. It’s nice, I think, for Jungkook to have someone like that in his life. Soft and prickly all at once. I should tell you, I was very glad for your arrival and I pray that you’ll renew your contract with moonchild when the New Year hits. Save your lantern and give a little more of your light to our maknae, will you? He hasn’t stopped glowing since you got here.”

Jimin blinks at that, thunderstruck.

The words kick up a whole host of feelings inside of him, old and new and cobwebbed by the basement of his heartbeat. If he looks back on his life over the last several months, he thinks he’ll see it through a pink film of taffeta and tulle, gentle waves of silk and sunshine. At its center is the silver voice, and the silver cat that led him to it. Namjoon’s elbows, bent just so. Taehyung and Seokjin and Hoseok and Yoongi, warm and beautiful and forever-feeling. Even Sungho. Blessings and magic and tea and tattoos. That’s it, really. And Jeon Jungkook, the stupid, talented, dimpled puppy with a six pack and pretty eyes, who sends Jimin’s heart skipping like a stone across the surface of a cool-faced lake.

Jimin stares up at Sungho, a little bug-eyed. A lot unnerved. “You didn’t have to say it like that!”

“Hah?” Sungho says through the pork he’s stuffed into his mouth. “Like what...?”

“If I’m in love, I’m blaming it on you,” Jimin says, digging a finger into Sungho’s hairless chest showing through the open collar of his shirt. He jabs once more, for emphasis. “I’m not, rest assured, and even if I was, I wouldn’t do anything about it because I’m a professional, but—just in case!”

“...Ah...” says Sungho, with a knowing smirk. He picks up Jimin’s palm and presses it to his breastbone like a rose-lapeled lover. “Yes, my poetry often awakens passions of the soul, Jimin-ssi! Feel my heartbeat flow through you with your tiny porcupine hands. Do you hear that...? That’s the sound of true love. Soon to be available on iTunes for a small price.”

“That’s the wrong side of your chest,” Jimin points out.

Sungho clears his throat, awkwardly, and switches Jimin’s hand over to the other side—his left, Jimin’s right. His heartbeat is a remote pulse through Jimin’s open palm, even and sure. “My resting BPM is the same as the Bee Gees’ ‘Stayin’ Alive.’”

“I don’t think that’s accurate,” says Jimin and then Jungkook is ducking into the break room in a black bucket hat and a rain-resistant windbreaker.

He glows like a lantern lit up with the warmth of a new release and also an ominous text message from Jimin that had read, simply, come to the break room i have something for you, until he looks
up and sees the scene set up before him. Something dark and displeased slams into his expression. Puppy to Rottweiler in an instant, Jimin thinks, and removes his hand from Sungho’s chest to begin unraveling ribbon and lifting the lids of the light blue pastry boxes. He’s been torturing himself with the sweet scent of icing through the cardboard slits for the last fifteen minutes.

“What took you so long?” he says.

Jungkook has brought Eun with him and almost in tandem, they headbutt Jimin gently, twin points of pressure from above and below. “What are you doing,” he mutters, like a sullen teenager, forehead to Jimin’s nape. It’s a move he’s copied from Jimin and one he seems to enjoy employing during moments of unforeseen vulnerability.

“Me?” Jimin says, picking up a butter knife that he then uses to scrape a bit of frosting off of a cupcake. He holds it up to Jungkook’s mouth. “I’m celebrating Jeon Jungkook-ssi.”

Jungkook huffs at that and sends Sungho a sidelong scowl when he picks up his pork cutlet plate and says, “I’ll go get everyone else! You two wait here! And save me a red velvet cupcake, Jimin!”

Reluctantly, Jungkook leans in and drags the pink frosting from the edge of the knife with his teeth.

The cupcake boxes have been embellished with satin ribbons, winter white, tied into perfect two-loop bows. Attached to them are little cream-colored tags that say SERENDIPITY, and, FOR AUSPICIOUS OCCASIONS! in script font, which feels a little fateful, like Jimin has met his match, is handing off his love for magic and luck and powdered sugar. He takes a moment to appreciate the look of the cupcakes, their neat uniformity, the loving craftsmanship that the ahjussi across the street puts into each and every one.

“Namjoon-hyung says you’ve finally set a date,” he says, like Jungkook is getting married—and in some ways, he is. Jimin’s body language is the brand of soft and hopeful he reserves for best friends unwrapping his holiday gifts in front of him. “I assume it’s secret and you have no intention of telling any of us, but still. I wanted to say congratulations. For all of your hard work over the last four months.”

“It’s not just me,”

Jimin twists around to look over his shoulder. “What?”

“You should be celebrating yourself, too,” Jungkook says, soft and firm. “You’re in that music video with me, hyung. You made it possible and now all my fans are going to learn your choreography. When I perform on that M Countdown stage, they’ll be dancing along with us.”

Jimin’s gaze warms. “You just can’t see me in it, right? Yes, Jeon Jungkook-ssi is wearing Park Jimin in his latest MV. My creations on your body. There and gone again. Hm...dance is a kind of clothing, isn’t it? We get all dressed up in it so others will see us and laud us.”


“And for the record, I did celebrate myself,” Jimin says, with a flare of sudden excitement, and he indicates the pretty pearl earring with white gold backing pushed through the soft flesh of his earlobe. The other half in the set he gave to Taehyung, his own attempt at a friendship bracelet. “It’s Chanel. My bank account is still weeping from it, just a little.”

When the music video went live, Naver exploded with praise for both Jungkook and Jimin. It
buried weeks of defamatory articles speculating about Jimin’s sexual exploits, alleged industry blacklisting, a possible relationship with Bak Dongwoo, who he’s danced subtext-heavy duets with before. For weeks, that remained a sore point: that Kim Namjoon of moonchild Entertainment had rediscovered Jimin’s dancing years later not through online acclaim but sordid, homophobic gossip spawned by a resurfaced routine with one of the most well-respected ballet dancers in South Korea.

If anything is cause for celebration, it’s this. Jeon Jungkook, in perfectly color-graded HD, dancing Jimin’s routine to a title track produced by Kim Namjoon. The world watching Jimin for his dancing and his dancing alone. The world loving him, and wishing for more.

Three days ago, he swung by Chanel on his way home and walked out with a palm-sized gift box made of pressboard and crushed velvet. He’d snapped a photo after making his purchase, Taehyung’s smiling cheek squished up against his own, their pearled ears bared for the camera. He sent it to his entire family and within moments, his father had replied, *my lovely son!* along with a stream of crying emojis. *two beauties* was his mother’s reply. His brother called to ask him if he should expect something expensive for Christmas this year, since Jimin clearly had a bigger budget. Jimin hung up on him.

In a way, moonchild has allowed him to shuck off his past and forge something from the rubble left behind, like a rock crushed into a crystal. Much of that is Jungkook’s doing, though he has no way of knowing the part he’s played, in both liberating Jimin and holding Jimin captive to his own feelings. Forced to watch his desire for an idol win out and take root. Jimin thinks: maybe infatuation is a flower, and the next thing he knows, Namjoon is stepping through the door with a bouquet of marigolds.

He brings the rest of moonchild with him, all the underpinnings of indie music: Yoongi in a corduroy coat, Hoseok behind him, Sungho with his plate of pork cutlets, Hyeon the sleepy receptionist, the camera crew, video editors, sound engineers, planning and PR people. Jimin starts plating cupcakes—gluten free lemon blueberry to Yoongi, chocolate marshmallow to Hoseok, belgian dark chocolate with vanilla frosting to Namjoon—and desperately hopes he’s ordered enough.

Jungkook takes his strawberry cupcake from Jimin, thumbing away a cut mark made by the butterknife, and accepts the bouquet of flowers from Namjoon with an incandescent smile and a bow. Congratulations are in order and everyone lines up single file to relate their feelings on the release of his new music video. Yoongi hands over a USB flash drive with the album’s initials sharpied onto it in silver marker: *IRBDTC*. Sungho gives Jungkook a hearty slap to the back and a good shake that makes his teeth rattle. Hoseok presses a pink heart sticker to the divot of Jungkook’s dimple and that’s where it stays for the rest of the day.

Jimin cuts into a caramel cream cheese cupcake and finds a seat in a window sill, where the sky is beginning to take on the look of a white sheet of paper dashed with watercolor paint. Smudges of pinks and reds and purples and blues, all bleeding into one another, like lives interwoven. Jimin snaps a picture with his phone, then pockets it. Eun watches him calmly from the floor.

“You can come sit with me, if you want.”

She leaps up and curls into a ball by his thigh, ears flicking.

He’s busy petting her into a puddle of purrs when Yoongi stops by to say, a little gruffly: “Your work here has been invaluable and we really appreciate you taking a chance on our company, especially given your past experiences with the idol world.”

And after that, Namjoon saying: “Jimin-ah, I can’t thank you enough for choosing to be here with
us for the last four months. You’ve pulled something out of Jungkook that I don’t think any of us knew existed and we’ll continue to see the effects of your influence for, I believe, years to come. And—though this might be naive of me—I hope that you can take from this experience even a fraction of what you’ve brought all of us, with your brightness and warmth.”

And finally, Hoseok saying: “The cut of your sweaters keeps getting more and more pornographic, Jimin-ah.”

Jimin huffs down at his slouchy brown sweater, currently slipping from the jut of his right shoulder where its collar is wide and v-necked. He rights the heavy fabric only for it to slide back down his shoulder again a few seconds later.

He shrugs. “They make them too big.”

“They make Jiminies too small!” Hoseok says sorrowfully and scoops a yelping Jimin up into his arms. He spins them in a graceful, ballroom-tight circle. “Don’t leave us! I love your little face and all the free tea and how sunny Jungkook gets when you’re around! Jimin, flowers bloom everywhere you walk and all the animals want to do your bidding! You’re our Gisselle!”

Jimin is laughing, arms around Hoseok’s neck. “That’s not true at all, hyung.”

“If you leave, I’ll feed Sungho to the sharks.”

“We don’t have any sharks.”

“If you leave, I’ll tell Namjoon we need at add sharks to the annual expenditure.”

Jimin hums in consideration. “That seems expensive and inhumane. What if instead we invest in an aquarium, fill it with carnivorous freshwater fish, and threaten to feed all of Sungho’s food to them—though we won’t, not really?”

“See!” Hoseok cries. “What are we gonna do without your weird, ingenious brain? If you’re gone, the whole ecosystem collapses! Yoongi-hyung gets bored without someone to argue with like an old man, Namjoon has no one to show off his completed crossword puzzles to, and Jungkook doesn’t have any reason to feel competitive all the time! And me—! Well, I’ll just be sad overall!”

Jimin turns that over in his mind. “I make Jungkook competitive?”

“Yes,” Hoseok says, with impatience. “Where have you been for the last four months?”

To that, he says, “Jungkook and I are on the same team and we’re going to win.”

“What are we winning?”

“Jeon Jungkook-ssi!” Jimin crows, suddenly overflowing with happiness like a shaken-up soda can. He wriggles impatiently and Hoseok lets him down. “We’re going to bring home the gold together!”

“Hyung,” Jungkook says, with the gravity that holds the moon in the circle of Earth’s arms, “when I win my first Daesang Award, I’m going to mention you in my acceptance speech.”


“I made Jiminie-hyung cry,” Jungkook says, with quiet, shoulder-quivering laughter.
“It’s not crying if the tears haven’t fallen!” Jimin says. “It’s just...self-lubrication.”

“Never mind,” Hoseok says from behind them, sounding viscerally horrified. “Jimin, please pack your bags and leave. All contract renewal requests will be uniformly blocked.”

Jemin bursts into laughter and smotheres the sound in the front of Jungkook’s jacket. “You have no say in that!”

“I have sway with the CEOs!”

“Oh?” Jimin says, turning to smirk at Hoseok. “How so?”

Hoseok’s face flames. “Nothing—! Bye!”

Jemin is warm with the remnants of his laughter when he hops back onto his window perch. He picks up his cupcake and peels back the paper lining to reveal moist caramel cake, almost a perfect copy of the color of his hair. “I didn’t know companies like this existed.”

Jungkook meanders closer, until the tops of his thighs are touching Jemin’s knees. “And now that you do?”

Jemin smiles, gaze lowered coyly, and licks a circle around his cupcake icing. His tongue comes away covered in French sea salt. “Fleur de sel,” he says to Jungkook, changing the subject. “Someday I want to travel to Paris.”

“I’ll come with you,” Jungkook says immediately.

Jemin laughs at that, gone pink with pleasure. “I would probably take my best friend, Jeon Jungkook-ssi.”

“Well, then, I’ll charm your best friend until they invite me along,” Jungkook says with determination.

“That would probably definitely work,” Jimin says, struck dumb by the idea. Struck dumb by how much he wants it. “I want you to meet him. Someday, I mean…”

“Okay,” Jungkook says, soft and indulgent.

It feels like he’s given himself away, somehow. Jimin blurts, “And I’ll meet yours.”

Jungkook chuckles. “You already have.”

“What? Who?”

He inclines his head, signaling the room at large, and all the bright, laughing people contained within it.

“Even Sungho?”

Jungkook’s mouth is a curve of warm humor. “Even you, hyung.”

“Me?” Jimin says, breathless. “Why me?”

“Why are you always asking that, Park Jimin?” Jungkook whispers. “Why not you? Who’s to say no?”

“A lot of people would say no,” Jimin whispers back. “A lot of people have. A lot of people have said yes, until they realized there was a catch, that I’m different than them. And then the yes is revoked, and it goes back to being no.”

“Different is good—”

Jimin smiles back, but his is a humor much colder than Jungkook’s. “Not when different means gay.”

In defiance of this little reveal, a nugget of ugly truth, Jungkook jams himself more pointedly between Jimin’s legs, as though to say, I don’t care. And also: I care, a lot. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but that’s not being different here, hyung,” he says.

“I know,” Jimin says, throat thick with emotion. “That’s why I like it so much. But moonchild isn’t the rest of the idol world. moonchild is just a little pocket of good. So much of this world is cold and mean.”

“Were they mean to you?” Jungkook whispers, sounding so much like a confounded child it makes Jimin laugh.

“Yeah, Jungkook-ssi, they were. I’m only really here because the last company I was choreographing for terminated my contract after an old video resurfaced,” he says. “But it’s okay. I’m used to it.”

“What video?”

“A video of a routine I’d danced with another gay man.” Jimin laughs, ferociously. “Anyway, it doesn’t matter now. Remember when I said being here is enough? Jeon Jungkook-ssi, I was wrong. It’s better than before, being here. It’s the best thing. I really love waking up now and I can’t stop talking about work to everyone who doesn’t work with me and my family says I’ve never sounded happier and everyone here is so funny and nice and talented. Even Sungho. My friend...Seokjin-hyung...he said I needed to find someone making music for the music and not for the money and I think I have.”

The quiet fury on Jungkook’s face melts away, bit by bit. “Then stay with us forever,” he says. “If you leave, Hobi-hyung’s tea will taste sad. And Eun will want you back very badly.”

Jimin buries a smile in Jungkook’s chest. The room around him is a riot of noise, the kaleidoscopic whirl of laughter and little pastries and Sungho playing drums with a pair of chopsticks while Hoseok beatboxes beside him, Namjoon smiling peacefully into his drink, Yoongi at his elbow, swaying sleepily, his expression the quiet of new music made. Jimin’s electric tea kettle gleams from the corner of the tiny kitchenette. His and Jungkook’s mugs have been secluded away inside the cupboards.

To Jimin, it seems an unexpected ending, but no less wonderful for it. He can fit himself snugly in the places between these people. Seoul has taken on a new tinge, not so stifling now. Beyond the windows, snow swirls down in eddies of bright white. Jimin likes the snow, particularly the first of the year, though it’s by no means a fixture from his childhood. He was born by the sea and he tells time by the number of summers he’s lived through. His strongest, most potent memories are of the ocean at night, when the wind is brine-imbued and heavy with heat. As a child he wanted an origin story like Aphrodite’s more than anything and he wanted it to be well-known, circulated like myth, whispered during his stages: Park Jimin, born from the foam of Busan, a white pearl dropped from a clamshell. The idol world is deep and clawing and cold, but there is good yet to be discovered, and much of it lives here. Here, where the mythology makes itself.
Jimin casts a slow, possessive look around the room, thinks: home away from home, and goes warm down to his toes.

KpopHerald @Kpop_Herald • 10m

Jungkook of @JK_twt accidentally sells out wine in Korea during a surprise V Live discussion of his new album and industry homophobia. For more details: https://bit.ly/2EhSeMD

◇ rather be dead than cool @tokkipatrol • 47m

jungkook please marriage me

jungkook gay @jungkookfeets • 53m

jungkook what would you do if we accidental kissed what would you do what wof you do if we acidebtal kiss... what would you do if this happened what would you do if we did this

守る @giyongchi • 1h

don’t know how this is gonna affect the way his album is received but goddamn am i proud of jungkook for publicly speaking out against homophobia in his industry

neli³65 ♡ @lesbiansforkook • 1h

WHEN JUNGKOOK SEES A HOMOPHobe HE FLOORS IT

Jungkook Updates @kookdates • 1h

“A little while ago I was talking to a friend about his experiences as a gay man in this industry. He’s faced a lot of backlash for it. It’s really horrible, isn’t it? Is it so hard to accept someone as they are? That is the most basic measure of human decency.” (1/4)

Jungkook Updates @kookdates • 1h

“If you don’t have that, you have nothing. Ah, seriously, I don’t get it. Everyone—well, everyone of age, haha—sit and have a drink with me. And afterwards find someone you love and remember to tell them so. The world can be unkind. Really, it’s not hard to be kind.” (2/4)

Jungkook Updates @kookdates • 1h
“In the new year, I’ll resolve to be kinder myself. Please join me. To hate someone for their sexuality...ah, it makes me angry thinking about it. I want to wish my friend a life free of hatred. That is my one wish of the evening.” (3/4)

Jungkook Updates @kookdates • 1h

“Hatred towards someone so bright—it’s unfair, really. And even worse to act on your hatred against them. We’re all going to be kinder, okay? Let’s make it a goal. Yes, it’s midnight here, haha. I was up thinking. Hello to Brazil. I’ll only have one glass tonight, okay?” (4/4)

He finds Jungkook by the coffee machine, caught under a dusting of early morning light.

He’s filling his mug with that dark, unsweetened brew, same as always. Jimin has half a mind to yank him out into the churning snow and kiss him stupid, torn between two temperatures. Jimin churns with it, like a snow globe set on its head. Jungkook is their Pantone palette unpacked, crowned with shades of startling blue. His black hair catches the color and throws it out like sparks from a flame. Jimin hears in his head Yoongi’s low drawl: the bluest of blues.

He hears himself saying: and even if I was, I wouldn’t do anything about it because I’m a professional.

He’s never wanted to go back on his word so wholly, so rapidly. He’s a kite carried by wind, fickle, full of feeling. He wants to shake apart and only just doesn’t. It’s a snarl in Jimin, all the things Jungkook calls out of him.

He thinks it must be either sheer daring or sheer stupidity that propels Jungkook—Achilles delivering Hector’s corpse to the mouth of Troy.

“Why did you do that,” says Jimin.

Jungkook looks up from sipping at his coffee’s froth. His eyes are the caught-out of their first meeting, but his reaction times have vastly improved since then. He’s already recovered himself; his mouth does something guilty or defiant. It sends a tremble of desire through Jimin, the gentlest ache.

“Do what,” Jungkook says.

“Why would you say those things,” Jimin tries again, “to two million live viewers?”

“Why were you watching?” Jungkook retorts.

Unbidden, Jimin laughs. “Jeon Jungkook,” he says, like a slap to the wrist.

“Do you follow me on V Live, Park Jimin?”

“It’s my last week here and you think self-sabotage will get me to stay?” Jimin murmurs, taking slow steps towards Jungkook.

“Well, no,” says Jungkook. “And it wasn’t self-sabotage. The wine just made me a lot more honest.”

“You’re really stupid,” Jimin says, frankly, foolishly, but he says it like he’s invoking the opposite.
Like his heart is trying to beat its way out of his chest so it can smother Jungkook with kisses, because it is. “Putting your neck on the line like that.”

Jungkook sets his coffee down and says, soberly, “Jimin-ssi. It’s no skin off my neck.”

“Let me feel, then,” Jimin whispers and closes the space between them, already reaching for his nape.

When the pads of his fingers connect, he shivers all over, though not from the cold. Or maybe it's Jungkook shivering. Or maybe it's a decision they reach unanimously—that the moment calls for shivery silence. No speaking. If Jimin were braver, this would be the part where he tilts his head into a kiss and takes slow, incessant sips from Jungkook's lips. Where he might feel out the twists and turns of his cupid's bow with the tip of his tongue.

Yes, he thinks, and eyes the mole just below Jungkook's mouth with interest. I want that.

It pulls at something in him, but he doesn't know how to be a neon sign of longing here and Jungkook's mouth still presents a kind of danger, the double-edged sword of desire. A kiss seals someone's fate in this world of theirs. Jimin won't sentence Jungkook to that. Not when he can't be sure it's what Jungkook wants.

He rests his head instead to Jungkook's sternum and feels the distant punch of his heartbeat. It's rabbit-quick.

Jimin smiles. He skates his fingers up and down Jungkook's nape. He tugs once at the dark, intimate tufts of hair growing there, overlong.

"It feels okay to me," he says and rubs mindless shapes into the skin.

"Yeah," Jungkook croaks. “I told you.”

“Don’t ever do that again,” Jimin murmurs. “I appreciate it, I do. But...not at the risk of your own career. Not at the risk of—of public condemnation, not when the whole world already has its eye on you and you’re on the brink of something huge. The height of something huge. Not the drop. And not, Jeon Jungkook-ssi—ever—to be a good ally or a good friend to me. That's not what I want from you, okay? I—”

“Hyung,” Jungkook says, with great patience. “I’m gay.”

“And then you popped a confetti cannon and rode him into a mattress,” Seokjin says. “That’s the next part in the story, right? Please tell me I’m right. Jimin-ssi, if I’m not right, I might actually exchange your Christmas gift for a Cone of Shame and make you wear it from now on.”

“Look at his face,” says Taehyung, waving a hand in Jimin’s direction. “Does that look like post-coital glow to you? No. That is deep-seated sexual blockage. That is dangerous levels of dick deficiency, Jin-ah. You’re sitting on a mattress that has not felt the loins of a lover in the last six months. All the ghosts in this apartment have left because they got bored of Jimin not having hot sex for them to spy on.”

Seokjin hums. “Yeah, you need your sexual chakras realigned,” he says to Jimin, like he’s doling out a medical diagnosis. “You need to be fucked so good you end up in a parallel universe and have to plot your way back home like a time traveler with nothing at your aid but the condoms you forgot to take out of your pocket at the time.”
Jimin sips coolly at his wine. “Are you done.”

Seokjin slams his fist down against Jimin’s nightstand, so hard that it rattles his bedside lamp, the shade gone crooked. “Yes,” he says, shortly.

Taehyung strokes Seokjin’s thigh in spousal support.

“Good,” Jimin says, setting his glass of wine down with a dull clink, “because I was very close to telling Jeon Jungkook to whisk me away to Sweden where I’ll never have to deal with either of you again.”

Taehyung and Seokjin squint at Jimin where they’re propped against his upholstered headboard like the cover for a terrible romantic comedy, in a look so profoundly piercing it makes the knobs of Jimin’s spine itch. Probably searching him for truth. They share a silent glance that seems to communicate their general agreement on the matter in ten seconds or less.

Taehyung turns to make pitying cat eyes at Jimin. His blinks his thick lashes and says, “You’re in love, aren’t you?”

Afterwards, Jimin reels like he’s just disembarked from a rollercoaster.

Days after, and he’s still reeling.

It’s the same slow curl of confusion he’d felt moments before connecting Jeon Jungkook to NOIZE, all the news coverage from another era, the legal chaos and broken-up boy bands.

Jeon Jungkook, gay.

It’s not that he’d ruled it impossible. He just hadn’t let himself entertain the idea, in concrete terms. Had blocked it out. Banished it to the back of his mind, where dreams and desires went to die.

And now it’s real and everything is unraveling. It still feels raw somehow, wrapped in careful ropes of gauze. Jimin is scared to touch it. He’s scared blood will well up where his finger’s been. He’s sorry the next part of the story isn’t confetti and sex. If only, he thinks, it could be so simple.

For the following three days he’d taken pains to avoid Jungkook, flustered by all the new possibilities this opened up. By the nearness of his own desire, mostly, now pushed up against the glass like a caged creature counting down to mealtime. He ducked inside unused studios when he caught sight of Jungkook coming down a corridor. He kept out of the break room at all costs, forsaking tea in favor of the water dispenser by Yoongi’s studio. He passed out on Namjoon’s velvet loveseat and woke to the muted glow of his hyung’s laptop left abandoned by his desk, and also to Jungkook’s head bowed over his tablet where he was sketching quietly on the floor with a little stylus and an eyebrow furrow.

His dark hair hung over his eyes and his mouth was a pout of concentration. The sight of him within arm’s reach, silent and sleep-soaked and lovely, was so relieving after abstaining for 72 straight hours that Jimin’s mouth leapt into action immediately, without consulting his brain first.

His “Jungkook-ah?” came out scratchy, thick with sleep, thoughtless and soft-sounding.

It sent Jungkook into total and absolute stillness. The watery bridge beneath his stylus remained motionless, and unshaded.
“I dreamt of you,” Jimin whispered, because he had, and it was still caught somewhere in his lashes.

He’d dreamt of Jungkook and he’d woken up wearing his crush like the imprint of a pillow, for the first time visible to the naked eye. Embarrassing, but true. The realization was carbonated bubbles in his belly. He hid a blush in his arms, toes wiggling guiltily. He couldn’t stop kissing Jungkook in his dreams.

After an eternity of silence, Jungkook said, “What did dream me do?”

“Mm,” Jimin said, lifting his blushing face to squint consideringly at Jungkook. “You carried me to Yoongi-hyung’s much softer couch because I was too lazy to use my legs.”

That drew a laugh from Jungkook. He set his things down, stood, then moved to scoop Jimin up like a baby, or a bride, showing no signs of effort or exertion.

Jimin went warm with it. He rested his cheek against Jungkook’s heart, because it was fast becoming one of his favorite haunts. Better even than Namjoon’s RKive. He fell asleep there, lulled by the quiet, measured throb, and was startled awake again as he was gently deposited on a new flat service.

His eyes flew open, but there was no light to go by. Only darkness. Panic coursed through Jimin.

“Hyung,” Jungkook said, trying to pry Jimin’s fist from his shirtfront.

“Guk-ah?” Jimin whispered into the dark.

“Yeah,” Jungkook rasped. “You’re okay.”

“C’mere,” Jimin slurred, fingers skating over the pulse at his throat.

“I am here.”

“Where?”

“That’s my face. Why are you giggling, you little monster?”

“I like your cheeks.”

A huff. “Thanks. I like yours, too.”

“And I like your lips.”

“Jimin-ssi.”

“And the bridge of your nose…”

“Okay, sleepy hyung. Are you gonna stay up babbling about how hot I am for much longer? Because I might need to get comfortable, if that’s the case.”

Jimin laughed and felt his way over Jungkook’s answering smile, fingertips to lips. “I didn’t say you were hot.”

“Your hands are saying quite a lot right now, Jimin-ssi.”

Jimin stroked over Jungkook’s cheek in the dark. “Ah, you’re so soft.”
“Wouldn’t it be funny,” whispered Jungkook, “if Yoongi-hyung was hiding somewhere in here right now and listening to all of this?”

Jimin ignored this and continued stroking.

“Jimin.”

“Mm.”

“Okay, now I know you’re really out of it. C’mon. Lay back. Do you want a blanket?”

“Yes,” Jimin said, and draped Jungkook’s arm over his body.

“That’s not a blanket, Jimin-ssi.”

“I’ve decided that it is.”

“This one is warmer—”

“I like mine better.”

Jungkook laughed and the expelled breath sent Jimin’s bangs into his face. “Are you gonna sleep now?”

“Yes,” Jimin said. “Jungkook-ah, in my dream—”

“Tell me tomorrow, hyung. When you’re awake.”

“I won’t remember then,” Jimin whined.

A pause. “Then you’ll just have to dream about me again.”

Jimin’s heart flipped over, wild with possibility. “Okay...okay. I will. And I won’t hide from you anymore, I promise. I was just a little scared, Jungkook-ah, but if you’re not then I won’t be either.”

“Good,” Jungkook whispered, and sleep swallowed Jimin.

☽

“It’s okay to be in love,” Seokjin says. “But it’s absolutely not okay to be a virgin.”

Jimin gets up to repeatedly thump him in the face with one of his pillows while Seokjin giggles hysterically and flails around on his bed.

“So we’ve misread you then?” Taehyung says, eyes widening behind his glasses. “It’s not your sex chakras, but your love chakras?”

“I can’t say I didn’t see it coming,” says Seokjin. He then adds: “Virgin.”

Jimin brings his pillow down against Seokjin’s face, again, to shut him up.

He doesn’t say yes, but the nervous energy brimming over and into his body language is a sure thing. It’s light through fog, pointed unerringly towards Jeon Jungkook. It’s the gravity that holds the moon in the circle of Earth’s arms. It’s as damning as a confession.

Jimin moves to drain his wine glass and sets off for his kitchen at a clip. His little Greek chorus
follows at his heels.

“I don’t know if this is cause for celebration,” Seokjin says along the way, “or commiseration. You’re officially off the market, but you’re in big, musically-gifted hands, so can we really mourn the loss?”

“I’m sorry I misjudged your spiritual energy wheels,” Taehyung says while Jimin is rinsing his wine glass at the sink. “In my defense, you seemed horny.”

“I always seem horny,” Jimin counters. “My Mars is in Scorpio.”

Seokjin says, “You rarely seem horny in the heart. Heart-horny. You’re heart-horny! Your heart is horny for Jungkook! Did I or did I not predict this?”

Taehyung wraps his arms around Jimin from behind and fits his chin to the place where Jimin’s throat becomes Jimin’s shoulder. “Please tell me before you decide to move to Sweden to have his blue-eyed babies. I need time to get used to the idea of an international move. Seokjinnie and I would have to figure out how to ship the bathtub...ah, there is so much to consider!”

“I don’t think that would go over well with Jungkook anyway,” Jimin says, then scrambles to add: "Wait, we're not even dating! Stop bringing up Sweden!"

“Knowing you, he’s already wrapped around your chubby little pinky like a wedding ring,” Seokjin says.

“We are not married and wedding rings don't go on pinkies.”

"How do you know that?" Seokjin exclaims. "Maybe the rules are different in Sweden!"

“Not married yet!” Taehyung says. “I want permission to haze him!”

“No! Absolutely not!” Jimin reaches backwards to flick sink water at Taehyung, in the spirit of Jeon Jungkook. “He’s a good guy! The best, even! He doesn’t need to be hazed or vetted, especially not when he was formally recommended to me by your boyfriend!”

“I thought I was the best!” Taehyung says, then shrinks back like a wet cat or a melting witch. “Ah! I just got my hair permed for the exhibition, stop it!”

Seokjin leans attractively against the counter, which isn’t hard to do when you’re owner of the face voted ‘Most Handsome In South Korea’ three years running. “Jimin-ah, I only have one question,” he says. “Loving Jungkook doesn’t make you miserable, does it?”

Jimin stops, hand frozen around the stem of his glass. Sink water fills then sloshes from the rim. “No,” he says, and sets it gently down. He turns the tap off, eyes averted. “No, not at all. He's...he makes me warm, hyung.”

“Then I’m happy you’ve found him,” Seokjin says, eyes twinkling. “And I’d love to get to know him over lamb skewers sometime. Preferably not at your Swedish wedding reception.”

"I would never serve that at a reception," Jimin mutters. "Oh, but spicy rice cakes..."

Taehyung shakes off his sulkiness to say, “I guess I'm glad he helped you find your passion again. And I can’t hate him, if you’ve decided you love him. But if he breaks your horny little heart, I will wring his neck like a towel. That’s a promise.”
Jimin turns in Taehyung's arms and his face thuds softly against a clavicle. “Taehyungie,” he says into his big, beige Chesterfield coat. “He wants to come to Paris with us someday.”

“I’ll allow it,” Taehyung says, after a considerable pause, “if he impresses me enough.”

“I want to kiss him under the Eiffel Tower,” Jimin continues apologetically. “I want you to take a picture of it for my Instagram.”

“Gross,” Taehyung says, with delight. “And overdone. How about the Arc de Triomphe or Latin Quarter instead?”

Jimin nods mutely, too ecstatic to speak.

Taehyung’s laugh is the warm of Jimin’s first summer in Seoul. “Then it’s settled. Now can we go back to our month-long sleepovers?”

“Taehyung-ah,” Jimin says, muffled by fabric. “Seokjin-hyung...”

“Jimin-ah,” Taehyung and Seokjin say, in unison.

“Thank you,” Jimin mumbles, gripping hard at his suede collar with both hands.

“Hey,” Taehyung says. “Don’t say it like you owe us one. Never. You never owe us, okay? This is what we signed up for, when we decided to love you forever.”

“But,” Jimin begins.

Taehyung shakes his head vehemently and Jimin feels it down his wrists. “You held my hand through my first ear piercing,” he says. “You cuddled me when my hamster died and I was inconsolable. You did overtime with me in secret when I still wanted to be an idol. You’re my best friend. You don’t owe me anything. We’re beautiful and symbiotic, like your dad explained. Like tea and the mouths it feeds.”

“I take so much,” Jimin whispers.

Taehyung laughs at that, actually laughs, one of his loud, glittering guffaws. “If you didn’t, I think you’d die, Jimin-ah. You’re the most selfless person I know. You give so much of yourself away. For once, I think you’ve found someone who will return what you give tenfold.”

Jimin reaches for Seokjin over Taehyung’s shoulder and feels a broad hand grip his back.

“Stay with him for a while,” Taehyung whispers. “And stay with us always.”

“Always,” Seokjin echoes.

“Always,” Jimin murmurs, and slowly pulls back.

“Okay,” Taehyung says, sounding recharged, "that’s enough for one night. If we don't hurry, we'll be late to my own opening."

"Thank god," Seokjin says. "My eye was starting to twitch from going so long without calling you a virgin."

Jimin sends Seokjin a glare full of playful promise and tugs once at Taehyung’s nape. "Let’s go look at art, you lovebirds."
A thin coat of ice covers the city—at first a slow hardening, then quicker, layers of clear to catch
and corrupt slices of Seoul, like fairy tale looking glass or warped little windows—and Jimin
breaks out in goosebumps beneath it.

He bundles up against the chill with Jungkook in mind. In his head, his stern voice says, aren’t you
cold? and dream Jimin wiggles suggestively until dream Jungkook invents an entirely new way of
warming him up. He puts his hands and tongue to good use. Jimin cuts the daydream short with a
flustered cough and shrugs on a hooded parka while Taehyung watches, eyebrows raised.

He pulls on a beanie and mittens with faux-fur lining next—recently overnighted—and stuffs his
socked feet into a pair of lace-up boots that have been collecting dust in his closet over the last
eight months, for the pure fact that Jimin prefers slip-on shoes. Ease of entry and ease of exit:
simple to kick off when he decides he wants to dance, sometimes during spontaneous studio
sessions, sometimes during spur-of-the-moment road trips to the nearest beach (which isn’t ever all
that near at all), followed by a barefoot wade into the cool water. It’s too cold for that now, but the
thought is nice enough to mourn anyway.

Jimin snags his keys, locks his front door, and follows Seokjin and Taehyung, linked at the arm,
out into the snow. The sight of them stuck together like glue doesn’t even ache anymore. Instead, it
prompts further butterfly-infested Jungkook daydreams. Jimin’s face feels hot the rest of the way
over.

He tracks slush into Taehyung’s art exhibition and takes it back out with him as the night comes to
a close, extricated at last from a knot of his fawning admirers, all clamoring for a glimpse of
Taehyung in his overcoat and loose loafers, heel-counters folded down by his bare feet. He looks
like the most effortless art director to walk off a well-lit set after twelve straight hours of shooting.
He’s the loveliest tiger Jimin’s ever seen.

He can’t even blame the giggling undergraduates lingering by the bar cart. Taehyung is a sight to
behold and his work is single to none. Tonight, he’s displayed some of his best interdisciplinary
pieces: blown-up 35mm photographs of rare vistas from around the world that have been painted
over with acrylics, paintings made with the help of high fashion magazine cut-outs, videos spliced
together using an intuitive computer software that mimics and overlays Taehyung’s handwriting
and doodles. A painting of a sun-drenched Jimin has been split down the middle by a photograph
taken of him in the dead of night. His photographed cheek is carved out of shadows. His painted
cheek gleams with gold.

The result is pure magic.

Jimin slips out the back with a little wave to Seokjin, who has appointed himself Taehyung’s
personal photographer for the night and keeps silently rearranging him under the soft studio lights.
Taehyung is too busy laughing with a curly-haired woman wearing a blazer to notice Jimin’s exit,
but he’s been made aware beforehand anyway. Jimin runs on subway cycles, not sleep.

Outside, he tugs his phone from his fuzzy coat pocket and opens KakaoTalk.
you are so magical
please let me keep you forever
sold!
to my best bidder 😊
i’m very proud of you
save me some champagne
yes yes
kiss your idol for me and save me a baby or two
i want to be a godfather
and best man!

this is not up for debate, jimin-ah

Jimin laughs and stashes his phone, thrown back into a world of drizzle and snowmelt. It rains and
the rain freezes on contact, dripping in dark blue shards from awnings and eaves. The trees around
him have been dressed up in twinkly fairy lights. Each bulb is a little pinprick of white-gold, like
the illusion or imitation of stars. They’re as bright as fireflies in the falling dark.

Jimin pulls his hood up over his head and thinks about plucking them free like grains of French sea
salt, tucked behind the tongue till they dissolve. If only kisses could be so secret. If only real
Jungkook asked for them like dream Jungkook.

He stands on the corner of Samseong-ro and tries to rub feeling back into his cheeks with his
mittened hands, regretting for a moment leaving the rich warmth of Taehyung’s art studio, with its
fizzy champagne flutes and starry-eyed art undergraduates. Jimin feels chapped, battered by wind
and sleet, so he takes momentary shelter under the awning of a bookshop glowing warmly through
its glass windows.

He considers for a moment—bus or subway home?—then props his foot up against a filigreed
chair to tighten his laces, thinking: subway is faster, and also: I’ll have to run, and finally: why
didn’t I bring a face mask for the cold? The bus stop beside him advertises an award show shot of
an idol hiding a shy smile behind tattooed knuckles. The HD photo catches Jimin’s eye.

He blinks and the dark image resolves itself into Jungkook, in a fitted suit, with frosted tips and
indigo undershirt. His ear cartilage is covered in piercings. Below him sit the words JEON
JUNGKOOK, OUR BLUE DREAM, SINCE 1997.

“Oh my god,” Jimin says, giddily, and feels around for his phone.

He lowers his laced-up foot and hurries back into the cold only to be launched backwards by the
weight of someone on the shared footpath smashing into him. Their legs snap, and tangle. Jimin
topples over one of the metal chairs with a birdlike yelp. He goes down hard and takes the culprit
with him, until they’re sprawled out on the icy concrete and the rush hour foot traffic is sending
them judgmental looks from behind beanies and big hoodies.
Jimin tries unsuccessfully to sit up, says, “Ow, I,” as he registers a dull throb of pain in the general area of his ass, and then the rest of the sentence dies on his tongue.

The air he pulls into his lungs is frigid when Jungkook’s eyes swim out at him from the darkening gloom and also from behind a black face mask. They’re doe-wide. Jimin thinks, by now, he’d know them anywhere, under stage lighting or butter yellow studio bulbs, dusked or dawned, in laughter and in despair, creased and closed and blinking innocently. They’re eyes that have been burned into his memory, almost without his meaning to.

“You,” Jimin says, half-accusation, half-exuberance.

Jungkook’s eyes round in a smile, crowfooted at the corners.

“So you do fall!” Jimin tries to slide a reprimanding hand down Jungkook’s coat and ends up fist ing the dark hair sticking past his cap instead, says, a little slyly, a lot shyly: “Liar.”

“Jimin-ssi, that was entirely your fault,” Jungkook says, as he begins the painstaking process of untangling their limbs. “You weren’t looking where you were going.”

“You were going where I was looking, actually,” Jimin says. Then he remembers, and his smile turns devilish. “And, if I’m being honest, I was distracted by a very enticing bus stop ad.”

Jungkook bends to help Jimin to his feet. “Is that so?”

Jimin wraps his arms around Jungkook’s neck like a baby and beams as he’s righted. “Yes.”

The look on his face must be enough to pique Jungkook’s interest, because he throws a quick look over his shoulder then goes, “Aish,” like Jimin has just embarrassed him terribly.

Jimin laughs so hard he has to hang onto Jungkook with all his might, lest he go crashing back to the cold concrete. “Move, let me—I want a picture with my blue dream Jungkookie,” he coos, while Jungkook blushes miserably. “Who let you dye your hair like that, huh?”

“That picture is from SBS Gayo Daejeon last year,” Jungkook says. “Are you making fun of me, Jimin-ssi? Should we revisit your old ballet pictures?”

“No, no,” Jimin says, laughing harder, then letting out a squeak of surprise when Jungkook suddenly sweeps him off his feet and tilts him downward, a foot from the ground in something of a silent threat. “J–Jeon Jungkook, Jeon Jungkook, no—no—wait, please!”

Jungkook grins as Jimin grips him hard around the neck with his icy palms, begging between giggles. “Hyung, why are your hands so cold?”

“Ah,” Jimin says, and twists a little to peer sadly at the floor where his mittens lay forgotten beneath one of the filigreed chairs. “My mittens fell off. I bought them too big”

It’s almost comical how quickly Jungkook scrambles to let him down, except he flattens one hand to the small of Jimin’s back, restricting his movements to a sideways inch or two. He uses the other to scoop up the mittens. “Come here, come here,” Jungkook is saying, even though Jimin is as close to ‘here’ as is currently possible.

He wriggles in a little closer, hoping Jungkook’s jacket will swallow him somehow.

“Let me see your hands,” Jungkook says, then adds, somewhat disapprovingly, "They're too tiny."
“They’re fine, Jeon Jungkook-ssi,” Jimin says, snatching his mittens back. He slides them on, fingers wiggling into the warmth. “Look, I’m all better now.”

“They’ll fall off, if you don’t take good care of them,” Jungkook says, and even looks like he means it. He tugs Jimin’s black cat beanie lower, so that the earflaps hang near his chin. “Are you cold?”

“Just a little,” Jimin says teasingly, grinning pink-nosed and pink-cheeked and pink-everything all over.

“Come on. We’ll warm up inside,” Jungkook says, pulling Jimin along in the direction of a corner shop lit red as a lantern, a flicker of flame on a dying day. “Why are you standing out in the cold anyway?”

Jimin sniffs, which further chills his nostrils. “Let me ask you the same thing.”

“I was walking, actually, which is what people do when they have a set destination,” Jungkook says. “I’ve been getting film developed and doing a little Christmas shopping.”

Jimin stares at the back of his head in surprise. His hair has been hidden away inside a black ball cap, except where a little sticks out past the backstrap, like plumage. There’s a bundle of shopping bags in the hand he isn’t using to yank on Jimin’s jacket cuff. “Should you be heading home, then?”

“No, I should be making sure your fingers aren’t going to freeze off,” Jungkook says, and pulls Jimin through the doors of a warm, well-lit BBQ place. “Are you hungry?”

“Jungkook-ssi,” Jimin says, haltingly, and when Jungkook twists around at the neck, throwing a curious look back at him, Jimin goes even pinker and tugs at Jungkook’s fingers, saying, “Yes, thank you.”

Jungkook says, “Good,” and then he spends seven torturous minutes massaging Jimin’s bare hands in the waiting area of the restaurant, until Jimin is woozy with tingles and leaning heavily against him, face smooshed into the fine fabric of his black trench coat. “You didn’t answer my question.”

“You didn’t pose one.”

Jungkook laughs, quiet near Jimin’s ear. “I asked why you were standing outside.”

Jimin groans and grinds his face into Jungkook’s shoulder, palms throbbing with tiny fingerprints of pressure. “Yeah.”

Jungkook laughs, again. “That’s still not an answer, Jimin-ssi.”

“Mmm,” Jimin hums into Jungkook’s arm and is saved by the sudden arrival of their waiter, who leads them through the maze of tables to a corner booth set against a wall of thin, smooth trees. “Your stage is very soon. How do you feel?”

Jungkook slides in after Jimin so that they’re sitting squished together at the thigh, which Jimin thinks is very anti-date etiquette but also very endearing. “Your contract ends very soon. Two days to be exact. How do you feel?”

Jimin smiles and opens his menu. “Jeon Jungkook-ssi, are you buying me dinner to convince me to renew my contract?”
“Yes,” Jungkook says unrepentantly. “Is it working?”

Jimin hides his giggling face behind his menu. He tells himself it’s not a date, because the terms haven’t been set, and if it’s bribery Jungkook is employing, Jimin will gladly play along, particularly where black pork belly is concerned. He twists on the burner and starts laying out their cuts as soon as they’re served, clinking his tongs to Jungkook’s in the gesture for *cheers, I’m very hungry!*

“Soju?”

Jimin nods his head vigorously.

Jungkook turns his smile on their waiter and two chilled bottles are immediately brought out.

Jimin downs his first in one swallow. “Isn’t it strange that we’re sitting here together? Both from Busan, both auditioned for NOIZE, both suffered and fell apart for it, for a little while. And now...pushed back together years later, at the same indie idol company?”

Jungkook says, “I don’t think it’s that strange,” and shrugs into his first shot. “We would have always found our way to each other.”

Jimin rotates a little in their leather booth, setting his chin in his hands to consider Jungkook. “How?”

“I just think it was always meant to happen,” Jungkook says, and flips Jimin’s meat for him. “Don’t you?”

“No,” Jimin says, startling himself. “I don’t think it was meant to be so much as...suggested.”

Jungkook takes a moment to meditate on that. “I have to believe that the world around me is made up of predetermined decisions, and paths, lives that we lead and discard before moving on to the next...karmic purchases and karmic returns,” he says. “Because if I do, then that means I’m not lost in the entropy of it all. I have meaning and purpose and someone, somewhere, needs me to make it to tomorrow, to keep getting better at what I do, to know that the things I create matter. And if they don’t need me to, then I’ll simply cease to exist, and that will be that.”

Jimin hums, then says, stubborn and argumentative: “I don’t believe that.”

“Hyung,” Jungkook says, and lays out his pork belly with metal tongs, a dull clink and hiss. “I’d be shocked if you did.”

“And I’ll fight you on it,” Jimin adds.

Jungkook’s smile is outlined, doubled, a photo negative thrown into shadow by the flicker of their table’s candle. “Tell me why.”

“You want to have no say in the matter, but you do. This I believe firmly,” Jimin says, because everything that he believes he believes with firmness, like a mother’s bird-sharp warning call on a cold, sickly day, like his father’s weathered hand held to the back of his head to break his first fall. His brother thrown from his two-wheel bike, then launched back to his feet with a dazzling little laugh, like he could shake off the greatest hurt with grace, like blood meant nothing to a boy with reason to keep going.

Some people, they grow up being told they’re fine-boned, big-boned, raw-boned. Jimin grew up firm-boned, bound to and discharged from his choices as whim struck. Growing up his parents
gave him legroom and with it he wriggled freely. Cradle the choices you make close to the chest and you’ll never regret them. They’ll fuse with your heart, like melted-down metal. This is what he was taught.

If fate kept him afloat, it was only in the intervening moments between big decisions that Jimin had seized, or stomped into the ground. He had forged this path himself. This, he believed firmly. He was swimming in an ocean of his own making and beyond the reach of the water, the sky shone the burnished reds and oranges of Bengal fur, of the flicker of their little candle.

He says, “I think fate has left me little markers, like—like a magical scavenger hunt! All over the world, I’ve been left moments or people or places that I need to find, to unlock something lovely and unexpected. But there’s no guarantee that I’ll get to any number of them. People like Taehyung-ah, they were designed to fit with me, we’re like cosmic daisy chains, together we’re better and more beautiful, but the only reason he’s in my life is because he found me and sat with me in school when I had no one else. It’s like that, Jeon Jungkook-ssi. Fate isn’t writing your story, it’s offering you suggestions and waiting to see what you’ll do with them.”

Jungkook checks his meat and sees that it’s past the point of browning, blood burned away. He sets it aside, cuts into it with the scissors they’ve been left, says, “You really believe you have a hundred Taehyungs waiting to be found?”

“Well, no...” Jimin admits. “Taehyung is one of a kind. He’s my be-all-end-all. But I have people fate wants me to find, that are integral to my growth and my happiness.”

“And if fate wants it, really wants it, and you’re taking too long, you don’t think it’d be easier for it to just intervene, set something in stone? You’re making fate out to be pretty lazy, Jimin-ssi. I think the system is more efficient than this,” Jungkook says, with affection.

“That’s just it! Fate has about seven billion people to preside over, so efficiency has to be impossible!” Jimin bursts out. “Don’t you get it? Entropy is part of the human condition. It’s what makes it so hard to check items off of your magical scavenger hunt list. How can you predetermine something that has no mathematical equivalent, that’s completely random? Something based on chance?”

“It may look random on the surface, but we can’t prove that it is,” Jungkook argues. “That’s the point of magic. There’s no way to untangle it. Maybe what looks random to you is actually based on accrued debt and everything you’re getting right now is exactly what you deserve.”

“So it’s either perfect order or absolute chaos,” Jimin says. “That’s where we stand?”

Jungkook shrugs. He’s wrapping chunks of cooked meat in sesame leaf, his tattooed fingers cautious and painstaking. “I think at the beginning of time, Jimin-ssi, fate decided you would have this conversation with me, and now you’re having it. And I also think fate wants you to agree with me on this one.”

Jimin swats at Jungkook. “If fate wanted that, according to your logic, then I’d already agree. And I don’t. And I won’t.”

Jungkook laughs, says, “I’m glad that you don’t, hyung. It’s one of my favorite things about you.”

Warm and wriggling, Jimin hooks his ankle through Jungkook’s beneath the table, says, “For now and forever, I’m going to take ownership of my choices and any consequences that may come with them,” which means, I choose you and you know it, and Jungkook looks over at him in the creamy candelit colors of night like he’s glimpsing a rare, radiation-bright sunset, or a blood moon—once
in a lifetime, or worthy of that treatment, if nothing else.

After dinner, Jungkook hails and shares a taxi with Jimin, then insists on walking him up to his apartment, despite Jimin’s protests that he’s not too drunk and can probably definitely make it up the five flights of stairs all by himself.

None of this is true.

During the trek, Jimin sticks to the inside of the winding stairwell, very aware of his distance to the metal railing. He makes it a point not to look in that direction, because doing so will send his belly plummeting towards his toes. That drop—meters of height made into miles by his frightened, soju-soaked brain.

Jungkook steps onto the landing beside him and pauses, finally reading Jimin’s body language for what it is. “Hyung?” he says.

“I’m fine,” Jimin insists, circling slowly towards the next block of cement stairs, one hand tracing his way with the wall as a guide.

“Are you feeling sick? Is it the alcohol?” Concern colors Jungkook’s words. “Do you need a—”

The heel of Jimin’s boot catches on the next step and he feels himself flung backwards in time and space, moments from meeting certain demise. The air slices out of his mouth. He makes to let out a yelp but before it can escape, he’s been caught soundly around the waist by a set of sturdy arms. His breath gets stuck in his throat on the way out, knocked askew.

“Hyung,” Jungkook says, lifting Jimin bodily by his waist. He sets him back down on solid ground at the next landing and Jimin turns in his arms, eyes wide with gratitude. “Be careful.”

“I might have a phobia,” Jimin admits, hands fisting anxiously in Jungkook’s trench coat. His knuckles are white with tension. “Of heights. It’s not so bad. Except...the soju.”

Jungkook huffs and it stirs Jimin’s hair, tickling at his neck. He turns his face into Jungkook’s chest to avoid having to look over the edge of the railing to that plunging drop. “And you live in a walk-up apartment with no elevator,” he says, like he knows and loves Jimin’s contradictions.

Jimin feels compelled to defend himself anyway.

“The views are pretty,” he says into the fabric of Jungkook’s turtleneck. He smells like the gentle surge of fabric softener. “I like waking up to the sun breaking over buildings. And the carpet is soft and fuzzy, so I don’t have to wear socks around the apartment. My dad says bare feet is the first way to catch a cold. And there’s a hotteok stand on this street that I love. They make them so soft and syrupy and they’re a nice treat after a long day at work. I like eating them on this little bench while the sun goes down, right by—ahi, Jeon Jungkook—!”

“Ah, Park Jimin,” Jungkook returns, a teasing lilt to his voice, as he lifts Jimin into the air like a baby koala.

“You can’t, you can’t,” Jimin gasps, arms flying around Jungkook’s neck. “You’ll drop me! I don’t want to die, please, I can walk—!”

“I won’t drop you. You weigh nothing,” Jungkook says with conviction, and forces Jimin’s head down, face turned into his neck. “Close your eyes and imagine you’re somewhere else.”
Jimin locks his legs around Jungkook’s waist and breathes through his fright, chest tight and aching. He’s clinging to Jungkook so hard he half-fears his hands will come away clutching wads of dark hair, but the tug to his scalp only makes Jungkook readjust his grip on Jimin, bouncing him a little in his arms to get a better hold on his waist.

Jimin yells unintelligibly into Jungkook’s neck and Jungkook laughs gleefully.

“You’re so mean to me!” Jimin says, pounding a small fist against Jungkook’s shoulder, which shakes with laughter.

“Says the mighty choreographer, most feared in all the realms,” Jungkook says.


“You know,” Jungkook says. “I thought plying you with alcohol would get you to drop honorifics around me, but so far it’s not working. Do you only do that right when you wake up?”

“Jeon Jungkook—ah!” Jimin yelps, as he’s readjusted again, Jungkook snaking a muscular arm beneath his thighs.

“That works,” Jungkook says, smugly.

“I’m going to kill you,” Jimin swears into the skin of his throat.

“At the moment, you’re more likely to end up giving me a hickey, I think.”

For that, Jimin sinks his teeth vengefully into Jungkook’s neck, giving a tiny growl of disapproval. Jungkook takes a jagged step forward and swears, narrowly avoiding colliding with the wall. He rights himself, regaining his balance, and starts forward again, ascending the stairs at a much brisker pace. The heavy clomp of his boots echoes through the stairwell.

“That’s called playing dirty, Jimin-ssi,” he says.

“Hey—slow down!”

“What’s the magic word?”

“Jungkook-ah, please,” Jimin begs, curled into a tight ball around Jungkook, face hidden.

“Open your eyes.”

Jimin shakes his head no, heart thumping unsteadily. From fear or affection, he doesn’t know.

“Jimin-ah,” Jungkook says quietly. “I can’t drop you off at your door if I don’t know which one is yours.”

Jimin lifts his head, glancing around uncertainly. At some point, they’ve left the stairwell. They’re now planted on floor five, among the cornflower blue carpet and gold sconces. Jimin can see the silvered numbers affixed to his black door, only feet away: 513. A feeling of fresh vertigo comes over him, at the realization that he’s dragged an idol into the cavern of his living quarters. Jeon Jungkook, against the chipping paint. The intimacy of it is an unexpected shock to the system.

Jimin feels his ears tingling with heat and looks down.

Jungkook peers up at him and Jimin’s heart stutters, butterfly-quick. “This is the right floor?”
“Yes,” he murmurs, unhooking his legs and dropping them safely to the floor. “Thank you.”

Jungkook’s hands linger at Jimin’s waist, like he’s afraid a sudden fainting spell will sweep him off his feet.

Jimin begins walking backwards towards his door, breaking Jungkook’s hold on him. Jungkook’s hands drop back down to his sides, slowly. Jimin doesn’t comment, tongue-tied, his waist tingling sadly at the loss. He claps his hands politely behind his back, casts around for something intelligent to say, mind racing.

“Okay.” That should do it. “I should be fine from here.”

Jungkook is still following him towards his door, looking amused.

“Jeon Jungkook-ssi, I think I can walk myself the two feet to my door,” Jimin says wryly.

A small smile pulls at Jungkook’s mouth. He sticks his hands in his coat pockets and halts a foot from Jimin’s door, head tilting inquisitively. “Do you have a body in there I’m not supposed to see?”

Jimin half-laughs, half-sighs, leaning back against his locked door. He gropes around blindly for the doorknob, finding and clutching it. The cool metal grounds him, in some small manner. He tries to contain the longing clawing its way up his throat, drawn out of hiding by the sight of Jungkook in his tiny, low-lit corridor, in a baseball cap and black outerwear. It hurts not to touch. It hurts to have to stare.

“If I did, I wouldn’t tell you,” Jimin murmurs. He slips his keys from the back pocket of his pants and turns to unlock his door. “But rest assured, I have no intention of implicating you in my crimes. Ah...I’m too tipsy for this...”

Jungkook’s big, tattooed hand closes carefully over Jimin’s. A quiet gasp leaves Jimin’s mouth. Jungkook gets a grip on the key, shimmies it around until it clicks into place, and twists, pushing Jimin’s door open. Jimin stands there, enfolded in his arms, heart hammering unevenly. He looks down his chin at their hands, still tangled together, the contrast between Jimin’s short, dainty fingers layered with rings and Jungkook’s, long and big-knuckled and bearing the letters for the word GOLD across each knuckle.

“Thank you,” Jimin says, a little unsteadily.

“Okay?” Jungkook murmurs.

“Yes,” Jimin says, twisting around. “Yes, thank you, I’m not drunk.”

Jungkook raises his eyebrows at that.

“I’m—could drink you under the table,” Jimin adds, flustered. He can feel his ears turning red. “Good night and goodbye.”

That prompts a little laugh from Jungkook. “Good night and goodbye?”

Jimin thinks: though I want to lick you like a popsicle, I cannot in good conscience sleep with you, Jeon Jungkook, it’s on the tip of his tongue and everything, but when he turns halfway through his doorway and sees Jungkook standing on his stoop in that sweeping trench coat and wool turtleneck, beautiful and big-eyed, what ends up coming out is, “Do you want to come inside for coffee?”
Jimin flushes, tongue thick in his mouth.

"Hyung," Jungkook says, very gently. "Thanks for hanging out with me tonight."

Jimin, who dislikes feeling small and uncertain, curls his arms around his midsection. The well of warm feelings he harbors for Jungkook burbles unhappily, like he’s been slighted somehow. Jimin doesn’t wear rejection well.

“Oh,” he says, staring down at his feet. With some difficulty, he steps on his heels to remove his boots and clumsily kicks them off in the direction of the kitchen, deepening his and Jungkook’s height difference. Jimin blinks down at his socked toes. "Of course."

“Aish,” Jungkook mutters and Jimin looks up, jeans cuffed and ankles bare. Jungkook is staring down at his feet, too. “I’m exercising a lot of restraint right now, you know.”

Jimin takes a moment to process that, and fails. "Huh?"

“Close your door, Jimin-ah,” Jungkook says, a low warning note in his voice.


“You are not making a great case for yourself.”

“I’m not!” Jimin insists and stomps his foot, just a little. “I drank the same amount as you!”

“You have much less body to offset alcohol content.” Jungkook removes his hands from his pockets. Shoves them back in, like he’s caught in the throes of some great internal battle. His eyes are warm and affectionate. “Jiminssi...”

“It’s unfair,” Jimin says, head thunking against his doorjamb.

“What is?” Jungkook murmurs.

“How good my name sounds when you say it,” Jimin mutters gloomily.

Jungkook makes a noise of intense disgruntlement and rubs at his eye sockets one-handed. He looks either very pained or very pleased.

No, that’s wrong. Through the thin glaze of alcohol, Jungkook looks just right, haloed by golden light, the perfect distance between desire and decisions made—the curl of heat before the kiss, the crash of thunder that predicts a jagged burst of lightning, the way rain collects in the pothole just beyond the bounds of Jimin’s childhood home back in Busan and how he always imagines it’s as deep as the ocean, because there’s no way of telling that it’s not. Not until he moves to find out. Not until he dashes through the puddle to check. Waiting for the moment that he drowns.

Just like that. It’s just like that, like the urge to slide his hands up Jungkook’s chest isn’t really an urge at all but an inevitability, a collection of sensations Jimin is going to fall into face-first. He wonders if it’s showing on his face: that he’s looking not at Jungkook the idol with desire, but at Jeon Jungkook, the shadow self, the strange, the joyous, the hyperactive, sulky, wine-drinking foolishness of first love, that intelligent immaturity, the funny faces and childish jealousy, that Jeon Jungkook, owner of the silver voice, with eyes as wide as koi ponds and tattoos to take apart up and down the length of his right arm.

“Park Jimin-ssi,” says Jeon Jungkook, deep and rough and unwarranted, like a badly-leashed
Jimin’s joy is physically felt. He wiggles his toes against it, drinks up and drowns in a feedback loop of desire, catches himself against his doorjamb to laugh up at Jungkook, the beginnings of a sentence on its way out, something like, “Jeon Jungkook-ssi, why the formalities—?”

It’s meant to be ironic and teasing if not inviting of kisses or at the very least the thought of them. Jimin thinks, Jeon Jungkook, I want to plague you. I want to be painted across the walls of your dreams. I want you startled awake to the memory of me, beneath and on top of you, hands gripping, mouth open, I want you ripped apart with wanting me, I want it physically felt, like the weight of natural disaster, I will be ruin and rightness and if you know better, you’ll run. If you know better, you’ll turn tail and flee and wipe the memory of me free, quickly now. This is what Jimin thinks, with all of his might, concentrating very hard on transmitting the message.

He laughs and thinks, Do you know any better?

Evidently, Jungkook doesn’t, or if he does know better, he doesn’t care, because then his mouth is on Jimin, deep and rough and unwarranted, and Jimin has no choice but to catch himself against Jungkook’s chest, gasping at the goodness of it, the stupid, startling, awkward perfection of a first kiss with a man made of music. Jungkook’s nose mashes into Jimin’s uncomfortably and his breath comes hot and harsh and he tastes like wet and sweet pork and his hat is lost somewhere in the chaos and he moves like he means to swallow Jimin whole. His hands are everywhere and all over the place. He gets his arm around Jimin’s waist but by then Jimin has already pushed up onto the tips of his toes, clutching Jungkook around the shoulders, asking for more, and harder, and wetter, and the embarrassing sounds start coming out, the whine of wanting it bad. Jimin’s belly is liquid. He digs his nails into the nape of Jungkook’s neck and kisses harder, begging with his body, back arched to smooth a path for Jungkook’s hands.

“Hyung,” Jungkook says, punched-out when he pulls back, his mouth catching against Jimin’s bottom lip with a sticky noise of separation.

Jimin presses forward again immediately, tipping his head up in a blatant request for more. He makes a sound like he’s falling apart when he doesn’t get it.

“Hyung,” Jungkook repeats, with a ragged laugh, his hands shaking against Jimin’s jawline, and Jimin’s back.

Jimin flutters his eyes open, dizzy. He cheeks burn with heat and everything feels off-kilter, set to the unsteady rhythm of a poorly-trained heart. Boom. Boom. Boom. Jimin could dance a routine to the pounding of his heart in his ears. The pure musicality of it.

“I said I wouldn’t...not until your contract is up...” Jungkook says, stroking a thumb down Jimin’s temple. His eyes hold the soft consternation of their first meeting.

“Not to me,” says Jimin petulantly, “so it doesn’t count.”

Jungkook laughs at that, a laugh that crinkles his eyes and nose adorably. “I’m supposed to be the reckless one between us.”

Jimin jerks his head to the side and closes his mouth around Jungkook’s thumb, biting down on it gently.

Jungkook is looking at him like he’d have to be physically removed to break their stare. “Hyung...” he whispers, a breath of warm air. “You’re supposed to be the sensible one, between
“Not me,” Jimin whispers, kissing Jungkook’s thumb, sweet and needy now. “I’m stupid.”

Jungkook laughs, saying, “Park Jimin.”

“I’m so, so stupid, Jeon Jungkook-ssi,” Jimin whispers, tightening his arms around Jungkook’s neck and pushing taller, until he can kiss Jungkook with some semblance of authority, a hair’s breadth higher with help from his feet, and for a moment, they’re kissing between Jungkook’s thumb, until he pulls it away and readjusts his hand against Jimin’s SERENDIPITY tattoo, burning hot through the fabric of his coat.

“Jimin-ah,” Jungkook groans, kissing him back for a wild, heart-stopping moment, and the addition of tongue makes Jimin start to feel faint all over, like he’s about to melt into the puddle of water made by the pothole outside of his childhood home. “Jimin-ah, if we don’t stop now, I am going to take you apart against your bed. Slowly and methodically.”

“Yes,” Jimin gasps, tugging Jungkook in the direction of his door by the collar of his trench coat.


“Jungkookie,” Jimin whines, dipping into his dirtiest tactics and tugging harder. When Jungkook doesn’t budge, he pulls back to send him a pleading look, bottom lip jutting out. “Please, Guk-ah. I’ll be good. I’ll be so good for you.”

“Fuck, you are so—” Jungkook shudders. Shakes his head as though emerging from a trance, flushed down to his neck. His lips are dark and spit-slick. “No more, hyung. We have work in the morning.”

“I’ll call in sick,” Jimin promises.

“It’s your last day,” Jungkook says softly.

“So spend it with me,” Jimin returns.

Jungkook leans in like he’s hopelessly endeared by the idea of that and kisses Jimin again, crooked and oh so sweet. He’s laughing when he pulls back. “Sweet hyung. You don’t get it.”

“Get what?” Jimin breathes dazedly.

“I need to take my time with you or I’ll go crazy,” Jungkook murmurs. He caresses Jimin’s cheekbone with his thumb, circles back down to lightly brush his bottom lip. “Jimin-ah, I’m all or nothing. In general, but especially about you.”

Jimin blinks, flushing hot.

“So, please, let me go slow,” Jungkook whispers. “I want to pull out all the stops for you. I’ve wanted to for a long time. Since I first met you, I’ve wanted to pull out all the stops.”

“What…?” Jimin pauses to regroup, ears ringing. “Since you first met me…? When you first met me, you insinuated that I looked like I was inexperienced!”

“I thought it’d be easier to date you if you were a backup dancer,” Jungkook says. “I was hoping you wouldn’t be the choreographer. That’s why I asked.”

“You—” Jimin’s mouth forms words, appalled. He fumbles Jungkook’s collar, yanking him to
eye-level, a downward inch or two. “I cannot believe you—!”

Jungkook laughs and drops another kiss to Jimin’s mouth. Jimin is weak, without defenses, unable to resist; he tilts into the kiss with a whine.

“Dangshin,” Jungkook whispers against his lips.

Jimin jerks back as though burned, kiss broken.

Jungkook smiles, his eyelashes casting spidery shadows against his cheeks. “Too much?”

Jimin hides his beet-root blush in Jungkook’s jacket and Jungkook laughs, one of his high, happy, shoulder-shaking laughs. “Shut up,” Jimin says. “Don’t ever call me that in front of someone else. That’s practically a proposal, Jungkook.”

“Hyung, you’re so cute,” Jungkook marvels. “I don’t know how I’ve held out for this long.”

“I don’t know how you’re currently holding out,” Jimin grumbles under his breath.

“With great difficulty,” Jungkook says, beaming one of his bunny smiles down at Jimin.

Jimin pouts and presses up onto tiptoe to deliver a kiss of his own to Jungkook’s mouth, this one slow and filthy. He draws Jungkook’s bottom lip between his teeth, gives a little stinging suck, then falls back onto his heels, blinking innocently. There’s a look on Jungkook’s face like he’s fighting against all his base instincts and Jimin is to blame for it. Jimin laughs, eyes crinkling.

“I think you’re evil,” Jungkook decides very seriously.

“Good night and goodbye,” Jimin teases, “Jungkook-ah.”

Jungkook tugs him to a stop before he can retreat into his apartment. “Will you call me that from now on?” he asks, with something almost imploring.

“We’ll see,” Jimin says, biting back a stupid grin.

“Okay,” Jungkook whispers, leaning in one more time.

“Jungkook!”

“Just one more.”

“You’re the one who said we have to stop!”

“You taste so sweet,” Jungkook groans.

Jimin hangs on by Jungkook’s ears, laughing into his insistent mouth. “That’s my lip balm.”

“I hope it’s edible,” Jungkook says, then licks into Jimin’s mouth with an obnoxious slurping noise.

“Jungkook!” Jimin warns, shoving to distract from how hard he’s giggling.

“Ah, okay, okay,” Jungkook says, makes to pull back, then leans back in at the last second to get in one last sneaky kiss, aim off-center by a centimeter or two so that it lands somewhere near the edge of Jimin’s mouth.
Jimin shoves harder, practically falling over himself with laughter.

“Ah,” Jungkook sighs, looking very pleased with himself. “Okay. Good night, Jimin-ah.”

After he’s caught his breath, Jimin holds his index finger up, scolding, “Don’t think this means you can drop ‘hyung’ when we’re around others.”

“I’ll try to keep that in mind.”

“No, you will keep it in mind,” Jimin says.

“Bossy,” Jungkook says, then sighs: “So cute. Wanna kiss you some more.”

Jimin blushes, says, “Good night and goodbye forever.”

“Hyung.” Jungkook leans against the doorjamb, grinning boyishly. “One for the road? I have to make it down five flights of stairs all by myself.”

Jimin shuts the door in his face.

jeon jungkook-ssi

rude hyung

ah jimin-ah

i like you so much

do you know how much i like you?

what are you saying?

i like you a lot, jimin-ah

i want to hold your hand in front of the whole world

really, stop. ቡወ ቡወ ቡወ ቡወ so embarrassing.

say it back

hyung

will you say it back?

please

kekekekeke jeon jungkook

yes i like you

i like you so much too

that’s why i kissed your dumb face for ten minutes

i wish it was longer ቡወ ቡወ ቡወ ቡወ ቡወ
i’ll fall asleep happily tonight thanks to you
thinking about kissing your pretty mouth

oh my god
jungkook
that is so cheesy

yeah you signed up for this hyung

you make me feel like a teenager
it’s unsettling

i’ll be outside your window with a boombox tomorrow night
don’t you dare

 Paladin

good night, hyung

good night and goodbye
sleep well

i will thank you

please think of me in your dreams

now who’s cheesy?
i’m ignoring you

i’ll think of you lots
please think of me also

i’m always thinking about you

seriously?
what am i supposed to do with that?
really, hyung, you’re making me want to turn back around
i would gladly take all five flights of stairs again for you

kekekekekeke
you’re so cute too

i thought everyone was lying when they said you were a hopeless romantic
you know my friends predicted i’d fall for you?

no that part is very true

you know i heard bells the first time i saw you?

what?

track 12

listen to it and think of me

hmm okay jeon jungkook

i’m going to fall asleep listening to your voice

my heart feels so happy tonight

stop it or i will make you turn around

✿✿✿✿✿✿✿✿✿✿✿✿

cute jungkookie

dangshin

i like you i like you i like you

ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

kekekekeke park jimin

good night and goodbye

sweet dreams

i’m going to kiss you more tomorrow

☼

True to his word, Jungkook kisses Jimin more.

He measures his last day at moonchild by the number of times Jungkook successfully sneaks him kisses—brushed against his hairline, pressed to the hinge of his jaw, sucked stubbornly into his bottom lip—and how convincingly Yoongi and Hoseok pretend not to notice, looking by every minute more and more fed-up with the public displays of affection. Jimin tries to put up a fight, he really does, but all his defenses have been razed and he’s now putty in Jungkook’s large, gifted hands. Eun seems to be their only supporter. Sungho catches them making out by the bathrooms and threatens to pry them apart with a crowbar.

Desire looks different by the light of day, he thinks. Firmer, more solid. Jungkook’s concentration is shot and Jimin can’t stop laughing, peals of it, like the chime of church bells. They can’t help slipping each other suggestive looks over the rims of their coffee mugs—Jimin’s marshmallow, and Jungkook’s black skull. Jimin sticks his hands up Jungkook’s sweatshirt and doesn’t remove
them until they’re caught by Hyeon in the halls. They’re called to Namjoon’s office to be gently reprimanded.

In some ways, it’s as easy as breathing, falling into each other.

Hoseok says, “You two make me sick,” but he says it with one of his beaming smiles.

“We’re rescinding any contract renewal offers,” Yoongi tacks on.

Jimin is laying on Jungkook’s belly on the floor of his favorite dance studio in moonchild Entertainment HQ. The sunlight is thin and watery with winter, cool blue against the cheekbones. Alien and unlike Busan, who is warmer, and more romantic than Seoul. Farther out of reach and golden with time gone. Jimin misses it, but the thing in him that has started to take root here, in the overcrowded city with its smattering of lights and smog, has also begun sprouting spring blooms. Too early. All wrong, all right. Jimin is sweet with the scent of it.

When it rains in Busan, the smell of the sea is lifted like a weightless perfume. In Seoul, the rain punctures, pins down the grit of wet asphalt, the gasoline tang, the crush of almost ten million bodies moving at once. When it rains in Busan, the pothole in front of his childhood home collects water like a little lake and he pretends to know its depth and dimensions. When it rains in Seoul, Jungkook scolds Jimin for not wearing warmer clothes, then wraps him up in a stern-browed embrace, warm and wonderful.

Jungkook, who is currently raking his nails carefully through Jimin’s hair, drawing circles with his fingers. He sings a note that carries, all breath. Do you even see me? Do you know who I am?

Jimin twists, peers up into his dark, glittering eyes. Sings back: “You don't like me like that. Come and tell me so much, beautiful heart.” He cups a palm to Jungkook’s cheek, the edge of his jaw. “I want to paint it like you.”

Namjoon, leaning in the open doorway and backlit by weak, wintry sunshine, crosses his arms over his chest. His expression is thoughtful. “Jimin,” he says, elbows bent just so. “Have you ever considered making music?”

Jimin thinks: this chapter in my life is the epilogue, all the loose ends cut and tied. Finished off at last with a pretty bow, satin pink, like luck courted. This is the ending notes of a dream, the last stanza in a concerto that has brought an audience to the edge of tears. Standing and supporting leg over-crossed, in a perfect fifth position. The free-fall following a somber climax: easy-breezy drifting, jubilant through and through. In the final sequence of the film, Jimin is all sky and the ocean beneath it, unbordered and endlessly breathing.

He catches Jungkook’s eye in the mirrors and smiles, slow and sweet.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/moonchild_Entertainment

moonchild Entertainment

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

moonchild Entertainment, Co. (Korean: 문할엔터테인먼트) is a small South Korean entertainment company established in 2015 by former underground rapper Kim Namjoon. Min Yoongi joined the
company shortly thereafter and has since signed on as co-CEO. He is known to many as Kim Namjoon’s musical right-hand man. The company currently manages soloists Chee Sungho, Jeon Jungkook, and Park Jimin. Although all three acts have put out a number of small projects under the auspices of moonchild Entertainment, including various mixtapes, EPs, and SoundCloud covers, Park Jimin has yet to release an official full-length album. He’s a late addition to moonchild’s musical roster and the second artist in the company with previous ties to NOIZE Entertainment. He and Jeon Jungkook are widely believed to be dating. As of yet, no moonchild idol groups have been formed, though Kim Namjoon has expressed interest in interviews.

Artists

Soloists

- Jeon Jungkook
- Chee Sungho
- Park Jimin

Producers

- Kim Namjoon
- Min Yoongi
- Jung Hoseok

Choreographers

- Jung Hoseok
- Park Jimin

End Notes

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