"What does it feel like?"

"What?"

"Knowing you fixed the heart of the man who broke yours?"
Chapter 1

Taehyung hears the heart monitors beeping first. The sound is slow, constant, grating, the only noise in the otherwise silent space. He groans, shifting in the bed, and the beeping becomes more rapid.

His eyelids feel like lead as he tries to pry them open, but his brain seems disconnected with the rest of his body, and it takes a while for him to take control and force them open.

He’s in a hospital room-- one of the luxurious ones, no doubt, and his bed is large and comfortable, the space is clean, but the smell… he can’t stand the smell.

It’s too clean, too sterile, devoid of life and any hint of what the hell happened, but Taehyung figures he’ll find out soon enough.

It must have been his heart.

The door opens, and two figures step through. When they notice Taehyung awake and shifting, they run to his side.

“Taehyung!” Hoseok yelps, eyes wide and frantic, tangling his fingers through the bed-ridden man’s own.

“Welcome back to the land of the living,” Yoongi drawls, hands stuffed in his suit pants pockets, smiling casually, but Taehyung doesn’t miss the relief in his eyes. “How’re you feelin’, champ?”

“Like shit. What happened?” Taehyung asks, voice hoarse from disuse, and he wonders how long he’s been in the hospital. His mind is foggy, and his limbs feel like jelly.

“See for yourself,” Yoongi says, finding the remote to the massive flatscreen television on the wall facing the bed, and flips to one of the major news channels.

“Media outlets have been packed outside Seoul General Hospital for the past five days, waiting for information after hotel mogul Kim Taehyung of Rise Enterprises reportedly fainted after a press conference for their luxury suites chain opening in Thailand next month. The Rise Enterprise group
has not yet issued an official statement on the well being of Mr. Kim, but reports speculate that he has undergone major heart surgery a few days ago, under renowned cardiac surgeon, Dr.-”

The screen goes black when Yoongi switches the television off, and Taehyung turns to the man, mouth dry.

“I fainted?” Taehyung asks after a moment.

“Went splat, right on the ground.” Yoongi grins, and Hoseok gives him a dirty look.

“Backstage, after you gave your speech. Luckily no reporters saw it, but they definitely noticed the emergency helicopter outside the venue,” Hoseok elaborates, frowning. “A doctor should come in and explain everything to you, now that you’re awake.”

“Was it…” Taehyung doesn’t need to finish.

“Yeah, it was.” Yoongi nods.

“God I hope this doesn’t affect the stocks,” Taehyung groans, digging his head back into the pillows.

“If anything, it’s going to make the prices go up. Rise is up 5% since last week,” Yoongi smiles. “Everyone thinks you’ve been overworking yourself, and the public loves to hear about the dedicated, hardworking CEO.”

Taehyung sighs, letting his eyes wander over the patterns on the ceiling. He’s just relieved this happened after the conference.

“No one hears about this, got it?” Taehyung orders, looking at Hoseok, who nods and notes it on the tablet that has been a constant fixture to the man.

“Then what should we say to the public?” Hoseok asks, stylus poised to receive instruction.

“Feed them the ‘hardworking CEO’ story. Make sure to clarify that I didn’t faint. I was having chest
pain and so I went to the hospital. They don’t need to know anything more about my personal life, and I don’t need to look weak either.”

Hoseok writes rapidly, nodding as he takes in his boss’s words. “And I’ll make sure to compensate the backstage workers, making sure none of this gets out.”

“Thanks, hyung,” Taehyung says, feeling mildly better after one issue had been taken care of. “Who did the surgery? Dr. Lee retired last year.” He wasn’t sure who would be competent enough to handle a complicated case like his, since Dr. Lee had been treating him since he was a baby.

Yoongi looks wary, and Hoseok opens his mouth to speak, but at that moment, a small woman in a short doctor’s coat comes in, a clipboard and patient file clutched tight to her chest. She looks at Taehyung nervously, blushing at the man’s direct stare, before looking down.

“Good afternoon, Kim ssi. I’m Yura, one of the interns who assisted during your surgery,” she says quietly. “I’m here to give you an update on your condition.”

“Get on with it, we don’t have all day,” Yoongi prompts after a moment of silence.

Yura apologizes, bowing her head a few times before clearing her throat and looking at the patient file with shaking hands.

“Kim Taehyung ssi, your rheumatic cardiac disease escalated into cardiac fibrosis. Five days ago, your mitral valve became dysfunctional, cutting off blood supply to your lower limbs, and you were brought in for an emergency procedure.”

The girl pauses, looking up to see the three men staring at her expectantly, and her eyes snap back to the paper. She clears her throat and continues in a monotonous voice, reading off the words on the page.

“We did a new procedure and replaced the damaged tissue with synthetic valves. You can be discharged in a week, once we’re sure the implants are working. Since it is a relatively new procedure, we are asking that you come in once a month for check ups.”

Taehyung sighs. He thought his constant hospital visits would have ended since he had gone on his medication after high school, but this puts a wrench in a lot of his plans.
“I’ll take of scheduling issues,” Hoseok murmurs, as though reading the man’s mind, and Taehyung nods. He lays back on the bed and lets himself zone out as the girl continues talking, still foggy from the painkillers, knowing that Hoseok will relay any important information, but most of it will be old news.

Once the intern leaves, Yoongi goes shortly after, needing to get back to work at his law firm, but not before ruffling Taehyung’s hair playfully and warning him not to cause too much trouble.

“How are you feeling, Taehyung?” Hoseok asks quietly, once everything has settled down, sitting in the chair next to the bed.

Taehyung sighs. “I don’t know, hyung. I’m kind of sick of this.” His whole life had revolved around trips to the hospital. He had thought he was done with them. Apparently not.

“I have some news that might make you feel better,” Hoseok says. Taehyung raises an eyebrow.

“I think I’ve found a good consultant for the heart center.”

“Really?” Taehyung’s lip tugs into a small smile. Hoseok, besides being his assistant, had been helping him coordinate the charity project Taehyung had been developing for the past few years, focusing on providing medical care to underprivileged children with cardiac diseases. They had met with countless cardiac surgeons and specialists, but none of them felt competent enough to Taehyung.

“The man who did your surgery, he’s been lauded as one of the most revolutionary cardiac surgeons of our time. He even developed the procedure you just had.” Hoseok says, eyes alight.

Taehyung is intrigued. “Who?”

“Jeon Jeongguk.”

And suddenly, the heart monitor begins beeping radically, numbers flashing red as Taehyung registers the name and memories come flooding into his mind.
“Jeon Jeongguk?”

“Best in the nation, Jeon Jeongguk!” Taehyung calls out. The bell had rung a few moments ago, and students were fleeing out of the classroom, a flurry of chatter and rustling papers. Taehyung sticks back, leaning back in his chair, watching as the small boy stops in his tracks, turning around slowly. He points to himself, mouthing me? and Taehyung nods, swirling the lollipop around in his mouth.

“Come here.” And Taehyung bites back a smile as the boy visibly gulps, shuffling nervously towards the back of the class where Taehyung usually sits.

“What the hell are you doing, Taehyung?” Yoongi hisses under his breath, packing up his books as Jeongguk approaches.

“Trying to make this hell hole more interesting,” Taehyung smirks, taking the lollipop out of his mouth and motioning for the boy to come closer.

“You’re good at chemistry, right?” Taehyung asks, voice honeyed, once the boy is standing a foot away from his desk, looking at him apprehensively. Jeongguk flushes, nodding once quickly before ducking his head.

Cute, Taehyung thinks. Jeongguk’s black hair flops over his forehead, some strands sticking up at odd angles. His cheeks are chubby and his front teeth stick out slightly past his lips, making him look a bit like a bunny. And he’s quite tiny, being two years younger than the rest of his class.

Certified genius.

He’ll do great things some day.

Taehyung points to the paper on his desk- the newly assigned homework for the class. “Explain this to me,” he orders, and Jeongguk looks at him reproachfully.
“Uhm…” Jeongguk scoots closer to take a look at the problem, clutching his books tightly to his chest. He cranes his neck to read the paper, trying to stay as far away from Taehyung as possible, and it’s not an easy task. Yoongi shoots Taehyung a warning look, and Taehyung just winks, putting the lollipop back in his mouth.

“This is a basic light particle duality problem. You just need to plug in Planck's constant and the speed of light, divide it by lambda, which is the wavelength, and make sure you convert it to meters from nanometers. You can find the energy like that,” Jeongguk rambles shakily, and Taehyung just nods, not absorbing any of the information, but smiling pleasantly.

“D-does that make sense?” Jeongguk asks shakily, voice cracking at the end, which makes his cheeks color in embarrassment.

“Oh, totally. You’re really good at explaining. You should tutor me some time,” Taehyung says casually, watching with pleasure as Jeongguk’s expression flashes from bashful to shocked.

“M-me?” he squeaks. Taehyung laughs. Adorable.

“There’s no one else around, is there?” Taehyung motions at the empty classroom. Jeongguk’s eyes dart around, looking at Yoongi for a moment before his eyes widen and drop to the floor.

“I--I don’t know if I’m the right person to tutor you… There are a lot of really good--”

“But you’re the best in the nation, Jeongguk. You’re the most qualified person to tutor me,” Taehyung insists. He rolls the lollipop around on his tongue, dragging his eyes down Jeongguk’s small frame appraisingly. “I only want the best,” he adds for good measure, and Jeongguk’s face turns a deep red.

“Uhmm…” He fidgets.

“Give me your phone number, I’ll text you sometime, and we can get together when you’re free.”

Jeongguk keeps his head down, and mumbles unintelligibly.
“What?” Taehyung asks. Jeongguk takes a deep breath.

“I don’t… have a phone…” he mutters, voice almost pained, and terribly embarrassed.

Taehyung aah ’s in understanding. Jeongguk is on scholarship, so he’s poor. He wouldn’t have a phone.

“That’s fine. You just let me know when you have some time, and I’ll clear my schedule for you,” Taehyung says.

Jeongguk peeks up at Taehyung as if this is all some bizarre dream. He lets out a shaky breath, and nods slightly. “Okay.”

Taehyung’s face feels like it’s going to split from how much he’s grinning. “Fantastic! I’ll see you tomorrow then.”

Jeongguk just nods again. He shoots Yoongi a wary glance before whipping around and almost tripping out of the classroom. Taehyung keeps the bright smile on his face until the door slams shut, and then it drops into a smirk.

“Taehyung, I hope you’re not pulling the shit you did with Minah last year,” Yoongi warns. Taehyung waves his hand dismissively in the air.

“Relax, hyung. It’s all just a game.”

♥

It feels like every bad thing Taehyung has ever done comes crashing down on him this exact moment, anxiety threatening to silently drown him as he stares at the door, engraved with the name Jeon Jeongguk, M.D., Ph.D. in bold, gold letters.

His hands are shaking, nerves on fire, and he can’t hear anything that Hoseok is saying to him. He just nods meekly, hoping his face doesn’t look too pale.
“Dr. Jeon will see you now,” the receptionist calls out, and Hoseok stands. Taehyung looks up at him nervously.

“Well, come on,” Hoseok prompts, and Taehyung gulps, getting up with wobbling feet, and makes his way to the door. The receptionist holds it open for them, smiling pleasantly as they pass, and Taehyung keeps his eyes down until he hears the door close behind them.

_You’re Kim fucking Taehyung_, he reminds himself.

_You have hotels in almost every country in Asia. You’re one of the richest men in the world. People kiss the ground you walk on. You can handle one person._

_You’re in a million dollar suit. You’re an icon. Act like one._

So he straightens his back, slipping his hands into his pockets, and looks up, fixing a stoic expression on his face, and readies himself to face what is sure to be disaster head on.

Nothing prepares him for what comes next.

“Hoseok ssi, I’m glad you could come,” a deep voice calls out, and Taehyung follows the sound to the man sitting behind a massive oak desk.

“I’m so glad you had the time,” Hoseok gushes, stepping closer to the desk. The man stands up, smiling pleasantly, shaking Hoseok’s hand. He looks expectantly at Taehyung, who stands frozen in his spot.

“Kim Taehyung ssi...” the man says, and it snaps Taehyung out of his daze. _Wrong Jeon Jeongguk_, Taehyung thinks, relieved, because this man, standing before him, tall and broad and incredibly handsome, is not _his_ Jeon Jeongguk.

No way.
Taehyung clears his throat and steps forward to shake the man's hand. He smiles, relaxing once the realization dawns on him.

"It's a pleasure, Jeon ssi. I want to personally extend my thanks for quite literally saving my life," Taehyung says, laying on as much of his winning charisma as he possibly can, smiling his trademark smile, because this Jeon Jeongguk really is quite handsome, all sharp jawline, smouldering eyes, immaculate form, and Taehyung would be a fool not to see a potential conquest. His previous anxiety has melted away, and he feels more in control of himself now.

"I was just doing my job," the man says simply, unphased by Taehyung's charms, and focuses back on Hoseok. "Please do take a seat." It takes everything Taehyung has to not pout in disappointment.

Hoseok jumps straight to business, delving into the details of the project and the nature of the leading cardiac consultant at the heart center.

Taehyung takes the time to fully appraise this Jeon Jeongguk, noting the perfectly coifed black hair, broad shoulders, and full, pliant lips, and god, Taehyung's never seen someone look so sexy in a doctor's coat.

His eyes wander down to the man's neck, appraising the smooth, tanned skin, before drifting to the base of his left earlobe, as if by instinct, where he makes out faint scars. Color drains from his face.

Taehyung straightens with a jolt, eyes fixating on the three marks on the man's skin, hardly noticeable, but now that he has seen them, he can't stop looking at them.

It's just a coincidence, Taehyung tells himself, as memories flash through his mind.

He could have gotten those scars from anywhere.

But the marks are unmistakable. Taehyung would never forget that day.

And his body flushes with terror, and his stomach turns with nausea, as it dawns on him, the horrific realization that this couldn't be anyone but his Jeon Jeongguk.
"Isn't that funny, Taehyung?" Hoseok asks, wrenching Taehyung out of his thoughts.

Taehyung stares blankly at Hoseok, who gives him an exasperated look.

"I was saying, it's funny how you and Jeongguk-ssi went to the same high school."

Taehyung's mouth runs dry, and any thought he could have had just evaporates.

"You guys even graduated in the same year, even though he's a couple years younger than you."

Taehyung feels like he's been dunked in ice water. Like he's being suffocated by the heated look Jeongguk gives him for a brief moment, and he can't move, can't speak. He can't do anything.

"I tutored him once or twice our senior year, I think," Jeongguk responds, voice light, dismissive.

"Taehyung ssi was quite popular at the time. I was at the bottom of that food chain. He couldn't possibly remember a nobody like me." Jeongguk laughs airily, and Hoseok joins him, but Taehyung presses his mouth into a thin line, fists clenched in his lap.

"And now you've saved his life!" Hoseok adds, good-naturedly, but it makes Taehyung's heart drop.

"It is funny though, isn't it? Life works in strange ways," Jeongguk drawls, face relaxed, detached, but the look he gives Taehyung when Hoseok isn't paying attention is heavy.

Taehyung feels like he's going to explode from the tension, the realization, the guilt, and he wishes he could run out of the room, out of the building and into the busy Seoul afternoon that goes on, continues to move forward despite all the sins he's committed.

The sharp ring of Hoseok's telephone makes Taehyung want to jump out of his skin, already tense and wired.

"I apologize. I'll just step out for a moment to answer this," Hoseok says, getting up and slipping out of the room. Taehyung bites his tongue when the door slams closed.
"Well well well," Taehyung’s eyes snap up to meet Jeongguk’s and he’s taken aback by the cold look on the man’s face.

"W-what are you doing, Jeongguk?" Taehyung winces when he stammers, but sets his face as passively as he can. He can't look weak.

"It's Dr. Jeon, actually. Please do refrain from being too informal. It's not professional," Jeongguk says curtly.

Taehyung leans forward, throat tight. “Professional? This is personal, and you know it.”

Jeongguk scoffs, eyes dark and cold. Taehyung’s throat tightens, and he wonders whether this detached man could be his same, shy little Jeongguk. “I have nothing personal with you, Taehyung ssi. You mean absolutely nothing to me.”

Something at the back of Taehyung’s eye begins to sting at the words. They hurt more than he expected.

“I’m your ex,” Taehyung hisses. Jeongguk lets out a bark of laughter. Taehyung’s skin tightens at the sound.

“Ex? Is that what I am to you? As far as I was told, I was just a little game. Something to help you relieve the boredom of your oh-so-privileged life. I could hardly be considered an ex. You give me too much credit, really.”

Taehyung had thought he had escaped those words, made them disappear after ten years, but they just come back to hit him, square on the chest, and he loses his breath.

“Oh but don’t worry, Taehyung ssi. It was high school. We all make bad decisions. I’ve all but forgotten that little episode.” Nausea churns in Taehyung’s stomach.

“W-we can’t do business like this. There’s too much conflict of interest.”
“Taehyung ssi, this relationship is purely platonic. I am intrigued by this project of yours, and I want to do my best, on a professional level. You need me. And as for remaining professional, the only one incapable of remaining so seems to be you.”

Taehyung opens his mouth to respond, but Hoseok comes in right then. Jeongguk’s dark gaze shifts immediately to a more pleasant one.

“I apologize for the interruption, Jeongguk ssi. But Taehyung has a board meeting to get to in a bit.”

Taehyung has never felt so conflicted than in this moment- on one hand he wants to get as far away from Jeon Jeongguk as he possibly can, try to forget everything that happened, lock up the past into a tiny little box the way he had been doing for the past ten years.

And on the other, he wants to stay and drag out an explanation from the man, lay everything out and figure out exactly what happened between them, what happened ten years ago.

“Of course, I’m sure Taehyung ssi is an incredibly busy man,” Jeongguk says, standing. Taehyung mirrors the action, and robotically offers his hand for the man to shake.

“Perhaps we can get together some time next week and discuss this in further detail,” Hoseok says. Jeongguk smiles graciously.

“I’ll have my assistant check my schedule.”

“Is there a preferred method to contact you, Jeongguk ssi?”

Jeongguk takes out a business card from his desk. “My private consultation line and my hospital line are on there, but any scheduling should be done through my assistant,” Jeongguk explains.

“What about your personal line, some way to contact you directly?” Taehyung says before he can think. Jeongguk’s eyes snap to his, narrowing for a ghost of a moment, before smiling.

“Well, this is purely professional, Taehyung ssi. The only people who have my personal number are those who are very close to me.”
“Of course, this is a business matter,” Hoseok laughs nervously, eyes shifting to Taehyung, wondering what has gotten into the normally sharp businessman. “We wouldn’t need your personal line, Jeongguk ssi.”

Taehyung continues to stare at Jeongguk. He can’t seem to bring himself to move, but Hoseok puts a hand on his shoulder, reminding him that he has other obligations.

“Alright Jeongguk ssi. We’ll get going. I will email your assistant the schedule, hopefully we’ll see you soon,” Hoseok says, bowing.

“Fantastic. I’ll look forward to it,” Jeongguk responds, bowing his head slightly in response to Hoseok. He turns to Taehyung and does the same. Taehyung returns it mechanically.

“It was good to see you again, Taehyung ssi.”
“Why do you keep staring at me?” a quiet voice asks, snapping Taehyung out of his daydreams.

“Was I?” Taehyung smiles bashfully, laying on the charm, and watches with pleasure as Jeongguk blushes, frowning in concentration at the textbook in front of them.

“You haven’t been listening to a thing I’ve said,” Jeongguk frowns, and his bottom lip sticks out subconsciously.

He’s too adorable for his own good, Taehyung thinks. And really, Jeon Jeongguk is quite cute, in a quiet, innocent way. He wonders how long it will take for him to draw the shy boy out of his shell. They had been tutoring for weeks, but Jeongguk hadn’t spoken to him unless it was school-related.

This is so boring.

And Taehyung’s friends had been asking when he was going to get the picture of them kissing, but at this point, even the idea of getting Jeongguk to smile at him looks very grim.

“Sorry, I’ve just been tired lately,” Taehyung sighs. “I have a lot of other responsibilities.”

Jeongguk mutters an apology. “I didn’t think about that…”

And Taehyung grins, because Jeon Jeongguk is too easy, too gullible for his own good. And he doesn’t understand what it’s like to be an heir. To have millions in his bank account. And Taehyung is luckier than others- his older brother Namjoon’s already taken control of the business.

Kim Taehyung is eighteen years old, and has never worked a day in his life.

“I just… I would feel bad wasting your time if you have more important things to do,” Jeongguk mumbles quickly, not making eye contact. Jeongguk never really makes eye contact with Taehyung, and the elder guesses it’s intimidation.

“If anything, I’m wasting your time, Jeonggukie,” Taehyung chirps, not even slightly guilty. “Which
Taehyung leans over to dig through his backpack, splayed open on the dining table where they had set up their work.

“Here,” Taehyung hands him a box. Jeongguk looks at him in surprise, before taking the box carefully.

“What… Why?” Jeongguk stumbles with his words as he takes out the shiny cell phone, eyes wide in disbelief.

“It’s a cell phone, silly,” Taehyung laughs, clapping Jeongguk on the back. The younger yelps, the phone almost falling out of his hands in surprise, and he clutches the device tightly in his hands.

“I… Why?” Jeongguk asks.

“You said you didn’t have one. So I got you one.”

“I… I can’t accept this,” Jeongguk puts the phone back in the box and tries to shove it back towards Taehyung, who frowns.

“It’s a gift. You’re supposed to take it and say thank you.” Taehyung moves the box back closer to Jeongguk.

“Th-this is expensive, Taehyung,” Jeongguk tries, and it’s true. It’s one of the newest models in the market, but Taehyung wouldn’t settle for anything but the best, even for one of his little toys.

“Does it look like money is an issue?” Taehyung sweeps his arms around the large hall, vases and portraits lining the walls, a large crystal chandelier hanging above them. Maids are bustling about them, and just a moment ago, the butler had asked what the chef might make them for snacks.

Jeongguk blushes deeply, ducking his head down again.
“It… doesn’t feel right,” Jeongguk stammers, and Taehyung’s frown deepens. This is a big
difference between Jeongguk and Minah, he realizes. Minah would insist Taehyung buy her things.
Jeongguk insisted that he not.

“Well, just use it to contact me, then,” Taehyung bargains. “Just me. And once this whole tutoring
business is done, you can give it back.”

In the back of Taehyung’s mind, he wonders who else Jeongguk would even use the phone for—
the boy never talks to anyone, and completely disappears during lunchtime.

Jeongguk eyes the box warily again. Taehyung sighs. “Oh come on, it’s getting annoying having to
go up to you in class every day,” he snaps, and Jeongguk recoils from the words.

“I-I’m sorry to be an inconvenience, then,” Jeongguk’s voice wobbles, and he starts packing up his
books hurriedly. Taehyung rolls his eyes, exasperated.

“No, hey, stop.” Taehyung wraps his hand around Jeongguk’s wrist, stopping him. He sighs again.
“That’s not what I meant, okay? I just… It would be easier for both of us.”

It feels like an eternity as Jeongguk just stares at him, wide brown eyes hurt and reproachful, but he
nods slightly, tugging his wrist out of Taehyung’s grip, and unpacks his things.

Jeongguk goes back to explaining molecular orbital theory quietly, as usual, and Taehyung doesn’t
listen, as usual.

But when Jeongguk leaves for the day, he takes the phone with him, clutching it in his hands like it’s
the most precious thing he’s ever held.

♥

“Dr. Jeon will see you now,” the receptionist says, smiling widely, and Taehyung bows his head
politely as he walks in. His heart still beats frantically, and his fingers are numb with anxiety, but he
holds his head up high.
“I was expecting Hoseok,” is the first thing Jeongguk says, looking up from his spot at the window, medical file in his hands. The light cast around him makes him look like an angel, glowing ethereally and making the man’s sharp jawline more pronounced, casting shadows around his broad frame. Jeongguk looks like heaven and hell.

Taehyung ignores the sting in his chest at the words, but fixes a detached smirk on his face, trying not to look phased. It had been two weeks since he had heard Jeongguk’s voice, seen his face, but everything is still so new, and he can’t wrap his mind around how intensely different this new Jeon Jeongguk is.

“Sorry to disappoint. Besides,” Taehyung strides up to the desk. “I wanted to speak to you privately.”

Jeongguk laughs, snapping the file closed and placing it on his desk before taking a seat in the massive chair. “I am an incredibly busy man, Taehyung ssi. If you’ve come to bother me about trivialities of the past, I don’t want to hear them.”

It takes everything in Taehyung not to wince at Jeongguk’s harsh tone, the sharp glint in his eyes.

“I am a busy man as well, Dr. Jeon. My time is precious.”

“Then stop wasting it.”

Taehyung opens his mouth to retort, but he can’t think of anything to say. He wouldn’t know what to say in the first place.

Can we talk about what happened to us?

But he already knows the answer he’d get. He controls the embarrassed flush threatening to stain his cheeks, and clears his throat.

“I’ve actually come here to extend my personal invitation to the gala I’m hosting next week.”

Jeongguk raises an eyebrow. “For the heart center?” His voice is less cold this time, but still stiff.
“It’s actually… for the orphanage I sponsor.” And normally, this would be a selling point for Taehyung, the philanthropic CEO, always giving back to the community (or so those magazines will say), but revealing this piece of information to Jeongguk makes him nervous. Like he’s being judged.

“An… orphanage,” Jeongguk deadpans, eyes intense on Taehyung, as though searching for a lie.

“I bought Hyunsik Orphanage,” he says slowly, and watches as the cold in Jeongguk’s eyes turns into something sharper, more fire than ice.

“Did you now?” he asks slowly, leaning forward to rest his chin over his laced fingers.

“Five years ago. I’ve been supporting the kids.” Taehyung controls the urge to stammer, because Jeongguk’s gaze sears through him, so heated it makes Taehyung’s stomach turn.

Jeongguk straightens, as though taking control of his own emotions, and settles a blank look on his face. “Guilty conscience?”

Taehyung sighs. “It started out that way, yes,” he admits. Jeongguk huffs a laugh. “But since then, it’s become more than that. The kids are… wonderful. They’re the light of my life.” A fond smile plays on Taehyung’s face, despite the tension in the room.

“That’s very cute,” Jeongguk says monotonously. “The press must love that story.”

Taehyung frowns, immediately defensive. “I’m not looking for your opinion,” he snaps, and he curses himself for losing his carefully maintained composure. He wills himself to reign in his irritation at Jeongguk’s aloof attitude.

“I need to ask you for a favor,” he says, through partially gritted teeth.

Jeongguk barks out a laugh. “A favor? Who would have thought, the great Kim Taehyung would be asking tiny little Jeon Jeongguk for a favor?”
“I’m serious, Jeongguk.” And maybe it’s the tone, thinly veiled with desperation, or the look he gives, half pleading, but Jeongguk sobers up very quickly.

“I’ve already saved your life, Taehyung ssi. What more can I do?”

“There’s a boy… his name is Park Jimin. He has the same illness that I did when I was his age.”

“He had rheumatic fever?” Jeongguk asks, concern thick in his voice. “How old was he when he was diagnosed? Has he been receiving any treatment?”

“I’ve been paying for his hospital bills since he was born, and they’re keeping him stable but… he needs treatment. And the only one qualified to do it is you.”

Silence is thick in the office as Jeongguk processes Taehyung’s request. “You want me to operate on him? He’s still a child, the complications are too--”

“You don’t have to do surgery. Just… make him healthy again. You're the only one who would know how.”

Jeongguk sighs, and Taehyung knows he’s gotten through. Because the one thing Jeon Jeongguk could never do was refuse a person who needed his help.

“Alright, I’ll try my best,” Jeongguk concedes. “I need to meet with him soon.”

Taehyung breaks into a smile, relieved. “You can meet him at the gala.”

“The children will be at the gala?” Jeongguk asks.

“Of course. This is their cause. They deserve to be seen and heard.”

♥
“I don’t think this is a good idea, Taehyung,” Jeongguk stammers, bottom lip trembling and eyes anxious as they walk down the sidewalk. Taehyung’s strides are wide, confident, and Jeongguk scuffles behind him.

“Oh come on, Jeongguk. I’m getting bored of sitting in my house all day,” Taehyung rolls his eyes. “A change in scenery will be a great way to expand my mind.” He swings his hands out dramatically, before grinning down at the red-faced boy.

“Anywhere else, Taehyung, please,” Jeongguk tugs at Taehyung’s sleeve. “It’s not a good idea, I’m not comfortable—”

“Relax, Jeongguk. It’ll be fine,” Taehyung says, throwing his arm around the younger’s shoulders and putting him into a headlock.

He rubs his knuckles on the boy’s head before releasing him. Jeongguk scrambles to smooth his hair down (which Taehyung thinks is a bit useless considering how naturally unkempt it usually is).

The smile remains on Taehyung’s face for a moment at how cutely Jeongguk blushes, until a car zooms past them, the passengers whooping and yelling, making him jump in surprise.

It makes him dart his eyes warily through the neighborhood, and he realizes that he is definitely not in Kangnam anymore. The stores are graffitied, the streets are cracked and crowded, and he can’t get used to the awful smell in the air.

Not to mention, he had taken public transportation for the first time in his life. It had been terrible- the bus reeked of urine, and a homeless man had kept staring at him until he and Jeongguk had gotten off. It was the worst hour of his life.

Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea.

Taehyung’s original plan had been to get Jeongguk to trust him enough to invite him to his house. Then he’d be able to work his killer charm on Jeongguk’s parents, gain their favor, and maybe then Jeongguk would start warming up to him.

This plan isn’t going to work otherwise.
But he hadn’t realized how far Jeongguk lived from the school, or what kind of neighborhood he lived in. Taehyung tugs his school uniform sleeve over his Rolex watch nervously.

_**I don’t want to get jumped. I’m too pretty to get jumped.**_

“Uhm…” Jeongguk mumbles, stopping in front of a run down house. The wire fence is rusting and has a massive hole in it. The front yard’s grass has dried up to the point where it just looks like hay sprinkled over dirt.

The house looks like it’s about to collapse on itself. The exterior paint is aged and peeling, and there’s graffiti on one side. The windows have been barred shut, and not a single sound comes from the place, save for the incessant barking of a dog somewhere next door.

But what drains the blood from Taehyung’s face is the sign, stuck haphazardly in the ground at the front.

_Hyunsik Orphanage._

“Y-you live here?” Taehyung asks, and suddenly, he’s lost a significant bit of his bravado. His hands are shaking.

Jeongguk nods slightly. Taehyung gulps.

“I told you we should have gone somewhere else,” he mutters, kicking at the gravel near his shoe.

“N-no, it’s fine.”

_Get your shit together, Taehyung._

Taehyung forces a smile on his face. Jeongguk looks at him incredulously before pushing the small gate open and walking up to the door. The stairs creak dangerously when they climb them.
“Sojin noona!” Jeongguk calls out, opening the door and peeking in tentatively.

“Jeongguk-ah! I’m in the kitchen!” a woman’s voice calls out, and Jeongguk motions for Taehyung to follow him through the house. Taehyung’s eyes wander over the dimly lit living room, sparse except for the small television set, a couch, an ashtray full of cigarette butts, and a wide array of half-filled alcohol bottles. His skin crawls at the sight, something awful churning in his stomach.

“Hi noona,” Jeongguk greets, and for the first time, as the boy embraces the short woman at the stove, Taehyung sees Jeongguk smile.

“Hi Jeonggukie,” Sojin coos softly, pressing a soft kiss to Jeongguk’s temple. Taehyung coughs awkwardly, and she turns to him in surprise. She gives Jeongguk a strange look, and the boy shrugs.

“This is… Kim Taehyung, noona. He’s the one I’ve been tutoring,” Jeongguk explains quietly, and Sojin nods, eyes still wary as she looks Taehyung up and down, noting the expensive watch, the leather shoes.

She forces a tight smile onto her face and holds out a hand. “Park Sojin, nice to meet you.”

Taehyung raises an eyebrow while shaking her hand and mumbling his own introduction.

“W-we’re not actually related,” Jeongguk explains, noting Taehyung’s confusion at the difference in last names. Taehyung nods, but he’s still confused.

“She’s… the warden’s daughter. She takes care of us,” Jeongguk continues, smiling at the woman, before his face drops down into a small frown. “Noona… is she going to be home soon…?”

Sojin’s eyes dart nervously to Taehyung, before shaking her head quickly. “I don’t know, Jeongguk.”

Jeongguk nods, chewing his lip nervously.

“You should go to your room and study. I just put the kids to sleep, so try to be quiet,” Sojin warns, and Jeongguk just nods again, before tugging at Taehyung’s sleeve.
“Nice to meet you,” Taehyung waves as he follows behind Jeongguk.

They go down a dark, narrow hallway, and Taehyung almost steps on shattered glass. Jeongguk mumbles an apology before going to a door at the very end and opening the door.

Taehyung is immediately assaulted with a sharp, acrid smell in the air, and Jeongguk sighs, stepping into the dark room and cracking open the window, letting in light and fresh air.

It takes a moment for Taehyung’s eyes to adjust, but after a while, he makes out a divide between the room- one side is messy, trash and cigarettes littering the ground, bed unmade. The other side is spotless, clean and organized, with books stacked on the small work table. Taehyung figures that side is Jeongguk’s.

“Sorry, Jackson hyung doesn’t usually smoke in here,” Jeongguk apologizes, seemingly for the hundredth time in the span of a day, and motions for Taehyung to sit in the chair.

“It’s… fine,” Taehyung says hesitantly, now recognizing the unmistakable smell of marijuana. Something in his chest stirs, somewhere between incredible discomfort and disgust. He settles down on the chair awkwardly.

Jeongguk gives Taehyung a disbelieving look, before sitting on his bed, ducking his head and swinging his feet back and forth nervously.

“So…” Jeongguk starts, but is interrupted by the sound of a door slamming. Taehyung jumps in surprise.

“Gukkie oppa,” A small girl says, appearing at the doorway, rubbing her eyes sleepily. Her dress is worn, there’s a tear at the knee, and the colors are faded. She clutches to a small rag doll and stumbles on small legs into the room.

There is yelling in the living room, and Jeongguk hops off his bed to pick up the girl and set her on the bed.

“Scary ahjumma is back,” the girl says, her voice wavering dangerously. Jeongguk bites his lip.
“I know,” he whispers nervously, and pats the girl’s hair down before kissing her forehead gently. Glass crashes in the background. A woman yells.

Jeongguk straightens up at the sound. He looks at Taehyung nervously.

“You bitch!” a woman screams, and Taehyung hears the unmistakable sound of slapping. A loud thud carries through the halls and into the room. Taehyung’s heart pounds against his chest.

“You need to go,” Jeongguk mutters, grabbing Taehyung’s backpack from where he’d dropped it on the ground.

“W-what?” Taehyung asks, watching as two small boys scramble into the room and join the little girl on the bed. They dive under the covers and wrap their arms around each other tightly. They can’t have been older than five.

“You can’t stay, Taehyung,” Jeongguk whispers, eyes darting around nervously. He cringes as something shatters in the background. He grabs Taehyung’s elbow and drags him out of the room and to the back door, where he pushes Taehyung out.

“Jeongguk, what are you--”

There is a loud screaming, mixed with the sound of several children crying.

“Call your driver, do something. Just don’t come back again,” Jeongguk says breathlessly, shoving Taehyung’s backpack into his hands.

“Wait, Jeongguk--”

And the door slams closed in his face.
Chapter 3

The air outside the Rise Hotel in Kangnam is chilly, and as the valets run back and forth between cars, their breath comes out in visible grey plumes in the air. Although the hotel is always busy, tonight the traffic is more escalated because of the Hearts for Hearts Gala and Fundraiser.

All the well-to-do Seoul socialites gather in the grand ballroom at the very heart of the towering building, dressed in all their finest silks and suits. Champagne is constantly flowing, and the ebb of gossip and laughter swirls in the air with the twenty piece orchestra tucked in a corner.

Taehyung hates these sorts of events, because his duty is to “kiss ass” as Yoongi would so tastefully put it (the elder stayed far away from these events, unless Hoseok used his deadly pout, which, indeed, he had), mingle and flirt and generally charm the money from people’s pockets.

It’s for a good cause, he reminds himself, as the daughter of one of the many CEOs present drags a silk-gloved hand across his arm, teeth flashing pearly white just like the necklace around her neck.

He realizes an escape plan when he spots Hoseok approaching him. When the older man attempts to pass, Taehyung grabs him by the elbow material of his suit jacket and drags him away, all the while nodding his apologies to the girl and smiling as pleasantly as he can.

He manages to get them to one of the more private balconies of the room before asking his burning question. “Hoseok, where is Jeongg- Dr. Jeon?” Taehyung clears his throat, clasping his hands behind his back and setting his mouth into a frown, trying his hardest to look displeased when in reality, he’s burning with anxiety.

“He said he’d be a little late.” Hoseok clicks his tongue in annoyance, jerking his arm out of Taehyung’s grip and smoothing the material. “He had to go pick up his date.”

Taehyung’s eyebrows shoot up, and something terribly close to jealousy swirls in his stomach. “Date? He didn’t tell me anything about a date.”

Hoseok shoots Taehyung a look. “Dr. Jeon didn’t tell you anything. I handled all the invitations, Taehyung. How would you know if he was bringing a plus one or not? Why would you care?”

Taehyung’s mouth opens and closes, but he can’t come up with any sort of excuse.
“You have a strange fixation on Dr. Jeon, Taehyung,” Hoseok leans in, eyes narrowing. “You don’t plan to turn him into one of your little fixes, do you?”

“No, no!” Taehyung says, a little too loudly. His eyes dart around him, making sure no one was privy to his little outburst. “No, I’m just… curious.”

“Right…” Hoseok drawls, eyes still narrowed, looking less than convinced, before his eyes scan over the ballroom floor and widen when he notices something.

“Oh! It’s Dr. Jeon!” Taehyung’s eyes snap to the direction Hoseok points in, and his stomach churns violently.

Jeongguk enters the ballroom the way a prince would, charming, poised, and his aura draws attention, makes heads turn as he smiles, bowing politely to the other guests as he walks past, dressed to perfection in a black suit and crisp white dress shirt, black silk tie clinging to his throat, and a man clinging to his arm.

Taehyung’s eyes narrow as he zeroes in on the tall, broad-shouldered man who hangs delicately from Jeongguk’s crooked elbow, takes in the pretty face, the light brunette hair, and pouty pink lips, and he thinks the man belongs more in a magazine than standing next to Jeongguk.

And then he realizes that the man is on the cover of magazines. This is Kim Seokjin, international runway model and actor, lauded worldwide for his soft, irresistible features and charm.

Currently, Kim Seokjin is charming it up with Jeongguk, and as Taehyung watches with growing ferocity, he notes how the two seem to be attached at the hip, how close they lean in when they converse, the quiet, secret little smiles that Taehyung knows only lovers share.

Taehyung is positively livid.

“He never mentioned a boyfriend,” Taehyung hisses, and clamps his mouth shut once he’s realized he’s said it out loud. Hoseok gives him another odd look.

“Why would he?”
Why *would* he? Taehyung wonders. *It’s not like he has to tell me about his love life… Not really. Just because we were together in high school…*

And Taehyung realizes, with a sinking feeling as Jeongguk tips his head back in laughter at something Seokjin says, that Jeongguk doesn’t belong to him. Not anymore, at least.

“Let’s go say hello,” Hoseok prompts, and Taehyung is content to remain rooted to his spot, but he supposes he’s taken part in enough suspicious behavior for one night, so he just trails after Hoseok.

*Pull it together, Kim Taehyung,* He tucks his hands into his suit pants pockets, smiling and nodding as he passes guests while making their way towards Jeongguk.

“Dr. Jeon! How nice it is to see you!” Hoseok smiles widely, offering his hand. Jeongguk shakes it graciously.

“This is Kim Seokjin, “ Jeongguk introduces, placing a hand at the base of Seokjin’s spine and smiling proudly. Taehyung notes the lack of the pronoun.

“Thank you for inviting me,” Seokjin says, smiling pleasantly. “Oh, and you must be Kim Taehyung.”

“Pleasure,” Taehyung smiles tightly, shaking the man’s hand.

“I am very intrigued by your cause, Taehyung ssi, Jeongguk has been telling me so much about it.”

“Oh really?” Taehyung drawls, raising an eyebrow at Jeongguk, who narrows his eyes for just a millisecond, and paints a wider smile on his face. “I would love to talk to you about it.”

♥

“You sure this is going to work?” Mark asks, standing behind Taehyung as they wait in the wings of the stage.
“Of course it will.” Taehyung rolls his eyes, but he clutches his guitar tighter. *Did I remember to tune it? What if a string snaps? What if my voice breaks?*

“You’re going a pretty long way just to get laid, Taehyung.” Jinyoung snickers, and Taehyung shoots him a dirty look. “Didn’t try half as hard with Minah.”

Taehyung huffs a laugh. *Idiots.* “Minah wasn’t half as hard. She wanted me from the beginning. Getting into her pants was easy.”

*Too bad I didn’t actually get into her pants.*

“Now Jeon Jeongguk… he’s a tricky one,” Taehyung explains, thinking back to the way Jeongguk had looked slamming the door in his face. The younger boy hadn’t answered his calls, avoided him in class. He needed to accelerate the plan, because time was running out.

“So you think this is going to get him?” Mark asks incredulously.

“*Of course it will,*” Taehyung drawls condescendingly. “Anyone would kill to get asked to prom like this by me. Jeon Jeongguk is no exception.”

He turns his attention back to the principal, who is rattling out the daily announcements, and peeks out to look at the crowd. Most of the students are falling asleep in their seats, others are texting or talking to friends.

“And now… we have a special announcement,” the principal says, and Taehyung realizes that this is his cue.

Now or never, he reminds himself, and takes a deep breath before straightening his shoulders and sauntering on to the stage. He mutters a thank you to the principal, who replies with his own thank you, bowing as he backs off the stage, and Taehyung wants to laugh, because he’s got this whole damn school wrapped around his finger.

“Hi everyone,” Taehyung greets into the microphone at the center of the stage. He’s got the students’ attention now- there’s a murmur going through the crowd, and people have dropped what they’re
doing to turn their attention to the Great Kim Taehyung.

Taehyung’s eyes scan the crowd, before landing on the small boy sitting in one of the aisle seats near the front. When he meets Jeongguk’s gaze, the younger’s eyes widen in surprise. Even past the stage lights, Taehyung can see Jeongguk blushing.

“I’m here to sing a song, for a special person here this morning. Jeon Jeongguk, this one is for you.”

And then Taehyung begins to strum his guitar, humming into the microphone the first notes of Eddie Kim’s ‘Slow Dance’.

Taehyung has never been a shy guy. He knows his many skills, and he knows how to use them. One thing he’s always been proud of is his musical talents- he’s exploited them too many times to count, and no one ever could resist his deep voice.

And he knows he’s got the audience enraptured- he always did have good stage presence-- and some people are even clapping and singing along. He just smirks and continues, maintaining eye contact with Jeongguk throughout the whole thing.

Jeongguk looks absolutely horrified, and he darts his eyes back and forth, noticing people around him whispering and pointing at him. He sinks lower into his seat.

Taehyung tells himself Jeongguk’s just being shy, that he’s secretly enjoying all the attention, and focuses on the song. When it ends, his heart begins to beat rapidly, chest tightening, but he ignores it, grinning into the mic.

“And I want to know. Jeon Jeongguk, will you go to prom with me?” he asks, and the students turn silent, all simultaneously turning to Jeongguk, who looks absolutely terrified.

Taehyung’s heart thumps wildly against his chest, and his breath comes out in short little pants but he keeps the smile plastered on his face. There’s a pause before Jeongguk jumps out of his seat, grabs his backpack, and runs out of the auditorium.

A bubble of chatter erupts in the audience and Taehyung’s smile turns tense as he flushes with embarrassment. He runs backstage, tearing the guitar strap over his head and shoving the large instrument into Mark’s arms before bolting out the door in pursuit of Jeongguk.
His heart is beating too fast, his throat is tight, and his limbs feel lethargic. He sees Jeongguk’s small form round a corner, but his vision turns blurry at the edges before everything goes black.

♥

“So, you’re the infamous Kim Taehyung.”

“Excuse me?” Taehyung frowns in surprise, and the model just smirks, taking a sip of the champagne from a flute resting elegantly between his fingers.

“The one who broke Jeongguk’s heart all those years ago?” he drawls, and Taehyung steps back in shock.

“H-he told you about me?”

Seokjin laughs airily. “Of course not, silly. But I’ve known Jeongguk for a very long time, and what he doesn’t say, I can piece together easily enough.” He runs his eyes over Taehyung, as though sizing him up.

“But I just had to take one look at you to know,” Taehyung’s skin pricks, and Seokjin smiles all too pleasantly. “The way he looks at you… the way you look at him. It’s unmistakable.”

And Taehyung supposes that were he a normal person in this situation he would blush in embarrassment, the unmistakable guilt swirling in his stomach, but he trains a composed look on his face, taking a sip of his own champagne.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Seokjin ssi,” Taehyung says coolly, not meeting Seokjin’s knowing gaze.

“If you’re looking to win him back, I can tell you it’s going to be difficult.”

Taehyung’s eyes snap up to the other man’s. “Why are you telling me this?” It takes everything in
his power to keep his voice from wavering. “Aren’t you his boyfriend?”

Seokjin lets out another peal of laughter, hand coming up to cover his mouth prettily, and he just shakes his head as if it were the most naive question anyone could ask.

“Me? Jeongguk’s boyfriend?” Seokjin sighs in amusement. “Jeongguk doesn’t do boyfriends, Taehyung ssi.” He takes another sip of his champagne, eyes rapt on Taehyung over the rim of the glass. “Jeongguk does lovers, flings. And I would be lying to myself if I thought I was the only one he has at the moment.”

Taehyung doesn’t know why, but the words resonate deep within him. Is this really my Jeon Jeongguk? he wonders, before bitterly realizing that he gave up the right to call Jeon Jeongguk his the moment he took that god damned picture.

His eyes scan the room for Jeongguk, and he finds the man immediately. He watches, transfixed, as the younger man moves effortlessly from patron to patron, mingling pleasantly. Jeongguk is drawing attention from every corner of the large ballroom, and he seems completely in his element.

“Charming, isn’t he?” Seokjin hums appreciatively from beside Taehyung, and he almost jolts in surprise, so caught up in staring at Jeongguk that he forgets about the man-- Jeongguk’s lover--standing next to him.

“If you say so.” Taehyung keeps his voice level, and he physically turns his back to Jeongguk because he knows that he won’t be able to resist ogling him all night if he’s within Taehyung’s line of sight.

Seokjin just smiles knowingly. “He’s incredible in bed, by the way.”

Taehyung feels the heat flush through his body, both from Seokjin’s brazen words and also his damned imagination, because fuck if he hadn’t thought about Jeongguk that way since they met for the first time in ten years.

“I’d rather not talk about fucking Jeongguk right now, Seokjin ssi.”

And the dark chuckle that tumbles past Seokjin’s lips sends a shiver up Taehyung’s spine. “Oh Taehyung ssi. You don’t fuck Jeon Jeongguk. Jeon Jeongguk fucks you.”
Chapter 4

Jeongguk can’t keep his eyes off of Seokjin and Taehyung. They’re in the opposite corner of the room, so he can’t even make out the words the two men mouth.

*Dammit, Seokjin,* Jeongguk curses. He should have known the older man would do something like this. Despite Jeongguk’s best attempts at keeping his mind closed to the people around him, Seokjin had a remarkable intuition.

Maybe that’s why they’d been friends for so long, and lovers for longer. Seokjin never did try to pry, because he didn’t need to. Even after all these years, Jeongguk had only told him so much about his past- the rest the elder had connected himself.

But something about the determined glint in Seokjin’s eye as he drags Taehyung off makes Jeongguk nervous. He doesn’t need Kim Taehyung knowing more about him than absolutely necessary.

“Jeongguk-ah, I wanted to congratulate you on your research being published this year.” Jeongguk bows graciously to Dr. Lee, the man who he had done his fellowship under, the one who recommended he take on Taehyung’s case.

“You’ve come a long way, and I couldn’t be prouder,” the aging, rotund man praises, and Jeongguk smiles more genuinely. He adores the older man, who he considered almost like a father figure.

Jeongguk’s future had always been clear to him, but after high school, everything was distorted and living became painful. He had made bad choices, slept around, lost all hope in himself and the world around him. In his darkest times as a med student, when he had been dealing with depression and pent up frustrations, Dr. Lee had rekindled his passion for helping people, putting the picture back into perspective.

After the man retired, he had only seen it fitting to hand over his far-reaching cardiac practice to his star pupil. Jeongguk had taken on the responsibility dutifully, and had continued to grow the practice, delving into research and patenting new procedures.

“I think this will be a good project for you, Jeongguk-ah,” Dr. Lee clasps a hand on Jeongguk’s shoulder, face becoming serious. “I know how important this cause is to you. I’m sure you and Taehyung will make a great team.”
Jeongguk’s eye twitches at the name, and his gaze instinctively snaps to Taehyung, seemingly still deep in conversation with Seokjin. His mouth turns dry and his stomach churns at the sight of the man—dressed immaculately in a black suit and bow tie, deep brunette hair combed to perfection, jaw line sharp, eyes warm and brown, box shaped smile still just as charming as in high school, and his heart thuds against his chest as he remembers the time when Taehyung used to look at him like that. And the way he himself used to look back.

No.

Jeongguk takes the stray thought and locks it away. He’s disappointed in himself for being so damn affected when he knows Taehyung doesn’t deserve a second of his thoughts. The few seconds Jeongguk had even spent looking at him are wasted, and he bemoans the loss.

*Kim Taehyung is not worth it.*

Jeongguk tears his eyes away with great effort and tries to put a genuine smile on his face. “Of course we will. I won’t disappoint you.”

Dr. Lee opens his mouth to respond, but he’s cut off by a clamour by the entrance. “Oh, the children are here!” the man chuckles, and Jeongguk raises an eyebrow, turning around to see a group of small kids running into the massive ballroom.

They’re accompanied by a small lady, who is pushing a small raven haired child in a wheelchair. *They look so happy,* Jeongguk thinks noting the nice dresses on the girls and the suits on the boys. They look well fed and healthy, even the boy in the wheelchair.

“*Tae oppa!*” a small girl screeches, sprinting across the room towards Taehyung, and the sound catches the attention of all the socialites. Everyone’s attention seems to be on the girl approaching Taehyung, and Jeongguk watches with bated breath, wondering how Taehyung will react.

“*Hyeri!*” Taehyung lets out a booming laugh, catching the girl in his arms and spinning her around. The girl screeches with glee and winds her arms around Taehyung’s neck. Taehyung settles her in his arms and presses a loud kiss to her cheek, making her giggle and wipe at her face, and the entire room erupts into amused laughter before everyone returns to their conversations.

Jeongguk scoffs, wondering when members of high society became so accustomed to orphan
children showing up at their galas, and then realizes that it must be Taehyung. Only he would be able to make people care like this.

*He always was a good actor*, Jeongguk thinks. Always able to make people care, manipulate them into getting his way. This is just another one of his little ploys, he’s sure.

He reminds himself that this is all an act. For the press, for the rich folk in the room. His eyes narrow as he watches the man smile that box mile, and he clutches his champagne flute tighter. *What a fake.*

“Jeongguk ssi!” Taehyung calls from the other side of the room. Jeongguk raises an eyebrow in expectancy, keeping his face flat. He wonders how Taehyung can call him so casually, like nothing is wrong. *Everything is fucking wrong.* “There’s someone I want you to meet.”

Jeongguk excuses himself to Dr. Lee and walks across, keeping his face blank and trying not to fidget because that’s weakness. He reminds himself that there are people watching, but by the time he’s made his way over Taehyung isn’t even paying attention to him, engrossed in clipping a bow in the little girl named Hyeri’s hair.

“Oppa! You’re doing it wrong!” The girl stamps her foot, pouting. Jeongguk expects Taehyung to snap at the girl, but the older man just pouts back, sticking out his bottom lip.

“Oppa’s sorry, Hyeri. Can you show me how?” Taehyung asks, tilting his head forward. Hyeri giggles and places the bow in his hair, right in the middle. “There, how does that look? Oppa’s handsome, right?”

Hyeri erupts into another fit of giggles, and Jeongguk rolls his eyes, because Taehyung does look absolutely ridiculous with a Hello Kitty printed bow on his head, and he bites down the urge to snatch it out of his hair. *This is business, Jeon Jeongguk,* he reminds himself.

After a minute, Jeongguk gets impatient and decides that he doesn’t want to waste another moment watching this disgusting exchange, so he clears his throat, and it catches Taehyung’s attention.

“Hyeri, why don’t you go dance with Youngjae for a while?” Taehyung asks sweetly. Hyeri nods and presses a sloppy kiss to his nose before skipping away. He straightens up, dusting off his knees and adjusting his blazer.
“Sorry,” Taehyung clears his throat. “I got distracted.”

Jeongguk narrows his eyes, crossing his arms in front of his chest, and glares at the bow still nestled in Taehyung’s chocolate hair.

“Nice bow. It compliments your skin tone,” Jeongguk remarks snidely.

“Oh!” Taehyung tugs the bow out of his hair and his skin flushes a light rose color. “Uhm…”

Jeongguk doesn’t know whether he wants to laugh at the sheer extent Taehyung would go to in order to feed these people the _philanthropic CEO_ bull shit, or just strangle him, because it’s been ten years and Taehyung is still the same fake asshole from high school.

“You were going to introduce me to someone?” Jeongguk asks impatiently. “I don’t have a lot of time, Taehyung _ssi_.”

Taehyung narrows his eyes, not missing the venom in Jeongguk’s voice. “Right, yes.” Taehyung sighs, turns his head until his gaze lands on the boy in the wheelchair, sitting almost dejectedly at the edge of the dance floor. “Come with me.”

“Jimmie,” Taehyung says softly once they approach. The boy turns his head once he realizes it’s Taehyung, and gives him a blinding smile, and it makes Jeongguk wonder if he’s the only one in this godforsaken room who hasn’t fallen for this obvious act.

“I want you to meet someone,” Taehyung says, and Jimin nods, turning in his wheelchair. “This is Dr. Jeon.” Jimin gives Jeongguk the same blinding smile.

“Hi Dr. Jeon! I’m Park Jimin!” he chirps, sticking out a tiny hand. His tone strikes something inside Jeongguk, and he forgets his blind rage for a moment as memories flood through his mind.

“Hello Jimin,” Jeongguk smiles, softer and more genuine than he has been all night, taking Jimin’s hand and shaking it. Jimin just beams again, and he reminds Jeongguk of the small boys who used to live in Hyunsik with him. They would smile the same way when Jeongguk saved up enough to buy them ice cream, cry and hide together in his bed whenever the orphanage warden went on a drunken rampage.
“Are you going to make me better, Dr. Jeon?” Jimin asks. His eyes are bright with hope, and it contrasts his sickly pale skin, the exhaustion hanging from his small frame.

Something heavy settles in Jeongguk’s chest. The weight of responsibility, one that he should be accustomed to as a surgeon. And yet, this child, so hindered by illness but so full of hope, makes him feel. Jeongguk brings his hand up to push back the fringe across the boy’s forehead. “I promise I’ll try my best.”

That seems to be enough for Jimin in that moment, because he smiles blindingly again. “TaeTae hyung said you were the best.”

Jeongguk’s eyes drift up in surprise to Taehyung, who stands with his hands tucked in his pockets and eyes trained on the floor. He narrows his eyes in judgement. *When is he going to drop the act?*

“That’s not what I said, Jiminnie,” Taehyung protests.

“Yes you did!” Jimin’s eyes widen in accusation before turning back to Jeongguk. “He said you were the smartest person he knows and that you’re amazing! I’m not lying, he’s lying. He talks about you all the—”

“That’s enough, Jimin,” Taehyung breaks in, chuckling nervously. “Why don’t we go find the chocolate fountain?” He promptly takes the handles of the wheelchair.

“Bye Dr. Jeon!” Jimin waves furiously as he gets wheeled away, Taehyung muttering something about ‘bro code’, and Jeongguk just stares at the pair, fists clenched, wondering what he got himself into.

♥

“Tae-ah.”

Taehyung looks up from the manga he’d been reading and his face breaks out into a wide grin.
“Joonie hyung!” he exclaims, tossing the comic aside and sitting up in the hospital bed. The older man chuckles, striding up to Taehyung’s side and enveloping him in a massive hug. Taehyung closes his eyes, committing to memory the dark scent of his brother’s cologne, mixed with his shampoo and the smell of his Italian suits.

“I thought you were gonna be in Japan for another month,” Taehyung says as the man pulls back from his embrace.

“What? Want me gone? I can leave now if you want—”

“No no no!” Taehyung rushes to explain. “I just…”

“When Hoseok called me about you fainting I rushed over as fast as I could.”

Taehyung’s body flushes with guilt, and he frowns down at the blanket spread over his lap. “I didn’t mean to bother you, hyung.”

Namjoon just cups the younger’s face and tilts it up to meet his gaze. “Hey, you know you’re more important to me than any stupid business deal, right?” Taehyung just pouts, eyes starting to water, and he throws his arms around Namjoon’s neck and holds him tight.

“I missed you hyung,” he mumbles into the elder’s shoulder.

“I missed you too, TaeTae.” Namjoon rubs at Taehyung’s back soothingly. It feels like ages before Taehyung releases his iron grip and Namjoon straightens.

“How’s my champ doing?” the man chuckles, pulling up a chair and finally settling himself down besides Taehyung’s bed.

“Dr. Lee said the medication they gave me last year isn’t working,” Taehyung scrunches up his face in annoyance. “That’s why I fainted at school.” He had heard the words ‘vasodilator’ and ‘arrhythmia’ thrown around but didn’t know what it meant. He just figured Hoseok would take care of it.
“They’re gonna put me on a new one soon,” Taehyung looks at Namjoon in annoyance. “I don’t like the pills, hyung.”

Namjoon sighs, taking Taehyung’s hands in his own. Taehyung has always loved Namjoon’s hands—big and warm, they always remind him that despite everything, there’s someone out there in the world who loves him.

“I know you don’t, but that’s all they can do for now.”

“I know,” Taehyung mumbles begrudgingly.

“You gotta stay strong, Tae. You have my lucky charm right?” Taehyung nods vehemently, raising up the small necklace that had been kept hidden underneath his hospital clothes. “Then everything will be okay,” Taehyung smiles softly.

“How’s school?” Namjoon asks, changing the subject. “I heard Yoongi got early acceptance into the law school he wanted.”

Taehyung nods excitedly. “Yup. I swear he was crying when he read the acceptance letter. When I told him he punched me and said it was allergies, but I know they were just happy tears.”

Namjoon lets out a booming laugh. “I knew he was a softy,” Taehyung grins, because Yoongi had harbored a crush on Namjoon for years, and he wonders what his best friend would do if he heard the object of his silent affections talking about him like that.

“What about you?” Taehyung just shrugs.

“I’m pretty sure I got into the university that I wanted. But we’ll see,” he says nonchalantly. Truthfully, Taehyung doesn’t care much for college, and he doesn’t really need to, but he’s going because he knows Namjoon wants him too. It’s the least he could do.

“Any cuties in your class?” Namjoon wiggles his eyebrows suggestively, and Taehyung smiles, and he’s about to say no, when a certain messy haired boy with bunny rabbit teeth pops into his mind.
“Kind of…” Taehyung starts. “But I think I screwed up.” He remembers the fear in Jeongguk’s eyes as he slammed the door in Taehyung’s face, the way he sprinted out of the auditorium, eyes watering with embarrassment.

“Screwed up how?” Namjoon leans forward, resting his chin on his hands.

Taehyung blushes. “Ah, hyung. You’re too busy to listen to my problems.”

Namjoon clicks his tongue in dismissal. “No, I want to know. I love juicy gossip.”

“Hyung,” Taehyung whines, shoving at Namjoon, and the elder just laughs in amusement.

“No, really Tae. I want to know. Maybe I can help. I’m quite the charmer.”

Taehyung sighs in defeat. So he explains his situation with Jeongguk (but leaves out the part about the bet), and once he finishes, Namjoon leans back, letting out a low whistle.

“I hate to tell you this… but you fucked up, kid.”

“Hyung.”

Namjoon grins, shaking his head, and rests back in his seat. “Have you tried… I don’t know… listening to him? Being nice to him?”

Taehyung looks at the elder in confusion.


“Is that all I have to do? Be nice to him?”
Namjoon just smiles softly. “You’d be surprised how much a little bit of kindness can be worth.”

♥

Jeongguk clicks his tongue in annoyance when Hoseok’s phone goes straight to voicemail. He had been trying to contact the man all day, but he wasn’t answering. He half curses himself for not asking for a personal number, but then remembers that he was the one so adamant about everything being professional.

He sighs and tosses the phone into the passenger seat of his car. Taehyung had been scheduled for a follow up to his surgery today. They were supposed to take x rays to figure out whether the synthetic valves were in good condition. Jeongguk couldn’t stress the importance of this meeting, and yet… both Taehyung and Hoseok had seemed to have forgotten.

It makes him wonder what could be so important that they would overlook a pivotal doctor’s appointment, but he reminds himself that he shouldn’t care so much about Taehyung.

As Taehyung’s doctor, Jeongguk has a certain responsibility to his patient, but that line is drawn when he’s been calling them all day and there is still no response.

It’s just as well, because it gives Jeongguk some precious free time. He had gone to the florist and hand picked a bouquet of white gardenias- they were always Sojin’s favorite-- and driven out of the city.

He parks his car and steps out, the air fresh and cool, and walks carefully, having memorized the way after so many times visiting the place.

“Noona,” Jeongguk says softly, stopping in front of the small tombstone. “I brought your favorite.” He kneels down to place the bouquet next to the granite sticking up from the ground.

The stone had been engraved with just her name on it. It was all Jeongguk could afford after her death. But even now, in his considerable wealth, Jeongguk couldn’t bring himself to build a large tomb for her. Although Sojin deserved nothing but the best, Jeongguk knew she would have appreciated the small things more.

“Things aren’t so good right now, noona,” Jeongguk starts. He brushes away the fallen leaves
around the tomb stone, swiping away dirt from the granite. “T-Taehyung is back… I know you said he would be nothing but trouble, and you were right, of course.” He frowns, biting his lip in frustration because it’s so hard to even just say his name. *When did it become like this?*

“I don’t know what I’m supposed to do. He’s… such a *liar*., He hasn’t changed one bit since high school.” He picks up older bouquet of flowers, the ones from last week, and stares at them in his hands. He frowns down at them, words on the tip of his tongue and yet not quite knowing what to say.

“I hate him,” he spits out finally, before sighing. “You’re still the only one who loves me.” Sojin had been dead for a long time, and Jeongguk is no longer sad, but the hollowness in his chest always aches whenever he comes here. It reminds him that he’s still very much alone.

He opens his mouth to say something else but he’s broken out of his thoughts when he hears the crunch of gravel under tires. He looks up to see a silver Mercedes pull up in the parking lot, and the driver gets out to open the passenger seat.

Jeongguk’s mouth goes dry when he sees Taehyung get out, thanking the driver, before walking into the cemetery. Jeongguk doesn’t know whether he should make his presence known or not, but Taehyung doesn’t notice him as he heads towards the large tomb site about a hundred feet away.

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“Hold on noona,” Jeongguk mutters, irritation and the potential for confrontation carrying his feet towards the magnificent white granite structure. It had been built almost five years ago, if he remembered correctly, but he had never cared to know who had been laid to rest there.

Jeongguk waits until Taehyung opens the door and steps inside, before moving closer. He almost feels bad for listening in, but he tells himself that the minute Taehyung comes out, Jeongguk will scold him for missing his appointment.

“Hi, Joonie hyung. Happy birthday,” Taehyung’s voice carries all the way to Jeongguk, and his eyes widen slightly. “I hope you’re doing well, wherever you are.” Taehyung’s voice wavers at the end, and Jeongguk bites his lip, frowning. Taehyung sounds… sad, and Jeongguk doesn’t know what to make of it.

“Hoseok hyung is the best, as usual. He nags me so much I think he’s deluded himself into thinking he’s my mother or something,” Taehyung laughs. “Yoongi hyung is doing well. His firm is getting a lot of clients now, and he’s happy. He still thinks about you, hyung, a lot. He won’t say it, but he does.
“Jiminnie’s getting better too, hyung. He doesn’t need the wheelchair as much anymore, and I’ve never seen him so happy. It’s all thanks to Jeongguk,” Jeongguk’s toes curl at the mention of his name. “Remember Jeongguk? He’s the one you gave me relationship advice about in high school. The one…” Taehyung lets out a shaky breath. “Well. You know who he is.”

Jeongguk bites his lip so hard he thinks he’s going to draw blood. “Yeah, he’s a really big cardiac surgeon now. Can you believe it? He’s helping me with the heart center,” Jeongguk digs his fingers into his palms. “I don’t know what I’d do without his help.”

No no no. You don’t get to say those things.

Taehyung sighs. “It’s funny how life comes back to kick you in the ass, huh? I never thought it would turn out like this. I don’t think you’d even believe it if you were here.”

Jeongguk bites back a derisive laugh. If anyone was ever affected by their history, it was him. After they had fallen apart, Taehyung still had his family, wealth, status, and connections that could take him anywhere he wanted without lifting a finger. Jeongguk was left with… nothing.

“I should have done what you said. I should have told him the truth from the start. You were right, hyung. But then again… you were always right,” Taehyung’s voice quivers, and Jeongguk’s heart thumps violently against his chest. He doesn’t want to hear this.

It’s all lies, Jeongguk repeats in his head, over and over again.

“... You must be disappointed in me, huh hyung? I screwed up… so badly. Every day I wonder what would have happened if I had just been honest. If I had done what you told me to do…” Jeongguk hears Taehyung take a deep breath. “God hyung, I fucked up. I wish you were here right now. You were always bailing me out, covering for me. You were always there for me, and now you’re not. Every day is so hard, hyung, knowing you’re not here to help me, knowing I can’t see you smile.”

And it’s getting harder and harder for Jeongguk to breathe. All the pent up rage, the anger and frustration, the betrayal, all comes to the surface, everything he had been trying to lock away suddenly flying out like some Pandora’s box. He shuts his eyes and wills himself not to make a sound.

“I know I’ve always been the screw up. No one ever expected anything of me, except you. You
always believed in me, and you loved me, despite how shitty I was. You never stopped loving me. And now you’re gone, and I feel so alone…”

Jeongguk’s skin prickles with the first sounds of Taehyung’s sobs. No. Jeongguks knuckles turn white with how hard he clenches. You don’t get to be upset. You don’t get to cry. You don’t deserve that, Taehyung.

“I know it’s stupid of me to think that. Yoongi’s always there for me, Hoseok too, but it’s different. I just wish I had more time with you. I wish I could have proved myself to you. I wish I could have made you proud.” Jeongguk clamps a hand over his mouth to keep silent, his other hand gripping onto the bouquet of wilted gardenias forgotten in his hand.

“I’m sorry hyung…” Taehyung says shakily, voice thick with tears.

“I’m sorry… I’m sorry… I’m so so sorry.”

Enough is enough.

“This is what you missed your appointment for?” Jeongguk asks sharply, stepping into the tomb, taking in the beautifully decorated interior, with flowers in vases lining the sides, and a large picture of a man with platinum blonde hair hanging in the center, smiling down.

Taehyung whips around in surprise, eyes puffed and red, and his skin is blotchy. He wipes furiously at the tears with his coat sleeve, sniffing, as he stuffs what looks like a necklace back underneath his shirt.

“J-Jeongguk…?” he whispers shakily, eyes swirling with confusion.

“You missed your check-up today,” Jeongguk repeats, narrowing his eyes. Taehyung looks taken aback, shocked almost, and exhales sharply.

“How did you find me?”

Jeongguk clicks his tongue. “You ask as though I actually sought you out. I have better ways to
spend my time than chasing after people who obviously don’t care enough about their health.”

Taehyung’s face scrunches up in disbelief, shoulders tensing, looking incredibly upset. He’s a fantastic actor, I’ll give him that much, Jeongguk thinks.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Taehyung asks, eyes swimming with anger. The words hit Jeongguk sharply but he brushes aside the feeling of potential regret under his skin. His brain warns him not to say any more, but he’s held this in for too long.

“What’s wrong with me? Says the person who almost destroyed my life,” Jeongguk scoffs. Taehyung recoils at the tone, still shaking with anger, but his eyes are reproachful.

“I have to hand it to you, Taehyung. You’ve put on a pretty good show. But there’s no one around. You can drop the act.”

“What are you talking about?” Taehyung’s brows pull together, clamoring to understand the poisoned words that continue to spill from Jeongguk’s mouth. “What act?”

“You act like you’re some caring, good guy, but you and I both know the truth,” Jeongguk steps closer, pointing a finger accusingly at Taehyung’s chest. The older man swats his hand away and glares back, eyes shining with anger and hurt and frustration, but Jeongguk just presses further.

“Deep down inside, you’re still the same selfish, deceitful boy you were in high school,” he whispers dangerously. “You’re still a monster.” His hands shake so he clenches them, knowing full well he’ll end up punching Taehyung square in the jaw otherwise.

“What happened to you?” Taehyung pleads, eyes searching Jeongguk’s eyes almost desperately as he shrinks back. “What happened to the beautiful Jeongguk? The one who saw the good in everything, treated everyone with kindness? Where is he?”

How dare you, Jeongguk wants to roar. He just chooses to laugh instead, air turning absolutely frigid with the ice in his voice. “You want to know where that Jeongguk went?” They’re almost nose to nose, and Taehyung winces at the proximity, but he refuses to back down.

“He’s gone, Taehyung. You killed him.”
When Taehyung comes back to school, it causes a big stir. He just tells people that his brother took him for a holiday in Europe (which is somewhat true).

“You okay?” Yoongi asks him as they wait for the bell to ring, so they can be dismissed for lunch. Taehyung slouches in his chair, making a face.

“Not really. Apparently the meds aren’t working so they have to put me on new ones,” Taehyung flicks at the scrap of paper on his desk.

Yoongi frowns in concern. “Do you know why they’re not working? Maybe--”

“Don’t know, don’t care.” Taehyung clicks his tongue, and Yoongi rolls his eyes.

“You should really take more care, Tae, it’s not healthy--” And then the bell rings, and Taehyung lets out a relieved sigh, eyes snapping to the young boy with the mop of black hair and bunny teeth at the front of the classroom.

Today, he’s determined to get to Jeongguk. He needs to crack the younger’s walls.

“Hey you brat! I wasn’t done talking to you!” Yoongi calls out as Taehyung hops out of his seat and gathers up his things, keeping Jeongguk constantly in his line of sight. He ignores the people in the halls who wave to him and keeps his focus on Jeongguk, following a few steps behind.

Taehyung begins doubting his split-second decision when he finds himself by the stairwell of the library’s top floor.

How the fuck did I even get here? he wonders, but there’s no time to doubt himself at this point. He ducks behind one of the book cases when Jeongguk turns around, eyes wide and searching before disappearing through the door. Taehyung counts out five seconds before stepping out and approaching the door.

This is the top floor, Taehyung muses. How higher can I even go? He sighs, adjusting his backpack
straps and opening the door slowly. He looks up the steps to check if the coast is clear, and steps inside. He climbs up slowly, afraid that Jeongguk might pop out at any moment, but he chastises himself, because the point was to talk to Jeongguk.

But it feels like I’m a spy, Taehyung reasons, reaching the top of the stairwell. He opens the final door, and he finds himself on the library roof. Of fucking course, dumbass.

His eyes scan the area for any sign of Jeongguk, and the grin on his face slides off when he sees Jeongguk sitting on the ledge, legs dangling off the edge.

“Holy shit don’t jump!” Taehyung yells, running at the speed of light to Jeongguk’s side. “It gets better I promise, this isn’t the way--” He falters when he notices the startled, confused look on the younger boy’s face.

“What are you talking about?” Jeongguk speaks up, after what seems like an hour of him just staring at Taehyung. “Why are you here? How did you find me?”

All the confidence and bravado in Taehyung falters as he scrambles for an excuse. I was following you doesn’t seem to cut it. And Taehyung can’t really think with Jeongguk judging him like this.

“I… came here for fresh air,” he says finally, stuffing his hands in his pockets and turning away to look at the view, eyes squinting in an attempt to look like he’s serious. Jeongguk’s shoulders slump forward, as though he had been expecting a different answer.

A little kindness can go a long way.

Taehyung gulps as his hyung’s words run through his head, and he sighs, embarrassment swirling in his stomach.

“Actually I…” Taehyung kicks at the gravel at his feet. He feels oddly flustered. He’s not sure why. He doesn’t usually feel the need to think carefully before he talks, but with Jeongguk he knows he needs to be careful.

“I… wanted to apologize for the whole prom thing.” The last part comes out in one breath, and the idea of being sorry leaves an odd taste on Taehyung’s tongue.
Jeongguk looks so surprised that Taehyung isn’t sure if he should feel insulted or not. “I didn’t mean to put you on the spot like that.” The younger’s expression drops into a frown, and he turns away from Taehyung.

“People are angry with me,” he says so quietly, Taehyung has to lean forward to hear it. “They keep calling me names in the hallways. It’s nothing new but… I didn’t do anything.”

There’s a strange tightness to Taehyung’s skin, and his face flushes. This must be what guilt feels like.

“I don’t like attention on me, Taehyung,” Jeongguk mumbles, the heels of his feet kicking at the ledge. “And… I don’t even know you that well. Why would you ask me to a dance?”

Now It’s Taehyung who’s frowning. He wonders why people wouldn’t like attention. He craves it, he lives for it, for everyone to be paying attention to him. It’s odd when people aren’t talking about him. Namjoon had explained that not everyone grew up in the spotlight like Taehyung did. Maybe it’s because he’s poor.

“I’m… sorry,” Taehyung bites out, keeping his eyes trained on the floor. His fists are clenched in his pockets. Why is this so fucking hard? Why am I trying this hard for the school nerd? “I… didn’t mean to.. put you in that position.”

Jeongguk sighs, shaking his head. “It’s alright,” he says, like it’s the easiest thing in the world to apologize, to sweep away Taehyung’s admittedly asshole-ish behaviour. Taehyung looks up in surprise, about to say something, but he bites his tongue when he notices how exhausted Jeongguk looks.

“...What are you doing up here during lunch?” Taehyung asks instead of the other questions burning in his mind.

“I do homework up here. It’s quiet,” is Jeongguk’s response.

Taehyung frowns. “Homework? What about your friends?” Jeongguk shoots him an incredulous look, like the answer is obvious.
“I don’t have friends here, Taehyung,” Taehyung’s eyebrows furrow in confusion. “No rich person wants to associate with the poor people.” Jeongguk’s tone isn’t bitter. He sounds sad, accustomed. Weary.

And Taehyung wants to open his mouth and deny it, but any refutation comes up short because he realizes Jeongguk is right. Bangtan Academy was for the elite in South Korean society. Anyone whose parents were important came here. And Jeongguk is an anomaly, a stain on the white carpet of the upper class.

“I’ll be your friend!” Taehyung blurts suddenly, and before he can look up to see Jeongguk’s no-doubt judgemental expression, he props himself up on the ledge next to the younger boy. He smiles his signature box smile-- no one can resist it-- and looks at Jeongguk expectantly.

“A-are you sure that’s a good idea?” Jeongguk stammers. Taehyung shrugs, unzipping his bag and pulling out his lunch. He lays out all the side dishes and rice on the space between him and Jeongguk. “I don’t think that would be good for your reputation.”

But I need you if I want to keep my reputation, Taehyung thinks, shrugging. “I don’t really care about my reputation.” Jeongguk looks at Taehyung, dubious, but the older boy just shrugs it off. He gets out his chopsticks and digs into the rice.

“Aren’t you gonna eat your lunch too?” Taehyung asks, mouth still half full of food, when he realizes Jeongguk is staring out over the ledge and not paying attention to him. Jeongguk looks at the food at his side, and bites his lip before shaking his head.

“Not hungry,” he says quietly, and just as he speaks the words, his stomach growls loudly. Jeongguk’s cheeks flare in embarrassment, and he ducks his head down. Taehyung narrows his eyes, staring at Jeongguk for a moment. And it occurs to him that maybe Jeongguk can’t afford to eat lunch every day.

A little kindness can go a long way.

“We can… share mine, if you want,” Taehyung says slowly, not really believing the words that come out of his mouth.

Jeongguk’s shoulders tense defensively. “No… that’s fine. I don’t--”
“There’s too much for me to eat by myself,” Taehyung cuts off his excuses. And it’s true, the chef always makes more than enough for Taehyung to eat on his own.

“I don’t want your pity, Taehyung,” Jeongguk whispers, eyes sad. Taehyung just shakes his head, smiling and digging through his backpack.

“Aha!” He takes out the extra pair of chopsticks. “The noona who packs my lunch always puts an extra, because I end up losing the first pair,” He laughs, holding them out to the younger boy. “You can use them.”

Jeongguk looks at the food hesitantly, and then back at Taehyung. “I keep screwing up with you,” Taehyung explains, sighing. “I want to make it up to you.”

It takes a moment, but Jeongguk finally reaches out slowly and takes the utensils. He holds the chopsticks in his hands carefully, turning so he can sit cross legged, facing the food and Taehyung.

“Go on!” Taehyung encourages. Jeongguk reaches out slowly for the rice, and places it in his mouth to chew, before pausing.

“Can you not stare at me eating?” Taehyung’s eyes widen at the Jeongguk’s words, an unfamiliar heat creeping onto his cheeks. He trains his eyes down on the food in front of him instead.

It takes Jeongguk a minute to adjust and move past the initial discomfort, but soon, he’s eating with a gusto, like it’s the first proper meal he’s had in a long time. Even then Taehyung can tell he’s holding back, probably for his own pride’s sake, and he has a fleeting idea that maybe he should share his lunch with Jeongguk more often. It might make him warm up a bit more.

“Is… everything alright at home?” Taehyung asks quietly. He looks at Jeongguk hesitantly.

The younger boy’s shoulders tense. “That place is not my home,” he says gravely, staring down at his lap.

Taehyung scrambles to correct himself. “I meant… is everything okay… over there? It seemed…” Taehyung doesn’t know how to word it. Jeongguk had looked legitimately afraid when he slammed the door in Taehyung’s face.
And he had spent thirty minutes thinking about it on a curb waiting for his driver to come pick him up. He had been catcalled twice, and he vows to never go back.

“It’s… fine. The ahjumma was just drunk… that’s all,” Jeongguk’s voice is quiet. Taehyung frowns. “Sojin noona took care of it.” Taehyung wonders why Jeongguk is talking like it’s not a big deal. Taehyung can recognize real fear when he sees it.

“So it’s alright?”

“Yeah.”

They’re both silent for a moment. A quiet breeze rolls through, and Taehyung finds himself actually enjoying the view. It’s comfortable up here. And he doesn’t feel like he has to put up any pretenses like he would at his crowded lunch table.

“You know… my parents died,” Taehyung divulges. He pokes at the last bit of japchae. “In a boating accident.” He doesn’t know why he’s telling Jeongguk this, but he feels like the younger needs to know. Maybe it’ll help them connect a bit better. Except… Taehyung still has Namjoon. And Jeongguk has no one.

Jeongguk looks up, sighing sympathetically. “I’m sorry to hear that.”

Taehyung shrugs. “I was like… three,” Taehyung was four. “I don’t even remember them really,” He keeps a picture of them in his wallet. Sometimes he wonders what they would have thought of him if they were still alive. Would they feel disgraced? Taehyung brushes the stray thought away before it can sour his mood.

“Still… it’s tough to lose your parents, no matter how old you were when you lost them,” Jeongguk’s eyes are so sympathetic and genuine. Taehyung squirms in discomfort, the conversation having gone in a different direction than he had anticipated.

“Yeah… well,” Taehyung shrugs, laughing nervously, and hopes that he can steer the conversation in a different direction. “I still have my hyung.”
Jeongguk nods. “That’s good then. It’s nice to have someone in your life who cares.”

“You have… S-sojin? Right? The lady I met that day?” Taehyung tries. Jeongguk’s lip tugs up into a sad smile.

“Yeah. But she has to take care of all the other kids too. Now that I’m older…” Jeongguk shrugs. “One day, I’m going to become a doctor. So I can take care of her and she won’t have to work so hard anymore.”

Taehyung just stares at Jeongguk. He doesn’t quite know how to respond to that. The guilt prickles at his skin, and he wonders whether he had ever faced responsibility like that. Definitely not. And now, Taehyung suddenly feels out of his league.

This bet is going to be harder than I thought.

♥

“Breathe in.”

Jeongguk presses the stethoscope just to the left of Taehyung’s sternum.

“Breathe out.”

His hand is pressed against Taehyung’s back, and he can feel the heat radiating off the skin, even through the thin hospital gown.

“Breathe in.” Taehyung’s heart beat is rapid, matching Jeongguk’s own, and he wonders why the hospital had to be understaffed now of all times. And his intern Yura had finished her rotation with him two weeks ago. He was on his own with this one.

“Are you going to let me breathe out or are you just going to let me die?” Taehyung asks irritably, and Jeongguk steps back, scrambling to remove the stethoscope from his ears and wind the cord around his neck.
Jeongguk draws his notepad from his pocket, fishing for his pen before scrawling in it. The less he has to talk to Taehyung, the better. After what had happened at the cemetery, they kept their interactions minimal, mostly communicating through terse short conference calls and a very confused Hoseok.

“Your heartbeat is abnormally fast. Have you sensed any arrhythmia recently?” Jeongguk looks up at Taehyung, face blank, and watches as Taehyung shrugs.

“How am I supposed to know?”

Jeongguk shoots him an annoyed look. “Do you feel out of breath often? Your heart feels like it’s beating too fast? Tightness of the chest?”

“No.”

“Alright then,” Jeongguk writes this in his notebook, concentrating on the notebook in his hand and not the thick tension in the room.

“Your blood pressure is also above your normal range. Are you eating and exercising according to your prescribed health plan?”

The look Taehyung gives him is dirty. “I don’t think it’s my diet, doc.”

Jeongguk clears his throat, not liking the way Taehyung’s gaze seems to sear through him.

“Emotional instability, then?”

“Holy shit, Jeongguk, you’re a fucking asshole, you know that?” Taehyung laughs in disbelief. Jeongguk clicks his pen and situates it back in the breast pocket of his white doctor’s coat.

“Then you and I are one in the same,” Jeongguk remarks, stepping over to the desktop computer and opening up Taehyung’s electronic file.
Taehyung snorts. “What the hell did I do? You’re the one who walked into my brother’s grave and-”

“I could spend days talking about you, but I have another appointment to get to in ten minutes.”

Taehyung’s mouth snaps shut, and his face furrows in annoyance. He tugs at the material of the atrocious blue hospital gown he’d been made to wear. Could this get any worse, really?

All he wants to do is sock Jeongguk in the face, but he figures that would be detrimental to his health, considering Jeongguk is the only doctor who can treat his condition.

He couldn’t believe Jeongguk had the nerve to walk in on him at Namjoon’s tomb, talk so disrespectfully in a place of peace. Clearly Jeongguk had completely lost it. The man was insane. How could he have even considered him attractive?

And yet, he had to stamp down the shiver when Jeongguk’s cold, gentle hand pressed against his back. He had nearly choked on Jeongguk’s cologne and the man’s proximity. It was embarrassing how he kept reacting to Jeongguk, despite everything screaming at him not to.

Regardless of how awful a person Jeongguk was, he was still a good doctor— an internationally acclaimed one, apparently (and no, Taehyung hadn’t Googled him). He had saved a lot of lives, his research was revolutionary.

But it hurt, and it confused Taehyung terribly, thinking about the different sides of Jeongguk.

“Your valves sound good,” Jeongguk says suddenly, snapping Taehyung out of his thoughts.

“Gee, thanks,” Taehyung snaps. Jeongguk raises a single eyebrow, and Taehyung scolds himself for allowing the younger man to worm his way under his skin like that. Jeongguk was the picture of cool confidence, unreactive, no matter what Taehyung did.

*Does he even feel?*
“You need to get a few MRIs done soon. When do you want to schedule that?” Jeongguk asks, voice disinterested.

“Hoseok will take care of it.”

Now, Jeongguk’s eyes flash. He straightens up to his full height, slipping his hands into his coat pockets.

“You ever do anything on your own?”

Taehyung’s face flushes with heat, and he opens his mouth to retort, but is cut off.

“I would guess you put your clothes on by yourself, but I can’t put it past you to have someone dress you as well.”

Jeongguk tuts, shaking his head. “You’re just a puppet, aren’t you?”

Taehyung’s entire body lights up, flaring with indignation and frustration. He wants to be mature about this. If Jeongguk is going to keep jabbing at him, he needs to stay calm. One of them needs to be an adult in this situation.

“How dare you.”

“Oh, is that a threat, Taehyung ssi? Are you going to set your lawyers on me? I’m scared.” Jeongguk rolls his eyes, and Taehyung’s fingers curl into a fist.

“Jeon Jeongguk, I would advise you to kindly keep out of affairs that are none of your business.”

Jeongguk’s lips tug up into a derisory smile. It makes Taehyung want to tear his hair out. “As you wish, Taehyung ssi.” He even has the gall to give a small bow, before stepping towards the door, and Taehyung finally finds his words.

“There is something, come to think of it.” Taehyung fights to keep his voice even. Jeongguk turns,
eyebrows quirked in disinterest.

“The orphanage. Everyone was against me taking over it. Even Hoseok. I had to fight for it, know why?”

“Why?” Jeongguk’s tone is frigid, adding to the already Antarctic chill in the room.

“Because those kids are fighting too. They have so much potential, so much happiness and love to give. They need to be loved, nurtured. I would hate for them to turn out like you.”

The door slams shut, the sound ringing in Taehyung’s ears. He knows he's gone too far. Once, a long time ago, Jeongguk had trusted him. Revealed all his vulnerabilities, his scars, the horrors of his life, and gone to Taehyung for support. For love. And Taehyung had just twisted the knife in further.

His shoulders slump, suddenly feeling drained, and he buries his face in his hands, groaning. He wonders who the real asshole is now.

*What have I done?*
Chapter 6

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” Jeongguk asks hesitantly, back pressed against the wall. He hesitantly looks down the corridor and snaps his head back quickly.

“He’s coming!” he hisses, throat tightening in panic. Taehyung snorts, peaking his own head from the corner and watching as Jaebum, one of Jeongguk’s regular tormentors, struts down the hallway.

“I don’t know about this…” Jeongguk presses a hand to his stomach as it churns violently. “What if we get caught? I can’t be on academic probation!”

“Chill, Jeongguk. We’ll be fine. No one can connect this to you,” Taehyung pats the younger’s shoulder in an attempt to soothe him. “Besides, don’t you want to get revenge on him?”

Jeongguk gives him an irritated look. “I never said that. Revenge is never the answer, Taehyung. When I told you about him this isn’t what I wanted to happen.”

Taehyung clicks his tongue and waves his hand dismissively. “I promise you’ll enjoy this.”

“How do we even know this will work?”

“I’ve done this plenty of times.” Jeongguk shoots him an incredulous look.

“Really?”

“Of course, who do you think I am?” Taehyung grins wickedly. He’d done much much worse than this. This was a baby prank. Basic. He had far more elaborate schemes up his sleeves, but he didn’t want to spook Jeongguk.

Taehyung peeks his head out again, and he sees Jaebum approach the door to the abandoned classroom. He knew from their mutual friend Mark that Jaebum went there during lunch to smoke.

So he had situated a bucket of soy sauce (that he stole from the kitchens) on top of the door, and
when Jaebum opened the door-

There’s a loud yelp. “Holy shit!” Jaebum screams, and Jeongguk, curious, takes a look. And he has to clamp his hand over his mouth because Jaebum looks ridiculous, with his bleach blonde hair soaked in the dark liquid, and he’s wiping his eyes furiously as the salt gets in.

Taehyung can’t help the snicker that escapes his lips and Jaebum freezes, turning towards the sound.

“Oi, you two!” Jaebum yells, and Taehyung’s eyes widen.

“Whoops, time to run Gukkie!” Taehyung sings, tugging at Jeongguk’s uniform and turning on his heels.

“Taehyung!” Jeongguk yelps, and Taehyung grabs Jeongguk’s wrist as they sprint down the hallway, Jaebum right on their tail.

“I don’t want to die today!” Jeongguk sobs, legs burning with the strain. He had never been athletic, never been good at sports, and now he wishes he put more effort into gym class because he really doesn’t want to get pummelled.

They run out into the main courtyard, crowded with students, and dodge them as they run past. Jeongguk ignores the strange, bewildered looks, as Taehyung expertly weaves through the massive crowds, and they somehow manage to lose Jaebum when they enter the library.

Jeongguk ignores his burning lungs as Taehyung pulls him towards the back and up the stairs, until they burst out onto the roof, panting.

“That was…” Taehyung lets out a huff of breath.

“Yeah…” Jeongguk agrees, and they both look at each other, faces flushed from physical exertion, before bursting out laughing.

“His face…” Jeongguk heaves, bending over to rest his hands on his knees as he tries desperately to catch his breath, but he’s giggling too damn hard.
“I wonder… how long… he’ll smell like… soy sauce…” Taehyung pants, dropping to the ground and laying flat on his back, arms and legs spread. Jeongguk’s eyes are swimming with laughter, and he looks at Taehyung for a moment, before lying down next to him.

They don’t speak for a few minutes, trying to regain control of their breathing, and bursting out into giggles.

“So, do you feel better?” Taehyung asks after a while. He turns his head to face Jeongguk, who shakes his head.

“It was funny, but it didn’t really do much in the long run,” Taehyung frowns, so Jeongguk scrambles to explain. “I feel like there’s better ways to get back at someone besides playing pranks on them, you know?”

“I guess.” Taehyung doesn’t really understand, but he accepts Jeongguk’s answer. The younger was a lot more reserved than he was. More worried about consequences. Taehyung never had anything to worry about. Maybe one day he would.

“But… it was still fun. Getting to… do it with you,” Jeongguk says quietly. Taehyung turns his head more to focus on Jeongguk at that moment, and he wonders whether Jeongguk was always this cute.

He’s smiling shyly, his little bunny teeth sticking out, and cheeks still flushed a pretty pink. The sun is shining on his shiny black hair, always a mess over his forehead, but for some reason… Taehyung thinks it looks perfect that way.

He reaches a hand out to ruffle the younger’s silky hair, and Jeongguk’s nose scrunches cutely.

*God, that’s adorable.*

“Same, Gukkie.” And for once in Kim Taehyung’s life, he smiles for someone besides himself.
“First we’re going to make a puncture here,” Jeongguk marks an ‘x’ on the skin to the left of the patient’s sternum. “We’ll get one of the catheters and a cam inside, and make another cut—” He marks another ‘x’ a few centimeters below the first mark. “—here.”

“Is everyone briefed?” His team nods, and Jeongguk hands the marker to his assistant, looking up at the clock directly across from him in the operating theater.

“The time is 11:52, and we are making the first epidermal incision.”

Most people would think Jeongguk mad, but when the man has his surgical tools in his hand, over a patient who needs his help, he’s in his safe place.

He doesn’t have to worry about himself for a moment, and he can just focus on the body in front of him. He can solve other people’s problems. That’s easy. But he can’t solve his own. So in surgery, with the smell of cleaner and new surgical tools around him, giving orders to his team with minimal talking, it lets him take a moment to remove himself from his own fucked up mind.

But today… somehow… it feels different. Maybe because the man lying in front of him, looks so much like Taehyung. Of course… no one could ever come close to achieving that man’s ethereal beauty but it was striking too close to home.

He remembers the way he felt when it was Taehyung himself lying on the operating table. He never thought their glorious reunion would be while the older was unconscious and Jeongguk was opening up his chest.

It had been jarring, getting the request. Dr. Lee had called him personally, asked him to take the case, and Jeongguk couldn’t say no… He didn’t want to raise any suspicions.

His hands had shaken. He almost wanted to throw down the scalpel and leave, because he couldn’t handle it. It had taken all his willpower to stamp down the memories, lock them in a box the way they had been for ten years, and put them away.

He had operated on Taehyung the way he would any other patient. He just couldn’t look at his face. He refused to look at Taehyung’s face, and distanced himself after the surgery, letting the interns take care of it, because he didn’t think he could take it.
Maybe he is, indeed, crazy. No sane human being would agree to work with the person who tore their heart to shreds. And every interaction was proving to Jeongguk that this was a big mistake.

He couldn’t keep his damn mouth shut. He wanted to use every opportunity to tear Taehyung down, but now, it was at the expense of his conscience. Jeongguk knew what he was doing was wrong. Probably making the situation worse. And he isn’t even sure what he wants anymore.

“Dr. Jeon, do you want me to put in another line? He’s not getting enough fluids.”

Jeongguk snaps his eyes up to the assisting surgeon. He doesn’t have time to be embarrassed about his sudden lack of focus. He just nods once, and reminds himself that he let Taehyung ruin him once. He can’t let Taehyung ruin him again.

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The wind sifts through the large oak tree, leaves rustling and filtering down around Taehyung and Jeongguk as they sit underneath, lost in their own world.

Taehyung had forgotten how nice the grounds around his house were. He used to climb the trees, play hide and seek with his imaginary friends, pretend he was a character in a story, the hero of a grand adventure. Then… he had grown up. He had grown bored.

But now, sitting there, not doing or saying anything, Taehyung couldn't be more content. With his legs bent up to his chest, cheek resting on his knee, he watches Jeongguk’s face flicker with a myriad of emotions as he thumbs through a library copy of The Great Gatsby.

Normally, Taehyung would get antsy, but in this moment, he’s satisfied, and Jeongguk’s nose scrunches in annoyance.

“You’re staring again,” he murmurs, quiet enough not to disturb the peace, loud enough for Taehyung to hear.

“Is the book really that good?” Taehyung counters, not denying Jeongguk’s statement. Jeongguk purses his lips in thought, before closing the book.
“The characters are all really shallow,” Jeongguk sighs in disappointment. “It’s beautifully written, but I can’t empathize with any of the people.”

Taehyung rests his chin on his knee. “What’d you mean?”

“Well… the main character’s name is Gatsby, and he’s really poor, but he’s in love with a rich girl named Daisy. But they can’t get married, so Gatsby leaves and he comes back really rich, but by then, Daisy’s married already, but Gatsby tries to win her over by throwing really extravagant parties.”

Jeongguk says it all in one breath, and it takes Taehyung a moment to process it. “Well… does it work?”

“What?”

“Gatsby’s seduction techniques…” Jeongguk scrunches his nose in distaste, but he laughs at Taehyung, so it comes out as a grimace.

“Yeah, it kind of does. But then Daisy gets back with her husband and Gatsby takes the blame for something really bad that she does…”

Jeongguk stops, looking up hesitantly at Taehyung. But now, Taehyung is entirely too curious.

“And what?”

“Gatsby… gets shot. And Daisy lives happily ever after with her family.” Jeongguk’s dissatisfaction is thick in the air around him.

“That’s not fair.” Taehyung thinks this is the only appropriate thing to say.

“I think Gatsby deserved it.” Jeongguk says.

“Yeah but,” Jeongguk pauses, trying to form the words. “He became really rich, just to get Daisy. Why would you work so hard just for some teenage romance?”

Taehyung has to think for a moment. “People do a lot of crazy things for love.”

“But it wasn’t really even love. Daisy pretty much used him and his obviously misplaced love for her,” Jeongguk pouts. “He should have become successful for his own happiness and moved on.”

“Is that what you would do? If someone broke your heart? Move on? Just like that?” Taehyung knows he’s in dangerous territory, but for some reason he feels like he needs to know.

Jeongguk draws his knees up to his chest, resting his cheek on his arms in a similar position to Taehyung.

“I don’t know. I’ve never been in love,” Taehyung is oddly… disappointed by that answer. “Daisy obviously didn’t love Gatsby as much as Gatsby loved her. But…” Taehyung perks up, eyes rapt on Jeongguk. "If someone loved me as much as I loved them, there wouldn’t really be a problem. If it was worth it, I’d fight for them, and they’d fight for me. Even if it was really hard. We wouldn’t give up. And if it’s really meant to be… it’ll all work out in the end, right?”

Jeongguk’s eyes are innocent and sure, like loving someone and fighting for it is so easy. Taehyung doesn’t know. Maybe he’s too selfish.

“What about you?”

“Oh… me… uh…” Taehyung clears his throat, trying to shove away the guilt prickling at his skin. “I haven’t really thought much about that stuff. But it seems like you do,” Taehyung reaches out to poke at Jeongguk’s side, and the younger squeaks.

“I do not.” Jeongguk’s face is steadily turning more and more red.

“I think you do. I think you like someone.” Taehyung teases, and Jeongguk buries his head in his arms.
“Maybe,” Taehyung’s not sure if he’s hearing correctly, but that’s what Jeongguk’s quiet mumbling sounded like. A maybe. Which means a definite yes in this situation, Taehyung knows.

“Who?” Taehyung prods, poking Jeongguk again, but he doesn’t really have to ask to know it’s him. “It’s me, isn’t it? I’m too charming, I suppose.” Taehyung jokes, but as Jeongguk lifts up his head, eyes unsure, the mood for teasing just evaporates.

This is what he wanted, isn’t it? For Jeongguk to like him. That was his plan all along. But… he hadn’t anticipated his own feelings. He knew he was starting to feel things for the younger boy, but he didn’t know what to do about it.

“Maybe,” Jeongguk answers quietly. Taehyung doesn’t know why he’s so surprised by the confession. But right now, he’s beyond stunned, and that one word is making all his doubts evaporate. He never thought he needed to hear it, but he did.

“You know…” Taehyung starts after a long, agonizing moment of just gaping at Jeongguk. He scoots closer until he’s right next to Jeongguk, their thighs and elbows brushing, mirroring his position, and he experiences a moment of lucidity.

“I think I like someone too,” Taehyung murmurs, afraid to say the words any louder, because he’s afraid. He’s scared of his feelings, but for once, Kim Taehyung isn’t scared of what other people think. Screw the plan. Screw the bet. He just wants to feel. And god does he feel when he’s around Jeongguk.

Jeongguk is staring at him, with his wide, doe eyes, and Taehyung’s heart thuds wildly against his chest.

“I think…” Taehyung leans in, until their faces are just centimeters apart. “I think I like you.”

It feels like an eternity, as Jeongguk just stares at him, eyes wide in surprise and disbelief.

“Why would you like me?” he squeaks out. And gosh, he looks so cute when he’s confused.

Taehyung’s lips twitch up into a smile. “I like the way your nose scrunches up when you’re
annoyed.” As if on cue, Jeongguk acts out his words, and his face colors in embarrassment. “I like your intelligence. Your big heart. How inherently kind and selfless you are.”

Jeongguk ducks his head down, not used to flattery, but Taehyung continues. “I like how whenever I’m with you, I feel like I can be myself. I don’t have to put up any pretenses.”

“And you’re so cute. How could I resist?” Taehyung pokes Jeongguk’s cheek, and the younger looks up, hesitant but hopeful.

“You’re cute too.” Jeongguk blurts quickly, and Taehyung’s mouth curves into a smirk.

“You don’t have to tell me that one,” Jeongguk flushes. “But the compliment is appreciated.” Jeongguk giggles softly, eyes crinkling at the corners, and wraps his arms tighter around his legs.

For a moment, they just stare at each other, the confession bubbling around them like a warm breeze, and the world around them stills. But the earth must continue to rotate, and life must go on.

“So… what do we do now?” Jeongguk murmurs. Taehyung shrugs.

“I don’t know. But let’s do it together.”
“I like this song.” Jeongguk says quietly, as Coldplay’s ‘Fix You’ starts playing from Taehyung’s phone.

“Me too,” Taehyung smiles softly. They’re sitting by the fountain in front of the school, shoulders brushing, thighs touching, under the guise of sharing headphones. Taehyung’s driver is running a bit late, but for once Taehyung doesn’t really mind, because it’s that much more time he gets to spend with Jeongguk.

If innocence had a personification, it would be the way Jeongguk smells, sweet and soft. It was the way the corners of his eyes crinkled when he smiled, the shy blush on his cheeks, his whispered words, and the warmth that bubbles in Taehyung’s chest whenever he’s around him.

Jeongguk’s hand is right there, resting on his own thigh, and Taehyung mirrors the action. When he’s sure Jeongguk isn’t watching, he reaches his pinky out, and their fingers brush.

“Oh! Sorry.” Jeongguk mumbles, jolting his hand away, and suddenly Taehyung’s face is flushed hot with embarrassment.

“No, it’s fine.” Taehyung forces out a laugh. No it isn’t. Jeongguk smiles sweetly, apologetically, and goes back to watching the music video play on Taehyung’s phone. I want to hold your hand.

“Taehyung oppa!” a voice calls out, and Taehyung snaps his head up. He regrets it immediately.

“M-Minah,” Taehyung stammers. The girl in front of him smirks, waving her hand as she notes Taehyung and Jeongguk’s proximity.

“Taehyung?” Jeongguk murmurs from beside him, looking between him and Minah in confusion.

“I don’t think we’ve met,” Minah says, stepping closer and offering her hand to Jeongguk. The younger boy takes it hesitantly. “I’m Bang Minah, Taehyung’s.”

“Jeongguk! The car is here!” Taehyung yelps, gripping Jeongguk’s wrist and pulling him up. “Sorry,
Minah, but we have to go.”

Jeongguk just lets himself get dragged, bowing apologetically to Minah as Taehyung attempts to flee.

“Maybe I’ll see you around, Jeongguk!” Minah calls.

Not if I can help it, Taehyung resolves. It had been a nightmare when they were dating for the bet, and she had just become more and more spiteful after they had broken up. Taehyung was going to keep Jeongguk far away from her.

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“Aren’t you going to eat?” Seokjin asks, watching Jeongguk frown at his plate.

“Sorry what?” Jeongguk blinks up at him, and Seokjin tuts at him, shaking his head.

“The chef made this especially for you, when he heard we were coming. You should at least taste!” he scolds, and Jeongguk’s lips tug up into a sheepish smile.

“Sorry, hyung. I’ve got a lot on my mind,”

Seokjin smiles knowingly, lifting the glass of wine slowly to his lips. “Don’t you always?”

Jeongguk huffs a laugh, rolling his eyes, before picking up his knife and fork. For the five years that Seokjin had known Jeongguk, there had never been a moment when the younger man hadn’t been consumed by his own thoughts.

Most lovers would have found that irritating. Jeongguk was charming, handsome, and internationally reputable. But he couldn’t keep a steady relationship.

Neither could Seokjin, though. He bounced from man to man, and none of them had cut it for him. He wanted an open, no-strings-attached relationship, which is what Jeongguk provided.
Jeongguk was an incredibly solitary, private man. He didn’t ask any questions, which Seokjin appreciated. And Seokjin, in return, had let him keep his secrets. But over the years, Seokjin had started to pick up on many different cues. Jeongguk probably considered himself extremely adept at hiding his feelings, but Seokjin had grown up in a world where everyone hid their true selves. Cracking Jeongguk had been a challenge, but not impossible. He knew depression when he saw it.

“Does it have anything to do with the infamous Kim Taehyung?” Seokjin drawls. He makes sure not to look directly at Jeongguk, instead occupying himself with cutting into his salmon. He can feel Jeongguk’s gaze on him, but he ignores it, taking a bite of the food.

“This is delicious,” Seokjin hums, taking his time savoring the savory bite of fish before meeting Jeongguk’s eyes.

“What makes you think that?” Jeongguk’s voice is low, borderline dangerous. Seokjin likes when Jeongguk is like this. Usually it manifests in bed, and anticipation curls up his spine.

“Well, I’m eating it,” Seokjin laughs lightly. “Aren’t I entitled to my own opinion about the food?”

Jeongguk narrows his eyes. “That’s not what I’m talking about, and you know it.”

Seokjin smiles softly. “No, I don’t think I do.”

“Kim Taehyung,” Jeongguk almost growls. Seokjin’s smile grows wider.

“Oh that.”

“Yes, that. Why do you assume I’m thinking about him?”

Seokjin leans forward, resting his chin on his hand. “Did you ever stop?”

Jeongguk reels back, face clouding over and shoulders tensing defensively. “What does that mean?”
Seokjin wonders whether he’s pushed Jeongguk too far. But he pressing on regardless. “Oh, come now, Jeongguk. You and I both know I’m not stupid.”

Jeongguk stares at him for what seems like a lifetime, and Seokjin matches it evenly. Finally, Jeongguk sighs, dropping his eyes down to his plate and resumes cutting into his own steak.

Seokjin’s not having it. This time, he’s going to get something out of Jeongguk. “I see the way you look at him.”

Jeongguk huffs a laugh. “You mean with burning hatred?” There it is. And Jeongguk knows it too, that he’s perhaps said too much. But Seokjin is on a mission.

“And why could that be?”

“He’s obviously a complete fake. All CEO’s are like that, aren’t they? Why wouldn’t I dislike him?” Jeongguk tries, but there’s something in his eyes.

“Oh, but I’ve heard so many good things about him. What about the heart center?”

“He’s doing it because it’s personal.”

Seokjin rolls his eyes. “The orphanage, then?”

Jeongguk grits his teeth. “Personal.”

“I suppose it must be. He seems to genuinely love the children. And they sure love him.”

Jeongguk sets down his cutlery to carefully lift his glass of wine. He takes a slow sip. “He is a child, so I suppose they would connect well with him in terms of maturity and priorities and such.”

Seokjin can’t help the laugh that escapes him. Jeongguk sounds so incredibly bitter for someone who claims to know nothing about the CEO of Rise Enterprises.
“It’s all an act, hyung.” Jeongguk says, and his voice is disarmingly sad.

“Why would you say that?”

Jeongguk clears his throat, immediately putting up his walls again. “Oh I don’t know. He just… seems like the kind of person who would lie a lot.”

Seokjin’s smile fades, and he just stares at Jeongguk, who looks like he’s trying very hard to pull himself together. It must have been really bad, Seokjin thinks, if someone as put together as Jeongguk would snap at the mere mention of his name.

And he’s worried. Jeongguk had been distant these days- not that he wasn’t before, but even more so now, in the past two months since he signed on as the cardiac specialist for Kim Taehyung’s project.

Seokjin and Jeongguk didn’t share any sort of deep, emotional bond, and they didn’t pretend to. They were casual acquaintances, often times lovers in the most casual sense of the word. Seokjin enjoyed Jeongguk’s body and the pleasure it brought, and vice versa. There had never been a need to add another layer to it.

And yet… Seokjin is terribly fond of Jeongguk. He had met the younger when he was just starting out as a surgeon, quiet and brooding, intelligent and respectable, but with a surprisingly insatiable sex drive. He had watched Jeongguk grow, become an icon in his field, stand taller and prouder.

And yet, he never really smiled. Of course he smiled, but Seokjin knew the difference between a happy-in-the-moment smile and a content-with-life smile. Jeongguk was definitely not content. He walked around with a massive chip on his shoulder, almost always frowning, and Seokjin had wondered why, until he saw the way Jeongguk looked at Taehyung. The way Taehyung looked back, when he was sure Jeongguk wasn’t watching. And it had all made sense.

Seokjin sighs. He had realized a long time ago ago that his and Jeongguk’s relationship was purely platonic. There were no real feelings, just fondness. He wants Jeongguk to be happy, but he knows he wasn’t meant to be that man. And he had wondered when someone would come along and make Jeongguk smile, in the most genuine way.

He wonders how far he can push Jeongguk before he finally lets someone in. So he words everything carefully.
“What does it feel like?”

Jeongguk looks up, fork poised at his lips, ready to take a bite. “What?”

Seokjin smiles softly. “Knowing you fixed the heart of the man who broke yours?”

Jeongguk brings the food to his mouth slowly, taking his time chewing as his expression turns more and more frigid by the moment. Seokjin once more wonders whether he’s pushed Jeongguk too far, but someone has to do it.

He finally finishes chewing and sets his knife and fork down carefully, dabbing at his mouth with the napkin.

“Like you’re having your limbs ripped off. One by one. And them growing back seconds later just so they can get yanked off again.”

♥

“So, how’s the bet coming along?” Mark asks, slinging an arm around Taehyung’s shoulder. The question throws him off for a moment, and he pauses in his steps.

Shit.

“Oh, the bet.”

Shit shit shit.

Mark looks at him, eyebrows raised, wondering why they had stopped in the middle of the hallway.

“You didn’t forget, did you?” Taehyung’s face burns, and for a moment, he is at a loss for words. He’d been so caught up in Jeongguk, he’d forgotten the original reason he had wanted to get close to
“No… of course not.” Taehyung tenses his shoulders defensively. Mark’s eyes seem especially judgemental, and it makes Taehyung uncomfortable. He wonders how Mark and his other friends might react if they found out that the bet had become something… more.

*God this is fucked up.*

“You only have like… a month until graduation. You don’t have a lot of time.” Mark reminds him, and Taehyung’s heart flops. *I am in way over my head.*

“Don’t worry,” Taehyung forces out a laugh, shoving at Mark’s arm. “I’ve got him wrapped around my finger. It’s only a matter of time.”


“Do anticipate,” Taehyung grins, playfully bowing, saluting at Mark before stepping into his class.

“Hey hyung,” Taehyung chirps, sliding into his seat. Yoongi looks up at him irritably.

“Are you still doing that bet thing?” Yoongi puts his pencil down--no doubt having been working on homework--and turns to face Taehyung. The younger shrugs.

“I thought you said you actually had feelings for Jeongguk,” Taehyung eyes snap to Yoongi, eyes darting nervously to make sure no one else heard the words.

“Don’t say it out loud!” Taehyung hisses. Yoongi sighs in exasperation.

“What exactly are you playing at, Tae? You know you can’t follow through with the bet and date Jeongguk.”

And of course, Yoongi is right. He’s always right. But Taehyung doesn’t really want to listen. There’s a panic brewing in his chest, and it’s odd and uncomfortable. He wasn’t going to take back
all the things he said to Jeongguk, because they’re true, but he had gotten caught up in the moment. Maybe he should have just kept his mouth shut.

As if on cue, the boy of Taehyung’s thoughts comes shuffling into the classroom. Jeongguk scans the room, and when his gaze lands on Taehyung, his entire face lights up. He waves shyly, cheeks flushing pink, and fuck.

Taehyung turns his head quickly, training his eyes down, and Yoongi kicks him under their shared table.

He considers giving Yoongi the death glare, but before he can do anything, he hears footsteps approaching.

“Oh hey Jeongguk,” Yoongi says amicably. He delivers another sharp kick to Taehyung’s ankle, making him yelp. Jeongguk looks between them in confusion, before smiling softly.

“Hi Yoongi hyung,” Jeongguk is still incredibly intimidated by Yoongi—he had told Taehyung so. He held the number two spot in the class, right behind Jeongguk, and he had a don’t-give-a-shit aura about him. Taehyung tells Jeongguk it’s because Yoongi cares too much.

“Taehyung...” Jeongguk says softly, voice lilting up at the end, unsure. Taehyung begrudgingly looks up, not knowing how he’s supposed to face the younger.

“Morning Jeongguk.” he manages to say. His heart is thudding too fast against his chest.

“I was… wondering if we were going to have… lunch today...” Jeongguk says hesitantly. Which is odd because they’d been having lunch on the roof of the library every day for the last two months now. Why is he asking me now?

“Uhm...” And Taehyung is suddenly nervous, feeling an immense weight on his shoulders and he’s so damn confused.

He shoots Yoongi a panicked look, but the older offers him no help. “Actually… I have something I need to take care of at lunch today, so I don’t think I can.”
Jeongguk’s face falls, and god Taehyung’s never felt like more of an asshole. A frown didn’t belong on that precious face, but… he needs some space. I don’t know what I’m doing anymore.

When he was with Jeongguk, all he thought about was Jeongguk and how happy he was when they were hanging out together. But then reality hits him, and he realizes how impossible it is for a real relationship to manifest from this.

What have I done?

“I’m sorry, Jeongguk.” Taehyung tries to smile apologetically, but Jeongguk’s shaking his head quickly.

“No, hyung, it’s okay! You can’t be hanging out with me every day, right?” He chuckles nervously, shuffling his feet in embarrassment. “I mean… yeah. I’m gonna… go back to my seat.” And he’s turning on his heels and dashing to his seat at the front of the class.

Taehyung can feel Yoogi’s disapproving glare without even looking.
“He’s just so…” Taehyung rakes his hands through his hair, not caring that the action ruins the perfectly styled coif.

“Frustrating?” Yoongi tries.

“Yes exactly!” He’d been venting to his best friend for the past twenty minutes now, about how agonizing it was to work with Jeongguk. He’d been nothing but professional, not even an inkling of emotion slipping past his stoic face as he rattled off various hospital protocols that needed to be accommodated, using words Taehyung couldn’t even hope to understand. He just hoped that the architect had gotten everything down, because he had been too busy dodging Jeongguk’s laser glare.

“Cold?”

“That too.”


The words make Taehyung pause, mouth running dry as Yoongi raises an eyebrow.

“But…”

“Defensive?” Yoongi continues. “Trying to protect himself against a world that was never kind to him?”

“He threatened me inside Namjoon hyung’s tomb!” He’s still absolutely furious about it. No sane person would ever intrude and speak ill in a place of the dead.

“Well, yes, and it was terribly disrespectful of him, but I don’t think he was thinking clearly.” Yoongi says, taking a slow sip of his latte.
“Whenever he’s talking to me I can feel him judging me. And when he talks it’s only to say rude things.” Taehyung splutters at Yoongi’s words.

“You had some pretty good one liners there too.” Yoongi remarks, taking another sip. Taehyung’s face clouds with embarrassment and guilt at the reference to the appointment earlier in the week.

“This is some damned good coffee,” Yoongi says. “Has your chef been experimenting?”

Taehyung runs a hand over his face. “Yeah. He’s too excited about the heart center.”

“Seems like everyone is except for you.”

“Yeah well…” Taehyung looks around the large dining hall. “This place has been my home since before I could remember.”

“Why don’t you just keep it then and use a different property for the center?” Taehyung shrugs.

“It’s too big of a place for me anyway… Too many memories.” The sprawling mansion was beginning to feel too large. Hollow. Whenever he was here he just felt lonely and uncomfortable, knowing no one was there. Of course, there were always maids and butlers bustling around, but it wasn’t the same as having Namjoon and Jeongguk.

Taehyung barely even came by anymore. He was always off in some foreign place, for business deals and meetings and society functions after he’d taken on the company. Coming back to an empty mansion was unnerving, and he hated sleeping, knowing there was no one nearby.

So he had decided that it would be the best place for his heart center. He was having major renovations done to it to accommodate the various needs of the patients and the doctors. Jeongguk had--much to Taehyung’s chagrin--been incredibly helpful in terms of listing out the specifications that the center would have to meet in order to be fully functional for use.

At least one good thing had come out of this arrangement.

“So where are you going to stay?” Yoongi asks.
“I’m going to stay in one of the penthouses in the Kangnam Apartments,” Taehyung says dismissively. It honestly didn’t even matter that much. He wasn’t going to be around enough to care.

“I mean… couldn’t he just act a bit more mature?” Taehyung wonders, and Yoongi takes another drink of the latte, unphased by the odd topic change.

“Couldn’t you?”

Taehyung gapes. “He started it!”

“No, you did. Ten years ago. When you decided that some stupid picture was worth more than a beautiful relationship you built with someone who trusted you too much.”

Yoongi’s words are sharp, and guilt gnaws at Taehyung. Yoongi is, as usual, right about everything, and Taehyung feels foolish, embarrassed, and at a complete loss of what to do.

“God, I hate this.” Taehyung groans, burying his face in his hands. He’s never felt so conflicted about anything in his life.

“You’re both being stubborn and it’s causing more trouble than it’s worth.” Yoongi states plainly.

“So what do I do?” Taehyung moans. Yoongi pats his back.

“There there, little baby. It’s going to be alright.” Taehyung shoots the older a dirty look. Yoongi grins, before his eyes turn serious. “The answer is simple, Tae.”

“Enlighten me. Please.” Yoongi clicks his tongue in annoyance.

“You know what Namjoon hyung always used to say? A little kindness--”

“--goes a long way. I know.” Taehyung finishes. His heart pangs at the mention of his older brother,
and he digs out the necklace that has always remained around his neck. Whenever he thinks of Namjoon, he always remembers that he has a piece of his older brother with him, always.

“So buck up. Swallow your Titanic-sized ego and apologize.”

It seems so easy when Yoongi says it like that, but Taehyung knows going about it will be difficult, especially if Jeongguk is determined to hate him.

“You made this mess, Tae. Now you have to clean it up.”

♥

Jeongguk dangles his feet over the ledge of the library rooftop, trying not to cry.

_God, I’m so stupid._

He and Taehyung hadn’t spoken all week. Jeongguk knows when he’s being avoided, and every time Taehyung actively breaks eye contact, ignores him, it sends a fresh wave of sadness through Jeongguk.

He had spent his entire life feeling unwanted. His own parents had dumped him on the doorstep of Hyunsik when he was ten, when they realized Jeongguk’s hyperactive brain required things they couldn’t provide.

They had decided, after a while, that Jeongguk wasn’t worth it. And now… Jeongguk figures Taehyung felt the same.

It was confusing. Because Jeongguk had been elated when they had basically confessed to each other. He thought that he might have really found someone who might like him unconditionally.

But it was like the sun was shining one day, and then there was a storm the next.

_Was falling in love always like this?_
Jeongguk had never had anyone express interest in him. Ever. He had lived most of his life overlooked. At the orphanage, he was expected to help care for the other kids. He had never been taken care of with someone’s undivided attention.

And then Taehyung had come in, with unclear intentions but a smile so bright it made Jeongguk dizzy, and he had gotten so caught up in the older’s constant attention.

Maybe he was spoiled. He had gotten used to Taehyung. The lavender-haired teenager had become a constant, a crutch, that Jeongguk had forgotten that Taehyung had a life outside all of this. And Jeongguk… didn’t like it.

Taehyung hadn’t shown up to the roof… again. Jeongguk waited faithfully at their spot--he considered it his and Taehyung’s, it was their secret place--but Taehyung never showed up.

He shouldn’t be so pathetic, he knows. But Taehyung was… Taehyung. And Jeongguk had fallen so hard he hadn’t even noticed.

“So this is where you hide all the time.” a female voice calls out, and Jeongguk jolts in shock. He wipes at the tears he didn’t know had been falling with his sleeve before turning.

Jeongguk turns to see Minah, standing there in the middle of the roof, with her hands on her hips, eyes glinting darkly.

“This is really something.” she says, appraising the space while stepping closer. Jeongguk’s mind is reeling, but he swings his feet back up, turning to hop off the ledge, wiping at his nose.

“C-can I help you?”

Minah rolls her eyes. “You’re Taehyung’s little toy this year, right?” Jeongguk’s face twists.

“His t-toy?”
Minah laughs. It’s high pitched, derisive, and Jeongguk’s stomach churns. “Whatever he says you are. Friend, boyfriend,” Noting Jeongguk’s confused face, she widens her eyes, covering her mouth with her hand.

“Oh gosh, he hasn’t confessed to you yet?” Minah asks, looking legitimately surprised. “He usually works more quickly than this. I would have thought the bet would have been over by now,”

“What bet?” Jeongguk’s mind feels like it’s working at snail-speed, because he’s not processing a word Minah’s saying.

“You know the bet that he and his idiot friends make every year? Where Taehyung has to seduce a new target or whatever?”

Jeongguk feels like the wind is being knocked out of his lungs. This was a bet? He was being seduced?

Minah narrows her eyes. “You don’t know anything about this.” She steps closer, and Jeongguk wants to step back, run, but he has nowhere to go.

“Listen here, Jeon Jeongguk. Taehyung is playing you. He’s going to confess and make you feel special and loved and then he’s going to break your heart.”

Jeongguk’s entire body is burning, and he can’t breathe. There are too many thoughts whirling in his brain and he can’t pin down anything. He’s thinking so much he can’t think.

“Y-you’re lying.” Jeongguk whispers.

Minah rolls her eyes, walking forward until there’s only a foot of space between them. “I have no reason to. After all, I was last year’s victim.”

Jeongguk balks, color draining from his face. He had just come to Bangtan this year. He didn’t know anything about Taehyung in the past. He didn’t know anything period.

“Why are you telling me this?”
Minah smiles, and it makes Jeongguk panic. “I’m telling you this because I want to get back at Taehyung. I want revenge… and I want your help.”

“Why?” Jeongguk eeks out. He feels like the entire world is getting smaller and smaller around him.

“I heard that you were really smart. We could hurt him together.” Minah’s smile is wicked, and Jeongguk is nauseous. The shock is keeping him from stringing together coherent thoughts. He braces his hands behind him on the ledge because his knees are going to give out on him.

“Minah. Step away from Jeongguk.”

♥

“Jeongguk, I’m leaving for Europe tomorrow.” Seokjin says suddenly. Jeongguk looks up from his mug of ginger tea with an eyebrow raised. He’s never surprised when Seokjin has to leave anymore—he was an international model with a busy career. He’s more caught off guard because Seokjin is actually telling him this time.

“Oh? How long will you be gone?”

Seokjin sighs, fiddling with the string of the tea bag in his own cup. “I… don’t know. Maybe a year? Two?”

Something twists in Jeongguk’s stomach. “That long?”

“Yeah. They want me to launch my fashion line soon so I’m moving back to France for the time being.”

Seokjin eyes Jeongguk hesitantly, but the younger man is the picture of cool indifference.

“We should cut things off then,” Jeongguk says, voice even as he raises the mug to his lips. “A lot can happen in two years.”
“That’s true.” Seokjin smiles softly. Jeongguk was always like this. No fuss. No attachments, no arguments. He’s almost disappointed, but mostly he’s relieved.

They finish their tea in relative silence. Jeongguk had cooked him dinner, and they had spent the night in. It was nice spending time in the company of Jeongguk. It was the only time Seokjin ever felt calm in his hectic life.

So Seokjin almost feels a twinge of regret as they stand at the doorway; Jeongguk eerily quiet as Seokjin puts on his coat.

“Jeongguk, I want to ask something of you.” He knows that he’s probably about to push too far; stepping out of his place.

“Yes?” Seokjin sighs, face dropping into a frown as he takes in the younger man, dressed casually in dark jeans and a sweater. Suddenly, Jeongguk looks more like his tender age of twenty six, and Seokjin feels all of his own thirty years.

“I’m saying this because we’ve known each other for more than five years now. And I really do care about you.”

Jeongguk’s head tilts in question, and Seokjin reaches out to cup his face.

“Please. Open your heart. The world is a dark place. But there is good. And one day, you’re going to find someone who can be your sun. Don’t push them away.”

Jeongguk’s eye twitches, eyes turning dark, and Seokjin knows he’s putting up his walls again. “Just… please. When the time is right, you’ll know. I want you to be happy.”

“I am happy.” Jeongguk says, voice like stone, almost frightening in its lack of feeling, but Seokjin knows Jeongguk. He smiles indulgently at the younger man.

“Then be happier,” Seokjin steps forward to press a soft kiss to Jeongguk’s unresponsive lips. “Keep in touch.” he whispers against Jeongguk’s mouth, before stepping back out into the hallway.
Jeongguk nods noncommittally, mumbling something that Seokjin is sure is a goodbye, before closing the door. Jeongguk braces his body against the cold wood, not wanting to open his eyes, because all he’ll see is a large, empty penthouse.

*I am not happy.*
“Be careful!” Taehyung yelps, scrambling over to help one of the men struggling with a box. He helps reposition it in the man’s arms.

“I-I’m alright, Taehyung ssi, thank you,” the man says, bowing profusely. Taehyung frowns in worry.

“Are you sure? I can help, I don’t want you to hurt yourself.”

“No no! It’s fine, Taehyung ssi. Thank you,” the man says, and Taehyung nods.

“If you’re sure...” he murmurs, watching as the man joins the other movers as they step into the lobby of The Tower, one of Taehyung’s many properties. It had been named one of the best in high-end luxury living, and if Taehyung was going to move, he was going to do it in style.

Taehyung bows in thanks when the movers come back down.

“Is that the last of it, then?” Hoseok asks from beside him. Taehyung nods, smile wide.

“You seem awfully chipper this morning,” the older man points out. Taehyung just shrugs.

“I have a good feeling about this, you know? Starting fresh.” Taehyung was taking on a new mindset regarding Jeongguk—kill him with kindness. It was the only way.

“If you fight fire with fire, you’re only going to get more fire,” Yoongi had said sagely. And, of course, the older man was right. And Taehyung hates conflict. And knowing that he’s the cause of it.

*I’m going to make things right.*

“Okay then, I’m going to head back to the office. Are you going to be okay unpacking alone?”
“Of course!” Taehyung smiles. “I can do things on my own, you know.”

Hoseok laughs, shaking his head. “Alright kiddo. I’ll see you later.”

“Bye!” Taehyung waves, before sighing in content with this attitude. He’s turning to face the revolving glass doors of the entrance when something catches his eye.

Well… some one.

“Oh! Jeongguk ssi!” Taehyung calls out, waving. The younger man is walking down the sidewalk in a dress shirt and tie and black framed glasses with his white doctor’s coat and his bag slung over an arm. He looks engrossed texting someone, but stops mid-step when he hears someone calling. He glances up once to scan the area and looks down again, before doing a double take and shooting his head up to stare at Taehyung.

The older man waves again, less energetically this time, because he suddenly feels very childish under Jeongguk’s cold glare. Last time, they had parted ways on less than pleasant terms.

“Did you need something?” Jeongguk asks, voice flat, as he approaches Taehyung.

Taehyung furrows his eyebrows in confusion. “No?” Jeongguk just narrows his eyes.

“Then are you stalking me?”

“What? No!” Taehyung huffs indignantly, irritation bubbling up in his chest, but he stamps it down.

Be the bigger person, Taehyung.

“Then why are you standing outside my apartment building?”

Taehyung stares blankly at Jeongguk until-
“Y-you… live here?” Taehyung asks, pointing to the towering building.

Jeongguk looks at Taehyung like he’d just said the stupidest thing.

“...Yes.”

Jeongguk rolls his eyes when Taehyung remains silent, and adjusts his bag in his grip. “If you’re quite done wasting my time, I would like to get home now, Taehyung ssi.”

And he steps past Taehyung, nodding to the doorman as he walks through the revolving door. It takes Taehyung a second to process what just transpired before he follows after Jeongguk.

“W-wait!” Taehyung calls as he steps into the lobby. Jeongguk stops in his tracks and turns.

“Taehyung ssi, if your intention was to become a nuisance, you’ve accomplished it. I would suggest you go home now.” Jeongguk’s voice is low and dangerous. The lobby is bustling with activity as the building tenants go about their nightly activities. A bellhop is helping a woman carry her shopping bags and the bell at the front desk seems to ding every few minutes.

If anyone were to look, they would notice two well dressed men having a private conversation underneath the massive glass chandelier. Business partners, perhaps.

“But… I live here too,” Taehyung says slowly, and the fact doesn’t really hit him until that moment, with Jeongguk’s irritated glare on him.

“Come to torment me in my personal life too? Fantastic, Taehyung ssi.” Jeongguk snaps, before turning again and heading for the elevator. Taehyung gulps and trails after him, suddenly very
The doors to the elevator slide open, and Jeongguk steps inside, with Taehyung right behind him. Jeongguk gives Taehyung a dark look as the doors slide closed.

God, of course he had to pick the exact building where Jeongguk lived. He doesn’t know whether this is a blessing or a curse, because they just keep running into each other in the strangest of places, and Taehyung wonders if there really is such a thing as fate.

“What floor?”

“Huh?” Taehyung looks at Jeongguk blankly.

Jeongguk gives Taehyung a dirty look as his hand hovers above the buttons on the wall. “I asked what floor.”

Taehyung gulps. “Twenty,” Jeongguk’s fingers are hesitant for a moment, shaking, before he presses the button and it glows a bright yellow.

“A-aren’t you going to press your floor?” Taehyung asks, noting Jeongguk’s oddly pained expression.

“That’s... my floor too.”

Taehyung knows the elevators are supposed to be ventilated, but suddenly the air feels hot. His fingers grip at the railing as he watches the numbers on the display change, wishing everything could go faster as his mind buzzes with the implications of this new piece of information.

The elevator dings, and Taehyung jolts. Jeongguk gives him a dead look before walking out right when the doors slide open. It takes Taehyung a few moments to release his death grip on the handrail and stepping out into the hall.

There are only two penthouse suites at The Tower. And Taehyung had just moved into the one right across from Jeongguk’s.
“Oppa,” Minah responds mockingly, whirling around to smile wickedly at Taehyung. He keeps his face blank and narrows his eyes though his heart is racing a mile a minute and his entire body is burning with panic. “I was just telling your boyfriend--”

“You need to leave,” Taehyung almost growls. It takes Minah by surprise, but only for a moment.

“Why? That worried about your bet? I was in the middle of warning him about you. Shouldn’t you be the one leaving instead?”

Taehyung’s eyes snap to Jeongguk’s form, and he feels his heart splintering. There are tears streaming down the younger’s face, skin pink and blotchy, and he looks beyond confused; hurt.

“Leave, Minah.” His face is dangerously dark, and Minah’s eyes widen before her eyes settle on Jeongguk and she fixes a smirk on her face.

“Sure,” She shrugs. “I’ve done my job.” She brushes past Taehyung, making sure to shove at his shoulder as she goes. The sound of her footsteps echo from the corridor for too long before the door slams shut. The sound rings in Taehyung’s ears.

There’s silence for a minute as they stare at each other, Jeongguk’s bottom lip trembling violently, before he sinks to the ground, back pressed against the ledge.

Taehyung is at his side in an instant. “J-Jeongguk,” he whispers, cupping the younger’s tear-streaked face. “What did she say?”

Jeongguk’s fingers curl around Taehyung’s wrists, gripping tightly like it’s his only lifeline.

“She said,” Jeongguk whimpers, eyes welling up, “that you were trying to seduce me. For a bet.” His voice pitches higher, cracking at the end before his small frame shakes with tears.
Taehyung wants to punch himself in the face, wants to be the one crying like this as his fingers shakily wipe at the seemingly endless stream of tears.

“She’s lying, r-right?” Jeongguk hiccups. Taehyung’s lips press into a thin line as he tries not to let his body succumb to the weight of the guilt pressing down on him.

“R-right?”

Taehyung wants to say yes. Make all of the hurt go away, but he’s lied enough to Jeongguk.

“No,” he says.

Jeongguk’s fingers tighten into a death grip, and Taehyung can feel his fingers pale as he cuts off circulation.

“So… I’m a bet?” Jeongguk sobs, and Taehyung’s face crumples.

“No, Jeongguk. You’re not.” Jeongguk squirms, attempting to push away as he’s holds onto Taehyung.

“How can I trust you? H-how do I know you’re not lying?” Jeongguk’s eyes swim with hurt and Taehyung’s never felt more like an asshole.

“Jeongguk… listen to me for a second.” Taehyung pleads as Jeongguk continues to ramble. The younger snaps his mouth shut, like he’s hoping Taehyung will say something that will make him believe.

“It… started out that way,” Taehyung says, feeling so disgusted with himself that he has to pause. “It started out as a stupid bet… but then I got to know you...”

Jeongguk’s lips continue to tremble, and he listens to every word, holding them to him like it’s the only thing left.
“I realized that I like you. So so much. And I don’t care about a stupid bet. I care about you.”

Taehyung leans forward, until they’re eye to eye, and he hopes Jeongguk can see that he’s being sincere. That he’s telling the truth, and owning up to his mistakes for the first time in his life.

“I’m so sorry I hurt you. And I understand if you don’t want to see me anymore. But I want you to know that everything I feel for you is real.”

And Jeongguk wants so desperately to believe those words. For the first time in his life, someone had shown interest in him, cared about him. Taehyung’s words sound so real and Jeongguk grapples with them, holding them close to his heart. He doesn’t want what he and Taehyung have to be ruined by a misunderstanding. He likes Taehyung… so much. Does he really want to end this beautiful relationship because of something so childish, so petty?

Jeongguk sniffles. “I… I trust you, Taehyung.” he says quietly. His voice is hoarse and shaky from crying, but Taehyung’s gotten used to the younger’s soft spoken ways and the relief that floods through him almost knocks the wind out of him.

“Thank you, Jeongguk,” Taehyung whispers, leaning forward on his knees so he can press their foreheads together. “Thank you.” He closes his eyes, basking in the feeling of Jeongguk’s skin against his.

The weight of it is heavy. Taehyung knows he’s only one of two people Jeongguk wholly trusts, and he doesn’t ever want to screw up again.

Jeongguk’s fingers loosen from around Taehyung’s wrist and move to Taehyung’s uniform shirt. He fists the material in his hands and shyly brushes their noses together.

Taehyung opens his eyes and the world around them falls silent. He can see every eyelash, wet with tears, count the flecks of gold in his dark brown eyes, smell the sweet innocence that is Jeongguk, and he loses his breath.

Jeongguk blinks slowly as Taehyung gently brushes his thumbs across his cheeks, wiping the wetness away.

“C-can I kiss you?” Taehyung whispers. Jeongguk’s eyes widen just a fraction, before he nods.
Taehyung’s never felt so grateful in his entire life, because for a moment there, he felt like everything he had with Jeongguk was going to disappear from him forever, that he’d never get to hold him like this. Never will he break the trust that Jeongguk had so easily given him back. He’d prove how true his feelings were.

So he tilts his head slightly to the right, sliding his hands down to cup Jeongguk’s jaw, and leans forward to press their mouths together.

Jeongguk lets out a stuttered breath as their lips meet, and lets Taehyung move his mouth to a rhythm that he clumsily follows. His hands curl tighter into Taehyung’s shirt, and his entire body floods with warmth and for once, he feels genuinely loved. He knows they have something special. Nothing could tear them apart.

He’d do anything for Taehyung.

They kiss until they’re breathless and dizzy, nothing in the real world echoing in their ears, and they break apart, but only slightly, so they can breathe, but still impossibly close.

“Jeongguk…” Taehyung breathes, like it’s the only word he’d ever needed to know, and everything else he’d ever learned means nothing compared to this boy in his arms, giving him his heart.

“I’m sorry,” he murmurs again, and Jeongguk shakes his head, but the older cuts him off. “You deserve more than just an apology, Gukkie. You deserve the world.” Taehyung sets his face in determination.

“I’m going to prove myself to you. Prove that I’m worthy of you.”

Jeongguk’s face flushes in embarrassment. “I feel like I should be saying that,” he mumbles.

“No, god no,” Taehyung runs his fingers over Jeongguk’s cheeks, wiping at the remaining wetness as he shakes his head. “You deserve everything. And I’m going to give it to you.”
“Here you go Taehyung ssi,” the floor manager smiles hospitably as he hands Taehyung his mail. “Sorry for the wait.”

“Oh that’s not a problem,” Taehyung returns the smile. “I like the haircut, by the way.”

“Oh!” The man’s hand flies up to pat at his head. “T-thank you Taehyung ssi.”

Taehyung has been here for only about two weeks and he has already gotten to know most of the staff. Namjoon had instilled a deep respect in him for the help, and now it came naturally.

“It looks good! Very slimming.” Taehyung’s smile widens and he bows his head slightly before turning on his heels to head back to the elevator.

“Good morning Jeongguk ssi!” The floor manager calls just then and Taehyung’s eyes snap to the figure of a man in running shorts and a sweatshirt as they walk through the door.

Fuck. He repeats a steady mantra of the word in his head as Jeongguk, sweaty and panting from what is obviously a jog, nods his head at the floor manager, before his eyes find Taehyung’s.

Fuck fuck fuck. Jeongguk’s eyes narrow and for some odd reason Taehyung thinks it compliments him, glowing from exercise and sweat, looking absurdly masculine almost... carnal?

Jeongguk’s eyes drift away from him as his face hardens with disinterest and walks to the elevator. Taehyung’s feet lead him in the same direction, eyes drifting down to Jeongguk’s ass, outlined perfectly in the thin gym shorts. He swallows, heat flaming across his face.

Taehyung hesitantly steps into the elevator, backing himself into the opposite corner of where Jeongguk is standing. The younger man wordlessly presses the button to their floor, and the doors slide closed.

Taehyung’s phone buzzes in his pocket with a text and he scrambles to dig it out, grateful for any distraction. Out of the corner of his eye he sees Jeongguk run a hand through his damp hair, tilting
his head back as he breathes and *sweet mother of--*. 

*You could cut something with that jawline.* Jeongguk side-eyes Taehyung, realizing that the older man has been staring at him this whole time, and Taehyung swears he sees the younger’s lips twitch up.

And then, to Taehyung’s absolute horror, Jeongguk brings a hand to the zipper of his jacket and tugs it down. Taehyung almost chokes when he realizes that Jeongguk isn’t wearing a goddamn shirt and *oh my god are those tattoos?*

His eyes run over the smooth muscle of Jeongguk’s chest and abdomen taunt from his jog, covered in swirling colorful ink patterns and sweat. It’s almost dizzying, except it’s so *goddamned hot*, and his eyes wander lower, down to Jeongguk’s pronounced V lines. He sees words inked onto the arch of the man’s pelvis, and Taehyung is *sweating*, but he’s not the one who went on an early morning jog.

*Who has tattoos on their V lines? who in God’s name would think that would be a good idea?*

Taehyung exhales sharply and looks up at the ceiling of the cursed elevator, wondering why this is happening to him right now. He’s a strong man but he’s not *that* strong.

Taehyung can’t even bring himself to pretend he’s not completely ogling the man, but he’s so completely taken aback that his brain feels like it’s short circuited. Jeongguk is the last person on earth Taehyung would expect to have tattoos, especially not this many. The man was always stoic and straight-laced and in the past, sweet and naive. The thought that Jeongguk had a hidden wild side sends a wave of heat through Taehyung’s body.

*I know absolutely nothing about this man*, he realizes with a start.

“Taehyung ssi,” *God why is his voice so goddamn low? Like some fucking sex god whose crawled out of the pits of hell just to kill me.*

“Yeah?” Taehyung croaks, mouth dry.

“Do you mind…” Jeongguk’s gaze drops down to his own exposed chest. Taehyung shakes his head too quickly.
“No!” Taehyung clears his throat, “I mean, no it’s… fine.”

Jeongguk just nods, before bringing his arms up sliding the jacket completely off and *Jesus fucking Christ*.

The muscles of his wide shoulders and arms bunch as he pulls the material off and ties it around his waist, exposing his smooth golden back, and *fuck* there’s another tattoo.

This one is a red and black dragon, it’s body swirled in a zig zag pattern across the expanse of Jeongguk’s back, and Taehyung almost drops his mail.

His entire body is frozen, and he’s unable to move his gaze away because his brain feels like it’s been completely fried. His heart is threatening to burst out of his chest and he wonders whether all the heart surgery and medication was worth it since he’s probably going to die in this exact moment. It takes all of his remaining willpower to keep himself from just sinking to the ground.

Taehyung is simultaneously glad and annoyed when the elevator slides open on their floor. Jeongguk gives him a small nod before stepping out. Taehyung stares as the younger man walks down the (unfortunately) well lit halls, stretching his arms over his head, back and forth, making the muscles of his back contract and smooth over.

Taehyung watches him punch the code for his door and step inside. He doesn’t find the will to move until the elevator doors start to close and he sprints out just in time.

♥

“Dr. Jeon!” Jimin squeals, eyes lighting up when he spots the man. Taehyung lets go of the child’s hand so he can skip up to Jeongguk.

“Hey buddy,” Jeongguk smiles, kneeling down in the middle of the waiting room so the raven haired boy can throw his little arms around him. He huffs out a laugh, straightening up with Jimin in his arms and situating the boy on his hip.

“Taehyung ssi,” Jeongguk nods briskly to the other man, who copies the action, albeit
“TaeTae hyung is crazy today,” Jimin giggles. *Your TaeTae hyung is crazy, period.*

“Hey, you were the one singing Sesame Street in the car,” Taehyung retorts. Jimin squeaks, burying his head into Jeongguk’s neck. “You don’t even know half the words.”

“Dr. Jeon, hyung is being mean to me,” Jimin whines. Jeongguk raises an eyebrow at Taehyung, who flushes, much like a scolded child.

“Why don’t we go into the room and get away from your mean hyung?” Jimin mumbles an affirmation. Jeongguk then turns to Taehyung, “You can wait in the lobby.”

Taehyung looks like he’s nervous suddenly, staring at Jeongguk. He keeps his mouth shut and nods. Jeongguk is almost thrown by his level of complacency. He was half hoping for a fight.

But ever since Taehyung had moved in next door, the man had gone out of his way to be nice to Jeongguk. He isn't sure what the older man is trying to do, but he's not falling for it again.

Knowing that Taehyung is just a few feet away from him while he sleeps is a never ending source of anxiety for Jeongguk. It’s like the older man is a parasite, latching on to every aspect of Jeongguk’s life, sucking whatever miniscule amount of joy there was out.

One thing had come out of the whole situation, though. This morning in the elevator, Jeongguk had come to a revelation.

When they were in high school, Taehyung had always been the bigger one, physically. He was also older, more popular, and rich beyond belief.

But now, Jeongguk was taller, broader, more muscular than Taehyung. He had come into his own considerable wealth and status. They were on equal footing. And Jeongguk learned over time that he was an incredibly attractive man. He could pick up anyone with just a glance.

For some reason, he had always felt inferior in front of Taehyung. Maybe it was conditioning since
their high school days, but while Jeongguk knew the effect he could have on people should he choose to exploit it, he never thought Taehyung would fall for it either.

And Jeongguk had decided to experiment this morning. It filled him with a strange satisfaction, knowing Taehyung was openly checking him out. Jeongguk was more than happy to flaunt who he had now become.

He can look, but he can never touch.

Jeongguk is more than pleased, seeing the dazed look on the older man’s face. He feels oddly… powerful.

“You’re in a good mood Dr. Jeon,” Jimin points out, swinging his feet on the patient bed when Jeongguk sets him down. Jeongguk smiles at him. Jimin was an intuitive little brat, and it was safe to say that Jeongguk had gotten attached.

He was terribly sweet and kind. Always trying to act like a grown up and solve the problems of the adults around him, even though he had his own fair share to deal with.

“I guess I am. How’re you feeling, kiddo?” Jeongguk asks, sitting himself down on the stool and scooting closer to the bed. He unwinds the stethoscope from around his neck and puts the buds into his ears.

“I feel good!” Jimin chirps.

“That’s good to hear.”

“I like not being in the wheelchair.” Jimin scrunches his nose in annoyance, and Jeongguk laughs.

“Yeah, it must’ve sucked huh?”

“You can’t do anything in a wheelchair Dr. Jeon! You can’t play soccer or dance or anything,” Jimin explains vehemently, eyes wide open and hands moving passionately.
"So you're doing all that now?" Jeongguk asks. Jimin nods excitedly. "You're not going too hard yet right? If you're not careful, you could get sick again."

Jimin grins and rolls his eyes. "Don't worry so much Dr. Jeon," He even reaches out to pat Jeongguk's head, like he's the adult, trying to soothe Jeongguk. "I know what I'm doing."

Jeongguk wants to be appalled, but Park Jimin is too damn adorable for his own good. "Big talk for such a little guy." He reaches forward to tweak Jimin's nose. The child giggles and swats his hand away.

"Alright, enough of that. Take a deep breath for me," Jeongguk says, raising the chest piece of the stethoscope to Jimin's heart. The boy nods and inhales. His face is serious and determined, and Jeongguk admires his spirit.

"You sound good kiddo," Jeongguk says, after a minute of moving the chest piece around and listening to the boy's valves and his lungs.

"Cause I'm doing everything you told me to do, Dr. Jeon!" Jimin says proudly. "I made a list of all the things and I check them off every day!"

"That's great, Minnie," Jeongguk ruffles the boy's hair. "I'm proud of you."

"TaeTae hyung says he's proud of me too," Jeongguk's smile drops slightly at the mention of the name, but he forces it back so as to not raise Jimin's suspicions. The kid is disarmingly good at reading people. He also couldn't keep a secret to save his life.

"He says once I'm all better he'll take me any place I want!"

Jeongguk bites back the irritation. He really had to commend Taehyung for putting up his act so consistently. He just hopes the kids at the orphanage, especially Jimin, won't be too disappointed when they find out their hero is a complete fake.

"That's great!" Jeongguk says instead. "Do you know where you want to go?"
Jimin shakes his head. "Not yet. First, I said I wanted to go on a boat, out into the sea, so I could see the whales and stuff! But TaeTae hyung is scared of that stuff."

This perks Jeongguk's interest. There's something nagging at the back of his mind, a distant memory of something once said.

"Apparently his hyung had an accident in a boat so he doesn't like the ocean anymore," Jimin says sadly. Jeongguk's throat tightens.

Is that how Namjoon had died? In a boating accident?

And then something clicks in Jeongguk's mind.

"My parents... they died in a boating accident when I was three or something."

Oh god, Jeongguk realizes with a start. Taehyung had confessed that on the roof of the library.

It was the same reason Jeongguk had been putting off going to visit the other children at the orphanage. He was afraid of reliving how Sojin had died. It was a raw, irrational fear, but a fear nonetheless. And it was doubled for Taehyung, having lost both his parents and his hyung in the same manner.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Jeongguk murmurs.

"Yeah, hyung gets really sad sometimes. I went to his grave once though!" Jeongguk supposed Jimin is referring to Namjoon. "It's really nice actually. TaeTae hyung takes really good care of it."

Jeongguk forces a smile because it was the place he had barged in and exploded at Taehyung. God, he thought about that moment all the time. And how he would have murdered anyone who dared disrespect Sojin's grave site in the way that he himself had done to Kim Namjoon’s. He wonders how Taehyung had managed not to strangle him. The thought is sobering.
"I'm sure he does. How's Hyeri?" Jeongguk is quick to change the subject. Every time anyone mentions Taehyung his mood turns sour, and he doesn't want Jimin to be around that.

The rest of the appointment goes relatively smoothly and Jeongguk is almost able to continue in his constructed reality where Taehyung is not human… except that he is. And Jeongguk can’t stop thinking about it.

♥

“Master Taehyung.” One of the butlers is standing at the doorway of Taehyung’s game room. He’d been in the middle of a wild race on Mario Kart, but he puts down his controller when he notices the man.

“Yes?”

“Master Jeongguk is here to see you,” he says, but his voice is grave, and his eyes clouded in worry. Everyone who worked at the mansion knew Jeongguk at this point and adored him. It was enjoyable when Jeongguk was here so his butler’s tone throws Taehyung off.

“Right now?” Taehyung asks. It’s almost midnight on a Friday and there’s a storm picking up outside.

“Yes, Master Taehyung. He’s in the living room. It’s not… It seems serious.”

Taehyung is up in a heartbeat, sprinting through the halls and down the steps, into the sprawling living room. He sees the back of Jeongguk’s form, wrapped up in a blanket and shivering.

“J-Jeongguk?” Taehyung’s voice wobbles with concern as he approaches and as he gets closer he notices Jeongguk’s dripping wet hair. The younger boy turns towards his voice and when Taehyung sees his face he feels like his heart stops for too long.

In an instant Taehyung is crouching down in front of Jeongguk, cupping his bloody, steadily-bruising face. Jeongguk has a bruised cheek, a split lip, and he’s bleeding from three scratch marks below his left ear.
As soon as Taehyung is within reach, Jeongguk reaches out to him, winding his arms around his neck and sobbing into his shoulder. It feels like he holds Jeongguk for an eternity, letting the younger soak his shirt with tears and rainwater as he clings on for dear life.

Taehyung’s mind is racing a mile a minute, trying to wrap his mind around the idea of anyone wanting to hurt his precious Jeongguk. After a few minutes, Jeongguk’s shoulders stop shaking so much and the tears stop. Taehyung pulls Jeongguk away gently to look at him.

“W-what happened?” Taehyung asks, raising his hand tentatively to brush at Jeongguk’s cheek; he still can’t believe the bruise darkening there is real.

Jeongguk winces and a violent shiver wracks through him. The fireplace is crackling with warmth, but Jeongguk is completely soaked through. As if on cue, thunder rumbles from outside.

“You know what, let’s get you cleaned up first, okay?” Taehyung knows Jeongguk could get extremely sick if he doesn’t get a warm shower soon. Jeongguk nods shakily, and Taehyung helps him up.

Jeongguk limps, holding tightly to Taehyung as they take the stairs up to his room. He guides Jeongguk into his bathroom and goes to the tub, running the hot water.

“I’m going to run you a bath and get you some warm clothes, alright?” Jeongguk nods and watches as Taehyung rummages through his closet for a shirt, a sweater, clean boxers, and pajama pants, before folding them neatly on the counter. He then goes to the tub--nearly full, and sticks his hand in to make sure the water is a comfortable temperature.

“Okay Gukkie. Take as long as you need, and tell me if you need help, okay?” Jeongguk just nods again. “Do you want anything to eat or drink?”

“Do you have ginger tea?” Jeongguk whispers.

“I’m sure we do.” Taehyung smiles softly. “It’ll be waiting for you when you’re out, okay?” He steps forward to kiss Jeongguk gently on the forehead. “Let me know if you need anything.”

He steps out and closes the door behind him. His hands are shaking, and he feels nauseous, but he needs to stay calm for Jeongguk. So he runs down to the kitchen for someone to make some tea,
before rummaging around for a first aid kit.

Once he has those things, he takes them back up to his room and sets them down on his desk. He
digs out the antiseptic, some cotton pads, and bandages. Right as he finishes, he hears the bathroom
doors opening and Jeongguk steps out.

“Hey,” Taehyung says, reaching out for Jeongguk’s hand. The younger is positively swimming in
his clothes—Taehyung had searched for the smallest things but even those were too big. *He’s so cute*,
Taehyung thinks, but chastises himself for thinking that at this moment.

He guides Jeongguk to the bed and sits him down on the edge, before gathering the medical supplies
from his desk and bringing them over, sitting down next to him. He’d never really done this before,
but he figures it’s pretty simple.

They’re completely quiet, as Taehyung gently dabs at the wounds with the medicine. The scars
below Jeongguk’s ear are the worst, swelling an angry red, and Jeongguk whimpers when the
medicine is applied. Taehyung murmurs a thousand apologies as he tries to be even gentler with his
actions.

Jeongguk has a few bruises on his knees and arms as well, but there’s nothing that either of them can
do about that. Taehyung quietly packs the first aid kit back up and brings the cup of tea, now cool
enough to drink, and Jeongguk takes it gratefully.

Jeongguk brings the cup to his lips slowly, with shaking hands, and Taehyung runs his fingers
through the boy’s hair. He looks legitimately… *afraid*. As if wherever he turns something will pop
up and come at him, but he relaxes slowly with Taehyung’s touch and the warm tea.

Once Jeongguk is done, Taehyung sets the mug back on his table before tucking Jeongguk
underneath the covers of his bed and joining him. He wraps his arms around Jeongguk’s waist and
holds him close, resuming stroking his hair until the last of the tension has left his body.

Eventually, Jeongguk sighs, curling himself tighter against Taehyung’s chest.

He doesn’t want to disturb the peace that’s settled around him, but he *needs to know*.

“Gukkie…” Taehyung murmurs. Jeongguk blinks up at him. “Do you… want to talk about…”
Jeongguk’s face drops into a frown and Taehyung scrambles. “I mean, you don’t have to, but I’m right here. No one can hurt you.”

Jeongguk sighs and it’s a quiet, weary sound. It reminds Taehyung of the first time he had seen Jeongguk on the roof of the library: tired, defeated.

“The ahjumma was really drunk tonight,” Jeongguk whispers. Taehyung knows exactly who Jeongguk is talking about. He can still hear the screams of rage from his brief visit to Jeongguk’s orphanage. The mistreatment fills Taehyung with frustration and rage. He wishes there was something he could do. But he’s just a kid. He has no power.

“She went after noona… She was so angry, I don’t know why. But she was hurting noona so I tried to stop her but…”

Jeongguk’s face falls and Taehyung can get a very clear picture without the younger having to continue. “Noona told me to go and I didn’t want to–” He cuts himself off and scrunches his face like he’s trying to hold back tears.

“Why are you always trying to be a superhero?” Taehyung jokes, stroking Jeongguk’s unmarked cheek. The younger huffs a laugh and Taehyung is relieved to finally see a smile on his face, but he’s still worried.

_He doesn’t deserve this._ Jeongguk, in Taehyung’s eyes, was the most perfect person in the world—next to Namjoon hyung, of course. Jeongguk was sweet, innocent, completely selfless, and never had to put up any pretenses. He was always honest, but also kind.

Jeongguk had showed Taehyung a lot of beauty in the world. He had stopped caring so much about what others thought of him. He started reading more often and he really found himself caring about what university he was going to, what he could really contribute to Rise in the future since Namjoon was the CEO. He really wants to do something, not just get by; become someone Jeongguk could be proud of.

And it kills Taehyung to think that someone out there is actively hurting his angel; that he can’t do anything about it.

“Can’t you report her or something?” Taehyung tries. Jeongguk shakes his head.
“The orphanage is owned by a private company. They don’t have to follow any regulations they don’t set, so there’s a lot of stuff like this that happens in the system.”

“Well… what if someone else bought it? Someone nice.”

Jeongguk smiles, but it’s tired. “That would be a dream come true. But it’s not going to happen… No one cares about orphans. I’m one of the lucky ones, because I have Sojin noona.”

Taehyung leans forward to rub their noses together, “You have me too.”

Jeongguk giggles, hands coming up to press against Taehyung’s chest, “Yeah, I do.”

Taehyung wraps his arms tighter around Jeongguk, pressing their bodies flush together. Jeongguk blushes at the proximity, tucking his head into the crook of Taehyung’s neck to hide his face.

“I’ll protect you Gukkie.”

“I’ll protect you too.” Taehyung tilts his head down to raise an eyebrow at the younger, who splutters. “I can’t fight or anything but there are other ways to protect people!”

“Of course,” Taehyung presses a kiss to Jeongguk’s hair. “We’ll protect each other.”
“Taehyung, where are we going?” Jeongguk asks, squirming in his seat. Taehyung just grins at him, wiggling his eyebrows.

“It’s a surprise! You’ll see.”

Taehyung had been intensely planning this for the past two weeks. He’d consulted Yoongi for logistics, and asked Namjoon for special permission. He’d dedicated every free moment to coordinating this, because he wanted everything to be perfect. Jeongguk deserved nothing less.

“You look really cute, Gukkie,” Taehyung says, mostly to distract the younger, but it doesn’t make it any less true. Taehyung had bought Jeongguk a tailor made suit under the guise of wearing it to their senior prom (which was, coincidentally, tonight), but Taehyung knew the younger didn’t really want to go, so he made different plans.

“We’re not going in the direction of the school, Taehyung,” Jeongguk points out, and Taehyung just smirks.

“I know.” He reaches over to slide his hand into Jeongguk’s. The younger tightens his grip, tangling their fingers together, and smiles sweetly. Taehyung’s heart stutters, because tonight is their night.

Jeongguk had brought it up shyly last week. About him wanting to lose his virginity to Taehyung. Taehyung himself had been thinking about it, but he didn’t want to bring it up in case Jeongguk felt pressured, so he wanted to wait until the time was right.

They had talked about it together. Their boundaries and comfort levels, everything, because Taehyung, while also a virgin, felt like he had a special responsibility in making sure Jeongguk was comfortable with the pace of their relationship, both emotionally and physically. It had been awkward having that conversation, but it felt nice after, knowing they were on the same page, and wanted the same things.

Beside Taehyung, Jeongguk gasps, as the car pulls into the valet area of the Rise Suites and Gardens in Kangnam. Taehyung had considered doing this at the main hotel, but Jeongguk loved being outside, and the gardens were the most perfect place.
The driver gets out to open the door for them, and Taehyung steps out first, holding his hand out to Jeongguk as he comes out of the car.

“Wow,” Jeongguk breathes, eyes wide as he takes in the building. The Rise Suites and Gardens had been designed in an almost Greek fashion, with pillars of tall white marble and figures etched into the walls that had been covered strategically with various vines and hanging flowers. There’s also a large waterfall outside, the roar of the water covering up the buzz of busy traffic.

Taehyung shivers in anticipation. He had always loved this place. He always felt like he was about to go on a wild adventure whenever he came.

“I feel like I’m about to go on a safari,” Jeongguk jokes, and Taehyung grins, because that’s exactly what he had been thinking.

“It’s even cooler inside, come on!” Taehyung tugs at Jeongguk’s hand, and the younger boy laughs and follows after. The doorman bows his head to Taehyung and Jeongguk, who return it, and opens the wide glass door.

“Wow,” It seems like that’s the only word Jeongguk knows, but Taehyung deems it appropriate. The lobby is like an indoor arboretum, with large, golden planters with trees growing out of them, artificial vines growing around the roof, flowers dotting every corner of vision. In the center of the space, there’s a pond, full of purple and pink water lilies and koi fish. A sense of peace permeates the air, and Taehyung sighs, releasing all the tension in his body.

“Isn’t it cool?” Taehyung asks, grinning. Jeongguk lets out a shocked laugh, head turning as he attempts to take in every little detail (which is impossible, Taehyung knows, because he’s tried too many times to count).

“Yes,” Jeongguk says breathlessly. He turns to Taehyung, smiling so brightly it takes his breath away, and so he squeezes Jeongguk’s hand tighter.

“Are you ready for your surprise?” Jeongguk flushes prettily, nodding shyly. “Come on.” Taehyung takes him through the lobby, to a set of glass doors that open out to the infamous maze of gardens at the center of the towering suites.

They walk past beautifully blooming flowers of a myriad of colors, trees in all shapes and sizes, that Jeongguk’s only seen in pictures of books about far off places and jungles that he’d probably never
get to explore. It’s overwhelmingly beautiful, and Jeongguk feels like he could get lost here, except he’s got Taehyung’s warm hand, leading him confidently.

After a minute, they approach a set of tall hedges, with a gap at the center. The plaque near it says that it’s a maze, and Taehyung strides forward.

“Wait! What if we get lost?” Jeongguk asks nervously. Taehyung laughs.

“I grew up playing in this maze. Just trust me.”

Jeongguk looks at Taehyung incredulously, before sighing and nodding. Taehyung tightens his hold on Jeongguk’s hand and leads him inside. Jeongguk’s stomach churns with anxiety as they become engulfed in the maze, hedges tall around them, but Taehyung seems to know the way just fine, because he’s rounding corners and cutting through paths with expertise, and after a few moments, they emerge into a beautiful courtyard in the very heart of the maze.

There’s a large, circular fountain at the center, and a table right beside it, set up with dinner for two, and a vase of red roses. Taehyung doesn’t really know anything about romance, but he hopes this is a good enough start.

“I knew you might be uncomfortable at the dance so… I just thought this might be better,” Taehyung explains, scratching the back of his neck sheepishly. Jeongguk looks up at him, eyes wide with disbelief.

“This is... perfect,” he says, approaching the table. Taehyung pulls out Jeongguk’s chair for him, and the younger giggles when Taehyung does an exaggerated bow before taking his own seat. On cue, a waiter appears from the back entrance of the maze, wheeling a silver dinner cart.

“Master Taehyung,” the waiter says, placing the plate down in front of Taehyung. “And Master Jeongguk.” Jeongguk murmurs his thanks as the food is set in front of him.

The waiter then uncorks a bottle, pouring bubbly, gold liquid into both of their glasses. “Champagne. Compliments of Kim Namjoon ssi.” Taehyung’s eyes widen, before he grins widely.

“Enjoy your dinner.” The waiter bows before disappearing through the exit, and Jeongguk stares at Taehyung in awe.
“I can’t believe hyung got us champagne!” Taehyung says, picking up the glass. He’d turned eighteen a few months ago, but he’d never really had a chance to have alcohol, despite the fact that he was legal.

“The food looks good too,” Jeongguk chimes, staring down at the filet mignon in front of him. He’d never seen anything so fancy and luxurious.

“I know right? It’s grown up food!” Taehyung exclaims, making Jeongguk giggle. Taehyung’s face takes on an air of mock seriousness, as he raises his glass of champagne.

“Let us make a toast. To pretending to be adults!” Taehyung proclaims. Jeongguk just grins at him, and clinks their glasses together.

“To pretending to be adults,” Jeongguk repeats, and they both hesitantly take sips. Taehyung screws up his face.

“God, that’s disgusting!” Jeongguk snorts out a laugh at Taehyung’s scrunched up face.

“It’s gross,” Jeongguk agrees, setting down the glass.

“Why do people drink this stuff?” Taehyung looks at the champagne, annoyed. “I thought this was supposed to be some sort of groundbreaking, magical experience. I feel tricked, Jeongguk!”

Jeongguk throws his head back in laughter, unable to stop himself, because Taehyung really does have a flair for drama.

“We should probably eat before the food gets cold,” Taehyung suggests, once Jeongguk’s stopped his incessant giggling. The younger nods, wiping at the corner of his eyes, and they dig in. Jeongguk always eats quickly, like someone’s going to take his food away from him if he doesn’t eat it fast enough. Tonight he eats slowly, pausing to converse with Taehyung, to laugh, to smile.

“Do you want to dance?” Taehyung asks, after they’ve finished their dinner. “We ditched prom, but I still feel like we should dance.”
Jeongguk raises an eyebrow. “We don’t have any music.”

“I can fix that,” Taehyung hums, picking up a small remote from the edge of the table. Jeongguk frowns, not having noticed it. Taehyung clicks a few buttons, and suddenly, the air is filled with quiet, slow classical music.

Taehyung hops out of his chair, bowing grandly to Jeongguk and offering his hand. “May I have this dance?”

Jeongguk grins, rolling his eyes and pausing, as though considering. “If you insist,” he relents after a moment, smile bright. He slides his hand into Taehyung’s waiting one, and the older boy pulls him up and into his arms.

Taehyung situates Jeongguk’s arms around his neck before settling his own hands at Jeongguk’s waist. Neither of them have much skill in dancing, so they settle for swaying back and forth with their foreheads pressed together.

“Hey Jeongguk?” Taehyung murmurs. Jeongguk hums, eyes widening as he looks up at the taller boy. “I’m really glad you’re here.” Jeongguk’s lips tug into a shy smile, and his cheeks flush prettily.

“And…” Taehyung sighs, nervousness tightening his skin as he searches for the words. He’d been practicing this for days, the perfect way to confess to Jeongguk. But now, with the person he loves actually here, in his arms, he’s forgotten what he wants to say.

“And I think I’m in love with you,” Taehyung says in one breath. Jeongguk frowns in confusion.

“What?” Taehyung clicks his tongue, pulling away from Jeongguk because he can’t think clearly with the younger so close to him. Jeongguk watches him with wide eyes.

“I think--” Taehyung takes a deep breath, before looking right at Jeongguk. “I’m in love with you.”

“Oh,” Jeongguk squeaks, face coloring in surprise. He’s quiet for a moment, but Taehyung’s learned that Jeongguk’s silent when he’s thinking hard.
It feels like eons before Jeongguk smiles shyly at him. “I think I feel the same way.”

Taehyung doesn’t know why he’s so surprised, but he is. He’s completely thrown, and he just stares at Jeongguk, unable to believe that someone as perfect as Jeongguk genuinely returns his romantic feelings. He wants to scream and jump and yell to the world because Jeongguk loves me and I love him! but he figures it would scare the younger boy, so he settles for his rectangle grin instead, reaching out to pull Jeongguk into a tight hug.

“I’ve never been this happy in my whole life,” Taehyung murmurs into Jeongguk’s hair. The younger’s hands fist at the jacket of Taehyung’s suit, burying his head into Taehyung’s neck. He doesn’t know know how long they stand there for, but he wants this moment to last forever.

There’s a crackle in the sky, and they both jolt in surprise, looking up, and watch with amazement as fireworks explode across the sky. Jeongguk’s face is alight with wonder and he’s glowing, and Taehyung can’t think of anything more that he’s ever wanted to do than kiss Jeongguk in that moment.

So he cups the younger’s face and leans down, pressing their lips together softly. Jeongguk is quick to respond, hands curling tighter at Taehyung’s chest as he slots their mouths together. They’re in their own bubble when they pull apart, breathless, as the colors continue to paint the sky a rainbow, and Taehyung feels bold.

“Jeongguk, I want to make love to you,” he says plainly. Jeongguk’s mouth pops open in surprise, and Taehyung leans down again to kiss his lips. “I want to worship you. And show you how much I love you.” He pulls away to gauge Jeongguk’s reaction, blood roaring in his ears from the anticipation.

“Okay,” Jeongguk whispers.

♥

“Taehyung…” Jeongguk breathes out, taking in the suite that Taehyung’s brought him to. The space is open and wide, with luxury dripping from every surface, from the paintings hanging on the walls, to the silken curtains and sprawling, grand furniture, and the chandelier above their heads.

Jeongguk walks in carefully, half afraid that this is a dream, and one wrong move could shatter the
entire illusion and throw him back into the darkness. Every step he takes brings a new rush of anticipation.

“I wanna show you something,” Taehyung murmurs, tugging at Jeongguk’s hand. He leads the younger into the bedroom, pausing at the doorway so Jeongguk can take in the sight.

The room is large and spacious, with a massive bed at the center. There are candles lit everywhere, bathing the space in a warm glow. Taehyung had pulled out all the stops for this, wanting everything to be perfect for Jeongguk. He hadn’t been sure whether things would go well tonight, but he had prepared for everything, just in case.

Taehyung’s toes curl in anticipation, and he turns to gauge Jeongguk’s reaction. The younger looks up at Taehyung, smiling shyly.

“I didn’t know you were this romantic,” Jeongguk whispers, eyes shinning, and Taehyung’s face flushes hot. He ducks his head.

“Yeah well…” He laughs nervously, suddenly embarrassed.

Jeongguk tightens his grip on Taehyung’s hand. “I love it.”

Taehyung’s heart feels like it’s going to leap out of his throat as Jeongguk steps closer, leaning up on his tip toes to press his lips to Taehyung’s jaw. The violent shiver that wracks through Taehyung is almost ridiculous, but Jeongguk’s light touches make him feel like he’s on fire.

As if on instinct, Taehyung’s free hand comes up to cup Jeongguk’s face, tipping it so he can mold their lips together. Their kisses are always slow, sweet, and it’s a slow burn. But Taehyung can feel the heat spreading from the tip of his toes, and he knows that tonight there would be so much more.

“Jeongguk…” Taehyung breathes, throat threatening to close up. Jeongguk’s eyes flutter open, apprehensive, but ready, and in that moment, Taehyung thinks that he and Jeongguk are one in the same.

“Do you…” Jeongguk’s eyes curve up, blushing cutely.
“Yeah, Taehyung. Yeah.”

They take turns undressing each other. Taehyung slips off Jeongguk’s suit jacket. Jeongguk takes off his. Taehyung fumbles with Jeongguk’s tie and shirt buttons, trying to keep their mouths connected as a distraction from his own nervous hands. Jeongguk does the same, but Taehyung thinks the younger’s hands don’t shake nearly as much.

The shirts are discarded somewhere on the floor near their feet. They’d never seen each other like this, and Jeongguk suddenly feels self conscious. Taehyung is lean and tall and athletic, and Jeongguk is scrawny and small. He feels inadequate and undeserving.

But the look Taehyung gives him evaporates that thought. The older drags his hands along the expanse of Jeongguk’s back, pulling him closer so he can kiss at Jeongguk’s neck.

“You’re so cute, Gukkie,” Taehyung murmurs, and Jeongguk presses his hands to the older’s chest. He tenses, and the muscle under Jeongguk’s fingertips goes taut. “God,” Taehyung breathes, dragging his mouth along Jeongguk’s jaw so he can press their mouths together again.

They’d never kissed like this before. Taehyung’s lips are more urgent, pressing hot and insistent against Jeongguk’s own, and his fingers dig into the dimples at Jeongguk’s back. Feeling more courageous, Jeongguk brings his arms up to wind around Taehyung’s neck, pressing their chests together, overheated skin against skin.

Taehyung experimentally swipes at Jeongguk’s bottom lip, and Jeongguk slowly parts his lips. Taehyung’s tongue is hesitant and unpracticed, but he makes up for skill with enthusiasm, licking into Jeongguk’s mouth.

Jeongguk lets out a quiet, breathy moan, and it makes Taehyung’s stomach flop. God, he’d do anything for that sound. It’s so unlike anything Taehyung’s ever heard before, so soft and sweet, but it makes Taehyung’s mind spiral into places he’d never thought to go before.

He tilts his head, slotting their mouths together again, and repeats the action, letting their tongues slide together. There’s too much teeth and not enough of anything else, but it draws another little sigh from Jeongguk, so Taehyung feels better about it.

Soon, just kissing isn’t enough. Their bodies are completely flushed, and Jeongguk is tugging at Taehyung’s hair, desperate for something he doesn’t know how to vocalize as Taehyung thumbs at
Jeongguk’s hip bones, right above the waist of his slacks.

Taehyung pulls away from the kiss to nudge his nose at Jeongguk’s cheek. “Is it… okay?” He gulps. “If I…”

He doesn’t have to continue, because Jeongguk knows what he’s talking about. “Y-yeah… okay,” Jeongguk answers, just as breathless, and Taehyung takes it as a green light for his hand to slide lower, down to the growing bulge in Jeongguk’s pants. His touch is feather light, not wanting to do anything wrong, but the high pitched whine that spills from Jeongguk’s mouth tells Taehyung he’s doing something right.

Jeongguk’s hips buck up into the touch, and Taehyung can feel the wetness already starting to form at the front of his pants. He blushes from head to toe, knowing that he is the reason why Jeongguk’s body is reacting like this. So he does it again, pressing harder this time. Jeongguk’s fingers dig into Taehyung’s scalp, tugging at his lavender hair as he crushes their mouths together.

Taehyung becomes distracted for a moment, forgetting everything but Jeongguk’s lips, hot and urgent against his, and his takes his hands and slides them down to cup Jeongguk’s ass, pressing their hips together. He jolts at the sudden friction of their crotches rubbing together, a delicious sting that he’d never felt before. Jeongguk seems to like it too, rolling his hips forward again eagerly.

Jeongguk tugs again at Taehyung’s hair, simultaneously nipping at Taehyung’s lip, and it draws a deep groan from the him, something about the stinging pain bringing a dark sense of pleasure, and he stumbles forward, pitching Jeongguk onto the bed.

Jeongguk lands on the mattress, and he slides back until he’s in the center, heart pounding loudly against his chest, and Taehyung crawls to him, hovering over him with his knees on either side of Jeongguk’s hips.

Jeongguk lifts his upper body to press his mouth to Taehyung’s and tugs the older boy down on top of him until their bodies are flush together. Every part of him is burning, anxiety jolting through him, and his stomach flops, because he’s feeling so much, but he doesn’t know what to do or say. He feels helpless and scared, but then Taehyung’s looking at him, with the same expression on his face, and it quells some of the unease. He has no idea what he’s doing, but he’s doing it with Taehyung, and that’s all that matters. He knows if he wants something, he should just say it. They had talked about this. He didn’t have to be shy.

“T-Taehyung,” Jeongguk stutters as the older breaks their kiss to mouth at Jeongguk’s neck, trailing hot, wet kisses down Jeongguk’s chest and stomach. Every touch, every kiss, every damn breath
Jeongguk takes makes him feel like he’s drowning. He’d never been touched like this, and it shows when he writhes as Taehyung runs his nose along Jeongguk’s waistband. His inexperience is painfully tangible now, as he keens underneath Taehyung. His skin is electric, and every brush of Taehyung’s fingers, every shaky exhale, is making Jeongguk so worked up he might explode.

“Please... Tae,” Jeongguk gasps, tugging at Taehyung’s hair. The older pulls away to reach into the nightstand drawer, fumbling around until he brings out a small bottle. Raw fear flushes through Jeongguk, knowing exactly what’s inside, and while he knows he wants this, it doesn’t help the uncertainty and fear that claws up his throat.

“So you… s-sure you want this?” Taehyung asks, eyes wide, pupils blown wide. He’s apprehensive, Jeongguk can tell. Neither of them had ever done this before. And Jeongguk wasn’t stupid. He knew it was going to hurt, that he might not enjoy it. His heart is lodged in his throat, and he half wants to run away. But he knows Taehyung would do his best to take care of him, make it as easy as he could, and for that, Jeongguk is grateful, and it makes him feel more than ready. Taehyung had given him everything, and the least Jeongguk could do is share this part of himself with him. Because making Taehyung happy makes Jeongguk happy.

So he reaches out to stroke Taehyung’s face softly, biting back his own uncertainty to smile. “Of course. There’s no one else who I would rather do this with than you.” His words ring true in the air between them, making Taehyung’s shoulders untense a bit, and the older boy tilts his face into Jeongguk’s touch.

“T-tell me if you want me to stop, okay?” Jeongguk just nods, and watches, chewing nervously at his lip, as Taehyung’s fingers fumble at the button and zipper of his pants. A fresh wave of fear rolls through Jeongguk as Taehyung tugs down the material, leaving him in just his boxers, with his arousal straining through them. Jeongguk blushes furiously as Taehyung pulls down his underwear soon after, and his first instinct is to close his legs, cover up his groin with his hands.

“No... don’t. Please,” Taehyung says softly, eyes swimming with an intensity that Jeongguk’s never seen before. He squirms as Taehyung’s gaze drags down to stare at his erection, now laying flat against his stomach. The older boy reaches out and brushes his fingers along the length. Jeongguk gasps, hips bucking up involuntarily, as a sheen of sweat breaks out on his forehead.

Taehyung strokes again, enraptured with the way Jeongguk reacts so wildly to every touch, and it’s the most beautiful thing. He’d never seen Jeongguk like this-- looking so frazzled underneath him.

He shakily uncaps the lube, having almost forgotten it in his other hand while being distracted by Jeongguk’s reactions, and squeezes out what may be too much onto shaking fingers.
“J-Jeongguk. You’re sure, r-right?” Taehyung asks, for what seems like the millionth time, but he needs Jeongguk to be on the same page as him. He knows this could hurt Jeongguk. That he could hurt Jeongguk, but he’s going to do his damned best to make it as painless as possible.

He just needs to know that Jeongguk is ready to give him this part of him. The same way Taehyung himself is ready to do the same.

It’s scary and exhilarating, knowing that they hold each other’s hearts so precariously in their hands. Knowing that one wrong move could send them both spiralling down, because if one of them hurts, the other is going to feel it tenfold.

“Y-yeah,” Jeongguk squeaks. Taehyung’s heart is beating so fast, it’s almost all he can hear as he lowers his lube slicked fingers near Jeongguk’s entrance. When his cold fingers brush along the skin, Jeongguk shakes, moaning and throwing his arms over his face in embarrassment.

Taehyung takes a deep breath, cursing himself for not remembering to warm up the lube before touching Jeongguk, but pushes forward, experimentally slipping a single digit past the knuckle into Jeongguk. It’s fascinating, watching his finger disappear into the tight, warm heat.

He looks up to gauge Jeongguk’s reaction, and finds the younger in the same position, except now his hands are curled into fists, as though trying not to make a sound.

“Gukkie, are you okay?” Taehyung murmurs, trying not to move the finger inside Jeongguk, and reaching up with his free hand to tug at the younger’s arms. Jeongguk moves them, and his face is scrunched with discomfort, bottom lip caught between his teeth as he looks at Taehyung anxiously.

“I’ll be okay,” Jeongguk mumbles. “Move.”

Taehyung nods, twisting the finger just slightly. Jeongguk tenses again, so Taehyung stops. “No don’t—” Jeongguk pleads, reaching out to squeeze Taehyung’s shoulders. “It’s okay. I’ll t-tell you if it really hurts.”

Taehyung frowns, still worried, but twists his finger again. Jeongguk’s body is still coiled, so Taehyung leans down to kiss at the younger’s stomach. Jeongguk lets out a shaky breath, so Taehyung does it again, and he slowly relaxes. They continue this process until Taehyung’s moving his finger in and out at a comfortable, slow pace for Jeongguk, and the younger is no longer tense.
“M-more,” Jeongguk stutters. Taehyung nods, having gotten an idea, because he wants to distract Jeongguk the best he can, so as he teases the second finger around Jeongguk’s rim, his mouth wanders lower, leaving little kisses along Jeongguk’s length.

The younger’s fingers tug at Taehyung’s hair, letting out a surprised, shaky moan, hips jolting in an attempt to get closer. And just as Taehyung takes Jeongguk’s cock into his mouth, he slowly slides in the second finger.

Jeongguk cries out, unable to distinguish the pain from the pleasure, so he arches his back wildly. There’s a dull sting at the base of his spine, and heat pooling in his stomach. He feels overloaded with the conflicting sensations, so he tries to focus on Taehyung’s hot mouth sucking experimentally at his length.

Taehyung’s teeth accidentally graze the sensitive skin of his cock, and Jeongguk yelps, bucking his hips up, which in turn makes Taehyung gag on the length.

“Oh my god. I’m sorry... I’m sorry,” Jeongguk fumbles, panting, and Taehyung pulls away, coughing in surprise.

“No it’s--” Taehyung coughs again, voice rough. “--it’s fine.”

“I didn’t mean t-to…”

“Jeongguk, it’s okay, I’m fine,” Taehyung tries to soothe Jeongguk. The younger doesn’t look convinced, just more disoriented, so he just lowers his head back down, taking in more of Jeongguk’s length. He’s still not used to the taste of precum in his mouth, bitter and salty, but he ignores it, digging his tongue into Jeongguk’s slit.

“W-what the…” Jeongguk breaks off into a high pitched moan, and Taehyung’s lips tug into a relieved smile. He wiggles his fingers inside Jeongguk slowly, twisting them and scissoring. His wrist aches, but he brushes it away, focusing on relaxing Jeongguk instead.

After a few minutes, Jeongguk is wriggling underneath him, pushing his hips down just slightly onto Taehyung’s fingers, craving more friction.

“Do you want more?” Taehyung asks, sliding his mouth off of Jeongguk’s cock. Jeongguk gasps,
nodding once quickly. So Taehyung pulls himself up, pressing his mouth to Jeongguk’s as he slips the third and final finger inside.

Jeongguk whines into his mouth, from pain or pleasure, Taehyung doesn’t know, but the younger doesn’t seem to be in too much discomfort, so he pumps his fingers in earnest while kissing Jeongguk sloppily.

Taehyung doesn’t know how much longer he can take this, with his own arousal still very much alive and straining in his own pants, but he knows he needs to take it at Jeongguk’s pace. He’ll wait as long as Jeongguk needs.

“T-Taehyung,” Jeongguk moans into his mouth, fingers pressed tightly around his arm. “I-I’m ready.”

“Are you sure?” Taehyung asks, pulling away to sense any pain or discomfort. Jeongguk nods, so Taehyung pulls his fingers out slowly. He slides away from Jeongguk and stands up, unzipping his pants and pulling down his boxers with them. He blushes because he can feel Jeongguk’s eyes on him, and he’s never felt more self conscious, even if he’d just had Jeongguk’s dick in his mouth.

He looks up hesitantly, to see Jeongguk coloring furiously, just as flustered as he is, and it makes him feel slightly less apprehensive. He crawls back onto the bed, hovering over Jeongguk.

“Y-you’re sure, right?” Taehyung asks. And Jeongguk just nods, too nervous to even be exasperated.

He reaches for the unopened box of condoms and opens it with shaky hands. He's not even sure he got the right size. He tears the foil package and it takes him a moment to figure out how to put it on before rolling it onto his length slowly. He bites his lip and the warm feeling of his hand, the snug fit of the latex on him. He then goes for the lube bottle again, pouring a liberal amount into his palm. He remembers to warm it this time, rubbing it with between his hands before coating his length with it. He hisses at the sharp twinge of pleasure it brings, having been strung out for a long time, but now that he’s so close, it’s almost twice as painful.

Taehyung spreads Jeongguk’s legs wide, settling himself between them. He knows he has to go slowly, or else it’ll just hurt Jeongguk more. So he aligns himself, and keeps his eyes sharp on Jeongguk as he slowly presses himself in.
Jeongguk gasps, fingers digging into Taehyung’s arms, as the older eases his length inside, and he feels like he’s burning. He takes a stuttered breath, trying to calm his rapidly beating heart, but he ends up just hyperventilating until Taehyung is fully inside him.

“God,” Taehyung groans, burying his face into Jeongguk’s shoulder, panting and lying still, trying not to jostle Jeongguk as the younger boy struggles to adjust.

The heat around his length is amazing, he’s never felt this good before, and Jeongguk is so tight, it’s almost unbearable. It feels like an eternity before Jeongguk’s squeezing his arm, prompting him to move.

Taehyung eases his length out, before sliding in again, and Jeongguk keens at the same time Taehyung moans, their voices blending together and driving Taehyung that much closer to the edge.

He repeats this several more times, barely keeping himself together as Jeongguk clenches around him.

Then suddenly Jeongguk wails, thrashing underneath Taehyung’s body and crying out loudly.

“Oh my god, Jeongguk, are you okay?” Taehyung pulls out completely, nearly having a heart attack, because he didn’t expect the boy to react so violently, and he doesn’t know what he did wrong. "I'm so sorry did I hurt you? Tell me what's wrong I'm--" 

“I’m… fine…” Jeongguk pants. “P-prostate,” he explains, before promptly bursting out into a fit of breathless giggles. Taehyung’s eyes widen, his mind taking it’s sweet time to process the words, and then… oh.

“Jesus,” Taehyung lets out a huff of disbelief, dropping his head back down onto Jeongguk’s shoulder, embarrassed. “You scared me,” he whines, and Jeongguk shakes with laughter.

“I-I’m sorry,” Jeongguk pants out, tugging at Taehyung’s hair. “It felt g-good though.”

Taehyung groans, and it takes a moment for Jeongguk to coax him to continue.
It doesn’t take much longer for Taehyung to finish after that. His orgasm rocks through him, and he spills himself into Jeongguk. His climax triggers Jeongguk’s and the boy shivers as spurts of come paint his torso.

Taehyung pulls out slowly, collapsing next to Jeongguk, face down on the pillow. He’s so embarrassed, coming before Jeongguk, and he’s not sure he even did a good job. Google was totally useless.

“Hey Taehyung,” Jeongguk shakes his arm, and Taehyung grunts. “Hey,” Jeongguk laughs, and Taehyung turns his head so he’s facing Jeongguk.

“Are you okay?”

Taehyung pouts. “That was a complete and utter failure.” It makes Jeongguk laugh again, and the younger rolls over to press closer to him.

“I don’t think so. It was… nice.”

“Nice? That was the most terrifying experience of my life and all you can say is nice?” Taehyung whines. Jeongguk scoffs, shoving Taehyung’s shoulder playfully.

“It was our first time. First times aren’t supposed to be perfect.”

“Yeah but…” I wanted it to be perfect for you.

“I’m just glad it was with you,” Jeongguk says, leaning in to kiss Taehyung’s nose. “So in a way, it was perfect. I’m happy. Are you?”

And Taehyung can’t help the dopey smile that spreads across his face. “Yeah. I’m happy.”
**Chapter 12**

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#).

_I shouldn’t be here_, Jeongguk tells himself for what seems like the millionth time. He’d stopped by the florist as usual— one bouquet of white gardenias. He had contemplated buying another, but it seemed like too much.

“I wish me luck, noona.” Jeongguk puts the flowers down on Sojin’s plaque, before straightening again. He turns towards the large white marble tomb (he can’t _not_ notice it anymore) and approaches it slowly.

He stops in front of the entrance and clears his throat, suddenly nervous, but he steps inside once he convinces himself to stop being a chicken, and walks up to the altar where Kim Namjoon’s portrait had been hung up.

The platinum haired man smiles down at Jeongguk, like some benevolent being, all-forgiving, all-understanding. Jeongguk shivers with guilt.

“H-hello Kim Namjoon ssi,” Jeongguk starts. He clears his throat. It feels awkward talking to someone he’s never really met before. Jeongguk firmly believes that the dead can always hear when people are talking to them at their graves. Which is why he comes once a week to talk to Sojin, update her on life as it continues on, because Jeongguk feels like she’d want to know.

But talking to Namjoon is like talking to a stranger. Jeongguk doesn’t know him personally, although their paths intersected at one point in the past. He knows the man is not to blame for Taehyung’s transgressions, but Jeongguk had taken out his frustrations here.

“I’m Jeon Jeongguk,” They’d never been formally introduced. “I was here about… two months ago.” He cringes at the memory. He’d allowed Taehyung to get under his skin and Jeongguk couldn’t afford to lose his temper like that again.

“And I wanted to come by and apologize to you.” Jeongguk stuffs his hands in his coat pocket and looks up at Namjoon’s picture. The older man’s smile is disarmingly kind, with a dimple on his left cheek and eyes that are all too trusting. Jeongguk can see the family resemblance.

“Although I stand by what I said, it was neither the time nor the place. I shouldn’t have done it here.
I’m sorry.” Jeongguk bows his head, chewing on his lip, and he wonders whether there’s anything else to say.

Jeongguk had known it was wrong of him from the start, but he couldn’t help himself. And Taehyung’s words keep ringing in his ears.

“I would hate for the kids to turn out like you.”

Angry, bitter, and completely alone-- Jeongguk agrees. He would hate for anyone else to go through what he had.

Jeongguk is an asshole. But he doesn’t think it’s Taehyung’s place to say so.

“I hope, wherever you are, you’re resting in peace,” Jeongguk finishes, giving Namjoon’s portrait a final glance before turning to leave. He stops cold when he sees Taehyung at the doorway, gaping at him.

He must be shocked that I can feel remorse, Jeongguk thinks bitterly, not acknowledging the embarrassment now swirling in his gut.

“J-Jeongguk ssi–” But Jeongguk just walks briskly past him and out of the tomb, not wanting hear anything Taehyung has to say.

The older man stumbles back as Jeongguk shoves past, and he watches, bewildered, as Jeongguk gets into his black Audi and speeds off, leaving Taehyung with his feet glued to his spot because did Jeongguk just apologize?

“Hyung, did you and I see the same thing?” Taehyung asks, looking up at Namjoon’s picture. He can feel the cool metal of the necklace against his chest, underneath his suit.

He turns the scene over and over in his mind, and the more he thinks about it, the more hopeful he becomes.

Taehyung had been under the impression that Jeongguk was cold and unfeeling. But having seen
him like this renews Taehyung’s hope that Jeongguk is still the same person he used to know, kind and loving, behind the walls he puts up so heavily.

Jeongguk had apologized. And to the right person in the situation. Taehyung knows he himself won’t be forgiven so easily.

“What do you think, hyung?” Taehyung asks. “Is there hope for me?”

There’s always hope, Taehyung reminds himself. Jeongguk had taught him that, a long time ago. When everything seems dark, unclear, there is always hope, a light at the end of the tunnel.

Taehyung takes a deep breath, setting his shoulders in determination. “Okay hyung, wish me luck then.”

*I’m going to break down Jeongguk’s walls.*

--

Taehyung loves being able to stare at Jeongguk like this. Not having to hide his fascination. Just drink in every minute detail of Jeongguk, the sparkle of his eyes, the shine of his hair as it flops messily over his forehead.

And Jeongguk stares right back.

After showering, they had climbed back into the big, soft bed, and curled up with each other. They’re nose to nose, silent, basking in each other’s presence. Taehyung’s never felt like this before - so calm and content. His entire life had been a flurry of acting out and not taking anything seriously, but here, with Jeongguk, the world is frozen for a few precious hours, and he feels like there’s something worth living for.

“What do we do now?” Jeongguk murmurs, bringing his fingers up to brush at Taehyung’s bottom lip.

Taehyung chuckles, kissing the younger’s fingertips. “That’s an excellent question.”
“We’re graduating in a week. And then I’m leaving for California a few days after.” Taehyung sighs at Jeongguk's words. This isn’t something they’d really talked about. Taehyung was going to attend Seoul University pursuing business, while Jeongguk had been given a full scholarship as a biology major at Stanford.

In the U.S.

Away from Taehyung.

“I think a lot of Skyping will be happening,” Taehyung says finally. “And during breaks I can come visit you.”

“Isn’t that going to be expensive?”

Taehyung rolls his eyes so hard he feels they might end up at the back of his head. “Really, Jeongguk?”

Jeongguk scoffs. “Well I’m sorry I’m not going around demanding that my boyfriend come visit me every chance he gets.” But his lips are quirked up, and Taehyung leans forward to bump their noses together.

“What matters is that I love you and you love me,” he puts simply, kissing Jeongguk’s lips. A thought strikes him. “You know like, with that Gatsby guy, except not. I’ll fight for you.”

Jeongguk is silent a moment, before letting out a shaky exhale. “Me too,” he whispers, suddenly looking upset and Taehyung frowns, wondering whether he said something wrong.

“Hey Gukkie, are you okay? Did I say something--”

“No, it’s not that,” Jeongguk shakes his head. “This is probably going to sound pathetic,” He laughs, but there’s no humor in it. “But… I don’t know… I never felt… good enough for anyone before. My parents didn’t want me, everyone at Bangtan looks at me weird, and I have Sojin noona but she has all the other kids to take care of and--”
He closes his mouth, eyebrows furrowing like he’s trying to regain control of himself. Taehyung brings a hand up to stroke at his cheek.

“Yeah, I just… I never felt like I was worth anything. But… when I’m with you…” Jeongguk’s hand comes up to tangle with Taehyung’s. “I feel… wanted. Worth something. Like someone genuinely cares about me, not my brain, not the paycheck they get for keeping me, just… me.”

Jeongguk sniffs, face flushing as he looks down in embarrassment. “Sorry, I didn’t want to be weirdly emotional or anything.” Taehyung opens his mouth to say something, anything, but nothing comes out.

Because in his own way, it’s the same. Jeongguk never cared about how much money Taehyung had, or his status. Taehyung never felt like he needed to be someone he wasn’t in front of Jeongguk. It was his pure, honest self, the person he only ever let Namjoon and Yoongi see.

“I just… wanted you to know.” Taehyung’s grip on Jeongguk’s hand tightens.

“Thank you,” Taehyung murmurs. “For telling me that,” It’s the only thing he can think to say. “And for letting me be myself when I’m with you.”

Jeongguk’s lips twitch up into a shy smile. It takes Taehyung’s breath away. “You’re so important to me.”

Jeongguk opens his mouth to respond, but it’s cut off by the familiar beep of Taehyung’s cell phone going off. Taehyung makes an exaggerated exasperated face, and Jeongguk laughs, clearing away the serious mood between the two boys.

“You should answer it,” Jeongguk giggles. Taehyung pouts, wriggling their bodies closer together.

“But I’m cuddling with you,” Taehyung whines, playfully nipping at Jeongguk’s jaw.

“What if it’s important?”
“You’re more important.” Jeongguk clicks his tongue in annoyance, and after some insistence, Taehyung reaches over to the nightstand for his cell phone. He swipes it open to see a message from Namjoon.

*How’d the date go kiddo?*

Taehyung grins at the screen. “Who is that?” Jeongguk asks.

“It’s Joonie hyung,” Taehyung responds quickly.

*Perfect! I have the best hyung in the world~~~~~*

“Did he help you with this?” Jeongguk asks. Taehyung nods happily.

“He loves me a lot. And he knows I like you, so of course he’d help!”

Jeongguk blushes, looking down shyly. “Do you think… one day, I’d get to meet him?”

“Well duh, I have to introduce two of the most important people in my life.”

*It’s always like this*, Jeongguk thinks. Taehyung always says things like that, and Jeongguk isn’t sure the older boy knows how much they affect him. How deeply the words resound in his mind, the way he clings to them because they’re all Jeongguk has.

“Taehyung?”

Taehyung hums in response as he fiddles with his phone. “Can we take a couple selcas?” The older boy turns his head to fully face Jeongguk.

“Now?”
Jeongguk flushes. “Yeah?” Taehyung’s lips curve up into a mischievous smirk. “I mean… We don’t really ever take any pictures together and I… want to remember… this.”

There’s a moment of silence while Taehyung just stares at Jeongguk, before he tugs the younger boy closer. “Let’s do it!” he chirps excitedly, opening the camera app as Jeongguk presses his nose against Taehyung’s cheek. He can feel Taehyung grinning as the flash goes off, and it sends a shiver of thrill down his spine.

“Look how cute we are!” Taehyung coos, and Jeongguk turns his head to look at the picture. He can’t help the smile that forms on his face as he stares at the couple in the picture-- him and Taehyung, looking so perfect and content. It doesn’t seem real, and yet, it is.

“I’m making this my wallpaper,” the older boy decides, pressing a few buttons and sighing in satisfaction in seeing the two of them as his phone background. He puts the phone back on the nightstand, before enveloping Jeongguk in his arms, tucking the younger boy into him.

“I’m really happy, Jeongguk,” Taehyung murmurs, breathing in the smell of Jeongguk’s hair, the feeling of his soft skin against Taehyung’s large hands, the thud of their hearts beating in sync. For once, everything seems so clear to Taehyung. The future isn’t such a scary place when he knows he has Jeongguk by his side.

Jeongguk’s lips are pressed against Taehyung’s collarbone, and Taehyung can feel him smiling against his skin. His cool fingers are making patterns against Taehyung’s body, and he shivers.

“I’m happy too.”

♥

The trouble starts on a Saturday.

It’s Jeongguk’s first day off in a while, where he doesn’t have to worry about meetings or appointments, and he’s content to just lie in bed for at least another hour before he starts feeling unproductive and starts working anyway.

His eyes are just about to drift closed, body lulled into a calm, relaxed state, when a shrill sound tears through the air, and he’s jumping out of bed in a panic because what the hell triggered the fire
He darts into the kitchen, body still groggy from sleep, and he hisses at the cold air because he’d slept in boxers and he’d forgotten to turn on the heater last night. Jeongguk checks the stove and the microwave as the alarm continues to blare, and then he realizes it’s not his.

As if on cue, his doorbell rings, and his vision flares red, because if that idiot Kim Taehyung’s started a fire then Jeongguk’s going to follow him into the deepest pits of hell. He strides towards the door and yanks it open, disgruntled and a lot more than annoyed, to see Taehyung standing right outside his door, smiling sheepishly.

“I think I burned something,” is the first thing that comes out of the older’s mouth, and Jeongguk considers punching Taehyung in the face, but he holds himself back. He’d been avoiding the older man like the plague after he’d been caught at the cemetery last week, and this is not how he’d wanted their next meeting to go.

“You think you burned something,” Jeongguk deadpans, crossing his arms. Taehyung’s face flushes in embarrassment.

“There’s no fire or anything and I don’t want the fire department to end up coming for no reason because nothing’s actually burning and I--”

“Just shut up and let me fix this,” Jeongguk interrupts, voice harsh. Taehyung recoils a bit, before nodding and scurrying back into his own apartment. Jeongguk strides in, not even looking around, because if he’s right, the alarm should be in the same place as his own.

He walks into the hall where a small white disk is blinking red, and he reaches up to press the button at the center. Immediately the sharp noises stop, and the silence is almost deafening.

Jeongguk turns, exasperated and ready to scold Taehyung, when he notices the older man visibly staring at his chest. He’s quiet for a moment, considering this observation, and allows himself to be just a bit pleased that his body could have such an effect on the Taehyung, before he crosses his arms over his chest.

Taehyung’s eyes flash with disappointment, before he glances up at the younger sheepishly.
“What the hell were you trying to do?” Jeongguk asks, voice frigid.

Taehyung laughs nervously. *I should have hired a cook*, he thinks, because his first attempt at making a meal has obviously gone down the drain. “I was… boiling water…"

“You managed to burn water?” Jeongguk asks, eyes narrowing.

Taehyung splutters. “I put it in the microwave in this really cute plastic bowl to--”

“Amazing,” Jeongguk scoffs, eyes widening in amazement. *A plastic bowl*. “You are really something, Kim Taehyung.”

Taehyung’s face burns under Jeongguk’s judgemental eyes. “I didn’t know--”

“Yes, well it seems like there’s a lot of things you don’t seem to know,” Jeongguk shoves past him to walk to the door. Taehyung considers kicking the wall. “Oh, and Taehyung ssi--”

Taehyung looks up sheepishly. “Let me know if you have trouble figuring out how to use the tap. Red means *hot*, blue means *cold,*” Jeongguk mocks, before slamming the door closed.

Jeongguk wishes this were the only incident, that he’d finally gotten rid of the pest, but like any good parasite, Taehyung just keeps coming back.

The next day, Taehyung is knocking at his door again. “Are whites supposed to come out of the laundry pink?”

Jeongguk has half an idea to slam the door in Taehyung’s face, but he decides to take the higher ground, explaining basic laundry tips to him in as condescending a voice as possible.

Taehyung does not take the hints.

The older man manages to burn everything in his fridge and cupboards (“What do you mean you don’t use the eggshells? Then how to you make it crunchy?”) and Jeongguk suggests snidely that he
just give up and hire a maid and a cook, but apparently as well as being dense, Taehyung is also stubborn.

Jeongguk’s patience is fraying, and every day he comes home, his entire body is on edge because all he wants to do is relax in his home, his safe place, and not think about a certain Kim Taehyung, but he’s like the plague, and Jeongguk just can’t get rid of him.

Jeongguk knows Taehyung’s doing this on purpose. He has to be. The older man could go to anyone-- anyone -- but he chooses to go to Jeongguk, who’d thought he’d made it clear that he and Taehyung were not on amicable terms.

But Taehyung somehow, at some deep twisted level, understands Jeongguk’s inherent need to take care of others. Jeongguk would much rather do things right himself than let others do it wrong, so Taehyung just keeps pushing, encroaching on Jeongguk’s space and making him almost feel bad because Taehyung is so incapable of doing the most basic of household things and taking care of himself.

And Taehyung keeps knocking, and Jeongguk can’t stand that Taehyung is able to throw him like this, in his own home, so he retaliates. If I’m going to be uncomfortable, so is Taehyung, is Jeongguk’s mindset when Taehyung knocks on the door for what seems like the millionth time, except things are different.

“Uhm,” Taehyung is standing outside Jeongguk’s door again, with that same sheepish smile that Jeongguk just wants to wipe right off. The bashfulness melts right off when the older man notices that Jeongguk has neglected to put on a shirt.

“Can I help you?” Jeongguk sneers, crossing his arms over his chest in a motion of expectancy, but really it’s just so his biceps will flex, and he doesn’t miss the way Taehyung’s eyes follow the motion, dragging over the muscles (ones that Jeongguk worked very hard for, thank you) before tearing his gaze away and looking back up.

“I’m trying… to make stir fry,” Taehyung gulps.

“Stir fry? You’re leveling up from the cereal, Taehyung ssi. I’m proud,” Jeongguk says. Taehyung clicks his tongue and rolls his eyes in annoyance.

“I just wanted to ask how much oil to put in the pan first.”
Jeongguk opens his mouth to respond, but hesitates. Taehyung, oil, and an open fire is not a good combination.

“I don’t think you should be cooking,” Jeongguk warns seriously. He’s shut off the fire alarm enough times in Taehyung’s home already.

And then Taehyung pouts, sticking out his bottom lip. He looks like a kicked puppy and it’s utterly ridiculous because this man is supposed to be a wealthy hotel mogul but all Jeongguk had seen of him was an incompetent, childish idiot.

“Please, Jeongguk. I want to learn how to do things properly,” Taehyung pleads, and Jeongguk tries not to wince at the informality. No matter how many times Jeongguk had reminded the older man to use proper titles, Taehyung would just ignore them.

There’s a dull ache at Jeongguk’s temple. He should just slam the door in Taehyung’s face. He should have done that a long time ago, and yet, that side of him that needed to take care of people wins over every damn time.

He lets out a sharp exhale, opening his eyes, and Taehyung beams, knowing he’s won. “Just let me do it. Before you burn down the entire building,” Jeongguk grumbles.

“Thank you, thank you!” Taehyung gushes, practically skipping into his apartment, and the last time Jeongguk checked, rich, adult hotel heirs weren’t supposed to skip. It’s like Taehyung hadn’t even grown up since high school, still possessing a child-like innocence and energy. It just adds to Jeongguk’s ever strengthening theory that Taehyung is still the same stupid teenager he was back then.

Even in a suit and with a vast hotel empire at his fingertips.

Jeongguk walks hesitantly into Taehyung’s home. Even after having been inside the space countless times, he still feels uncomfortable. He’s way out of his comfort zone here. It’s just too much.

He turns his head just in time to see Taehyung waving around the knife haphazardly. “Oh my god, you idiot,” he yelps, bounding over to carefully take the blade away from the older man. “Jesus Christ, just let me do it. You’re gonna bleed to death,” he huffs, shoving Taehyung away.
Taehyung huffs indignantly, but remains mostly silent as Jeongguk finds himself carefully chopping bell peppers. *I should be getting ready for bed*, Jeongguk bemoans, but he doesn’t want Taehyung, the air head, to die of starvation, because first and foremost, Taehyung is Jeongguk’s patient. And he can’t have a dead patient. Not when they live across the hall.

That’s what he reminds himself as Taehyung practically breathes down his neck, watching closely as Jeongguk cuts with alarming skill and speed.

And then Taehyung’s phone rings, the sound cutting through the tense silence, making both of them jump.

“Sorry,” Taehyung says when Jeongguk gives him a scathing look, scrambling for the phone on the counter, and steps away from Jeongguk to answer it.

“Hello?”

“No, I told you not to move forward with the contract signing.”

Jeongguk hears Taehyung exhale sharply in annoyance. “If they sign now we can’t do any more negotiations. They’ll ask for lower priced shares and we’ll have to give it to them.”

Jeongguk pretends he’s not listening, but it’s hard not to notice the firm, irritated tone to Taehyung’s voice that he’d never heard before.

“Do I need to explain to you the fundamentals of economics? This is very simple. Don’t sign the contract until I can catch a flight out and talk to them myself. I’m not trusting you with any further negotiations because you’ve clearly displayed your incompetence. And now I have to clean up the mess you’re about to make.”

Taehyung taps his foot irritably, pacing now with a determined frown on his face. “We’ve been in this situation before with Thailand. I had to go in and redo the whole damn contract or else the deal would have fallen through and we would have lost a major investor and a hell of a lot of money. I’m not covering your ass again. Learn from your mistakes, Taewoon ssi, or there will be serious consequences,” Taehyung snaps, before promptly ending the call.
Jeongguk snaps his head back to the vegetables with lightning speed as Taehyung turns around, not having realized that he’d been staring at the older man during the whole heated exchange. Suddenly his mouth feels dry, his skin tight, and he yelps when he accidentally cuts his finger.

“Oh my god are you okay?” Taehyung is at his side in an instant, grabbing his sliced finger and putting it in his mouth to suck at the blood. For a moment Jeongguk’s eyes flutter shut at the sensation, the image of Taehyung’s pretty pink lips burned at the back of his eyelids, and the warmth of his mouth singing his nerves, before the boiling irritation and horror rolls through him.

“I’m fine,” he hisses, pulling his finger away. Taehyung looks immediately regretful, and Jeongguk glares, clutching his hand to his chest like it’s on fire. “Do the rest yourself,” he barks, before storming out of the apartment and straight into his bathroom for a cold shower.

Taehyung’s sure he’s ruined it. Not that things were okay before… but the careful pushing he’d been doing-- wearing away at Jeongguk’s walls and defenses, falling into a routine of relative normalcy-- had most likely crumbled the moment he had put Jeongguk’s finger in his mouth.

_You’re an idiot, Kim Taehyung_, he thinks, considering bashing his head against the wall. And now the fire alarm was blaring again– a sound that had become too familiar to Taehyung in the last few weeks. Boiling spaghetti in theory should have been easy. But now the noodles are burnt black at the bottom of the pot and there are plumes of smoke coming out of it.

“You can do this,” Taehyung says, shaking his head and squaring his shoulders. Jeongguk wasn’t even home yet, so he has to take care of this himself. So he walks to the alarm in the hallway, and jumps a few times, trying to get to the button that he’d seen Jeongguk press so many times, but he’s not as tall as Jeongguk and it takes a few attempts before the shrill alarm shuts off, surrounding Taehyung in deafening silence.

Taehyung lets out a shaky exhale, but the relief is short-lived when his doorbell rings.

“J-Jeongguk?” Taehyung gulps when he’s met with an eye full of bare chest. The younger man is leaning against the doorframe, hands crossed over his chest, eyes disinterested. Taehyung’s body flushes with heat because I’m never going to get over the tattoos. Or the muscles. Or him.

“Just wanted to check and see if you were still alive,” Jeongguk says, inspecting his nails.
Taehyung splutters indignantly. “Of course I’m alive, I’m not a complete idiot!” There’s an uncomfortable heat spreading on his face, and he’s trying desperately not to stare at Jeongguk’s chest because he should be pissed at Jeongguk, not checking him out.

Taehyung had spent too much time lately staring at Jeongguk. He wonders if he has any shame, because the images of Jeongguk’s dragon tattoo, the intricate geometric designs on his pectoral muscles, the words and lyrics inked into his skin are branded at the back of Taehyung’s eyelids, and it’s the last thing he thinks about every night when he goes to bed.

He feels guilty, because he doesn’t deserve to be able to even think about Jeongguk that way. He had lost that right when he’d taken the picture. When he’d decided being a coward was more important than the beautiful relationship that they had formed. Jeongguk deserves better than that.

Jeongguk scoffs, rolling his eyes at Taehyung’s irritation, before straightening. Despite Taehyung’s annoyance, he doesn’t miss the pronounced dip of Jeongguk’s v-lines, just barely covered by the low-slung slacks and--

**Slacks?**

*Why is Jeongguk wearing slacks? And not a shirt?*

“Wait a minute,” Taehyung calls when Jeongguk takes his silence for defeat and turns to go. The younger raises an eyebrow in expectation. “Why aren’t you wearing a shirt?”

Jeongguk’s face is the picture of cool indifference. “You never wear a shirt!” Taehyung points out. Jeongguk just shrugs.

“I take off my clothes when I get home. Is there something wrong with that?” Jeongguk’s voice dips low, dangerous, and it just throws Taehyung off more. He knows when he’s being messed with.

“But every single time? Isn’t it a coincidence,” Jeongguk shrugs with disinterest. “You’re fucking with me, aren’t you?”

Jeongguk’s eye twitches, before he steps closer and towers over Taehyung. “Trust me, Taehyung ssi.
If I was fucking with you, you’d know.”

“But you are, aren’t you? You’re trying to throw me off. You’re trying to seduce me!” Taehyung exclaims, and he regrets the words the moment they come out of his mouth but by then it’s too late, because Jeongguk’s face clouds over, and he leans in close, eyes dangerously dark, lips pulled into a thin line.

“You’re the last person on *earth* I would want to sleep with,” he whispers, voice sharp, and Taehyung winces, because he feels like he’s being cut. Embarrassment and indignation flush through him, but he doesn’t drop his gaze, because that would be giving in, and Taehyung won’t give in.

“You can look,” Jeongguk leans in to whisper in Taehyung’s ear. An involuntary shiver crawls up Taehyung’s spine, and he feels like he's suffocating on Jeongguk's cologne, the heat of his skin. “*But you can never touch.*”

The younger takes a single finger, trailing it down Taehyung's clothed chest, tapping over his rapidly beating heart, before pushing him back just ever so slightly, but to Taehyung, it feels like he's been hit by a train, and he stumbles back. Jeongguk winks wryly, but it makes Taehyung’s mouth run dry, and he steps away, straightening up to his full height.

And then Jeongguk is gone, disappearing back into his own apartment, leaving Taehyung standing there alone, slightly aroused, and as usual, embarrassed.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Jeongguk is on edge all of the next week.

His argument with Taehyung had left an acrid taste in his mouth, and he doesn’t know why. Usually he loves tearing the older man down, lashing out at him and watching him get flustered, but something feels wrong.

It’s not bringing him the same satisfaction that he had been getting earlier. Maybe he hadn’t ever been getting any satisfaction at all, but he’d been able to delude himself into thinking he did. Maybe Jeongguk had just gotten so used to Taehyung’s presence in the last few weeks, and the sudden silence from the elder is leaving him agitated.

He’d finished a night shift at the hospital, and considers just falling asleep without changing out of his scrubs. But he pauses right in front of Taehyung’s door.

The older man had been quiet lately. No fire alarms, no random knocks on Jeongguk’s door asking him about the proper way to peel an onion. Nothing. And Jeongguk wishes he wasn't so damn affected by the silence.

Jeongguk taps his foot in irritation, chewing his bottom lip as he glances at Taehyung's door.

I shouldn't do this.

It's none of my business.

But I'm his doctor. What if he's dead or something?

He clicks his tongue in annoyance, finally turning to face Taehyung's door. His heart is beating abnormally fast but he pushes the nervous feeling away to press the doorbell.
It feels like an eternity as he waits for someone to answer, and it gives him time to think of a million different excuses as to why Taehyung wouldn’t open the door.

*Maybe he’s still asleep.*

*Maybe he’s on a business trip.*

*What if he’s mad at me?* The last bit makes Jeongguk scoff because Taehyung has no right whatsoever to be mad at Jeongguk. If anything, Jeongguk should be pissed at Taehyung. Ruining his life ten years ago. Ruining his life now.

Just as he decides to call it quits, there’s a scuffling on the other side of the door, and it opens. Jeongguk opens his mouth to say something moderately valid as to why he’s knocking on the door of his worst enemy, but there’s no need.

“Can I help you?” Jeongguk’s blood drains from his face as he takes in the woman standing in front of him, in what is obviously one of Taehyung’s dress shirts, hair mussed. He notes the pink and purple marks along her exposed neck, and the faint flush in her cheeks.

“Uhm… I was just…” Jeongguk’s mouth is suddenly dry. Usually his mind is running at a mile a minute, but right now his entire body is frozen-- including his brain, apparently.

The woman’s eyes widen in sudden realization. “Oh my god! You’re Dr. Jeon Jeongguk, aren’t you?”

Jeongguk manages to nod. “I’ve been following your research for quite some time now! Taehyung’s told me so much about you, and I just-- gosh I just admire you so much!”

There’s a sickly tightening to Jeongguk’s skin. His body feels uncomfortable and lethargic. He doesn’t know whether it was his graveyard shift at the hospital or the fact that he’d failed to consider the idea of Taehyung having a life outside of annoying Jeongguk.

“Hey babe who’s at the--”
Taehyung. Who appears from seemingly nowhere, with a towel slung low on his hips, droplets of water still clinging to his hair, dotting the golden skin of his chest. He looks out the door expectantly, and when he realizes it’s Jeongguk, his face pales.

It’s silent for a moment, as they simply stare at each other, having two different conversations in languages neither of them can understand. Taehyung looks like a kid who got caught with his hand in the cookie jar, and Jeongguk just wants the floor to swallow him up so he doesn’t have to think about the senseless irritation, the seething anger, the burning rage and betrayal currently coursing through his body.

“I’ve caught you at a bad time,” Jeongguk manages to say, and it’s beyond him how his voice can remain even, detached, when all he wants to do is scream.

The woman, so affectionately dubbed *babe* by Taehyung, giggles, bringing a hand up to her mouth prettily as she laughs. “No, it’s alright. I’m glad to finally have met you, although I wish it were in better, more professional circumstances,” she says, looking down at her attire-- Taehyung’s dress shirt a pale blue, which, in Jeongguk’s opinion, does *not* go well with her skin tone--and blushes bashfully.

“Perhaps we could go get dinner some time. I would love to talk to you about your mitral valve procedure.”

It takes all of Jeongguk’s willpower to rip his eyes away from Taehyung and the silent battle they’re having, and he nods, just barely.

“I would love to,” He forces a thin smile on his lips for good measure. “I-I should be heading home now. I just wanted...” What do I want? “I just wanted to check in.”

“Of course! I’m Ryu Sujeong by the way,” the girl extends her hand and Jeongguk makes to shake it. “It’s such an honor to meet you, Jeongguk ssi.”

“Same.” Jeongguk bows his head slightly, before stepping back. He glances--against his will--at Taehyung, who’s still standing behind Sujeong, frozen, and the older man’s expression floors him.

He turns away quickly, punching in his code at record speed, before slamming the door shut. He needs to take a long shower and find a nice big bottle of wine.
It feels like an eternity until Sujeong finally leaves, with Taehyung promising her at least five times that he’ll arrange a meeting between her and Dr. Jeon. He wonders how she hadn’t sensed Taehyung’s unease, but it’s just as well, because Taehyung doesn’t really want to explain something he doesn’t understand.

He’d known Sujeong for years, ever since starting college. He’d gotten his business degree and took over Rise, while Sujeong went on to graduate school, where she was doing pharmaceutical research. They were friends, and they fucked a lot. Taehyung never worried about her trying to use him for his money because she herself came from a wealthy family. They had an understanding.

His conversation-- if he could call it a conversation-- with Jeongguk had gone downhill incredibly quickly, what with his remarkable ability to say the damnedest things at the wrong times. It had left him agitated, frustrated, and more than a little disappointed.

But in calling Sujeong, there were several things he hadn’t anticipated. First, he didn’t think them sleeping together would make him feel so guilty. Like he had done something wrong-- almost like he cheated on Jeongguk, which was ridiculous because Taehyung would be lucky if he could even call him and Jeongguk acquaintances.

Yes, the sex was nice. Especially with someone who wanted to be there just as much as Taehyung. It had felt good at that moment, had helped relieve a lot of his stress and Sujeong understood that. But he didn’t expect to have the sudden desire to evaporate when Jeongguk had knocked on the door, having found Taehyung in such a compromising situation. The look Jeongguk had given him, Taehyung still doesn’t understand, but he knows that he had just destroyed any small flicker of hope of rekindling what little of a relationship they had.

“Kim Taehyung, you are the worst,” he groans, thumping his head against the dining table. He’d been sitting there, stewing in his own shame for the past hour, wondering what he could do to fix this goddamn mess without shoving his whole foot in his mouth again.

So he takes a deep breath and stands up. He’d waited until night time because he knows Jeongguk would most likely be sleeping all day. And the last thing he wants is an aggravated, sleep-deprived Jeongguk on his hands.

“You can do this, Taehyung,” he reminds himself, squaring his shoulders as he presses the all-too-familiar doorbell to Jeongguk’s apartment. He stands there for about a minute, heartbeat progressively getting faster, anxiety growing tenfold, and is about to leave, when Jeongguk opens the
Jeongguk looks surprisingly put together for someone who looked like he was going to incinerate Taehyung with his eyes just that morning. His face is blank, passive, the picture of cool indifference, and Taehyung is almost... disappointed.

Maybe a little part of him had hoped that Jeongguk might have been jealous. He feels foolish the moment the thought crosses his mind.

“You’re not supposed to microwave styrofoam, Taehyung ssi,” Jeongguk deadpans, and Taehyung frowns in confusion.

“I-- What? Why would you--” He looks incredulously at the younger man, who just looks bored.

“I just assumed you needed more advice considering your inability to perform the most basic of domestic tasks,” Jeongguk shrugs. “If there’s nothing else I can do, then good night.” He goes to close the door.


“I-I’m sorry about this morning.”

Jeongguk’s face twitches into a sneer. “Why?”

“Sujeong is just a friend, Jeongguk. It’s not anything serious, we just--”

Taehyung is cut off by a derisive laugh. Jeongguk’s lips are curved in an amused smile and he tucks his hands into his pants pockets.

“Why are you telling me this?”

Why am I telling him this?
“I just— I didn’t want there to be any… misunderstandings,” Taehyung says slowly. He’s on high alert now, afraid he might say something wrong and get the door slammed in his face.

Jeongguk chuckles in amusement, but it comes out sinister. “Misunderstanding? What is there to misunderstand?”

Taehyung opens his mouth but he doesn’t know how to respond. Jeongguk continues. “The way I see it, Taehyung ssi, is that your personal life is your own. It has nothing to do with me.”

But I want it to be. Taehyung doesn’t say this as his face flushes hot. “Who you decide to sleep with is none of my concern.” And of course, what Jeongguk says is completely true, but somewhere in the back of Taehyung’s mind he had hoped that maybe Jeongguk did care.

“You didn’t actually think I cared, did you?” Taehyung is starting to regret ever knocking on Jeongguk’s door. "Did you expect me to be jealous?" It had been a stupid idea, and he wonders why he’s even trying to get close to Jeongguk in the first place, when all Jeongguk ever does is talk to him like every word passed between them is an inconvenience.

But deep down inside, Taehyung knows it’s just a defense. He knows Jeongguk isn’t like this. He’d seen the younger man’s capacity for kindness and love in so many different ways. But the moment Jeongguk is alone with Taehyung, the walls go up, his voice becomes ice. He longs for the day when Jeongguk might look at him with the same smile he had when they were younger.

Right now, it feels like some sort of nightmare that Taehyung has found himself stuck in, and he doesn’t know when the universe will have mercy on him and let him wake up.

“Like I said, Taehyung ssi. You are the last person on earth I would ever sleep with. So don’t worry about explaining yourself.”

And that’s the final straw. “You’ve made that quite clear, Jeongguk ssi,” he snaps, and it makes Jeongguk blink in surprise. “What I don’t understand is why it’s you who keeps bringing that up. I certainly didn’t say anything. Why would you even assume I want to sleep with you?”

Jeongguk is completely silent and Taehyung can feel the air around them turn frigid. But he can’t seem to care much, because as much as he wants to gain Jeongguk’s trust again, as much as he wants to earn his forgiveness, he’s not going to do it by being humiliated and put down. There’s only so
much he’s willing to put up with.

“I feel like in you moving here, Taehyung ssi, things have crossed more than a few boundaries,” Jeongguk’s voice is even, detached, and Taehyung wished the man would just be mad for once. Yell at him, be angry, do something to show that he cares, but he always acts like he couldn’t care less and that hurts Taehyung the most because Taehyung cares so much. But there’s only so much getting stomped on for the sake of forgiveness he’s willing to put up with.

“Perhaps so.” If this is the game Jeongguk’s created, Taehyung doesn’t want to play anymore. “I suggest limiting any further communication to our assistants.”

“I agree,” is Jeongguk’s clipped response.

“Good,” Taehyung says frigidly.

“Good,” Jeongguk shoots back.

“Fine,” Taehyung snaps.

“Fine,” Jeongguk hisses, but Taehyung is already turning around and heading into his own home before he can get the door slammed in his face.

♥

Taehyung’s had two shots of vodka before Jeongguk comes in. He’s at the bar with Hoseok and an event planner, having an internal battle between ordering another shot of vodka or going for the whiskey.

“I apologize for being so late,” Jeongguk bows his head before sliding into the seat next to Hoseok. He gives Taehyung, who’s sitting directly across from him, a momentary glance before turning to Hoseok and the event planner with a more amicable smile.

“No, that’s alright, Jeongguk ssi. Your assistant notified me right away,” Hoseok says graciously. Taehyung had been informed that Jeongguk was having complications during a surgery and it was
running longer than usual. It was just as well. He was already strung out. Might as well string himself out for just a bit longer.

Taehyung had made sure not to have too much to drink-- this was meant to be a professional meeting-- but he knew he’d need something to take off the edge when he saw Jeongguk. They hadn’t spoken, much less seen each other in two weeks, despite being the only two living on the same apartment floor.

He’d figured it would be best, keeping away, because Jeongguk had made it too painfully clear that Taehyung’s presence was unwanted and Taehyung wasn’t going to sit around and let the younger man walk all over him until he bled. That’s not how forgiveness worked.

So he’d resigned himself to the fact that Jeongguk would probably never let him in again or let him even explain himself. But it didn’t make it any less painful, because for a moment, Taehyung had a foolish notion that maybe they had a chance.

He didn’t want to be miserable just because of Jeongguk though. He still has a life to live, a massive business to run, and people who care about him with the same intensity and compassion that he himself did. If Jeongguk didn’t want that, there was nothing Taehyung could do.

He fiddles with the clear shot glass in his hands, so he doesn’t have to look up and see Jeongguk. He’s not drunk, but he’s had enough that he probably wouldn’t be able to control his shameless ogling because as much as he’s actively trying to distance himself from the younger man, Jeongguk is still overwhelmingly attractive and he’d be a fool not to notice, especially not with the alcohol thrumming in his veins.

“So, we have everything planned perfectly,” the event planner says, swiping through his tablet as he talks, “I’ve booked the catering and the musicians, found the invitation template.” Finally, the man seems to find what he’s looking for, and turns the tablet so the others can see the picture.

“I’ve found this magnificent yacht. It’s the perfect size for the number of guests and I’m imagining stringing lights along the…”

Jeongguk’s eyes snap to Taehyung, the event planner’s voice fading away as he takes in the older man’s stricken expression. His eyes are vacant and glazed and he’s clutching tightly to the shot glass in his hand. Jeongguk half wants to pry it from Taehyung’s hands so it doesn’t shatter and make him bleed.
“Apparently his hyung had an accident in a boat so he doesn't like the ocean anymore,” Jimin’s words ring around Jeongguk’s head and makes his heart lurch.

He wonders why Taehyung isn’t saying something. And Hoseok isn’t saying anything either. The assistant is enraptured in what the event planner is saying. Jeongguk seems to be the only one noticing Taehyung having a minor panic attack.

There’s a glass of amber liquid in front of him-- a glass of brandy that he hadn’t touched for fear of losing even a bit of his edge, but he downs it in one go, letting the burn in his throat distract him from what he’s about to do.

“I don’t think a yacht party is the best idea,” he says suddenly, keeping his tone polite. “Perhaps we can agree on a different venue? I’m not a fan of the ocean.” The event planner opens his mouth to disagree, but he sees the firmness in Jeongguk’s eyes.

“Y-yes, of course, I can reconfigure the plans.” The man fumbles with his tablet, and Hoseok gives Jeongguk a strange look, but immerses himself in helping decide on a new location. Jeongguk spares Taehyung a glance, and he immediately regrets it, because the older man’s eyes are wide and swimming with gratitude. It makes Jeongguk’s insides churn.

He orders another shot.

♥

The bar they're at is situated at the top of one of Taehyung’s hotels. It’s a wide open space, glowing a light blue, and everything about it is clean, luxurious, modern. It’s a far cry from some of the places Jeongguk’s been to, but he supposes that bars made for rowdy college kids and bars meant for Seoul’s elite would have different tones.

The lull of the soft music is making Jeongguk groggy and he half blames the alcohol. Whenever he drinks, the burning rage and discontent inside him becomes more diluted, and he can relax. Which is why he doesn’t do it often anymore. In college it had been a nice reprieve-- forgetting. But now, in front of Taehyung, he needs to keep his walls up.

He’s been nursing his fourth glass of whiskey and all that's left now is the ice at the bottom and he wonders how long he’s been staring at it. All he knows for sure is that melting ice is fascinating and he could watch it all day. Something about the natural process of a solid turning into a liquid is beautiful-- entropy, nature's inevitable bias towards chaos and--
“Jeongguk.” He turns his head slowly to see Taehyung sliding into a seat next to him. He leans back in his chair, arm slung over the back, and raises an eyebrow.

Taehyung blinks in surprise, because Jeongguk is running his gaze over him lazily, no malice in his eyes. He’s wary for a bit, because it’s the first time Jeongguk doesn’t look like he’s going to smite him on the spot, but those eyes paired with the scene earlier that night makes him feel more confident.

Plus, he’s drunk.

And he keeps repeating the scene over and over again, wondering if it was some sort of bizarre hallucination, because does Jeongguk know? Why did he speak up for me?

It goes against everything Taehyung had thought. He was more than sure Jeongguk hated him, and would continue to hate him for the rest of eternity, but…

Jeongguk had defended him. And Taehyung’s not thinking straight enough to try and understand why, but one thing is clear-- Jeongguk probably doesn’t hate him as much as he says he does. Or maybe Taehyung had just worn him down and he doesn’t hate Taehyung as much as he used to.

Either way, there’s a warmth in Taehyung’s chest, a bright, giddy feeling because there’s hope.

“Can I buy you a drink?” he asks. He’d stopped from drinking himself silly while the event planner was present, but Hoseok was currently walking the man to the car and there’s no one around.

“Why?” Jeongguk asks, voice blunt. Taehyung flushes hot with embarrassment, but Jeongguk’s not trying to antagonize him.

“I just…” Taehyung gulps. “I wanted to say thank you.”

Jeongguk frowns, eyebrows furrowing together and Taehyung can imagine his brain trying to fit the pieces together, but it’s a slow process, and Taehyung figures Jeongguk has probably been drinking more than he himself has.
“For… stopping the yacht thing from happening,” Taehyung explains. Jeongguk’s mouth opens into an ‘oh’ and he shrugs.

“It’s nothing.”

Taehyung shakes his head vehemently, reaching out to grasp Jeongguk’s wrist without thinking. “No, it’s not nothing. I… don’t know what I would have done if I ended up having to get on that yacht.”

Jeongguk’s staring at Taehyung’s long fingers, curled around his hand. There’s a warm pulse coming from the contact and it’s not altogether bad. So he doesn’t pull away. *It feels nice, doesn’t it?*

“Why didn’t you say anything?” Jeongguk asks, after a pause.

“I… didn’t know how. I couldn’t find… the words. I guess. I panicked,” Taehyung frowns, staring at his own lap in discontent. Just then, the bartender places two clear shots of vodka in front of them.

“So… thank you.”

Jeongguk just shrugs again. “It’s not a big deal. Don’t mention it.”

They’re both silent and still for a while, until Taehyung slips his hand away to pick up the shot glass. Jeongguk is almost disappointed at the loss of contact but it’s not so bad as he watches Taehyung tip his head back, downing the liquid in one go.

*He has such a nice jaw*, Jeongguk thinks. *And a nice neck. I wonder what it would be like to run my tongue over the skin, taste it. He would look so pretty with my bite marks on him.*

And Taehyung has always been terribly attractive, but Jeongguk had turned a blind eye in the last few months because Taehyung’s even more painfully beautiful now than he was in high school, but admitting that would make Jeongguk weak. It would give Taehyung some sort of leverage over him, but now he’s drunk and Jeongguk’s willing to admit that every time he looks at Taehyung his heart flops.
Taehyung scrunches his face as the vodka slides down his throat and turns to Jeongguk, who is still simply staring at him. But it’s not off putting, because his gaze is dark and intense and Taehyung likes it. He feels like prey, but it’s nice, being watched by Jeongguk like this.

“And… I’m sorry about bothering you. All the time,” Taehyung says.

Jeongguk blinks at him, before picking up his own shot and downing it. He doesn’t react half as much as Taehyung does when he swallows. “It’s okay. I don’t really mind that much. It gets… lonely sometimes.”

Taehyung’s fingers shake at the confession, and he feels like he’s going to break. *Why do I want to cry?* He’d always been an emotional drinker, but the thought of Jeongguk, lonely, makes his chest ache in a way that had nothing to do with his drunken haze. It’s like the first day they had met on the school roof, seeing Jeongguk sitting at the ledge, defeated, with the weight of the world on his shoulders. Taehyung had promised that he would never let Jeongguk feel lonely again. And yet, here they are. Both still alone.

“And I’m sorry for being an ass all the time. But. You know. Defense mechanisms and all,” Jeongguk states plainly, like they’re discussing the weather. It’s almost frightening how calm he seems. “But you’re really nice about it even though I’m not.”

Taehyung is stone still as Jeongguk brings up a hand, cupping gently at his face, thumb running over his cheekbones, “You’re really pretty.” Something about the gentle, honest words makes Taehyung’s body flush with heat, and suddenly, the suit he’s wearing is too warm.

“I don’t know what to do about that,” Jeongguk’s eyes train on Taehyung’s pink lips, as the older man sticks out his tongue to swipe at them. *Are they still as soft as I remember?* Jeongguk aches to press their mouths together. Breathe Taehyung in. Consume him. *Own him.*

And Taehyung doesn’t know what to do either, with the raw heat of Jeongguk’s hand on his skin, making his body pulse with need. Everything is amplified, every brush of Jeongguk’s fingers over his skin, the aching lust in his eyes that mirror Taehyung’s own.

His skin feels electric and he can’t breathe because Jeongguk’s looking at him, *touching* him, and it’s overwhelming. His hand slides dangerously high up Jeongguk’s thigh, relishing the warmth and the feeling of Jeongguk’s muscle quivering under his fingertips. If he just leans in… a little closer…
“Taehyung, Jeongguk ssi!” Taehyung jerks his body away on reflex and Jeongguk’s hand drops. They both turn to see Hoseok approaching, smile wide.

“That was an efficient meeting!” he says enthusiastically and Taehyung nods, but he’s still staring at Jeongguk. “But I’m sure both of you are tired. Jeongguk ssi, why don’t you go back with Taehyung? Since you’re both heading to the same place?”

*Please say yes.*

“Sure,” Jeongguk sighs, eyes not leaving Taehyung.

They’re bustled into Taehyung’s partitioned Rolls Royce before he can even blink, and on the road. It’s quiet in the back, Jeongguk staring out the window on the opposite side of the car and they’re only two feet apart but to Taehyung it seems like a mile. Taehyung wonders if Jeongguk remembers the moment between them, mere minutes ago. But they’re both drunk, and nothing is quite for sure.

He wants to be closer, he needs to be closer, so Jeongguk’s cologne can suffocate him, have Jeongguk’s burning hands on Taehyung’s body. He’d always been needy and horny when drunk but this is new. This is much different from the basic lust and tightening in his pants. This is aching necessity.

“Jeongguk…” Taehyung murmurs softly, and Jeongguk turns his head slightly. “You think I’m pretty, huh?” There’s a ghost of a smile dancing on Jeongguk’s lips.

“You’re more than that,” is Jeongguk’s low response. Taehyung scoots himself closer, back pressed against the seat, head tilted back against the headrest, eyes rapt on Jeongguk.

“What am I, then?”

Maybe Taehyung is crazy, but he’s thinks Jeongguk might be as desperate for him the same way Taehyung is. He moves closer.

“Beautiful…” Jeongguk whispers. Taehyung licks his lips and he gulps.
Jeongguk sighs, tugging at his tie and loosening the knot around his throat. He looks up to say something but the words catch in his throat when he sees Taehyung watching the motion, eyes dark with intent.

Maybe it’s the suppressed desire that’s been burning inside him for the past two and a half months, maybe it’s the heat that licks at his stomach from the way Taehyung looks at him, maybe it’s the drunk intoxication, the sweet lull of lust that makes him shift closer.

“What about me, Taehyung?” he asks, words slightly slurred, and the older man’s eyes snap up to meet his, swirling with desire. “Do you think I’m attractive?” His voice is honeyed, glazed over with the whiskey he’s had too much of, and before he knows it, his thighs are brushing against Taehyung’s.

“Y-yes,” Taehyung stutters, the words spoken quickly as though they’ll disappear if he doesn’t say them fast enough. “God yes.” Because he’d been thinking about this every moment of every day, how badly he craved Jeongguk, both emotionally and physically. He wants Jeongguk all over him in every possible way.

“Better looking than in high school?” he prompts, tilting his head almost boyishly, if not for the wicked intent in his eyes, and Taehyung’s chest heaves.

“High school was d-different,” Taehyung stutters. “You were cute then.”

“And now?”

Taehyung’s hand grips Jeongguk’s thigh again, and he can smell the spice of Jeongguk’s cologne. He thinks he might suffocate.

“Sexy,” Is Taehyung’s breathless response. “So so sexy. You’re all I think about. I feel like I’m going to go crazy.” And Taehyung would rather be a madman if that means having Jeongguk look at him the way he is right now.

Jeongguk’s lips curve up into a slow smirk, and Taehyung has to close his eyes to keep from melting at the blatant display of sensuality.
“A lot of things are different than in high school,” He leans forward until their noses brush softly. Taehyung’s eyes flutter open and closed in surprise at the proximity, but he doesn’t move back. He wants this.

“I’m a much better kisser,” he drawls and lets the invitation hang in the air, dangerous and taunting, and Taehyung would be a fool not to take it.

“Show me,” Taehyung says breathlessly, bringing a hand up to grip at Jeongguk’s tie, before pulling him close until their lips crash together. It’s an explosion, a beautiful disaster as Jeongguk’s hands fly up to grip Taehyung’s face, pulling their mouths closer until there’s not an inch of space where their lips aren’t connected.

Taehyung’s mouth opens immediately and Jeongguk wastes no time plunging his tongue inside, owning him, dominating him in the most delicious way, and Taehyung goes pliant; lets the younger take the lead.

Jeongguk’s grip tightens, tilting his head to slot their mouths together as his fingers tangle in Taehyung’s silky brown hair, breathing in the elder’s intoxicating scent, committing the taste of his mouth to memory as he falls into delirium and forgets his original intentions.

Taehyung’s hands come to splay against Jeongguk’s chest, helplessly tugging on the material of his dress shirt as Jeongguk consumes him, breathes in all the air in his lungs and leaves none for him. Jeongguk’s lips are unmerciful, rough, all-commanding, and Taehyung can barely keep up.

The air grows hotter and hotter, mixing with the sounds of Taehyung whimpering as Jeongguk’s teeth clamp down on his lower lip, drawing blood and sending heat down Taehyung’s spine.

None of Taehyung’s lovers had ever treated him like this— rough and sloppy in the most controlled way. He was always treated with care, with reverence, always getting his way in the bedroom, but Jeongguk gives him no room for movement, no room to do anything besides be kissed into submission, and it’s a gloriously new and sinful feeling.

Jeongguk presses him back against the seat, broad shoulders pinning Taehyung back until there’s no room to move, but he doesn’t want to. There’s whiskey on Jeongguk’s tongue, and Taehyung shivers, letting out a needy moan.

And just when Taehyung thinks it can’t get any better, Jeongguk pulls at his hair, stinging at his
scalp, and the pain is incredible. His body arches towards Jeongguk, thrashing wildly, deliriously and
the younger man takes the moment to wrap his other arm around Taehyung’s waist and flips them so
Taehyung’s straddling his hips.

Taehyung uses the new position to grind his pelvis down, wrap his arms around Jeongguk’s neck,
and slant their mouths even closer together. Jeongguk’s tongue is demanding and hot and Taehyung
wants to give him everything he has and more, because even when they were younger they never
kissed like this-- so rough and needy. It makes his body throb and a soft whine bubbles at his throat.

Jeongguk pulls Taehyung closer, until they’re chest to chest, trying to find every conceivable way to
bring them closer because this isn’t enough. He growls in frustration, bucking his hips up to grind
against Taehyung’s, while tugging at the older’s hair again, and Taehyung sobs desperately into his
mouth, hands grappling wildly at his neck and shoulders, clinging onto him like his life depends on
it.

And right now, it’s like the oxygen in Taehyung's lungs is the only air Jeongguk can breathe, not
even letting the older man come up for breath because he can’t stand the idea of them being apart and
all he wants to do is own Taehyung, destroy him and put him back together again, kiss him and
wreck him until the only name Taehyung will ever remember is Jeongguk’s.

They’re like waves, surging together and crashing, writhing and grinding their bodies together in a
wild attempt to get closer, merge their souls together, but nothing is enough. Jeongguk can feel
Taehyung’s heart beating rapidly against his chest, moaning and bucking against him, but the
adrenaline is burning the alcohol from his veins.

With every passing moment, he becomes less urgent, lips turning to lead, and suddenly, the needy
throb in his chest is turning into a sick, heavy feeling. Taehyung is responsive to Jeongguk’s change
in pace, slowing until their lips are just touching, foreheads pressed together, chests heaving.

Jeongguk looks up, drinking in the image of Taehyung with his face flushed, hair mussed, lips
swollen and shiny with spit, and the older man ducks down to press soft, urgent kisses against
Jeongguk’s neck, but they’re no longer on the same page.

It takes a few moments for Jeongguk to realize that the car has stopped, and that they’re in front of
their building. Taehyung’s mouth is hot against his skin and he shivers, stomach churning because
he’s starting to crawl out of the whiskey-induced haze.

It takes just a few more seconds until Jeongguk snaps. He pushes Taehyung’s body away, horrified,
and his heart leaps at Taehyung’s confused, groggy expression.
“This never happened, alright?” Jeongguk hisses, before opening the door, stepping out and taking a deep breath, trying to rid Taehyung from his lungs. The older man is still slumped against the car seat, expression bewildered and wounded, and Jeongguk has to turn his body physically away.

He rushes into the building, vision suddenly blurry, headache pounding at his temple, and he can’t think. He presses the call button for the elevator rapidly, as though pressing it enough times would make everything go away. He steps inside quickly when it arrives and the moment the doors close, he slides down onto the ground, face in his hands, trying to keep the oncoming panic away.

He puts a hand against his mouth to choke back a sob as the first wave of terror hits. *What have I done?*

Chapter End Notes

hello friends! [im on tumblr](https://tumblr.com) and i would love to talk to y'all! about AU’s, the SMH universe, anything! (except fic updates, please dont ask about those <3) i even have a [tag](https://tag.com) for questions related to the SMH universe, and people have asked some really cool questions, so feel free to drop by!
The charity event, not ironically, is held at Rise Suites and Gardens. It’s almost spring now and with the light breeze rustling through the trees, moon high up in the sky, it’s a perfect place for a garden party.

There are lights strung tastefully around the trunks of trees, a thick, white canopy set up to shelter tables of shining silver cutlery and clear champagne glasses. As custom, there’s a ten piece orchestra, playing something soothing, something to make Seoul’s elite open up their hearts and their checkbooks.

Despite the musicians’ best attempt at creating a relaxed, easy atmosphere, the feeling Taehyung carries around with him is dark and nauseating.

Taehyung smiles pleasantly and nods graciously to person after person, but their faces blur together until he can’t tell up from down and it’s all because of Jeon Jeongguk.

The man stands out to Taehyung like there’s a spotlight trained at him, shining on him no matter where he moves, and he’s all Taehyung can see. Even while Taehyung is speaking to someone, his eyes are on Jeongguk, following his every move, as though trying to will the younger man to look at him.

Unfortunately, Jeongguk is terribly good at giving the silent treatment. When he doesn’t want to be seen or talked to, he completely vanishes and Taehyung would think he’d disappeared off the face of the planet in the last week except that he is, in fact, here, wearing the most well-fitted tuxedo Taehyung’s ever seen and he wishes he wasn’t so pathetic to still be attracted to him after all the things that had happened.

His lips still burn with the phantom sensation of Jeongguk’s mouth on his. The way Jeongguk had touched him, had made him melt, fingers pressing into him with such a ferocity that it makes his knees weak when he thinks about how quickly he had unravelled in Jeongguk’s skilled, demanding hands.

It’s a far cry from the shy, innocent touches of high school. Neither of them had had any experience and just a simple touch of the lips would make them laugh and blush. And their first time had been awkward and nerve-wracking, but they had done it together, so sure of each other and their feelings.
It had been beautiful in the most naive way.

But now-- everything is rough bites and loud moans and grinding hips, hair pulling and bruises on his hips, moving and writhing against each other like there’s no time to think about emotions and consequences, or the fact that they had both been drunk but Jeongguk was the first to pull out of his alcohol-induced haze.

Taehyung should have known the only time Jeongguk would actually let people in was when he was drunk. He should have been ready for the hurt when Jeongguk shoved him away. He should have braced himself, should have expected the denial, but it doesn’t mean it was justified, and it fucking hurts.

Because Taehyung wants to try, he’d never loved anyone the way he loved Jeongguk in the past. Things may not be the same now, but he knows how his body reacts to Jeongguk. The way his heart lurches whenever he's near. There’s something there, but if Jeongguk isn’t going to meet him halfway, what’s the point?

And his mood grows progressively more foul with every passing moment, the more he stews over it, until Hoseok notices and hands him a glass of champagne.

“I think you need some air, Taehyung,” the older man suggests firmly and Taehyung can only nod. He’s been conditioned to plaster a smile on his face and listen to socialites blabber about things he doesn’t care about his whole goddamn life and he just needs a break, so he’s more than glad when Hoseok offers him a chance to step away from it all.

So he downs the bubbly drink in two gulps and grabs another as he steps out from underneath the canopy, letting his feet lead him down a familiar path.

He hadn’t been through the maze in a few years; not after he’d taken over the company. Suddenly these kinds of things were too childish and trivial. He wasn’t allowed to just wander the gardens the way he used to, but he turns the corners confidently, because much like riding a bike, he can’t really forget this place.

He can hear the soothing gurgle of the fountain before he sees it and a languid smile stretches across his face, some of the unease of the past week slowly fading away. The place holds so many fond memories; it’s easy to relax.
But Taehyung’s mood drops when he sees the outline of a familiar broad shouldered man standing with his back to him. Taehyung doesn’t have to see Jeongguk’s face to know it’s him. And his heartbeat quickens with anxiety, blood pounding in his ears because--

“You still remember the way.” It’s more of a statement than a question. And secretly, Taehyung is thrilled. Jeongguk hadn’t forgotten. If he closes his eyes, he can almost hear the way they had laughed over champagne, stared at each other across the table, held each other in a tight embrace. He’d do anything for that time again.

The nostalgia is suffocating, but he shoves it down as he watches Jeongguk’s body tense.

“I should have known you’d follow me here.” Taehyung winces, because he hates when Jeongguk masks up his emotions, detaching himself. His voice is so cold, so disconnected, and it spirals Taehyung into doubt because he wonders if he’s the only one who feels anything.

“I wasn’t following you,” Taehyung clarifies. “I haven’t been here in a while. It’s quiet. Relaxing.” But not anymore.

Jeongguk huffs a derisive laugh and Taehyung burns with irritation, giving him a sideways glance as he steps up by the younger man’s side. “Funny, because I was just thinking the opposite.”

“Well that’s fantastic for you.” Taehyung snaps before he can help himself, because he’s angry and Jeongguk is just taunting him. He knows he should be the mature one in the situation, but any attempt at decency had been dashed when Jeongguk had shoved him away in the car.

Taehyung tries to remember the conversations they had when they were teenagers, giddy on love, being silly, being honest, in an attempt to reign in his anger and be the bigger person in the situation. When did it come to this? Taehyung wonders. The last time they had been here, they couldn’t keep their hands off each other. And now, they’re worlds apart.

“That was remarkably, but not surprisingly, petty of you, Taehyung ssi.” Jeongguk says, taking a sip from his champagne. But his knuckles are white and he’s gripping the glass too tightly to match up with his cool tone.

Taehyung stares at Jeongguk, open mouthed. “Are you fucking kidding me?” Jeongguk raises a single eyebrow, turning to him and taking another sip of the champagne. “I’m childish? Says the guy who drunk made out with me and then spent the last week avoiding me because he can’t fucking
handle his own feelings!”

He doesn’t mean for his voice to get as loud as it does and by the end he’s practically yelling, but he can’t stop himself.

“I understand my feelings just fine.” Jeongguk growls, turning fully to face Taehyung.

“Oh really? One second you want me, the next you’re shoving me away,” Taehyung taps his chin in mock thought. “That’s strange, isn’t it? For someone who understands his feelings so well why can’t you fucking pick if you want to kiss me or not? It sounds a lot more like you’re afraid of your feelings and trying to run away from them.”

“You assume that there are feelings to begin with,” Jeongguk snarls. “I don’t feel anything but indifference for you and if you think there’s anything more than that, you’re still as stupid as you were in high school.”

Taehyung laughs in disbelief. “You’re a liar. That’s such a fucking lie and you know it. What the hell are you even doing here then? Why this fountain? But you’re just going to keep denying it, aren’t you? Because you’re a coward.” Taehyung shoves at Jeongguk’s chest, but the younger man grips Taehyung’s wrist and holds it tightly as he pulls Taehyung toward him.

“Don’t you dare call me a coward after everything you did,” he spits out.

“You never even gave me a chance to explain, Jeongguk. How the hell would you know? And I was a stupid teenager! I made a mistake! But you’re a grown man. Start acting like one.” He rips his hand away, body flushing hot with anger.

“You don’t get to tell me what to do or how to feel, Tae-hyung ssi. You’re just a business partner. You mean nothing to me.” And with that, Jeongguk is storming off, out of the maze, leaving Taehyung feeling like he’d just run a marathon because he’s exhausted; he didn’t know fighting with Jeongguk could be so tiring, but this is so much harder than he expected it to be.

He knows Hoseok will be wondering where he is. He’d have to make a speech in a few minutes and he wonders how quickly he can pull himself together so no one gets suspicious that the two men in charge of this whole project can’t go ten seconds without wanting to tear each other’s throats out.
When Taehyung gets home, he’s exhausted and irritated. Time had dragged by so slowly he thought he might go insane plastering a smile on his face and keeping his voice light and conversational when all he wanted to do was chase after Jeongguk and give him a piece of his mind.

He tosses over the words said inside the maze. He doesn’t-- he can’t-- regret them, because they’re true, but he wonders if anything even registered in Jeongguk’s mind. Jeongguk most likely put up his walls again. Ignored everything Taehyung had said. Refused to see the truth.

*He’s such a coward,* Taehyung laments, tugging at his tie because he’s suffocating and tosses his blazer haphazardly over the couch. He just wants to take a hot shower and sleep for a few days because maybe then he won’t be constantly thinking about Jeon fucking Jeongguk.

But just as he’s about to walk out of the living room there’s a sharp knock on the door. He frowns. Why would anyone knock when the doorbell is right there? But the knocking is insistent, rapid, and Taehyung’s heartbeat quickens.

He looks through the peephole to see Jeongguk standing there and he can’t open the door fast enough.

“What the hell--”

Jeongguk steps forward, shoving Taehyung into his home. “I need you to leave me the hell alone,” he growls and Taehyung stumbles back in surprise. It takes a moment for him to get over the shock before he finds his words.


He doesn’t know whether to punch Jeongguk or kiss him because half of him wants to scream and the other half is relieved because for the first time Jeongguk’s come to him, not the other way around, and Taehyung can read between the lines.

“Don’t touch me,” Jeongguk spits out swatting at Taehyung’s arm. “That’s why I’m here. Leave me alone. Don’t touch me. Don’t talk to me, don’t do anything.”
Taehyung laughs, sharp and derisive, before stepping closer until they’re chest to chest. He can see the red tinting Jeongguk’s eyes, the barely restrained fury, and it’s just as well because he’s got some anger of his own.

“I think you and I both know why you’re really here.” And before Taehyung can blink, he’s being slammed against the wall and he gasps in surprise as Jeongguk pins his wrists above his head, grip bruising.

“Tell me then, Kim Taehyung, why am I here?” Jeongguk is so close. If Taehyung leans forward he’d be able to kiss him.

Taehyung’s body is quivering with nerves, but he presses forward. “Admit it. You still have feelings for me.”

“Feelings?” Jeongguk growls and it makes Taehyung shake to the core. But he’s not afraid. He’s done dancing around the truth.

“Yes, feelings. But you’re never going to say it,” Taehyung’s also done with consequences. “You’ll always be a coward.”

Jeongguk presses closer, until their noses are brushing. “Say that again.” Jeongguk is positively seething, teeth clenched, and his grip on Taehyung’s wrists tighten ever so slightly.

“You’re a fucking coward,” Taehyung repeats, not breaking eye contact. Jeongguk let’s go of one of his wrists to wrap his hand around Taehyung’s jaw.

“Says the king of cowards himself.” Jeongguk sneers, gripping Taehyung’s jaw tightly and arching his head back. Taehyung’s heart is in his throat but he’s not going to back down.

“At least I got over it!” He’s practically yelling now, but he can’t bring himself to care. “I fucking grew up, Jeongguk! But you obviously didn’t because all you do is petty shit. You’re so fucking transparent, you know that? You’re not fooling anyone, so stop lying to yourself and admit it.”

Jeongguk’s face drains of color, but it’s momentary, because he’s back to livid in a split second and
his grip tightens more. “You want me to admit it? Admit what? That I have feelings? Feelings for you? Still? Now?” His teeth are clenched, and Taehyung is questioning every word he’s said. Did I go too far?

A little kindness can go a long way. He wonders why he didn’t keep this in mind before when all he could think about was lashing out at Jeongguk, but now all they’re doing is trading punches and both of them are getting hurt. I don’t want to hurt him.

“In the car. I know you f-felt it too, Jeongguk,” his voice is more quiet and it shakes because he’s feeling too much, it’s overwhelming, and he can barely keep his thoughts straight. “Stop lying to yourself. For your own s-sake.”

He can feel Jeongguk’s heart thudding wildly against his own chest because their bodies are pressed so tightly together it would be impossible not to notice, and belatedly Taehyung wonders how they even got into this position. He normally doesn’t fight with people in this proximity, but he’s doing it with Jeongguk. It seemed like Taehyung experienced a lot of firsts with him.

“What do you want me to say?” Jeongguk asks derisively. “You’re all I think about, Taehyung,” he mocks, using Taehyung’s exact words. “I feel like I’m going to go crazy, is that it?”

Taehyung bites his lip to keep from tearing up, because yes, that’s what he wants.

“You fucking ruined my life!” Jeongguk roars, letting go of Taehyung’s neck to slam his fist against the wall next to his head. Taehyung winces, body jolting at the surprise more than actual fear-- he knows, somehow, that Jeongguk would never actually physically hurt him-- but he tries to control himself, keep himself afloat amongst the waves of guilt crashing around him.

He takes a stuttered breath, trying to collect his thoughts. “I know. And you’ll never know how sorry I am for that, I--”

“Sorry doesn’t fucking cover it, Taehyung.” Jeongguk growls and Taehyung’s eyes sting. “What makes you think, that after all of that, I’d still have feelings for you? After everything you did to me? After all those lies?”

Jeongguk seems more now like he’s pleading for answers. The same way he still couldn’t understand why Taehyung would make a bet to seduce him. He had wanted to believe, with every fiber of his being, that he could trust Taehyung. But now, he can’t. He’d learned better. Now, he wants to know
Why me? What is it about me that makes everyone leave? Why is everyone so intent on hurting me? He’s desperate for answers, he can’t make sense of what’s going on, and Taehyung doesn’t quite know either.

“It was never a lie, Jeongguk,” he murmurs, desperate. “It started out as a game, yes. But after I actually got to know you, a-and you got to know me…” He sighs, chest aching with the happy memories of their puppy love. It’s a far cry from where they are now. “I’ve never felt anything more real in my life.”


“I’m telling the t-truth. Everything was so complicated, Jeongguk, you can’t understand w-why I had to--”

“No,” Taehyung can see the walls starting to go back up, Jeongguk’s voice thick with denial and Taehyung is terrified they’ll be right back where they started. “You were just using me. You never loved me.”

Taehyung knows he has to do something to get Jeongguk to stay. Prove that everything was-- is-- real.

“If you really believe that… then what are you doing here?”

The words are whispered, but they echo between the two men, and Jeongguk’s fingers go slack. Taehyung’s arm drops from where Jeongguk’s pinned it and he brings it up, hesitant, and strokes Jeongguk’s face gently. His breath stutters, because Jeongguk’s skin is so soft, so warm underneath his fingertips and although he flinches when Taehyung touches him, Jeongguk remains still, face blank.

Spurred on, Taehyung inhales shakily, trying to build up the courage, before going up on his tip toes and pressing his lips softly to Jeongguk’s. For a moment he’s discouraged, because Jeongguk is stone still, so he tangles his fingers in Jeongguk’s hair. That seems to make the younger man snap out of his daze and before Taehyung knows it, he’s being slammed back against the wall, with Jeongguk’s hand wrapped around his throat.
“What the fuck are you trying to do?” Jeongguk hisses, pressing his thigh between Taehyung’s legs, pressing against his growing hardness.

And Taehyung moans.

He could have said one of the million things whirling around in his head, but suddenly, all he can focus on is the feeling of Jeongguk’s fingers around his neck, thumb pressed against his pulse point, the heat licking at his belly, and he moans again, the sound stuttered and desperate.

Jeongguk’s grip loosens for a moment in surprise, before tightening again, and he presses his body closer, until his thigh is nestled even more firmly against the bulge forming in Taehyung’s pants.

“You like that?” Jeongguk asks, mildly surprised, but his voice is dangerous, sickly sweet and Taehyung feels like he’s going to pass out but Jeongguk’s voice holds him up, holds him in this limbo of bad decisions and he can’t think straight. He can never think straight when it comes to Jeongguk.

Taehyung whimpered and Jeongguk’s grip tightens.

“You do like that, don’t you,” he hisses, eyes wicked with intent, and Taehyung’s breathing stutters as he’s filled with an overwhelming need, a torrent of desire for this man so intent on destroying him, and Taehyung wants to be destroyed, in every possible way. Like he’s offering his body and soul to the Devil himself, but Jeongguk pressed up against him feels like heaven.

“J-Jeongguk,” Taehyung moans again, chest seizing as he’s overwhelmed with feeling.

“You want me to fuck you, Taehyung?” Jeongguk asks, voice soft and dangerously sharp. “Want me to fuck you until you’re crying and begging me to stop?”

Taehyung’s eyes trail up to stare at the man, eyes blazing and pupils blown, looking wild and a little bit murderous, and he shudders because he’s never felt like this before, never wanted to be dominated by someone like this. He’d bottomed often with others, but then there’s Jeongguk, who always takes his mind to places he’s never thought of, makes him want in the most basic and primal way.

“But I’ll never w-want you to stop,” Jeongguk’s grip slackens just barely, betraying his feelings, and
Taehyung knows he’s just as affected by the situation.

“Are you sure?”

“Y-yes,” he whispers, because he’s never felt so small, and it feels like it’s a different universe from the way they were in high school, but he likes it. Maybe a little too much.

“Yes, what?” Jeongguk hisses, winding his fingers through Taehyung’s hair and tugging it back until Taehyung’s throat is completely exposed and he’s gasping from the sting.

“Please… Jeongguk. I want it,” Taehyung says and his voice quivers. He feels completely useless and small and vulnerable and Jeongguk has him like putty in his hands.

“It?” Jeongguk is egging him on now. “What’s it? What do you want, Taehyungie?”

And Taehyung is fighting for air, because he can’t breathe, everything is so intense and it’s overwhelming, the pain blurring into mind blowing pleasure. He’d always had a thing for pain and Jeongguk is probably figuring that out quickly.

“You, Jeongguk, I want you. I want you to fuck me, please,” Taehyung sobs, tears already starting to form at the corners of his eyes.

“You know,” Jeongguk leans in to whisper in Taehyung’s ear, “I never thought I’d have you begging for me like this.” His breath is hot against Taehyung’s face and heat licks at his belly.

“I’ll d-do anything,” Taehyung mutters and he can almost feel Jeongguk smirking.

“You want it that bad?” Jeongguk’s voice is like velvet, enveloping him with poisoned words, and it feels so good against his skin and he’s falling quickly into Jeongguk’s spell. A stuttered moan works it’s way out of Taehyung’s mouth and his heart beats erratically against his chest.

“I need it,” Taehyung pleads and Jeongguk’s thumb presses tighter against his throat. He’s sure he’ll have angry red bruises tomorrow and knowing that he’s being marked is thrilling.
“You want to play? We’re going to play by my rules,” Jeongguk growls, pressing his thigh into Taehyung’s erection and by this point Taehyung is panting, whining, desperate for air and for Jeongguk.

“You take it how I want you to.”

“P-please…” Taehyung sobs and he can hardly believe the words coming out of his mouth, but in that moment, with the heat sizzling around them, there’s nothing he wants more than for Jeongguk’s cock to be inside him, tearing him apart and owning him in the most dirty way.

Jeongguk smirks darkly, leaning in to whisper tauntingly in Taehyung’s ear. “If you can’t take it, tell me to stop.”

The words wrack Taehyung’s body with shivers and he stutters out an “Okay,” while nodding vehemently, biting down on his lip because he wants this so badly he feels like he’s going to shatter if he doesn’t have Jeongguk inside of him soon, “But that’s not going to happen.”

And as soon as he has the affirmation, Jeongguk’s hands are flying, ripping at the buttons of Taehyung’s custom-made Brooks Brothers dress shirt, slipping off his silk tie, unbuttoning his slacks with such ferocity that it makes his body shiver with anticipation.

Taehyung’s whipped around, chest slammed into the wall, and he turns his face so it’s pressed against the cool surface. “Where’s the lube?” Jeongguk’s breath is hot against Taehyung’s ear.

“Don’t… want it,” Taehyung chokes out and Jeongguk’s grip on his hips tightens.

“You want me to take you raw?” Jeongguk asks, taken aback, and Taehyung nods feverishly. Jeongguk slides a hand up Taehyung’s back and neck to tangle in his hair, pulling his head back. “It’s going to fucking hurt, you want that?”

“I… w-want it to hurt,” Taehyung stammers, blushing wildly, because how does he tell Jeongguk that he just wants to feel everything? The pain, the pleasure, every bit of friction.

And once Jeongguk’s gotten over his initial shock, he presses his body closer, tugging again at
Taehyung’s hair. Taehyung claws wildly, erection caught between his stomach and the wall.

“You’re a kinky little bitch aren’t you?” Jeongguk chuckles darkly and Taehyung whimpers, skin tightening, because he feels so degraded, but it makes the heat pool in his stomach, toes curling. Then Jeongguk steps away. “But I’m not fucking you without lube. You should know better.”

And Taehyung is on the verge of tears, panting against the wall. “Bedroom,” he pants out. He doesn’t have the focus to argue. “Bedroom… d-drawer--”

He gasps when he feels Jeongguk disappear from behind him, knees wobbling with the feeling of vulnerability and cold without Jeongguk pressed up against him. But his suffering doesn’t last for long because Jeongguk’s back faster than he expected-- or maybe time is going by differently than Taehyung can comprehend.

He’s shoved back roughly against the wall again, Jeongguk’s breath hot against his neck. “Please,” Taehyung sobs in half-relief, eyes squeezing shut. He feels Jeongguk’s fingers pushing past his lips and he opens his mouth obediently.

“Suck,” Jeongguk orders and Taehyung does, licking and rolling the digits around on his tongue, slicking them and trying his best to make it pleasurable, because there’s nothing he can do from this position other than take what Jeongguk gives him.

“Enough,” and Jeongguk’s fingers are slipping out of Taehyung’s mouth. He whines at the loss and hears the snap of the opening lube bottle. He shivers in anticipation, before feeling Jeongguk’s fingers prodding at his puckered entrance. He lets out a low, needy moan and it morphs quickly into a high pitched keen when Jeongguk pushes the first finger in.

Jeongguk is thorough about prepping Taehyung and for a minute it’s silent as the younger man scissors his fingers with alarming skill, pressing against Taehyung’s inner walls and finding his prostate so quickly it has Taehyung shoving his hips back in an attempt to fuck himself on Jeongguk’s fingers.

“Don’t fucking move unless I tell you to, got it?” Jeongguk hisses, roughly pressing Taehyung’s hips against the wall so he’s completely immobile and frustration claws at his chest because he wants to touch Jeongguk, kiss him and make him moan the same way he himself is, give Jeongguk as much as he’s getting, but Jeongguk has him trapped.
“Jeongguk…” Taehyung whines as Jeongguk pumps in three fingers with a steady rhythm. “Please... fuck me now. I’m ready. I’m--” And he gasps, Jeongguk’s fingers disappearing in an instant. He hears Jeongguk unzip his pants, tearing open what can only be a condom wrapper.

Taehyung presses his forehead against the wall, not knowing how he’s supposed to wait any longer and lets out whimper, which breaks off into a sob when Jeongguk rubs his length against Taehyung’s ass. Taehyung bemoans the fact that he can’t even see it, can’t touch it, but he can feel it pressing teasingly against his entrance.

“Are you sure you can take it?” Taehyung doesn’t know whether Jeongguk is teasing him or actually asking, but he nods anyway, curling his fingers into fists until his nails are digging at his palm.

“I need... your cock inside me,” Taehyung pants out and it seems to do the trick because Jeongguk’s slowly easing himself inside and Taehyung can’t help the choked cry because it hurts; it feels like he’s being torn in half. Jeongguk stops immediately, hands tightening on Taehyung’s hips. Taehyung knows it’s Jeongguk’s way of asking.

“I’m…” Taehyung gasps, tears stinging at his eyes. “I’m fine… Just… fuck me. Please,” and he can feel everything-- the friction of Jeongguk’s cock inside him, rubbing against his walls. His vision is blurry, but every other sensation is heightened and he’s never wanted anything more.

Jeongguk rolls his hips slowly, letting Taehyung get used to his length. After a few gentle thrusts, his hilt strikes Taehyung’s sweet spot and Taehyung writhes in Jeongguk’s arms, body suddenly feeling overheated and it spurs Jeongguk to move faster.

And then he’s slamming into Taehyung, striking his prostate over and over again, hips digging into the flesh of Taehyung’s ass as he slides in and out with a renewed fervor. All Taehyung can do is claw desperately at the wall, tears of pleasure streaming down his face as he screams out Jeongguk’s name with every thrust.

The friction is almost too much to bear, his erection rubbing against the wall and smearing it with precome while Jeongguk pounds ruthlessly into him. Taehyung wishes that Jeongguk would be as loud as he is, but all he gets are a few low grunts from the effort of thrusting up into Taehyung and nothing more.

It’s frustrating, wanting to touch Jeongguk, lick at his skin, bite him, but the younger man won’t give him any chance at intimacy. He’s getting fucked. And that’s all.
And then Jeongguk’s mouth is on his neck, his breath spilling hot across Taehyung’s sweat slick skin and Taehyung cries out in pleasure, tilting his head to the side to give him better access, because he wants that, wants Jeongguk’s lips on him, and it drives him to the edge.

“I-I’m…” Taehyung sobs out as Jeongguk’s mouth moves to his shoulder, teeth scraping against the skin.

“Do it,” Jeongguk growls, snapping his hips in faster, and Taehyung spills out a series of staccato moans as he actually gets lifted on his toes with the force. His vision goes white and Jeongguk clamps his teeth down just as the first wave of the orgasm rolls through him. He can feel the skin breaking, and it stings, but it adds to the torrent of stimulation threatening to drown him.

He comes hard, screaming Jeongguk’s name as his body wracks with shivers, and he’s left a quivering mess, panting against the wall, tears staining his cheeks. He’s so wrecked, and he can barely register when Jeongguk slips his length out.

Taehyung turns around when he hears the zip of Jeongguk’s pants. “W-wait, you--”

Jeongguk’s eyes snap up and they’re glinting dark and dangerous. He’s still fully clothed, while Taehyung is naked and the only way the older man can tell they’d fucked is the sweat dotting Jeongguk’s forehead.

“You got what you wanted, right?” Jeongguk’s voice is impossibly low and it makes Taehyung’s stomach churn. “You wanted me to fuck you until you cried,” He sounds so detached, like he’s talking to a patient rather than Taehyung.

“But…” You didn’t come, Taehyung wants to say, but saying it out loud would make it more tangible. It feels like a slap in the face. Taehyung knows it’s a slap in the face. And his body burns with embarrassment, with frustration, but he pushes it aside.

“I hope you’re satisfied, Taehyung ssi,” Jeongguk says, and he bows his head-- he bows his head-- before making for the door. And there’s inexplicable irritation bubbling up Taehyung’s throat. He can’t let Jeongguk have the last word.

“When you’re finishing yourself off in the safety of your own home, try not to scream my name too loud.”
And then Jeongguk is gone, slamming the door behind him, and Taehyung sinks to the ground, body exhausted, but his mind is reeling. He can still feel the burning of Jeongguk’s cock inside him, his body is still shaking from the pleasure. But despite his seething anger, he can read between the lines. Jeongguk had knocked on his door. Jeongguk had gotten hard for him. Jeongguk was lying through his teeth and Taehyung isn’t an idiot.

And he’s not a doormat either. He refuses to let Jeongguk walk all over him like this. He wants to play dirty? Fine. But now, Jeongguk is going to have to get on his knees, he resolves. Taehyung won’t be swayed so easily. And if Jeongguk wants him as badly as Taehyung knows he does, then he’s going to have to fight for it.

Chapter End Notes

dthis have to get worse before they can get better right? haha /crickets chirping/ anyways thank you for 700+ kudos! i wanted to put up this chapter early cuz i was so happy :D as always you can come yell at me on tumblr. i even have an SMH tag for questions that people ask about the AU!
okay i figure i should put up trigger warnings just in case someone is really sensitive so here is my warning-- this chapter contains minor character death, suicidal thoughts, self harm, blood mentions, mentions of drug use. read at your own caution!

Taehyung sighs for what seems like the millionth time, scrolling through the pictures on his cell phone. Everything about that night brought a smile to Taehyung’s face, but then again, anything relating to Jeongguk made him happy.

“TaeTae?”

Taehyung looks up and smiles sheepishly at Namjoon from across the table. His brother was in town for a few days, and they had agreed to try out one of the new restaurants Rise had acquired.

“Sorry, my head’s kind of been in the clouds lately.”

Namjoon’s lips curl up into a lopsided smirk. “Since when is your head not in the clouds?” he asks, reaching forward to push Taehyung’s forehead back with his finger. Taehyung laughs, swatting his hand away.

“Honestly, I’m a little jealous,” Namjoon continues. “I’m sitting right here, your hyung, your hero,” he says dramatically, and Taehyung snorts. “But you’re just on your phone the whole time.”

Embarrassed color rises in Taehyung’s cheeks. “Sorry hyung,” he mumbles.

Namjoon examines him closely, joking smile fading away. “Are you still hanging around Jeongguk?” he asks, voice serious, but careful.

Taehyung furrows his eyebrows together. “Yeah, of course, we’re dating. Did you think we broke up?” Something twists in his stomach.
Namjoon sighs. “I figured it was a fling, that you were just messing around.”

“Why would you think that?” Taehyung asks, more defensive than he would like. He looks down at his untouched steak. He usually has a huge appetite, but something about the way Namjoon is looking at him throws him off.

“That’s what you did with Minah,” Namjoon says evenly, and regret stabs hot against Taehyung’s chest. “I figured you would get over it quickly.”

“B-but. The champagne, the hotel. You didn’t like Minah, but you like Jeongguk.”

Now Namjoon looks regretful. Taehyung hates that look. He’s hardly ever on the receiving end of it, but he knows it can never lead up to anything good.

“I did. I mean, I do. But--” Namjoon takes a deep breath, looking up at the ceiling, obviously trying to figure out how to but his words. “-- that was before. Before I found out who he was.”

Taehyung’s fist clenches in his lap as he narrows his eyes. “What does that mean?”

Namjoon sighs. “Don’t look at me like that, Tae. I know what you’re thinking, but you have to hear me out on this.”

Taehyung stays silent.

“With Minah, it was fine. She’s the heiress to Bang Industries. She has status. It goes well with us, and if you had been serious, I figured it could lead to some sort of lucrative merger--” Namjoon reads the obvious bewilderment rolling off the young boy. “Don’t give me that look, Taehyung, you know this is the way I have to think. Always two steps ahead, thinking about the future. We’re not just… normal people, you know? The entire country is watching us, so we have to be careful.”

“What does this have to do with Jeongguk?” Taehyung asks, voice quiet, because he’s still trying to wrap his mind around the knowledge that his brother is thinking about marriage and mergers. Taehyung wanted nothing to do with the company, the rules and regulations that came with it. The weight of his name.
“I figured he was similar to Minah. If you’re at Bangtan, then you have to be affluent to some degree, so it was the only sensible assumption to make. But I came across an article-- something about Bangtan taking in a student on scholarship--”

“Jeongguk is a fucking genius, hyung! He deserves to be here, maybe more than me--”

“That’s not what I was trying to say,” Namjoon says, fixing Taehyung with a look that said let me finish. Taehyung purses his lips together, an unfamiliar irritation and anger buzzing under his skin.

“I’m sure Jeongguk is very deserving of the education he’s getting. And I wish him well. But…” Namjoon sighs. “He’s not one of us, Taehyung.” He brings up a hand to stop Taehyung from blurting out whatever he might have wanted to say. “He’s not a socialite. He doesn’t have money. He lives in an orphanage, Taehyung. Do you honestly think he’d fit into this world?”

Taehyung’s lip quivers, and he curses himself for being so affected by the words, but he’d never had to hear anything like this before. When was the last time Namjoon had talked like this? His brother had always taught him to be humble, to never look down on anyone based on money or circumstance.

“If the media got a wind of him and your relationship, they’d tear him to shreds. He wouldn’t last a day in our world. And it’s only going to be a trainwreck. Is that what you want?”

Taehyung winces. “What about what you always say? About a little kindness going a long way? Why can’t you show Jeongguk a bit of--”

“This isn’t about kindness, Taehyung,” Namjoon says, voice flat and serious. “This is about our reputation, one that our parents, our grandparents, their grandparents built. You want all that to come crumbling down because you went crushing on an orphan?”

“We’re orphans too, hyung,” Taehyung bites, his vision blurring from the tears. Namjoon’s eyes harden.

“But we’re in a much better situation than him. I took care of you, Taehyung. I took care of the company. Who did he have? No one. How do we know he was raised properly?”
“So now that he finally has someone, you want me to abandon him?”

“I’m not telling you to stop talking to him entirely. But you know a romantic relationship won’t lead to anything good. You have to be serious for once, Taehyung.”

“How can you ask that of me?” Taehyung whispers, heart clenching uncomfortably. “How can I do that to him?”

“My advice would be to talk to him. Explain everything, communicate. He’ll understand, and it’ll be safer for both of you, and the least painful,” Namjoon explains, and Taehyung’s never been more irritated by his older brother’s pragmatism until this moment. The idea of having to tell Jeongguk all of this, after making all those promises, makes Taehyung nauseous.

“I’m sorry it has to be this way, Taehyung. But you have a duty to yourself, and the family. It’s time for you to grow up.”

♥

Yoongi exhales sharply. “That’s tough, man.”

“Yeah,” Taehyung can’t bring himself to look up, fiddling mindlessly with his phone. “I don’t know what to do.”

Yoongi is quiet for a moment. “You could do what Namjoon hyung said. Talk to him. Jeongguk is really smart, and he’ll understand. You need to explain it to him.”

Taehyung groans, leaning back in his chair and looking up at the lights on the ceiling. “What am I supposed to say? Hey Jeongguk, we have to break up because my brother’s a rich snob!”

“You were worse, you know.” Yoongi remarks quietly. Taehyung lifts his head up, glaring at his friend.

“What does that mean?”
Yoongi purses his lip, fixing Taehyung with an even stare. It was almost uncanny how Yoongi and Namjoon were able to give him that same look. Taehyung knew he could be intimidating and manipulative when he chose. People would rather just give Taehyung what he wanted rather than cross anyone from one of the most powerful families in Korea. Yoongi wasn’t one of those people. Which Taehyung usually appreciated greatly, but this was not one of those moments.

“The way you talked about Jeongguk back then. He was a charity case to you.”

Taehyung opens his mouth to try and respond, but finds that he has nothing to say.

“He was just a toy. Dispensable, like all poor people are to the rich.”

Taehyung’s stomach sweeps, and Yoongi’s face is unreadable, but Taehyung knows what he’s thinking. Yoongi’s own family had fallen out of grace, his father getting into trouble with loan sharks when he was young. The family had been impoverished all of Yoongi’s childhood, and all his friends, all the people who he thought he could trust, turned their backs on the family.

It was only through a successful deal with Rise that the Min’s were able to find success again, but Yoongi carried that scar with him, always. Knowing how fickle the rich could be. Not knowing who to trust, who would abandon him when they decided he wasn’t worth their time.

Taehyung gulps, looking down at his hands. “I know. I’m sorry—” He’s cut off as the bell rings, and Yoongi sighs, getting up and joining the wave of students rushing out the door.

“Yoongi!” Taehyung calls, scrambling to his feet and sprinting after his friend. He grabs Yoongi by the arm and turns him around. “I’m sorry,” he says sincerely. He searches Yoongi’s eyes for any sign of forgiveness.

“It’s not me you need to apologize to, kid. You owe Jeongguk a hell of an explanation.”

Taehyung’s chest tightens with anxiety and remorse. He sighs. “I know.”

“Speaking of Jeongguk, where is he?”
Taehyung blinks, remembering that he was supposed to meet the younger for tutoring today. “Shit, I have to call him,” he mumbles, feeling around his pockets for his phone. He frowns. “I think I left my phone in the classroom.”

Yoongi rolls his eyes, patronizing. “Then go get it.”

Taehyung smiles at him sheepishly and dashes back to the classroom. It’s empty, silent, and Taehyung walks down the aisle to his desk, where he remembers leaving his phone last.

“What the hell…” he mumbles, searching the ground, and the tables around his as well. Stealing was unheard of at Bangtan-- there was no need to, not when every student could afford to buy anything if they liked what they saw.

Had he imagined having his phone with him in class?

“I probably left it in my locker,” he murmurs, doubling back out of the classroom, confused.

♥

Jeongguk stumbles to school in the morning with shaking hands. His eyes are probably puffy from crying so much, and he doesn’t know how he’s going to explain the scratched up voice to Taehyung either.

It was a few days before graduation, and he supposes he’d been off his guard at the orphanage, so ready to leave the nightmarish place after graduation that he’d almost forgotten just how terrible it could be.

He was making breakfast for the younger kids when the fighting started. The warden was on another bender, and Jeongguk could see the white powder on the coffee table in the living room-- remnants of lines of cocaine that hadn’t been snorted up. His stomach twists.

Sojin had rushed down quickly, blocking her mother from entering the kitchen and getting near the children in her state. There had been screaming, pushing, and Sojin had bashed her head against the kitchen counter. It wasn’t until Jeongguk saw the blood that he knew something was wrong.
She couldn’t open her eyes, Jeongguk remembers. The kids had been crying, gripping to his legs as everyone stared at her limp body on the floor, red seeping onto the cracked and dirty linoleum. The warden had just stared, eyes glazed over, and it had been Jeongguk who had to dial for an ambulance. It had been Jeongguk who had to wipe the blood from the floor. It had been Jeongguk who had to get the younger kids dressed and in their rooms before he’d allowed himself to cry.

He couldn’t remember being so scared in his entire life. There were only two people he knew who he loved more than life itself-- Sojin and Taehyung. And Sojin was currently in Intensive Care at the hospital, with a brain hemorrhage. And Taehyung… Taehyung hadn’t answered his calls in the last day, and hadn’t shown up to tutoring. He should know better than to be upset by this, but he’d never felt so alone.

He stumbles onto the campus grounds, keeping his head down and trying not to sniffle, because his bedraggled state constantly attracts attention anyways, he didn’t need to add to the pity party. Today, however, the atmosphere seems different.

Jeongguk is used to the whispers and the stares, he’d dealt with them all year. But there’s more staring than usual. People are pointing at him, laughing. Snickering openly, instead of covering their mouths with their hands. Jeongguk looks down and notices a small blood stain on the corner of his white uniform shirt.

Is that what they’re laughing at? Jeongguk wonders, brushing his finger over the fabric with his thumb and forefinger. It didn’t seem that noticeable, and Jeongguk hadn’t had the time, nor did he care, to make himself presentable today. He just wanted to find Taehyung and ask for a hug.

“Pathetic, right?” Jeongguk hears someone whisper as he walks through the hall. He looks up, but suddenly everyone’s turning their attention away, ignoring him, and his skin heats up. Jeongguk had been dealing with the constant jabs and sneers his whole life, but it was always exhausting, and today, he didn’t have the strength to brush this off.

“Does he know how hard he was played?” A stab of fear runs through Jeongguk, and he wonders what they’re talking about.

“He should be thankful Taehyung paid attention to him in the first place.”

There are alarm bells ringing in Jeongguk’s head at the mention of Taehyung’s name, and he knows he needs to find the older boy quickly. He can’t be sure if people knew about their relationship,
whether Taehyung had said anything or not. His phone goes off, and he sighs in relief, knowing Taehyung had texted. No one else bothered.

He slips his phone out of his pocket, running his finger over the screen to remove the smudge on the corner of the glass, before unlocking it and opening his messaging app.

_I unread message from taehyung_

Jeongguk smiles, despite everything that had happened this morning. He clicks on it, and sees all the pictures Taehyung had taken of the two of them together in the hotel. His smile melts off, wondering why Taehyung had sent the photos again. Then he notices that the pictures hadn’t just been sent to him. It had been sent to two hundred other contacts. Which was approximately all of Bangtan’s graduating class.

Jeongguk’s blood chills, and he stops in his tracks. There’s a new message that pops up.

_won the bet! and got a little extra on the side ;)_

Jeongguk’s hand goes limp, and the phone almost drops from his slackened grip. Taehyung had told him about the bet. He had said it was over. That it didn’t matter anymore. _So why…?_

“Guess you’re that desperate, aren’t you, whore?” Jeongguk stumbles forward as someone slams into him from behind, hissing the words as they walk past. Jeongguk’s entire body is burning, and he can feel himself going into shock.

“Jeongguk…”

Jeongguk’s eyes snap up, and his stomach swirls with a disgusting mixture of relief and unadulterated fear.

“Taehyung.”
There’s a chill that crawls up Taehyung’s spine as he stares at Jeongguk from across the hall. It almost feels like they’re facing off, but there’s no fight. Jeongguk looked distressed, confused, like all the fight had left his body, and his eyes are watery, pleading.

There’s a clamor behind him, and suddenly Mark and Jinyoung are at his side, throwing their arms around him and whooping.

“Look at our champ!” Mark bellows, shaking Taehyung, but he doesn’t even register it, just letting his body be throttled as he stares at Jeongguk. He’s not quite sure if he can breathe at the moment.

Yoongi had gotten the text too, sent from Taehyung’s phone, though Taehyung hadn’t been able to find it yesterday. When he saw the pictures, and who the pictures had been sent to, he’d had the sudden urge to vomit. He had raced through the halls, trying to find Jeongguk, to take him somewhere and explain, but there were too many people here.

“Didn’t think you’d make it, but you went above and beyond this time, Taehyungie,” Jinyoung says proudly, clapping him on the back. He points at Jeongguk. “This was a slippery one.”

Taehyung clamps his teeth down on his bottom lip, and he can taste the iron on his tongue. He needs to stop this. He needs to tell the truth. Protect Jeongguk.

“I-is it true? Taehyung?” Jeongguk asks shakily, looking like he’s unravelling at the seams. They’re making a scene, he knows, because everyone’s crowding around them now, watching like it’s some sick, twisted drama on television, and not someone’s fucking life.

“It was all fake?”

“You have a duty to yourself, and the family. It’s time for you to grow up.”

Namjoon’s words resound harshly in his head, and he winces. He finds himself nodding, and he can’t be sure why. Why am I doing this? Jeongguk lets out a choked sob.

“You’re lying. You’re l-lying.”
It’s the hope in Jeongguk’s eyes that kill Taehyung. That shining hope, getting duller and duller by the second. He wishes he had enough faith in them as Jeongguk had in him.

“If the media got a wind of him and your relationship, they’d tear him to shreds. He wouldn’t last a day in our world. And it’s only going to be a trainwreck. Is that what you want?”

Deep down inside, he knows Namjoon is right. And if he twists this enough in his head, he can pretend this is for Jeongguk’s own good. His protection, his well being. He scans the crowd, and everyone’s eyes are on him, waiting for a response. It’s oddly symbolic. Just like Namjoon had said; everyone was looking at him. He had a reputation to uphold. He needed to grow up.

This wasn’t the way he wanted it to go. He wished he could explain everything, tell Jeongguk how much he loves him, how much it hurts. His eyes catch on a figure standing in the crowd-- Minah. She’s smirking, holding Taehyung’s phone in her hands. Karma.

He didn’t want Jeongguk to be the center of more unwanted attention, more ridicule and hate. And yet here they were. And Taehyung knows there’s no going back from this.

He can feel the weight of peer pressure weighing down his tongue as he speaks. “It was all a game, Jeongguk,” he says, voice faltering, and vision blurring at the corners. He doesn’t want to look at Jeongguk, he’s a coward, he knows. But he can’t take his eyes off the younger boy-- the boy he loves so much. He wishes he could show Jeongguk his heart, how much it aches, how sick this makes him. He needs Jeongguk to know that this isn’t a game. That everything he says is a lie.

But there are tears streaking down Jeongguk’s face, cheeks flushed with shame, embarrassment, the heated glares thrown his way. His shoulders are hunched, just like that day on the roof. The first time they had really talked. Where did it go wrong?

“You should learn the rules quickly.”

Taehyung has never hated himself more than in that moment, watching Jeongguk’s face crumble in betrayal, hurt, and standing rooted to the spot as the younger boy turns on his heels and runs down the hall, pushing past the crowd of people and disappearing around a corner. No amount of self hatred could quantify it. He felt like he’d ripped his skin off and set himself on fire.

“That was cool, man,” Mark says, shaking Taehyung by the shoulders, but Taehyung’s still staring at
the spot where Jeongguk had last stood. He takes a deep breath, looking up and blinking the tears away.

“You need to grow up.”

“I know, right?” Taehyung says, forcing himself to smirk and get dragged away. As he passes the cheering crowd, he locks eyes with Yoongi, and all he sees is disappointment. He looks away.

♥

“Hello, is this Jeon Jeongguk?”

Jeongguk takes a deep breath, trying to steady his voice before speaking. “Yes.”

His feet dangle precariously off the edge of the roof. He’d skipped class today, for the first time in his life, deciding instead to sit on the roof. There was something almost soothing about the wind blowing against him, cooling his heated skin. He was sweaty from the running and the panic attack, and he’d just managed to calm down his heart. If he doesn’t think about what happened, he can almost pretend everything is normal.

But his arms sting from how hard he’d scratched them. There's blood under his nails, and his jaw feels sore from how hard he’d ground his teeth together. His vision has spots, and he isn’t quite sure what was real and what isn’t. There was no room for forgetting. He was perched on the building ledge, which probably wasn’t the best place in his current state of mind or body, but he had nothing left to lose.

He’d spent a good amount of time crying and screaming, and now it seemed like there were simply no tears left to shed. *Dry sobbing was the most painful, because that’s when you knew everything had gone so far to shit that you’d cried more than your body was equipped to handle.*

“This is child support services. I’ve been asked to contact you and inform you of the most recent development,” The lady’s voice is cold, clipped, all business. It’s a welcome reprieve from the snide remarks, the sneers. At least the lady wasn’t judging him.

“Park Sojin is dead. And her mother has been arrested on homicide charges, as well as for possession methamphetamines and cocaine.”
“What?” Jeongguk whispers, and any inkling of strength he had left in his body just evaporates. There’s nothing left.

“Her brain continued hemorrhaging, and the doctors couldn’t stop the bleeding. There was too much damage, and she died about an hour ago. My condolences, Jeongguk. I’m contacting you now to inform you of your options, since you’re turning of age in a few months, and you’ve received a scholarship to Stanford Uni—”

Jeongguk doesn’t hear anything else. He slackens his grip on the phone, and it slips out of his hand. He watches blankly as the tiny electronic device drops past the six stories and makes a sickening crunch on the pavement below. He wonders if he should follow after.

♥

Maybe in another universe, they were meant to be. Being together in this lifetime wasn’t their fate. Maybe Taehyung was too romantic, but he could feel the ache in his chest, a gaping hole that Jeongguk had filled, and taken with him when he’d run. It was a stupid idea, maybe, but Taehyung believed they were soulmates. There was something there, something almost like magic. What else could have brought two such different people together? To love, to learn. The universe had given him a gift, the gift of Jeongguk’s presence, his light, and Taehyung had decided he wasn’t worth it. He’d given all that up. He was weak, a coward. But next time, he wouldn’t be.

I promise you, Jeongguk. In the next life, in whatever universe, I’ll find you. And when I do, I won’t ever let you go. I’ll be brave for you.

Chapter End Notes

so this is what happened That Day. of course this isnt the only reason why kook is fucked up but it's what starts the spiral down. more to be revealed in the next chapter which i will put up september 6th which is my birthday hahu i want nothing more than to bring you pain on my special day :)))))) as always you can find me on tumblr!
Intermission

Chapter Notes

everywhere pain. a cornucopia of pain. everything pain. just. pain.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

That day had been the first time Taehyung had to think of the company. The first time he’d given up what he wanted and loved the most, to make others satisfied. All his life leading up to that moment– he could only fool himself into thinking that he existed in his own bubble for so long.

The day he had to let Jeongguk go had been the first time Taehyung learned what the word sacrifice meant. And since then, he’d only gotten more and more intimate with that word, the hollowness in his chest, the knee-jerk reaction he now had when faced with a decision where he had to choose between his comfort, his sanity, and the good of the company.

He lets out a shaky breath, vision burning with unshed tears, and he presses the palms of his hands to his eyes. They hadn’t spoken for days since that night, and Taehyung thought he could get over it, but one look at Jeongguk today at the meeting had him spiralling down again. They’d managed to keep things civil, engaging in conversation, enough to fool Hoseok, but Taehyung had slipped out early, unable to take being in the same room as Jeongguk for too long. I feel like I’m suffocating.

Taehyung exhales sharply, walking towards the full wall window of his office, and staring out at the busy Seoul traffic below. Not a day went by when he didn’t wonder what would have happened if he hadn’t been such a coward. If he’d just been honest. Maybe Jeongguk would have understood. Maybe he would have understood that it had been painfully clear what Taehyung’s priorities would have to be. It might not have hurt any less, but at least they would have been able to communicate.

But Jeongguk was right– Taehyung was a coward. He couldn’t tell Jeongguk back then. He couldn’t have. How could he? How could he explain? Would Jeongguk understand now? Ten years later?

“You’re an idiot,” Taehyung whispers to himself. He wonders whether Namjoon would have have approved of a relationship now.

“Do you honestly think he’d fit into this world? If the media got a wind of him, they’d tear him to shreds. He wouldn’t last a day in our world.”
Taehyung lets out a bitter laugh. Jeon Jeongguk had merged so seamlessly into Korea’s high society scene, poised, elegant, charming, intelligent, and no one could touch him. He was powerful by his own right, respected, and carried himself like he belonged among the wealthy, like he’d been born into it.

Jeongguk seemed a better fit into Taehyung’s world than Taehyung himself. Especially with what had happened two nights ago, Jeongguk had proved how selfish, how deluded, how twisted he was, and it was a perfect fit for the high society world. Taehyung knew too many people like that. He didn’t think Jeongguk could end up being one of those people who Taehyung had grown to despise the most.

In the back of his mind, he knows it’s partially his fault. He’d been tactless, cruel, insensitive. Jeongguk had trusted him, and it had been more than Taehyung could bear. But he also knows that he didn’t deserve to be treated like this. Ten years was a long time. It should have been enough time for them to think, to cool off, to heal.

Taehyung had accepted his role in hurting Jeongguk, and he was getting his karma, tenfold. He’d locked away his heart, his emotions, for work, for the good of the company. The only person he could ever open up to was Jeongguk. And he had been stupid to think he should bare his heart again, after everything, and expect to get out unscathed.

Taehyung is angry. He can’t remember being so angry in his life. He feels tricked, used. And the worst part is that he liked it. He liked the pain, the way Jeongguk filled him up just right, took him to the edge and back, made him feel for the first time in so long because he’d had to keep his emotions at bay for years. He’d had to keep himself detached to make it hurt less.

He’d always been weaker than Namjoon. He wasn’t born to lead. He gave his heart out too easily. It had taken him a long time to cut himself off, force himself not to wear his heart on his sleeve. Not to trust. But one look at Jeongguk and those years of detachment just flew out the window, and he’d just thrown himself at him.

If given the choice, he’d probably do it again in a heartbeat, and it’s almost disgusting how weak he is for Jeon Jeongguk. But he won’t. He won’t let himself. Not unless Jeongguk got on his damn knees. Taehyung won’t be pushed around like this. He won’t let Jeongguk play his stupid games anymore. And he knows deep down Jeongguk isn’t getting any sort of satisfaction from them either.

Taehyung likes to think he knows Jeongguk. Of course he’d changed, they both had, Jeongguk more so, but underneath all the anger and hurt and the brick walls thrown up, Jeongguk was the same person in high school-- vulnerable, lonely, hurting. Taehyung feels foolish for wanting to try to ease
some of that again, and getting hurt in the process. He doesn’t want to be an ass, but he won’t be a doormat either.

His office phone rings suddenly, and he’s jolted out of his thoughts.

“Hello?” he murmurs into the receiver.

“Dr. Jeon is here to see you,” his secretary says over the line, and his blood chills. For a moment, he considers lying and telling the woman that he’s busy, because the last thing he wants to do is be alone with Jeongguk right now.

“Send him in.”

Taehyung can feel the nausea churning in his stomach, a sick kind of dread that weighs down his bones, and waits the few seconds it takes for Jeongguk to reach the door. He turns when he hears Jeongguk step inside, and curses himself for taking even a second to appreciate how beautiful the man is.

“Can I help you?” Taehyung asks, voice clipped, and trying very hard to keep the anxiety at bay.

Jeongguk just lets his eyes rake Taehyung’s form lazily, hands in his pockets. “You left early. I had to close the meeting alone,” He pauses, an icy smile on his lips. “Not that I can’t do it myself, but it would have been nice to have my co-chair there with me. Not very professional, Taehyung ssi.”

Taehyung doesn’t want to open his mouth, for fear of what will come out if he doesn’t collect his thoughts first. But Jeongguk takes the silence as guilt and continues.

“You’ve had a really bad track record with being professional, haven’t you, Taehyung ssi? Am I making you uncomfortable? Have I done something wrong?”

“You know exactly what you did,” Taehyung says, praying for his voice not to waver. He’d always been bad at personal confrontation, he was an emotional crier. He’d be damned if Jeongguk saw him cry today.
Jeongguk cocks his head to the side, smiling innocently, but there’s something twisted in his eyes. “I can’t recall,” he shrugs. “Unless, of course, you meant a couple nights ago, when you begged me to fuck you?” Taehyung winces, heart hammering in his chest. “The way I see it, I was just giving you what you wanted. You’ve always been very good at getting what you want, haven’t you?”

Taehyung’s vision blurs red, frustration and anger boiling in his blood, and he hears the slap before he feels it, his fingertips burning hot where they had met with Jeongguk’s cheek, and the regret punches the air from his throat, but he won’t apologize. He has a lot of things to be sorry for, but this is not one of them. Jeongguk’s head is turned with the force of the slap, but he keeps his face flat and he flexes his jaw as he turns his head back towards Taehyung, eyes flashing.

“Want? You think I always get what I want?” Taehyung asks, skin burning as tears blur the edges of his vision. He feels like he’s going to be sick, but he needs to get the words out while they’re on the tip of his tongue. He needs Jeongguk to listen. Jeongguk opens his mouth to retort, but Taehyung cuts him off.

“Shut your fucking mouth Jeon Jeongguk or I swear to god I’ll shut it for you,” Taehyung hisses, anger boiling white hot under his skin, and he’s beyond the point of censoring himself. “You’ve fucking made your feelings clear so just shut up for once and let me fucking talk, alright?” Jeongguk opens his mouth in shock, but closes it when he realizes Taehyung is serious.

“Do you honestly think my life has been some fucking walk in the park?” Jeongguk meets his gaze evenly, but there’s something else there, behind the ice. “I’ve lost people too, Jeongguk. You’re not the only person in this fucking world who’s lost someone!”

The words feel like a torrent of emotion, rushing out, and he can’t quite control what he’s saying. “I’ve spent my whole life wondering who I can trust. Who cares about me for me, and not for my money. And you know what? Most of the time it doesn’t even fucking matter. Because most of the people in my life only care about what’s in my bank account, but I have to sit there and smile and laugh with them anyways.” Taehyung lets out a bitter laugh, eyes stinging and throat raw.

“It’s really funny, you know? I don’t matter. These people see right through me, right into company stocks, the company profits, mergers, the business. I’m just a figurehead to them, easily replaceable. Doesn’t matter to them whether I’m in this office or out on the streets because it’s the company that matters.” He rubs at the tears streaming down his cheeks roughly with the back of his hand, pain pulsing in his chest.

“You know what’s just as bad as being completely alone? Being surrounded by people who don’t give a shit about you, being alone in a room full of people who pretend they’re your friends. Smiling and pretending that you’re not weak, that you’re not tired. That you’re not all alone and hurting inside. Do you know how much that makes you want to hate people? How much I despise
practically everyone I know, but I have to keep smiling and pretending everything is okay?”

The sobs wrench themselves from Taehyung’s throat. “My whole life is a fucking lie, Jeongguk. I’ve never been able to stop and think about my feelings or what I want for the last ten years because they don’t matter! I don’t matter! The company does. No one gives a shit about me.

“My parents? Dead. My brother? Fucking dead, Jeongguk. The only people I could ever think to trust, who genuinely care about me—” The truth of the situation hits him full force then, and he has to stop for a moment just to breathe. “I trusted you, Jeongguk. You’re the only person I ever let in like that. The only person I’ve ever really loved like that. And I thought…” Taehyung exhales shakily, raking a hand through his hair and trying to gather his words.

“Out of all the fucking people I’ve met in my life, I’ve only ever known a few truly genuine people. I don’t trust people because they don’t care enough to show me the same treatment! You were one of those people I trusted. I’ve never been able to show anyone my real feelings, how much I’m always hurting inside, but I wanted to show you. I wanted to let you in, and I know I fucked up before but I wanted to try again, but it’s just really shitty right now because I’m trying to be vulnerable for the first time in a long time but you’re just spitting it all back in my face!

“I thought we could have a chance. I could just not give a fuck about you, you know? I could totally ignore everything and just not give a shit about you and your’re feelings, but that’s not what I want to do! I wanted to fix things, explain. Apologize to you! Because I care about you! But you won’t let me. You obviously don’t care about me. You make it so damn difficult.” He looks up at the ceiling, trying to furiously blink away the tears, and he lets out a strangled laugh, completely fed up and drained.

“You’ve made your point, Jeongguk! I fucking get it! You’re hurt, I’m sorry! But I’m not playing this sick fucking game with you anymore, I’m just fucking not! I’m not gonna let you walk all over me, so if you think I’m just gonna sit around and let you treat me this way, you can go fuck yourself. I hate you, I fucking hate what you’ve become and I’m not dealing with it anymore!”

The fury burns white hot in Taehyung’s veins, and his stomach churns. He knows he’s going to be sick when this is all over, but he can’t bring himself to regret the things he’d said. He doesn’t want to even look at Jeongguk, but he wants to gauge how he’s feeling. He’d been uncharacteristically silent this whole time, and Taehyung doesn’t know whether he wants to hear what’s going through Jeongguk’s mind at this moment.

“It’s always been about you though, hasn’t it?” Jeongguk says, voice detached, but some of the bitterness slips through the cracks in his voice. Taehyung narrows his eyes at him, chest heaving because he can’t quite breathe. “Always.”
“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Even when you think it doesn’t, the world always revolves around you. You think you’ve been through shit? Have you even stopped to consider what I’ve gone through? Not just the shit you pulled, but everything else?” For the second time, Taehyung sees Jeongguk angry. The ice had given way to the fire.

“Sojin died that day, Taehyung! The only two people who I cared about, the two people I thought cared about me, I lost. On the same fucking day. That morning, at school, I was trying to find you because I just wanted you to tell me that everything would be okay. But then everything went to shit instead. Do you really know what that’s like?”

Taehyung winces, because this isn’t just anger. There’s a silent plea in his voice, a clawing desperation, and his throat constricts. “H-how could I have known that, Jeongguk?” He won’t let himself feel guilty for this, he’s spent enough time taking the blame for things he didn’t do.

“You couldn’t possibly have known!” Jeongguk yells, throwing his hands up in frustration. “How could you? You’re so fucking self-centered, you couldn’t have known unless it hit you in the fucking face. Do you know how many times I wanted to die? How many times I’ve tried? And the worst part was knowing no one would care if I did. I have absolutely no one, Taehyung.

“You think you could come back from something like that and be in one piece? You think you’d be quite right in the fucking mind after life fucked you over so many times you can’t tell up from down?”

Jeongguk is visibly trembling, and Taehyung’s head throbs with the sudden confession. “I loved you, Taehyung. Hell, maybe I still fucking do. Maybe I’m still in love with you. Because you’re the only person so far who hasn’t fucking died on me, and I’m trying to hold on.” Jeongguk tugs at his hair, the strands coming loose from his usually impeccable style. He laughs, and the sound is so deranged, so livid, a shiver wracks through Taehyung’s body.

“I want you to suffer so much, Taehyung. I want you to feel what I’m feeling inside, and understand, but I won’t, because I wouldn’t wish that kind of suffering on anyone. You think being alone in a room full of people is bad? Try being alone in a locked room all your life. At least when you speak, someone will hear you! I could fucking scream at the top of my lungs, bang on the fucking doors and no one would give a shit!”
“That’s not true!” Taehyung raises his voice, and the strain of it in his ears makes him wince. He reaches his hand out on instinct, wanting to touch Jeongguk, comfort him, but Jeongguk jerks back, noticing the movement, and Taehyung brings his hand down, rejection burning in his gut like acid. “That’s not true,” he repeats, softer. “I’m here, Jeongguk. I’m here and I want to listen. I want to be there for you, but you have to stop this!”

“You’re lying,” Jeongguk hisses. “You’re always lying, Taehyung! Everyone’s always fucking lying, right to my face!”

“I’m not lying right now, Jeongguk, and if you’d just shut up and listen, just this once, you’d know-”

“I don’t want to hear anything you have to say! I know what I’m gonna hear and it’s not going to make anything better, Taehyung! My life isn’t sunshine and rainbows,” Jeongguk drops his head, and looks up. The vacancy in his eyes makes Taehyung stutter for breath.

“You want to know why I became a cardiac surgeon?” Taehyung stays silent, and Jeongguk continues. “Because I don’t have a heart. Maybe you tore it out, maybe I did it myself. But I don’t have one anymore. So I fix other people’s hearts instead. I thought maybe if I did it enough, I’d feel whole again. That I’d get some sort of salvation from this living hell. But I’m still here. There’s no fixing this.

“Maybe I’m lashing out because it makes me feel, you know? You’re right, I’m not getting any sort of satisfaction from this, but at least it makes me feel something.”

“Then you’re a monster,” The words slip out of Taehyung’s mouth uninhibited. He can’t stand to listen to any more of this. Everything in his body aches, and he just wants this to end. “You don’t get your salvation because you can’t be saved.”

Jeongguk lets out a hollow laugh. “Probably not. So stop trying.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay so let me get really sappy for a second here in the notes. First off I want to really thank the people who have made SMH go from my incoherent ramblings into a real story-- Dani, the best big sis and the most enthusiastic president of #teamtae, thank you
for always keeping the characters grounded; Tiffany, holy shit the most hardcore and skilled editor ever, truly amazing, your editing powers have no rival; and Jo, for being so supportive of the AU, giving feedback and critiquing it, always willing to talk about ideas and help flesh out the AU! I couldn't have possibly done this without these four peeps, so they deserve so much credit. Second, I want to thank everyone who has been reading this story, giving kudos (I have over 900+ kudos wtf????? sweet mother of all things holy), commented (I usually make it a point to respond to every comment but I've been so busy these days that I couldn't, and I'm so sorry about that, but know that I've read every single message, and I'm so grateful for the support), and even sent in questions about the AU to my blog. I'm always so pleasantly surprised by the questions that people have about this story, so thank you a million times <33 I'm really blessed to have this platform to write and express myself through stories, and it's made better knowing that others enjoy them! I'm really overwhelmed by the birthday love and messages, and I just wanted to take this time to thank everyone, and know that I couldn't have had a better day!!! Thank you so much <33333
Jeongguk takes a deep breath. He’s standing on the sidewalk, right outside the rebuilt Hyunsik Orphanage-- renamed Hyunsik Children’s Home according to the cheerful sign at the front-- and if he didn’t know better, he’d think he was in a different place altogether.

Gone is the dead grass and wire fencing, the peeling coats of paint, the splintered wooden planks of the patio. Now, the lawn is sprawling with bright green grass and colorful flower beds, bikes and soccer balls scattered around. There’s a small vegetable garden in the corner, labelled in shaky, childlike scrawl. The entire house had undergone a renovation, the outside painted a cheerful yellow, and it seemed like the old house had been torn down completely, replaced with a building so full of warmth and vibrancy.

Jeongguk doesn’t want to go inside. He doesn’t want to walk the halls he’d promised himself he’d never find himself in again. He can almost hear the screaming, the crying. See the blood. He clenches his fists to keep his fingers from shaking too much.

He’d avoided any visit to the home in the last few months, afraid, and not ready to face all the memories. They haunted his dreams-- his nightmares -- for years after he’d left. They were the reason he couldn’t sleep so often at night, spent hours hunched over the toilet, dry heaving until he felt like he had nothing left inside his body.

No, I’m not starting this again, Jeongguk reminds himself, trying to stamp away any feeling of an approaching panic attack. Do it for Jimin.

He’d been meaning to visit the child for a while, but had been too cowardly, but today he was determined to do his check up, and face one of his biggest fears.

A dry sob threatens at his throat when he takes a step forward, past the threshold, and makes his way slowly towards the steps. He climbs them slowly, his legs feeling like they’ve been weighed down by lead, but he forces himself to go forward.

The door-- painted a bright and vibrant red-- is slightly ajar, so Jeongguk opens it fully and lets himself in. He braces himself for the onslaught of the images permanently etched in his brain, and he curses himself for his photographic memory, because that means remembering the bad just as clearly as the good.
But inside the house, there’s no resemblance to the interior of his childhood-- the foyer and living area are wide and open, with calm blue walls covered with children’s drawings in marker and crayon. There’s a massive TV in one corner, playing Cinderella, and there are five or so kids sprawled out on the many couches surrounding it, engrossed in the movie and eating popcorn, paying no attention to Jeongguk.

He gulps, remembering how the living room had always been off limits to everyone, lined with alcohol bottles and whatever drugs the ahjumma could get her hands on.

“Oh, you must be Dr. Jeon!” a cheery voice comes from behind Jeongguk, and he turns around to see a smiling woman come out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on a towel with the scent of cinnamon trailing behind her.

“Uh… the door was open so I… let myself in,” Jeongguk manages to say. There’s a sting of tears burning at the back of his eyelids, because for a fleeting moment he wished it was Sojin coming out of the kitchen, smiling at him. *She would have loved this*, Jeongguk thinks with a jolt.

The lady clicks her tongue in annoyance. “Youngjae probably left it open, that boy always has his head in the clouds,” she says, annoyed, but there’s no real malice in her voice, just fondness. “You’re here to see Jimin, right?”

Jeongguk just nods, not quite trusting himself to speak. “He’s in the backyard, he’s there with--”

“I’ll go myself, I don’t want to burden you,” Jeongguk says quickly. He doesn’t want anyone to be around if he really does have a breakdown. The woman nods, and steps back into the kitchen.

Jeongguk feels like he might need to talk himself up for a moment before going any further, because going to the back door meant walking down the hall and passing his old bedroom. *Stop being so damn dramatic, Jeon,* he chastises himself.

Shaking his head, he steps into the hallway. Much like everything in this house, the hall had completely changed as well. It had always been a dark and mildly terrifying walk for Jeongguk to make every day, not knowing whether the ahjumma was going pop out at any moment. He tenses, half expecting to get dragged by his hair like he used to, and it takes all his willpower to not sprint out and never look back. His body flashes hot, remembering how he’d stumbled home every day from school, bag heavy with books, shoulders heavy from taunts from his schoolmates, bruises and cuts if he wasn’t so lucky.
He wishes he wasn’t so weak, but the argument with Taehyung-- could he call it an argument? He’d just yelled too many things he wished he hadn’t said out loud-- had left him drained, vulnerable, and feeling altogether shitty. It had never occurred to him that Taehyung could be hurt by the situation. That Jeongguk could have crossed a line, and now he doesn’t know who’s right and who’s wrong.

But the walls in the hallway are white, strung with cardstock banners and more drawings. All the doors had been painted cheery colors, with no rhyme or reason, but it all seemed to come together in a sort of whimsical order, it felt like a real home. It felt like Taehyung.

Jeongguk pauses at the door he’d trudged himself through so many times growing up. The door had been painted a bright apple green color, and there was a sign hung on it, reading *Bogum and Yugyeom’s Room!!!* with two little stick figure drawings in the corner, smiling and holding hands.

He lets out a shaky breath, and he resists the urge to cry. Every fiber of his being feels so relieved, almost weightless, and it’s a breathtaking feeling. Jeongguk would go through hell a million times if that meant that these kids could have the life they do now. He aches for all the people who’d suffered with him, and he doesn’t know where any of them are right now, but he imagines they’d be happy, if they could see this.

For a fleeting moment, Jeongguk feels happy too, and he basks in the feeling for a moment, until he hears a squealing peel of laughter echo through the hall, and he turns his attention to the back door. It sounds like Jimin, and he reminds himself to focus, since he’s here on business, not a trip down memory lane.

He takes a deep breath, trying to steady himself, and walks the rest of the way down the hall. He pushes the door open and begins to say Jimin’s name, only to stop in his tracks.

“TaeTae hyung!” Jimin squeals, perched on a bright yellow picnic table, while Taehyung crouches down in front of him, squishing Jimin’s cheeks between his hands.

“I’m gonna make your face into a pancake,” Taehyung says seriously, moving his palms around and contorting Jimin’s face, much to the amusement of the little boy. “And then I’m gonna eat you.”

“Don’t eat me! I’m not a pancake!” he wails, and Taehyung leans forward to bite playfully at his nose as Jimin dissolves into a fit of giggles.
“Pancake Jiminie, I’m gonna eat your nose!”

Jeongguk watches, skin uncomfortably warm, as the two play around, completely unaware of his presence. He’s not quite sure how to feel.

Jimin finally manages to wrench himself free, grabbing Taehyung’s wrists and pulling them away. He beams, but his face drops when Taehyung winces. He brings Taehyung’s wrists up to eye level, inspecting the chaffing red skin.

“Did hyungie get an owie?” he asks, voice high and thick with concern. Taehyung’s face tinges a little pink as he splutters, and Jeongguk imagines he himself must look the same way, because he knows exactly how Taehyung got those marks, Jeongguk gripping him too hard when they’d fucked, and it makes the guilt stab hot in his stomach. He doesn’t want to think about how Taehyung had felt around him, how he’d cried out so perfectly, about how disgusting Jeongguk felt jerking himself off in the shower, trying in vain not to cry out Taehyung’s name when he came, just as the older had predicted.

“Uh... yeah,” Taehyung says.

Jimin gives the marks another once-over, before beaming. “Don’t worry, hyungie! Jiminie will kiss it better!” he exclaims proudly, before proceeding to litter small kisses all over the red skin, and Taehyung’s face goes from bewildered to amused.

When Jimin decides he’s done, he looks up, waiting for Taehyung’s approval. “Do you feel better now?”

Taehyung beams at him, and Jeongguk winces. His smile hadn’t changed a bit since high school, resembling something much like the shining sun, and it makes his heart lurch. He hadn’t seen that smile in years. He hadn’t been doing anything to give Taehyung a reason to smile anyways.

“All better!” he says in affirmation. “But you know,” Taehyung drawls with a mischievous smile on his face. “Hyungie has another owie.”

“What?” Jimin asks, eyes wide and alert.

Taehyung taps his cheek. “Right here. It hurts a lot.”
God, could he be more cheesy, Jeongguk bemoans. Jimin falls for it, though, kissing the skin enthusiastically.

“And here,” Taehyung points to his other cheek. Jimin kisses him obediently. He taps his nose. “Also here.”

Jimin leans in, then pauses, face scrunching. “Hyungie, you’re lying.”

Taehyung’s eyes widen. “I would never.”

Jimin points a finger at him accusingly. “Yes you are, yes you are! You just want all of my magic kisses!”

Taehyung breaks out into a grin and swoops Jimin into his arms. “You’re right, you caught me! I want all of Jiminie’s magic kisses!” he proclaims, before nipping at Jimin’s cheek and blowing a raspberry there as the kid flails around in his arms, squealing with glee. Taehyung goes to swing him in his arms and turns, stopping in his tracks when he notices Jeongguk standing at the door.

Jeongguk drops his gaze, embarrassed that he’d been caught staring.

“Dr. Jeon!” Jimin screams, wiggling his way out of Taehyung’s arms to run at him, latching himself onto Jeongguk’s leg.

“H-hey kiddo,” Jeongguk says, trying to compose himself, and Jimin raises his arms in a motion asking to be picked up. Jeongguk can’t help but comply, gathering the young boy in his arms, and smiling genuinely for the first time in a while.

“Dr. Jeon,” Jimin asks seriously, pressing his small hands to Jeongguk’s cheeks in a fashion much like Taehyung’s just moments earlier. Jeongguk makes a noise of question, unable to be annoyed that Jimin is currently squishing his face so hard his lips pucker like a fish. “Do I look like a pancake? Would you eat me?”

“Uh…” Jeongguk’s eyes drift to Taehyung without thinking, and he looks just as uncomfortable as Jeongguk feels, but he just pushes the feeling aside. Jimin would definitely notice something was off.
“If you were a pancake, you’d be the cutest pancake ever. And I wouldn’t want to eat that.”

Jimin’s face breaks out into a grin, eyes disappearing from how hard he’s smiling, and it makes up for how ridiculous Jeongguk feels saying the words out loud in front of Taehyung.

“Dr. Jeon, you’re my favoritest person in the whole world!” Jimin cheers.

“Hey!” Taehyung says, approaching. Jeongguk gulps, not knowing what to do in this proximity, because Taehyung is so achingly beautiful, it’s unfair. Everything about this situation is unfair. “I thought I was your favorite person. Traitor.”

“But you both are my favoritest people!” Jimin explains. “You should get married to each other and it’ll be perfect!” he squeals, eyes dancing with delight at the idea. Jeongguk’s eyes widen in panic that surges through him, too quick to mask. “We can play house right now! We can have the wedding!”

“T-that’s not why I’m here, Jimin,” Jeongguk says quickly, because the last thing he wants is to pretend to get married to Taehyung. Jimin’s face drops down into a pout. “I came to check up on you. Make sure you’re staying the healthiest pancake around, yeah?”

Jimin’s mood shifts back into delight. “Okay!” he chirps, and Jeongguk wants to sob in relief. He carries Jimin inside the house, into his room, and finishes the check up without a hitch, letting Jimin chatter about his new action figures, and how his TaeTae hyung got him a new snapback. Jeongguk listens attentively, nodding when necessary. When he starts to pack up, Jimin runs off, having heard Cinderella playing in the living and itching to go watch it with his friends. Jeongguk tries his best not to laugh as Jimin practically trips over himself trying to out of the room, and turns to his bag, packing up his equipment.

“How is he?”

Jeongguk turns around to see Taehyung leaning against the doorway. He’s got his arms crossed, shoulders hunched a little, and he looks small and vulnerable. Much like Jeongguk feels. He doesn’t know how he’s supposed to talk to Taehyung anymore. He’s not particularly sympathetic, but he’s so tired of making constant jabs. It only leaves him drained, and there’s no satisfaction in it.

“How is he?”

“Doing better than I thought,” Jeongguk says, unwinding the stethoscope from around where he’d draped it around his neck and puts it carefully in his bag. “I don’t want to jinx it or anything, but he’s
doing really well.”

Taehyung sighs in relief, and Jeongguk bites his lip. “I’m glad to hear that. Really, I just--”

“The disease isn’t going to cure itself, obviously. He’s still going to need surgery when he’s an adult. We have to focus on prevention and reduction of any cardiac episodes that may happen in the future, so we need to keep him constantly monitored, just in case.”

Taehyung gulps and nods. “I understand. I’ll make sure nothing happens.”

They stand there in silence for a moment, and Jeongguk is itching to leave, because he really doesn’t want to be around Taehyung right now. He doesn’t want to see him, or think about him. And he definitely doesn’t want to consider what Taehyung had said yesterday.

“Jeongguk, about what I said--”

“I don’t want to talk about it, Taehyung ssi,” Jeongguk cuts him off. Taehyung frowns.

“But we need to talk about this, you can’t keep running from--”

“I heard you loud and clear,” Jeongguk says, forcing himself to keep his voice even and neutral.

You’re a monster.

You can’t be saved.

It’s not like the words are some sort of epiphany, since Jeongguk had considered them, processed them, and internalized them, long before Taehyung could say them out loud. But it fucking hurt hearing them, coming out of someone else’s mouth, out of Taehyung’s mouth, and he just wants to ignore all of this, because then maybe he then could have some sort of peace.

“Jeongguk, can you stop being such a stubborn ass for once in your goddamn--”
“Why do you keep trying?” Jeongguk blurts out. “I told you to stop. Why don’t you just fucking let it go? You said you hated me right? So act like it! Why can’t you just leave me alone like everybody else?”

Jeongguk regrets the words the minute he’s said them, because it’s too lucid of a moment. He curses himself for being so weak, for letting all this slip. Now Taehyung knows too much.

“Do you think that’ll fix anything? Do you think if I drop it, we’ll both magically feel better? Cuz I can promise you we won’t.”

Jeongguk clenches his jaw, grinding his teeth together. Taehyung straightens up and steps closer.

“I want to apologize. For lying in front of everyone that day. I didn’t lie to you, I lied to them. Because everything I told you was the truth, but everything I told them was bullshit. But I was a coward. I didn’t try to explain myself to you afterwards, I was too terrified. I’d already fucked up twice, and I didn’t think you’d ever forgive me a third time. I did everything wrong, and I’m so sorry. I’m sorry I ever let you think none of it was real, that I didn’t love you enough, that I didn’t care. I still care.”

Taehyung sighs, rubbing his eye with his palm in a motion of exhaustion before looking up again, meeting Jeongguk’s gaze evenly. “But that’s all I have to apologize for. I will take responsibility for what I did, and how it must have made you feel back then, or still feel now.”

Jeongguk gulps, throat tight. He so badly wants to walk out the door, ignore the words, keep being angry and frustrated. “You think it’s that simple?”

“Maybe not. But you’re not letting me try and help make things better, Jeongguk. And that’s on you,” Taehyung sighs again, and Jeongguk notes the darkness under his eyes, the tired droop of his shoulders. “I don’t expect you to forgive me. But I have to know I apologized.”

He steps back, and Jeongguk lets himself breathe. “And I’d be stupid to expect that you’d apologize. But know that unless you do, I won’t forgive you either.”

And Jeongguk doesn’t know why those last words knock the wind out of him, but they do, and he fights the nausea churning in his stomach. Maybe he’d gotten used to the idea that Taehyung would let everything go, that it wouldn’t matter what Jeongguk did, because it wouldn’t be as bad as what
Taehyung had done. They’d be even.

But Taehyung had apologized, and that threw him off. They weren’t really even.

“I have another appointment to get to, so if you'll excuse me,” Jeongguk says tersely, placing the rest of his things into his bag, brushing past Taehyung and out the door.

♥

Jeongguk considered himself a master of avoidance. It was easier to pretend problems didn’t exist, brush them off, and keep moving forward. That way he didn’t have to think. He could pretend everything was okay, that his hands weren’t always shaking, that there wasn’t a gaping void in his chest that left him constantly heaving for breath.

Avoiding Taehyung in the beginning had been relatively easy. Avoiding Taehyung when he was less than twenty feet away from him was damn near impossible. But in a twisted way, it was better. It was better to have Taehyung close by, invading his space, and Jeongguk could lash out, and everything was safe. Because in his mind, nothing he did could be as terrible as what Taehyung had done. Everything was in his control.

But when he’s alone, Taehyung invades his thoughts. And with him somewhere on the other side of the world at a business conference (no Jeongguk didn’t ask, Hoseok had mentioned it in passing, Jeongguk didn’t care), it left Jeongguk to his own devices, to mull over the conversation-- the yelling match-- that they had, and what Taehyung had said. How painful everything was, how lonely he was, and how terrified that made him.

There was a thin line between love and hate, and Jeongguk is slowly starting to realize that he doesn’t quite know where he stands. He had figured, after all those years, he firmly hated Taehyung with all his being. But he made it so damn hard for Jeongguk to hate him, when he was constantly trying to apologize, take the higher ground. Maybe Jeongguk never hated him at all. Maybe Jeongguk loved Taehyung so much that finding out Taehyung didn’t love him back broke him, and it was easier to convince himself that he hated Taehyung, than to admit that after everything, he still cared. Because that was weakness. Jeongguk didn’t need weakness. He didn’t have time for it.

But he didn’t want to keep torturing himself like this either. He’d heard Taehyung come home last night, the familiar beeping of the automatic lock, the rustle of a suitcase. Jeongguk physically had to hold himself down to keep from getting up and going to Taehyung’s door. He wouldn’t know what to say.
I’m sorry.

I’m a monster.

I don’t deserve you or your forgiveness.

He doesn’t know if he can bring himself to say that. Because once he does, Taehyung will be gone. There would be nothing else to say. He’d lose Taehyung all over again. But deep down inside, Jeongguk knows that’s not a good enough excuse. He never really wanted to hurt Taehyung. But he had, deeply. And he had to fix it.

He couldn’t understand half the things Taehyung had told him. All he knew was that he needed to apologize, at least for the things he understood and knew he was responsible for. Maybe one day, he’d understand. Or maybe Taehyung wouldn’t want anything to do with him, and he’d never quite find out.

“Hey,” a voice interrupts his thoughts and Jeongguk almost jolts in his seat. He looks up to see Taehyung approaching his table at the restaurant and taking the seat next to him. Immediately a waiter is at his side, filling his glass with wine. Taehyung thanks the server graciously, and Jeongguk twists the cloth napkin in his lap.

“You’re early,” Taehyung notes, voice subdued, but trying very hard to sound light. Jeongguk knows it’s his fault. His fault for creating this mess. He’s responsible for the darkness under Taehyung’s eyes, the hesitant movements.

“I’m always early,” Jeongguk replies quietly, not daring to look up. If he does, then he’s probably going to blurt out something really stupid and botch the delicate almost-truce they’d seemed to form without even thinking.

“It’s a very Jeongguk thing to do,” Taehyung agrees, taking a sip of his wine.

What do you even know about me? Jeongguk thinks miserably. He wants to say this out loud but he censors himself.
“Thank you for agreeing to this, by the way,” Taehyung says, voice low. About a month ago, Hoseok had approached Jeongguk, asking if he would accompany Taehyung to a meeting with one of the board members of the private company that owned Hyunsik, along with a few other children’s homes in Seoul. Taehyung was trying to acquire the whole company, and wanted Jeongguk there to field any questions about his personal experience.

The last thing Jeongguk wanted to do was relive his memories growing up, but he figured it would bring to light the harsh living conditions, the negligence, and maybe, maybe, some of the kids might benefit from this.

“I know how sensitive of a subject this might be for y--”

“Hopefully I’ll be of some help,” Jeongguk cuts in tersely, not really wanting to talk about that with Taehyung in this moment. Taehyung purses his lips in obvious disappointment, but nods. The conversation fizzles when Taehyung turns his attention to the menu to order. They’d agreed to meet at one of the restaurants in their apartment building, and Jeongguk hopes he can slip out quickly after the meeting and just be alone at home.

The Director of Finance, Bang Sihyuk, arrives a few minutes late, much to Jeongguk’s chagrin.

“It’s pouring outside, you wouldn’t believe the traffic,” the man says, unbuttoning his coat, and they exchange introductions and handshakes before settling down to begin the meeting.

“Jeon Jeongguk, I’ve heard a lot about you,” Sihyuk says, smiling. He’s a portly man with a big smile, and narrow, shrewd eyes that contrast the rest of him.

Jeongguk’s eyes widen a fraction. “Oh?” He’d been mingling with Korean high society for a few years now, but it never failed to shock him how quickly his name and reputation got around. Going from a nobody to everyone’s favorite somebody was something he was still trying to get used to.

“Absolutely! You’re something of a miracle in our circles,” Sihyuk says, eyes focusing on the steak that’s focused in front of him. “Rags to riches and all that. I figured it was all just rumors, but my eyes do not deceive me.”

Jeongguk bites his lip and smiles politely, trying to ignore the slight irritation at the older man’s words. “Yes, well. Not everyone can be born into money, right. Some of us have to earn it.”
Si...yuk nods in jovial agreement, missing Jeongguk's jab. “Of course! The unlucky ones have to work for it, huh?” He laughs, and Jeongguk fights to keep the pleasant look plastered on his face, but he feels Taehyung tensing beside him.

“I wouldn’t necessarily consider myself unlucky. I love the work that I do, and I get to help a lot of people. I wouldn’t trade that for the world. And the money is just something that comes along with it,” Jeongguk says, forcing himself to keep his tone light. There's a pause as the waitstaff bring in their food.

Unlucky unlucky unlucky. Was that why everyone always left him?

“I can’t imagine being a doctor, truthfully,” Si...yuk continues, and Jeongguk cuts into his own meat with more force than necessary. “All the brutal hours. Your life practically revolves around the patients. I can’t imagine being at someone’s beck and call like some sort of servant, can you, Taehyung ssi?”

Jeongguk casts Taehyung a wary look, and the older man looks the picture of serenity. Jeongguk would buy it, if not for how hard he sees Taehyung grip the fork. “Si...yuk ssi. Didn’t you have a ruptured kidney last year?” he asks, voice conversational and light.

Sihyuk nods, forking mashed potatoes into his mouth.

“And if Dr. Kang hadn’t dropped everything during his vacation and come do an emergency surgery, you would have died, right?”

Jeongguk can’t help the way his mouth drops open in shock, and he closes it just as quickly. Si...yuk splutters from across the table, and Taehyung just smiles serenely.

“That’s enough small talk though. I really wanted to get down to the details of the takeover. Is that alright with you, Si...yuk ssi?” Taehyung asks evenly, and Jeongguk finds himself both grateful and in awe of how seamlessly Taehyung had handled the conversation.

“Oh yes,” Si...yuk says, wiping his mouth with his napkin, obviously grateful at the change of subject and doing a very poor job of concealing it. “Let’s talk about the little monsters.”

“What?” Jeongguk blurts out, unable to help himself. He can feel the anger boiling under his skin.
Taehyung throws him a warning look. He clears his throat. “I just meant-- could you elaborate on that?”

Sihyuk shrugs, taking a leisurely sip of his wine, and Jeongguk fights to keep from twitching his eye in annoyance. “They’re little heathens, all of them. Their parents didn’t want them for a reason right? So they dropped them in our laps. And none of them turn out right.”

White hot fury rushes through Jeongguk, and Taehyung throws him a worried glance.

“They all end up druggies, alcoholics, prostitutes. Nothing good ever comes of orphans,” Sihyuk says dismissively. “Truthfully, Taehyung ssi, I don’t know why you even bother. They’re all messed up in the head.”

Taehyung opens his mouth to respond, but Sihyuk continues, pointing at Jeongguk. “That’s what I meant when I said you’re a miracle, Jeongguk ssi. I don’t know how you didn’t end up on the streets.” Jeongguk doesn’t know either.

“Sihyuk ssi, that’s hardly fair,” Taehyung says, voice barely controlled. There’s a visible tension in his face, and Sihyuk seems to realize this. He leans back in his chair, throwing his hands up.

“I meant it as a compliment! Jeongguk ssi has a brain, unlike most of them. Knows how to use it too,” Sihyuk says, nodding to himself as though he’s proud of his words. He leans forward, eyes humorous. “But let’s be honest here. You can’t be quite right in the head either, right Jeongguk ssi?”

Jeongguk laughs, and it lets out some of the tension. He has the sudden urge to throw something, but stays still. He can feel Taehyung watching him carefully.

“You’d be right about that, Sihyuk ssi,” Jeongguk agrees, and he knows only Taehyung could ever hear the bitterness in his voice. He takes a bite of the steak, cooked to perfection, but it feels like cardboard in his mouth.

The rest of the meeting passes quickly, with Taehyung wrapping things up early. Jeongguk knows it’s for his benefit, and he’s grateful, and it mixes with the sickening guilt twisting his gut. The restaurant suddenly feels too small, and he keeps his eyes trained on the window, watching the rain pour on the street.
“It was a pleasure meeting you, Jeongguk ssi,” Sihyuk says as they all stand, and Jeongguk keeps his smile in place as he shakes the man’s hand.

“Likewise,” he says, the evenness of his voice not quite matching the churning in his stomach.

Taehyung watches the interaction closely, in awe of Jeongguk’s calm facade. He himself is burning with anger, but he knew he had to keep calm. It was another one of those things he hated about his life, the fakeness, the veneer smiles, having to keep calm no matter what people said or did. And some people felt like they could just say and do absolutely anything and not have to deal with the consequences.

“Taehyung ssi, until we meet again,” Sihyuk says, and Taehyung redirects his focus for a moment. Having to have physical contact with Sihyuk makes him feel sick, but business is business. “Hopefully the acquisition process will go smoothly from here.”

For that, at least, Taehyung is glad. He remembers the night when Jeongguk had come crying to him so many years ago, curling up into him in bed and talking to him about the horrors of living in Hyunsik.

“The orphanage is owned by a private company. They don’t have to follow any regulations they don’t set, so there’s a lot of stuff like this that happens in the system.”

“Well… what if someone else bought it? Someone nice.”

“That would be a dream come true. But it’s not going to happen… No one cares about orphans.”

He can’t imagine how Jeongguk must feel right now, but he’d made it his personal responsibility to do the best he could, show that someone did care.

“Jeongguk--” Taehyung starts, and looks up, but the words die on his tongue, because Jeongguk is gone.

Chapter End Notes
please take my offering of baby jimin to make up for the angst fest. as always, you can find me on tumblr!
Taehyung bites down the bubble of panic as he whirls his head around, searching for any sign of Jeongguk, who’d been at his side just seconds ago.

He catches a glimpse of the navy blazer that Jeongguk had been wearing, and he breathes a sigh of relief as he follows after the man, walking briskly out of the restaurant and into the lobby. Taehyung calls out to him, but Jeongguk just ignores it, walking through the main doors, and-- much to Taehyung’s horror-- right into the pouring rain.

Taehyung yelps, quickening his pace and bursting through the exit, ready to yell at Jeongguk to get back inside, but something makes him pause.

Jeongguk stands just a foot away from the large awning covering the entrance of the lobby doors, eyes squeezed shut, head tilted back as the rain pours over him, soaking his clothes and hair.

He looks so pained, like he’s about to shatter into a million different pieces, and the only thing that’s holding him together is the cold patter of the rain against his skin.

Taehyung’s heart lurches, and finally-- finally-- he feels like he can see Jeongguk clearly. All the carefully hidden layers of hurt, betrayal, unadulterated sadness, coming to the surface in a moment that Taehyung wasn’t supposed to see.

Vulnerability.

And Taehyung wants to wrap the man in his arms, protect him from a world that has been so cruel, and hold him. He wants Jeongguk to be happy, to know his worth as a person, but how could he show him? When the entire world was saying otherwise?

Taehyung steps up next to Jeongguk without even thinking, shivering as he himself becomes
drenched, water seeping past his suit and into his very core. Whether Jeongguk acknowledges his presence is a mystery, but they stand there, together, watching the ever-busy Seoul traffic whirring past them, as the world continues to turn and life goes on, despite the tragedies and the sadness that occur around every corner.

“I thought I had gotten over it, but apparently not,” Jeongguk says suddenly, breaking the silence between them. There’s no sarcasm in his voice, no malice. He just speaks as though he’s telling a simple truth. His eyes are trained above them, to the billboard across the street. A pair of eyes, advertising double eyelid surgery. Taehyung feels like they’re being watched.

“He was way out of line,” Taehyung growls, the anger still acrid on his tongue. He had been under the impression that he had surrounded himself with good people in this situation, even knowing how socialites could be. But even good people could be prejudiced, misguided. He just wishes it wasn’t at the expense of hurting Jeongguk like this. But just thinking that, he knows he's the biggest hypocrite of all.

“That meeting shouldn’t have gone like that. He shouldn’t have said those things to you.”

Jeongguk laughs, sharp and bitter. “But it’s true, isn’t it? About me? You said so yourself.”

Taehyung’s stomach churns, and his eyes sting with tears unshed, for Jeongguk, for the guilt. He wonders when the younger man had begun to internalize the self hatred like this, and Taehyung knows that he, himself, is part of the problem. He knows he’d apologized, but he still feels so incredibly sorry.

“No, it’s not,” Taehyung says firmly, staring straight at Jeongguk, and he wishes the younger could believe the words he’s saying, but he knows they’re probably falling on deaf ears. But he tries anyway. “I-I was angry when I said that back then. But you are so much more than what I or any other ignorant socialite says.”

Taehyung takes a shaky breath, wondering if he should say the words that sit on the tip of his tongue. It's probably not his place. Nothing will probably help, but he has to try. "I-I think you were lying. Back then, when you said help people for salvation," He gulps, and Jeongguk stays stone still beside him. "I think you help people because you care. Because deep down you're a good person."

Jeongguk turns his head to look at Taehyung, and for once, his eyes aren’t cold. He’s not putting up his solid titanium walls. It’s like he’s trying to let Taehyung see him. See the real him, crying out for help, under the layers of snark and cold detachment.
Taehyung shivers, from the intensity or the rain, he won’t know, but Jeongguk’s lips twitch up into a smile. “We should get you inside before you come down with hypothermia,” His voice is kind, almost like he’s concerned for Taehyung’s well being. Taehyung wants to believe that deep down, Jeongguk really does care about him.

So they trudge back into the building, dripping water on the shiny new tile, and ignore the odd looks the other tenants shoot them as they step into the elevator.

Taehyung stares longingly at Jeongguk, who’s put himself at the opposite side of the elevator, hands stuffed into his pockets, shoulders hunched like he’s trying to curl into himself. Gone is the confidence and bravado, the snark. And everything just hurts.

He turns his head away, focusing instead on the numbers flashing on the screen by the door. The air is thick and stifling, but it’s not the usual angry tension. It’s Taehyung wishing Jeongguk would let him help, and it’s Jeongguk wanting to deny that he needs any. Like a silent battle happening in their minds, as they try to keep themselves together.

The doors slide open on their floor, and they walk in silence, shoulder to shoulder, before separating at their respective doors. Taehyung takes a deep breath, mustering up the courage to reach out before opening his mouth.

“J- Jeongguk ssi,” He almost cringes, hating the formality, but he does it because Jeongguk is more comfortable that way, creating an invisible barrier between them and their feelings.

The younger man turns, eyebrows raised in expectation.

“Would you… like to come by later? For tea?” Taehyung asks, holding his breath as something flashes in Jeongguk’s eyes. The younger man just shakes his head.

“Thank you for offering, but I think I just… need to be alone,” Jeongguk explains, and Taehyung is floored, because in his eyes, the last thing Jeongguk needs is to be alone right now. He ignores the crushing hurt and rejection the best he can, because he knows at this point it’s nothing personal. But it makes Taehyung wonder, when will he stop trying to close himself off like this?

“I-- If you’re sure,” Taehyung finally says, brushing aside the disappointment to force a smile. Jeongguk just nods his head, before stepping into his apartment and closing the door softly behind
him.

Taehyung lets out a shaky breath, leaning his head against the cool wood of his door, and curses himself to the high heavens. _I didn’t think this would hurt so much._ He thought he’d be able to just ignore the feelings, since Jeongguk had made it so terribly clear where their relationship stood. Taehyung had tried to compartmentalize. Whatever Jeongguk did from this point forward wasn’t his problem. It _shouldn’t_ be his problem.

He repeats that over and over again as he gathers himself as best he can, and enters his own home. The emptiness of the space is crippling, but he ignores it, throwing his clothes carelessly on the ground as he walks into his bathroom. He turns on the shower and steps inside, hissing as the sting of boiling water hits his cold-numbed skin.

He stands underneath the water for a long time, trying to collect himself. His brain turns over the events of that today, trying to make sense of them, but ultimately, they all lead back to the same thing— _Jeongguk is hurting, and I’m not okay with it._

The realization isn’t particularly surprising, but it _is_ frustrating, and he shuts off the water, drying himself off quickly, and pads out of the bathroom, more agitated than he’d been going in. He doesn’t know what to do anymore, since he’d promised himself to stop trying, but he wants to. Maybe he’s a masochist, but he wants to keep trying. But he won’t. Jeongguk has to come to him from now on. He needs to decide that he wants things to change, and nothing Taehyung says or does can force him.

He slips on a soft, cotton, long sleeve shirt, one he’d cut up a long time ago across the shoulder and a rectangle right at the elbow. He was in the privacy of his own home, so he didn’t need to worry about anyone seeing him like this. He can’t help wondering what people would think if they found out how the great Kim Taehyung dressed when he wasn’t in the public eye.

Would they even care? he wonders as he pads into the kitchen. He hadn’t eaten much at the restaurant, losing his appetite very quickly into the conversation. He’s half afraid to make anything and set off the fire alarm again, so he rummages through the fridge and curses himself for being so damn stubborn, because he really should have just hired a chef, but he hadn’t and now he’s starving.

Just as he’s making the decision between eating raw celery or the peach flavored yogurt that he’s found at the back of the fridge, the doorbell rings. He frowns, wondering whether Hoseok or Yoongi were supposed to come by today.

He looks through the peephole, and who he sees makes his stomach swoop. The speed with which he opens the door is almost embarrassing.
“Jeongguk,” Taehyung breathes, taking in the younger man, standing in the hall sheepishly. He’s in a dark long-sleeved shirt and slim, tapered black sweatpants. His hair is damp and unstyled, and he looks both soft and painfully handsome at the same time.

“Is that… offer for tea still available?” Jeongguk asks, the words whispered like it pains him to say them. Taehyung’s eyes widen in surprise, and the younger man clears his throat, not looking him in the eye.

“O-of course! Come in,” Taehyung scrambles to hold the door open, and Jeongguk mumbles a thanks as he steps inside. Taehyung gets a whiff of some sort of body wash, clean and mouthwatering, but he pushes those thoughts aside. His desire for Jeongguk is secondary to Jeongguk’s well being.

“Please sit,” Taehyung says, motioning to the couch, and Jeongguk nods. “Let me get you that tea,” he mutters, before scrambling into the kitchen. He scans through the cabinets before finding a box of ginger tea, and sets the kettle to boil.

His hands are shaking, happiness bubbling inside him because Jeongguk is here. He had willingly come to Taehyung, and while the older is unsure how much Jeongguk will open up to him, it’s progress nonetheless.

Taehyung’s lips curve up slightly, thrilled at the thought of Jeongguk making a conscious decision to come to him, of his own volition. Maybe deep down inside, Jeongguk wants to fix things too. Maybe now they could have a civil conversation, communicate properly.

He prepares the tea quickly and grabs the two mugs before coming back into the living room.

“Thank you,” Jeongguk says, taking the mug Taehyung hands to him and making room for the older on the couch. He notes the way Jeongguk’s eyes flit over his shirt and he’s suddenly self-conscious of his attire. He brushes it off and sits down next to Jeongguk, making sure there’s a comfortable enough distance between them, and tries not to seem too obvious that he’s watching the younger out of the corner of his eye.

“Ginger,” Jeongguk notes, after taking a sip of the warm tea. Taehyung smiles softly.

“It was always your favorite, wasn’t it?” Jeongguk grips the mug tighter, and his lips curve down
into a frown. Taehyung worries he’s said something wrong. “I... I used to hate the taste, but now
I’m really partial to it,” He chuckles nervously, trying to alleviate the tension, but it just deepens
Jeongguk’s frown.

Taehyung had never been a tea person, but in high school, Jeongguk drank ginger tea all the time.
Said it soothed the nerves. And now Taehyung kept it well stocked, because for some odd reason, it
did make him calm. But not because of the tea. It just reminded him of Jeongguk.

The silence is thick, and Taehyung hates it. He hates the quiet, he can almost feel how hard
Jeongguk is thinking in this moment. And he wishes he wasn’t so affected by it, since he’d resolved
not to be so invested in how Jeongguk felt.

“I’m...” Taehyung turns his head in surprise when Jeongguk speaks up. The younger is still  staring
down at his mug, fingers wound tight around it. "I'm sorry,” he breathes out quickly, like if he
doesn’t say it fast enough, he won’t say it at all.

Taehyung’s eyebrows shoot up in alarm. “For what?” he asks, a little taken aback. His mind races at
a mile a minute and he’s not sure what to think, because he never thought he’d hear those words.
Belatedly, he realizes it's probably a stupid thing to ask, since he’s the one who wanted an apology
in the first place.

Jeongguk looks up reluctantly, gazing at Taehyung’s exposed wrists where the bruises from a few
days ago had all but faded.

“For e-everything, I guess. Being so difficult, hurting you. I overstepped my boundaries too many
times to count,” Jeongguk swallows thickly. “Sihyuk was right, I’m not quite right in the head either.
But that doesn’t excuse how I treated you. And. I’m sorry for that.”

Taehyung lets out a sharp breath, looking down at the amber liquid in his mug and watching the
steam curl up, his chest tightening inexplicably. “I forgive you,” he says softly, looking up at
Jeongguk, who opens his mouth in shock.

“You’d forgive me that easily?”

Taehyung sets his mug down. “I understand why you did and said the things you did. It doesn’t
make them right or any less hurtful but. You apologized, and you’re obviously being sincere about
it.”
“It shouldn’t be that easy. Not after what I put you through.”

Taehyung snags his bottom lip between his teeth, wondering how to phrase things right. “I’m not a fan of dragging issues out, Jeongguk,” he explains. “I asked for an apology, and you gave me one. You meant it, and I know it must have been hard for you. I can’t say I can empathize with you, since I couldn’t possibly comprehend what you’ve been through, but I understand you’re hurting right now, and I want to help how I can.”

Jeongguk’s eyes snap to Taehyung’s wrists, frowning deeply. “But… the sex? I hurt you.”

Taehyung winces. As much as he’d enjoyed Jeongguk dominating him, it wasn’t how he imagined their reunion going. And it had hurt, it still hurts, but not physically. Emotionally, Taehyung is still drained, but at least now he and Jeongguk were on the same page about everything… except for the sex, it seemed.

“You didn’t hurt me. At least, not physically.” Now it’s Jeongguk’s turn to be surprised.

“B-but… the bruises… I bit you.” Taehyung’s cheeks flare because he still has the mark on his shoulder, and he looks at it all the time. It’s almost become a fixation, and he half wishes it wouldn’t ever fade. He knows he needs to be over it, considering the implications of the mark, a constant reminder of the way Jeongguk had left. But all he can remember is how Jeongguk had felt inside him, filling him up, making him feel whole.

“It hurt right? You cried and--” Jeongguk looks down, pained, shoulders hunched.

“Yes, it hurt, but it wasn’t the physical kind. Do you know what I mean?” Taehyung chews on his lip, searching for the words.

Taehyung gulps. “I hated that you left the way you did. I-I… wish it hadn’t ended like that. It felt like a slap in the face,” Jeongguk’s grip on his mug tightens, and Taehyung can see the guilt rolling off the younger man in waves, but for the first time, Jeongguk isn’t trying to hide it. “You shouldn’t have done that. And I think, of all the things you’ve done, that hurt the most.”

“I’m sorry,” Jeongguk repeats, for what seems like the millionth time that day. “I would say I didn’t mean to hurt you, but I did. I wanted to hurt you then. I thought it would make me feel better,” Jeongguk’s knuckles are white as he grips the mug so tight Taehyung thinks it might shatter. “It
didn’t, in case you were wondering.”

“I know. It’s okay. I forgive you.”

Jeongguk lets out a disbelieving huff, and mumbles something that sounds similar to *unbelievable.* “I’m not deserving of that, Taehyung.” Taehyung didn’t think so much self-loathing could be crammed into a single sentence.

“I think you should let me make that call, yeah? You’re not really being fair to yourself.”

“You know, if the situation was reversed, I probably wouldn’t forgive that easily, right?” Jeongguk asks, voice low and grave.

Taehyung fiddles with the sleeves of his sleep shirt, fingers brushing over the yellowing chafe marks on his wrists. He laughs softly. “Then it’s a good thing I’m me and you’re you, right?” He puts his hand on Jeongguk’s shoulder gently, hesitantly. “Just… don’t make me regret it? Please?”

Jeongguk’s face scrunches in obvious conflict, but he makes no motion of discomfort at Taehyung’s touch. “I-I can’t promise that, Taehyung. I don’t want to hurt you. But I-I can’t be sure. I don’t know the right things to do or say.

“The best thing to do would be to stay away from you. So I can’t hurt you anymore,” Jeongguk says darkly, and Taehyung gulps, tightening his grip on Jeongguk’s shoulder. “But… I’m. I want to be selfish and be near you and touch you and--”

Jeongguk breaks off, face flushing, and Taehyung’s stomach swoops at the unexpected confession. He hadn’t realized how much he wanted to hear those words until now. He’d had a hunch that Jeongguk wanted him, but it was nice hearing it. For the first time, the feeling of hope worms its way under Taehyung’s skin.

“Sihyuk was right about a lot of things, Taehyung. I’m a monster. I don’t want to keep hurting you.”

“What? No , Jeongguk,” Taehyung can’t help it when he reaches out his other hand, cupping Jeongguk’s face and turning him to face him. Jeongguk’s eyes look a little red around the edges, and there’s so much vulnerability in that one look, it floors Taehyung. He thumbs gently at Jeongguk’s cheekbone.
“If you keep convincing yourself of that, you’re not going to feel any better,” Taehyung says firmly. “If you think you’re a monster, then you have to do your best to not act that way,” Jeongguk casts his eyes down, ears tipped red. “And I’ll be here to swiftly kick you in the ass if you do act like a prick again, okay?”

Jeongguk doesn’t say a word, but the coiled tension in his shoulders seems to dissipate a bit, and for that, Taehyung is relieved. He didn’t think this conversation would happen so soon, if ever, but it leaves him feeling lighter than he has in a while.

Taehyung leans in closer, feeling more confident, and is spurred on when Jeongguk doesn’t flinch at the proximity. “Can I kiss you?” he murmurs. Jeongguk nods slightly, the movement almost imperceptible if Taehyung hadn’t been watching so closely. Jeongguk keeps his eyes resolutely down at his cup, so Taehyung can’t read his expression, but he figures he might want this too, but is just afraid to ask. He sighs softly and closes the distance slowly, pressing his mouth against Jeongguk’s, just the slightest brush of lips.

He shouldn’t have expected a response, of course. Jeongguk remains still in Taehyung’s hands. Not responding, but not rejecting him either. Just clutching the mug of tea to his chest. The disappointment is almost crushing, and Taehyung pulls away, chest aching, because Jeongguk’s lips are so soft and warm and addicting. Would he ever get to feel the way he did in the car so many weeks ago? Drowning in the heat and the passion?

He doesn’t realize he’d been staring intently at Jeongguk for a while, until the younger man clears his throat, and Taehyung leans away, giving him space.

“I should go,” Jeongguk says quietly. Taehyung forces back the sigh of disappointment, and forces himself to smile. In the end, he’d gotten what he’d wanted-- a sincere apology. Jeongguk had come to him. They’d made more progress than Taehyung could have hoped for, and that should be enough for him.

Jeongguk sets the now-empty mug carefully on the table, and eyes Taehyung hesitantly. “Thank you, Taehyung,” he says quietly. Taehyung feels a bright smile spread on his lips. “F-for the tea, I mean.”

Taehyung bites his lip, trying not to laugh. “Of course. For the tea.”

Jeongguk gets up, blushing red in embarrassment. Taehyung follows after him, leading him to the
door, and there’s an inexplicable fondness in his chest, mixed with something else less innocent. His eyes trail over Jeongguk’s broad shoulders, framed by the well fitting shirt, and he feels his throat run dry. Of course he would get horny after a deep conversation. But it doesn’t feel like something that primal. *Horny doesn’t cover it*, Taehyung bemoans as he opens the door for Jeongguk.

“I-I’ll see you later, then?” Taehyung says, as Jeongguk stands on the threshold. He nods, and Taehyung looks down, suddenly feeling shy under Jeongguk’s gaze. He feels a hand grip his wrist and he looks up. Jeongguk looks at him hesitantly, biting his lip. There’s a burning want in his eyes that Taehyung knows mirrors his own, but there’s something else there. More than just desire.

Jeongguk leans down, movements slow, and presses a soft, indulgent kiss to Taehyung’s lips. Taehyung’s mouth parts on instinct, his entire body suddenly on fire at the gentleness of it, but Jeongguk pulls back, bumping their noses together.

“Thank you,” he whispers. “Really.”

And then he steps away completely, and Taehyung stands there stupidly, feeling like an lovestruck teenager, and bites back a whine at the sudden cold that hits him without Jeongguk’s warm body so close. Jeongguk gives him another soft look, then steps away, turning his back to head towards his own door.

Taehyung closes his door slowly, still not quite able to process what had just happened, but the happiness bubbles under his skin. He brings his fingers up to run across his lips, still burning with the feeling of Jeongguk’s own pressed against them. He stares at the door, stomach churning, and wonders if he hopes hard enough, Jeongguk will come back.

He stands there for a moment, and is jolted out of his thoughts when there’s a swift knock on the door. Taehyung’s heart leaps out of his throat, and he can’t open the door fast enough. The sight of Jeongguk standing there, body coiled and eyes dark, is enough to punch a shaky moan from Taehyung, and Jeongguk doesn’t hesitate to step inside again and slam the door behind them.

And then Jeongguk is on him, around him, hands cupping Taehyung’s face and kissing him like his life depends on it. Taehyung hardly has time to react, fisting at Jeongguk’s shirt and opening his mouth obediently. Jeongguk kisses him so hard that they stumble back with the force, and Taehyung’s knees go weak. He would have sunk to the ground if Jeongguk didn’t catch him in time, winding an arm around his waist and holding him close.

“Am I crazy?” Jeongguk asks, pulling away for a moment to mouth at Taehyung’s jaw, his neck, grazing his teeth along the skin, and Taehyung just tips his head back to give him free reign, eyes
practically rolling to the back of his head with the pleasure of having Jeongguk’s mouth on his skin. “For wanting this so much?”

“W-well,” Taehyung says, breathless. “W-who wouldn’t be crazy for me,” He tries to be cheeky, but it doesn’t sound nearly as good as it did in his head, not when everything he says is punctuated by gasps and whimpers. Jeongguk bites at Taehyung’s shoulder, the strip of skin exposed by his DIY project. He yelps, but raises his shoulder, pressing closer.

“What the fuck is this shirt?” Jeongguk growls, tugging at the fabric. Taehyung has no answer for him besides a needy moan as he scrambles to pull Jeongguk back to kiss him. They stumble down the hall, Taehyung leading Jeongguk, and tugs him towards his bedroom. Jeongguk presses him against the door and sucks on Taehyung’s bottom lip impatiently as Taehyung struggles blindly for the doorknob.

He whines in relief when the door finally opens and they fall into the room. Jeongguk pushes him back until he feels the mattress behind him, and falls onto it. Jeongguk, it seems, has no patience for any sort of showmanship, because he’s got Taehyung completely stripped down in a matter of seconds, and rips his own shirt over his head.

Taehyung only gets a few precious seconds to drink in Jeongguk’s glorious chest before he’s being shoved back onto the pillows.

“Hands and knees,” Jeongguk orders, and Taehyung doesn’t even spare a moment to think, just does as he’s told. He turns his head to see Jeongguk settle behind him, and he’s embarrassingly hard, the erection hanging between his legs. And that’s just from kissing him.

Jeongguk’s hand is so impossibly warm as he rubs it across the expanse of Taehyung’s back, fingers pressing against the base of his spine, before squeezing Taehyung’s ass appreciatively. Taehyung lurches at that, loving the sting of it, and he can already feel a bead of precome leaking out and dropping onto the bed.

“Fuck, Tae, can I eat you out?” Jeongguk asks, the poorly concealed lust making his voice rough around the edges, and Taehyung’s elbows wobble, almost faceplanting into the pillows.

“P-plea--” Taehyung can’t bring himself to finish a damn word, nerves alight with anticipation. Jeongguk brings his other hand to Taehyung’s other ass cheek, and he kneads them, just hard enough to drag another moan out of Taehyung.
He spreads Taehyung’s cheeks apart and rubs his thumb around his puckered hole. Taehyung whines at that, and Jeongguk wonders what kind of noises Taehyung will make when Jeongguk gets his mouth on him. He leans in and runs his tongue experimentally over Taehyung’s entrance, gauging his reaction. Taehyung just lets out a sob, and it definitely does things for Jeongguk’s confidence, and he presses forward, encouraged.

He runs his tongue over Taehyung again, this time pressing the tip of his tongue into his entrance, and at that, Taehyung loses his strength, elbows giving way and he drops down onto the pillows.

“Keep your ass up for me,” Jeongguk says, pulling away to readjust Taehyung’s hips, and he makes such a beautiful sight, completely submissive and offering himself up like this. “Good boy,” he murmurs. He can feel his cock rubbing painfully against the material of his briefs, but he ignores it, focusing on pleasuring Taehyung.

It becomes obvious to Jeongguk very quickly that Taehyung is more sensitive than most of his previous partners, and he loves being rimmed, because with every lick, every press of Jeongguk’s tongue into Taehyung’s hole, he lets out a beautiful little sob, voice getting higher and more broken with every passing moment.

Jeongguk leans away for a moment to breathe, not realizing how much he’d gotten into it, not even sparing a moment for air, so focused on Taehyung that breathing had become of secondary importance. He bites at Taehyung’s ass, sucking a purple mark onto the smooth skin, and Taehyung wriggles back, obviously wanting more, but Jeongguk nips at the skin in a warning.

Taehyung lets out a wrecked sob at that, hands fist in the sheets to keep himself from moving too much. “J-Jeongguk,” he whines.

Jeongguk makes a noise of question, smoothing his hand over Taehyung’s back, and it does little to douse the fire slowly growing at the pit of his stomach.

“W-want to come. Need--” Taehyung gasps out, unable to form any coherent sentences.

“Before I even get to fill you up?” Jeongguk asks, and Taehyung feels so dizzy. “Do you want to come before you even get fucked?”

Taehyung shakes his head vehemently. That’s the last thing he wants. “Then you have to be a good boy and wait. Can you do that?” Jeongguk asks, and it sounds so gentle, but commanding at the
same time, and Taehyung’s body wracks with a shiver and he just nods.

“Good,” Jeongguk says, and leans away from Taehyung to reach into the nightstand. Taehyung wants to wonder how he knew to look there for the lube, and then remembers Jeongguk had grabbed it from there the last time they had fucked too. Taehyung’s stomach coils, remembering the glorious feeling of being pressed against the wall, Jeongguk’s body trapping him, filling him so perfectly and-

“J-Jeongguk,” Taehyung keens, feeling the first slicked up finger slide inside him, and graze against his prostate. He doesn’t know whether to be happy or annoyed that Jeongguk could remember exactly where it was, because it’s making it hard for him to try not to come.

“More,” Taehyung whines, chewing at his lip. He wants this to go by faster, for Jeongguk to fill him up right now, and Jeongguk obliges him quickly sliding the second in and scissoring with an efficiency that punches another moan from Taehyung's throat.

Taehyung’s taken enough cock in his life that prepping doesn’t take too long and Jeongguk manages to get four fingers in before Taehyung sobs at him, begging him to just fuck me already, and then the fingers are gone.

He hears the crinkling of the condom wrapper being ripped open, and he forces himself to get up on his hands again, though they wobble dangerously. Jeongguk seems to notice, because he wraps a steadying hand around Taehyung’s waist.

“You okay?” he asks, and Taehyung just nods his head, not quite trusting himself to open his mouth, He feels Jeongguk pressing the head of his cock against his entrance, and his toes curl in anticipation. Belatedly, he realizes he hasn’t actually seen Jeongguk’s cock in a decade, and figures sixteen year old Jeongguk wasn’t quite the same size as twenty six year old Jeongguk, because twenty six year old Jeongguk fills him up so well, and Taehyung’s never felt so full--

“Jeon-- oh god…” Taehyung keens as Jeongguk slides in, painfully slowly, gripping Taehyung’s hips so tight that there will definitely be bruises in the morning-- a thought that thrills Taehyung-- but he doesn’t have a chance to dwell on the thought any more as Jeongguk bottoms out. He stops and waits for Taehyung to adjust, but Taehyung just wriggles his hips impatiently.

“Jeongguk fuck me, d-dammit, please,” Taehyung begs, and Jeongguk groans in aroused disbelief, bringing one of his hands up to tug at Taehyung’s hair.
“Want me to fuck you hard?” Jeongguk asks, leaning over Taehyung’s body to murmur into his ear. Taehyung can feel his cheeks burning, body electric at Jeongguk’s proximity, and he just nods frantically. “Til you’re screaming? Will you scream for me, Tae?”

“Yes,” Taehyung gasps, wanting so badly to just come at the words, but he knows Jeongguk has something better planned, if he could just hold on a little longer.

Jeongguk seems to approve, because he runs a hand down Taehyung’s side and squeezes his hip. “Hands up,” he says, and Taehyung’s mind goes blank, not knowing how to process the request, and he lets Jeongguk guide him, lifting his hands and pressing them onto the headboard. He keeps a hand over Taehyung’s own, the other gripping at his hip, strong and anchoring him in place.

Taehyung squeezes his eyes shut as Jeongguk slides out slowly, and no amount of mental preparation could make him ready for when Jeongguk slams back into him, hitting his prostate dead on. He lets out a cry, throwing his head back against Jeongguk’s shoulder.

“Harder?” Jeongguk prompts, voice rough and thick with lust.

“Harder, more, please please please,” Taehyung sobs, and it turns into another broken cry when Jeongguk thrusts in again. He’s completely trapped again, and his body has nowhere to move, he just has to take everything Jeongguk’s giving him, and he can’t imagine anything else better than this.

Jeongguk sets a rough pace, focusing on fucking into Taehyung so hard he sees stars, letting out staccato moans every time Jeongguk drills back into him. Jeongguk works at sucking a mark into Taehyung’s neck, biting and laving his tongue against the skin. Taehyung tilts his head to the side, letting Jeongguk have free reign, and screws his eyes shut, voice hoarse as Jeongguk just keeps thrusting in, grazing his teeth against the sweet skin of his shoulder.

“Wanna come, Tae?” Jeongguk asks, nose pressed against Taehyung’s temple, teeth tugging at his earlobe, and it feels so filthy and so so satisfying. He doesn’t let up his pace, hips rough and deliberate. The skin on skin is delicious, and everything feels too hot and so perfect.

“Y-you first. Please. Want you to f-fill me up,” Taehyung whimpers, voice hoarse and low from crying out so much. He looks so fucked out, Jeongguk half didn’t expect him to respond. But he had and god he could probably orgasm with just those words.

He thrusts faster, the friction against his cock making the heat stir in his stomach, and Taehyung
clenches around him, probably by accident, but it drives Jeongguk over the edge. “Fuck, Tae,” he groans, letting the orgasm rip through him, and he spills himself into the condom.

Taehyung whines, clenching around Jeongguk again, orgasming seconds later, come spilling onto the sheets. Jeongguk buries his face into Taehyung’s neck, panting as he keeps thrusting, much slower this time, until Taehyung’s body trembles from the hypersensitivity. They stay still for a moment, trying to catch their breath. After a while though, Taehyung can feel his hands cramping, and he squirms against Jeongguk.

“Shit, sorry,” Jeongguk says, a little winded, and pulls himself away from Taehyung, slipping his length out too. Taehyung whimpers softly, lowering himself down onto the pillow, and suddenly everything feels cold without Jeongguk pressed against him. Taehyung wants to kiss him so badly, but his limbs feel like jelly, and his body is still thrumming with pleasure. He can’t quite bring himself to move, until he hears Jeongguk padding around the room, a rustle of fabric.

He rolls over and pushes himself up slowly, pulling the covers over his lower half. Taehyung had never been one to be self conscious of his body, but right now he feels a little vulnerable. He watches Jeongguk tug on his sweatpants, and he bites down on his lip, because Jeongguk looks so mindblowingly attractive right now, skin glowing from the sex, hair mussed and clumped together with sweat. The tattoos look like they’re glistening on his skin, and the lust stabs hot in his stomach again.

Jeongguk turns his head in search for his shirt, and catches Taehyung’s heavy gaze on him. Taehyung drops his eyes, embarrassed, cheeks flaming. He doesn’t know why he feels so shy all of a sudden.

“Y-you can stay if you want,” Taehyung murmurs, gathering up the confidence to look up again, and he sees the sudden panic in Jeongguk’s eyes.

“I-- I don’t usually-- It’s okay I--” Jeongguk stammers, suddenly nervous and not looking as in control as he had five minutes ago, fucking into Taehyung, owning him. He lets out a sharp breath in relief when he finds his shirt, and bends down to snag it. He pulls it on quickly, and Taehyung tries vehemently not to be disappointed.

“I have to be at the hospital in a few hours anyway, I-I’d just be in the way,” Jeongguk stammers, giving Taehyung an apologetic look. Taehyung can’t bring himself to smile in return, so he just nods. He can practically see Jeongguk putting up his walls again, and he wonders how he’s supposed to handle this constant push and pull.
Jeongguk runs his hand through his hair, tugging at the strands in frustration. “I’ll. I’ll get going then,” he says, and Taehyung just nods again. He feels so drained, from the sex, being jolted out of the floaty headspace he’d been in, and the crushing disappointment of Jeongguk leaving again.

Jeongguk seems to notice, because he hesitates at the door, chewing on his lip, and sighs, before walking over to Taehyung. He cups Taehyung’s cheek, and leans down at the same time Taehyung arches up on instinct, pulling him into a deep kiss. It’s enough of a reassurance to make hope bloom in Taehyung’s heart, and while he wishes Jeongguk could stay, the deliberate drag of his lips against Taehyung’s is enough to hold him over for now.

Jeongguk pulls away, the separation of their lips making a muted noise in the air between them.

“I’ll show myself out,” Jeongguk says quietly, and Taehyung hums, still a little dazed, and stays still until he hears the front door closing with an audible click.

When he’s sure Jeongguk’s gone, he groans, covering his face with his hands to hide the blush quickly forming. I’m in so much trouble.

Chapter End Notes

as always, you can find me on my [tumblr](https://tumblr.com)!
“We’ll be breaking ground on construction in just a few short weeks,” Taehyung explains, standing at the front of the long conference room, motioning to the projector screen, where the blueprints for the center are being shown. Jeongguk sits at the very end of the table, keeping an eye on the other investors, gauging their reactions.

At least, that’s what he tells himself. If he looks at Taehyung, all he’s going to think about is last night, their conversation, the sex. He’s too tired for this. He wants to regret the things he’d said when they talked. Taehyung probably thought he was a mess. Jeongguk is, in truth, a mess, but he’d rather not have anyone know. He’d looked weak, and Taehyung probably pitied him. Maybe Taehyung realized it was a mistake. A mistake to let Jeongguk in.

But Taehyung had asked him to stay. He couldn’t have regretted it if he’d asked me to stay, right? The thought of sleeping in the same bed as Taehyung-- waking up next to him-- terrifies him beyond belief. If Taehyung didn’t regret the invitation right after sex, he sure would when he woke up in the morning.

“We’re going to be tearing down the entire west wing and rebuilding, up to hospital standards, as Dr. Jeon had advised.”

Jeongguk, as a general rule, didn’t stick around after sex. It was safer to stay detached, and his partners never really wanted anything besides that anyways. Sleeping together seemed too intimate. And fear stabs hot in his stomach when he realizes how badly he’d wanted that with Taehyung in that moment. But he was weak. And he ran. Why do I always run?

He could tell Taehyung was upset, and god he hated that. He hated seeing Taehyung upset, knowing he made the man with the sunshine smile sad. He hated it when he was angry at Taehyung, he hates it now when he… He doesn’t know how he feels right now. He doesn’t know how he feels about Taehyung, but he’s definitely afraid.

Jeongguk kissed him, like an idiot. He didn’t want Taehyung to be sad. But he knows he couldn’t be what Taehyung probably wanted. What does Taehyung want from me? Either way, they’d kissed, and Taehyung had seemed happier after that. He couldn’t have regretted it that much, right?

“We will be keeping certain portions of the east wing intact, mostly to preserve the history and
certain areas of... sentimental value,” Taehyung continues. Jeongguk remembers Taehyung mentioning that Namjoon’s bedroom and office were in the east wing, and he wanted to keep that untouched, as a sort of memorial. “The rest will be transformed into family accommodations and an art center for the patients.”

“The construction will take approximately two months, then we’ll be clearing up all the legal details, and be set to open in the spring,” Taehyung finishes, the pride very obvious in his voice. Jeongguk can’t help but feel lighter, knowing Taehyung was satisfied. Jeongguk himself couldn’t believe that in the last three months, everything was coming together so quickly. Despite the fact that they didn’t get along, they had been able to put all that aside to work efficiently on the cardiac center.

“Any concerns?” Taehyung prompts, and answers questions patiently, before wrapping up the meeting. Taehyung beams at Jeongguk from across the room as the investors file out and Jeongguk shoots back what he can only hope is a smile in return, but it probably looks like a grimace.

He needs to get back to the hospital, since he’d only taken a few hours to go to this meeting, and he needs to start making his rounds again in half an hour. He wonders if he can make a break for it, so he can avoid Taehyung, but as soon as the last person has left the conference room, Taehyung makes a beeline for him, and Jeongguk holds back the urge to groan.

“Hi!” Taehyung says, sliding into the seat next to Jeongguk’s, smiling widely. Discomfort churns in Jeongguk’s stomach, and he tries not to wince, because Taehyung’s smile is blinding. He doesn’t know what Taehyung could possibly have to smile about right now.

“Hey,” Jeongguk says, voice a little gruff, but trying very hard not to come off hostile, and he fiddles with the paperwork in front of him.

“How are you doing?” Taehyung asks, voice a bit sing-songy, and Jeongguk wonders what happened to the poised businessman from five minutes ago and how he was replaced so quickly by a ten year old.

“I’m fine, thank you,” Jeongguk says, and then tacks on a, “And you?” It takes every bit of energy in his body to be civil, because all he wants to do is sink to the floor in embarrassment.

“I’m fantastic actually!” Taehyung chirps. Jeongguk gulps, the tips of his ears burning. “I actually wanted to talk to you about something,” he says, voice serious. Jeongguk tries not to wince. Please don’t ask about last night. Please please please. “It’s about the heart center!”
Jeongguk snaps his eyes up and gapes for a moment, body flushing with relief, and then worry, because Taehyung’s smile is a little too bright. Jeongguk opens his mouth to respond, and then closes it again. He narrows his eyes in suspicion. “No.”

Taehyung’s face drops into a pout of disbelief. “What? You haven’t even heard it yet!”

“Every time you have an idea, that means I have to do more paperwork,” Jeongguk says.

Taehyung’s frown deepens. “But--”

“Do you know how many legal hoops I had to go through so that the center could stock saline? It’s just salt water, but they jacked up the insurance rates already. Medical centers aren’t like putting up hotels, Taehyung. These are people, not buildings.”

Taehyung looks so crestfallen at that, and Jeongguk scrambles for something better to say, realizing how harsh he must have sounded. Dammit Jeon, can’t you say one thing right?

“I mean,” Jeongguk sighs. “I think you have plenty of great ideas, Taehyung. But you might be getting a bit ahead of yourself. Let’s wait until the center is up and running first, okay?”

Taehyung is silent for a moment, chewing on his lip thoughtfully, before bursting out into a smile. “You’re right, of course! It can wait.”

Jeongguk nods, trying not to look too relieved and fiddles with his papers again, placing them carefully into his bag.

“Are you doing anything after this?” Taehyung asks and Jeongguk’s heart lurches in his chest.

“I. Uhm,” Jeongguk wracks his brain because he knows he has something to do but he can’t think. He doesn’t mean what I think he means, right? He gulps, cheeks flaming. “I have to get back to the hospital.”

Taehyung leans back, surprised. “Haven’t you been there since like, the middle of the night?”
“Yes. I’ll probably be there for a while longer; I have a few surgeries scheduled for tonight so.”

Taehyung frowns, seemingly deep in thought. Jeongguk gulps, zipping up his bag. “That’s so hardcore,” he says seriously, the awe in his voice making Jeongguk’s lips twitch up in a smile. “And I thought I worked a lot,” he laughs. “How do you stay awake the whole time? Don’t you get tired?”

Jeongguk shrugs, making to get up. “I’m used to it,” he says, slipping the strap of his bag over his shoulder. Taehyung gets up too. “Plus there’s a room on each floor with bunk beds so if you have down time you can nap if you want, like in between surgeries and all that.”

Taehyung raises his eyebrows. “Really?” Jeongguk nods, feeling a little bashful. He’d talked to various people about his job too many times to count: interns, college students, other surgeons, and socialites, trying to make small talk. He’d never felt so shy about it until Taehyung.

“I wish they had beds here too,” Taehyung jokes. Jeongguk bites back a smile.

“W-why do you ask?” Jeongguk coughs awkwardly, trying to cover up his stutter.

“Oh!” Taehyung beams at him. “I was going to go see Jimin today and I was wondering if you would have wanted to come too. He misses you a lot.”

Something about the words makes a warm feeling bloom in Jeongguk’s chest. “I saw him last week,” he says, chuckling. Taehyung smiles knowingly.

“He likes you a lot,” he says softly. Jeongguk ducks his head, trying to keep a straight face.

“He’s a good kid,” Jeongguk replies. Taehyung nods in agreement as they walk towards the door. Jeongguk pauses, one foot on either side of the threshold. He opens his mouth to say something, anything, but Taehyung beats him to it.

“I’ll see you later,” Taehyung says, a gentle hand at Jeongguk’s elbow. Jeongguk nods. “Have a good rest of the day, yeah?”
Jeongguk’s heart lurches again. “You too,” he mumbles quickly, and steps out into the hall.

♥

Jeongguk sighs for what seems like the thousandth time today. His shift was dragging by slower than usual. He was used to pulling long hours, but for some reason he’s been itching to get home. And see a certain Taehyung, according to the nagging voice in his head.

He’d finished his rounds for the day, and decided to retreat to his office to unwind and prepare for some of the surgeries he had to do later tonight. He figures he has a bit of downtime, but that idea is dashed when he hears someone running down the hallway.

A nurse knocks twice before opening the door and ducking in. “Dr. Jeon, code blue!” Jeongguk frowns, immediately alert, and gets up quickly from his chair; grabbing his stethoscope and rushing after the nurse.

“We have a five year old male. Fainted from lack of oxygen in the lower limbs. We’re gonna get him on a ventilator,” another nurse explains as Jeongguk strides up to the medical team currently wheeling a gurney through the halls.

Jeongguk looks down, and he feels like he’s been punched in the gut, because lying there, with an oxygen mask on his face, eyes drooping, is Park Jimin.

“Hi… Dr…. Jeon,” Jimin says weakly, face pale, lips blue. His voice is muffled by the mask, covering his nose and mouth. Jeongguk feels like his heart is going to burst out of his chest from the sheer panic. His mind goes blank for a fleeting moment, but feels multiple pairs of eyes on him-- his team is waiting for his instructions, and he reminds himself to put the personal feelings aside. He takes a deep breath.

“Jeongguk!” a voice calls out, and Jeongguk snaps his head up to see Taehyung, tears streaming down his face, panicked and frazzled.

“Get him into the ICU. Put him on oxygen with a vasodilator to open up his airways. If he’s not responding, do CPR. If there’s no response, intubate him right away” Jeongguk orders, and the team murmurs the affirmation. Jeongguk steps away from the gurney to let them get through the hospital floors, and he turns to Taehyung.
The older man rushes to his side, gripping Jeongguk’s arm tightly. “What happened to him? Is he going to be okay? I was just goofing off with him and then he just dropped. Oh god, I can’t believe this is happening. He’s not going to need surgery right? He’s going to be okay, right? I--”

“Taehyung, you need to calm down,” Jeongguk says, thrown off by the pure fear in Taehyung’s eyes. “Breathe, okay? Take a deep breath.”

Taehyung makes an obvious attempt, but ends up hyperventilating.

“Taehyung, slow down. I need to you to stay calm, alright? Jimin’s going to be just fine but I need you to sit down so I can go take care of it,” Jeongguk guides Taehyung to one of the chairs in the waiting room. He’s shaking, worry rolling off his body so obviously that it takes all of Jeongguk’s willpower not to be affected by it.

“Call Hoseok. Tell him to come down so you’re not waiting alone,” Taehyung nods, and Jeongguk steps away, frowning. He’s never seen Taehyung this broken and he doesn’t know what to think.

“God, this is my fault,” Taehyung moans as he buries his face into his hands. His shoulders shake with sobs. “I shouldn’t have played so much with him, you told me not to. He was breathing too hard already, I should have known.”

Jeongguk takes a shaky breath, trying to steady himself before he tries to steady Taehyung. He kneels down in front of Taehyung, gently prying his fingers away from his face.

“Hey,” Jeongguk murmurs softly. Taehyung’s eyes are wide, swimming with tears, and he looks seconds from passing out. He wraps his hands around Taehyung’s cold ones in an effort to comfort him. This isn’t uncommon when dealing with people close to the patient, and Jeongguk usually goes into autopilot here. But he can’t-- this is Taehyung.

“Everything’s going to be okay. I’m going to take care of Jimin,” Jeongguk soothes, taking one hand to brush away the wetness on Taehyung’s cheeks. Taehyung hiccups, fingers curling tightly with Jeongguk’s own, as he clings onto Jeongguk’s words.

“He’s going to be fine,” Jeongguk says. Taehyung nods shakily. “It’s all going to be okay.”

“O-Okay,” Taehyung hiccups again.
“Are you going to be okay?” Jeongguk asks, cupping Taehyung’s cheek. The older man gives him a watery smile.

“I w-will be.”

♥

“Hoseok, I’m not going.” Jeongguk looks up from the papers he’d just signed, having finished Jimin’s check up. Taehyung and Hoseok look like they’re in the middle of a heated argument.

“Taehyung, I can’t tell you enough times how crucial it is that you be at the conference,” Hoseok tries.

“Then you go in my place!”

“It’s you the press wants to see. You were supposed to make the speech!”

“Hyung, I can’t. You know that. Jimin’s still not awake. I need to be there when he wakes up!”

Hoseok looks at his wit’s end. “Jimin is fine. Dr. Jeon and his team did a great job. He’ll be up and running in no time,” He steps closer to Taehyung. “But if you miss this event, the stocks are most likely going to drop. They’re not going to write good things about you.”

Taehyung cards a hand through his hair, laughing in disbelief. “You think I care what the press thinks right now?”

“You should.”

“Well I don’t, hyung. They can go to hell, because right now, Jimin needs me. And I’m not leaving him.”
“Dr. Jeon--” Jeongguk’s eyes snap away from the scene in the middle of the waiting room to look expectantly at the nurse. The lady says something, but Jeongguk doesn’t quite hear it over the roaring of blood in his ears.

The scene feels achingly familiar and yet, so different-- Taehyung fighting for Jimin, though everything could go wrong. He wonders what would have happened if Taehyung had fought the same way for Jeongguk.

♥

“Taehyung,” Jeongguk says, jolting the man awake. Taehyung blinks sleepily, turning his head towards Jeongguk. He grips the coffee cup in his hand.

Jeongguk sighs. Taehyung’s eyes are sunken in, his face is blotchy from crying, lips swollen from biting them too much. Jimin is lying on the hospital bed, unconscious, and Taehyung’s got one of child’s tiny hands wrapped around his own, clinging to it.

“Yeah?” Taehyung croaks. It’s five in the morning, and it had been ten hours since Jimin had been admitted into the hospital. Taehyung hadn’t left Jimin’s side since he had been stabilized. His neck hurts from having fallen asleep at such an awkward angle, in a chair with his face down on the hospital bed at Jimin’s side.

“Are you alright?” Jeongguk asks hesitantly. Taehyung blinks at him, as though he’s surprised Jeongguk’s asking.

“Not really,” he replies honestly. He turns to Jimin, brushing back the sleeping boy’s black fringe.

“He’s on an IV sedative drip. We’ll wake him up in a few hours. Maybe you should go home. Eat something,” Jeongguk tries. Hoseok had pulled him aside, begged Jeongguk to say something to make Taehyung see clearly, but his focus was obviously only on Jimin, and nothing Jeongguk said could convince him.

Taehyung shakes his head. “It’s fine. I’ll stay here.”

“I really--”
“I’m fine, Jeongguk. I just need to be with Jimin right now,” Taehyung says irritably, glaring at Jeongguk, determined, and it makes Jeongguk snap his mouth shut. “If you’re awake, then I can stay awake too.”

Jeongguk raises an eyebrow. “I’m awake because this is my job. I’m used to it.”

“I’m not some delicate little princess, Jeongguk,” Taehyung snaps, and almost immediately regrets it. Jeongguk’s eyes widen a fraction in reproach. “I’m sorry, I just--” Taehyung takes a deep breath, frowning like he’s trying to collect his thoughts.

“I really just need to be with him right now.”

Jeongguk looks down at his feet, remembering the determination and conviction with which Taehyung had stood up to Hoseok last night. He still had a hard time connecting serious businessman Taehyung with playful, kind Taehyung.

For the last ten years he’d been so convinced that this man-- who’d cried over a small child, who spent all of his free time trying to use his wealth for good causes, who’d remained patient and kind with Jeongguk for so long-- was evil incarnate, and in this moment, Jeongguk realizes just how wrong he was.

About everything.

“He’s such a good kid,” Taehyung says softly, running his fingers gently over Jimin’s hair. “He’s my whole world. I see too much of me in him and-- I just want him to grow up and be a good person. Be better than me.”

“He’s going to be fine, you know,” Jeongguk tries, then clears his throat. “Health-wise, I mean.” Taehyung just looks at him sadly.

“Yeah, but for how long? I went through this same thing, over and over again as I was growing up. It takes a toll on you.”

“It didn’t seem like it in high school,” The words slip out before Jeongguk can stop them. Taehyung looks taken aback, and Jeongguk wants to apologize, but doesn’t. The first time Jeongguk had heard about Taehyung’s condition was when Dr. Lee had asked him to take the case. He feels almost
betrayed, having traded those words of love and shared all his secrets, when Taehyung hadn’t done
the same.

“I never talked about it because I didn’t want to worry you.”

Jeongguk bites back a snort.

“I spent all my time being miserable about it. Trying to overcompensate for it. But when I was with
you…” Taehyung’s voice goes quiet as he stares at the hospital sheets. “Maybe this sounds really
dumb, but all I ever thought about was how beautiful the world was. You always made me forget
about the bad things.”

Jeongguk swallows thickly as the words seep into his skin. His entire being is trying to reject the
words, tune them out because he doesn’t want to believe them. But Taehyung’s eyes are disarmingly
sincere. Sad. Jeongguk shifts the weight on his feet awkwardly, skin suddenly feeling too tight.

“Here,” Jeongguk says suddenly, holding out the cup of coffee that he had almost forgotten in his
hands. “I thought you might need it.”

“Oh. Uhm… Thank you,” Taehyung says in surprise, taking the cup slowly. Jeongguk breathes a
sigh of relief for having momentarily distracted the older man. If Taehyung had kept staring at
Jeongguk like that, he doesn’t know what he might do. Kiss him, maybe.

“I’m just going to…” Jeongguk points to the door awkwardly. Taehyung nods soberly, and
Jeongguk nods before exiting the room and closing the door behind him. Once he’s walked a
suitable distance away, he lets out a breath he didn’t know he’d been holding.

“You’re such an idiot, Jeon Jeongguk,” he whispers to himself, leaning his forehead against the cool
wall. His head is throbbing from everything that had happened. Jeongguk doesn’t know anything
anymore. Everything he’d convinced himself about Taehyung for the last ten years had been a
massive lie.

“God,” Jeongguk groans, head colliding with the wall with a soft thump.

“Dr. Jeon?” Jeongguk jumps away from the wall, whipping around to see one of the nurses standing
there with a clipboard in their hands, eyebrows raised in concern.
“Are you alright?”

“Yes… I just…” Jeongguk scratches his head nervously. “Sorry,” Jeongguk bows, before turning around and walking briskly around the corner. He needs to get as far away as he can from Taehyung, and from his feelings.

♥

Jeongguk is putting the last dish in the dryer when his doorbell rings. At this point, his body is conditioned to think that it could only be one person. He sighs, running his hand through his hair before going to the door.

“Taehyung?”

Who else could it be?

Jeongguk blinks, taking in Taehyung’s bedraggled, unstable state as he stands in the hall outside Jeongguk’s door. He looks drunk.

“Oh, hi Jeonggukie,” Taehyung smiles, and his lips form a box shape and it would be almost cute if not for the fact that his eyes are red and he looks like he’s going to tip over.

“Wait no,” Taehyung frowns down at the floor, scratching his head. “I’m not supposed t’call you Jeonggukie anymore, huh?” He laughs sheepishly, tottering. “Sorry Jeonggukie.”

Jeongguk stares at Taehyung, lip curled down in concern. “Come in,” Jeongguk says. “Before you seriously hurt yourself,” he grumbles, watching as Taehyung stumbles into his living room, plopping down on one of the massive leather couches.

“So comfy,” Taehyung says, stretching his body out. As he lifts his arms, his shirt rides up, revealing his taut, tanned abdomen. Jeongguk rolls his eyes, crouching down next to the inebriated man to pull down the shirt again because it’s too damn distracting, and that’s when he really gets a whiff of the alcohol.
“God, how much did you drink you idiot?” Jeongguk scolds and Taehyung shrugs.

“A lot, I think. Vodka, rum. Oh, I think I had some rum too,” he giggles.

“Did you eat anything today? Drink water?”

“Nope,” Taehyung says, popping the ‘p’.

“You are seriously something else,” Jeongguk murmurs under his breath, straightening up to go to the kitchen.

I can’t believe I’m doing this, Jeongguk tells himself, but pathetically enough, he can, rummaging through his cupboard until he finds the wheat bread and pops two slices into the toaster. He fills a glass with water, grabbing the bread when it’s done, and puts the slices on a plate before going back out to Taehyung.

“Eat this,” Jeongguk orders, putting the plate in Taehyung’s hands. “When you’re done, drink the water.” He sits down on the coffee table, right across from Taehyung.

Taehyung scrunches up his face. “I don’t like wheat bread,” He picks up a slice with two fingers, fake gagging, and Jeongguk bites down the irritation.


“Chew,” Jeongguk says through gritted teeth. I can’t believe this. He looks at the clock across from him. It’s so late. He’d pulled such a long shift at the hospital, he had only been able to muster up enough energy to cook something before mentally preparing himself to sleep away the rest of the century.
“I’m chewing,” Taehyung says, mouth full.

“Chew faster.”

Taehyung sticks out his tongue, but dutifully eats both slices of the bread. “Drink this. And when you’re done, drink another one.” Jeongguk hands Taehyung the glass, and it wobbles dangerously in the older man’s hand. The water splashes onto the couch.

“Whoops, I guess I’m drunk,” Taehyung laughs and Jeongguk pinches the bridge of his nose.

“Just drink the goddamn water,” Jeongguk pleads. He’s desperate to have Taehyung in his own bed, hydrated and with a full stomach. That way Jeongguk doesn’t have to worry so much, and he can sleep easier. Taehyung had been relatively silent the whole day, staying at the hospital until Hoseok managed to get him out for a while, and Jeongguk had lulled himself into a false sense of security. He didn’t think Taehyung would go and get himself drunk.

“This water is good,” Taehyung chirps, finishing the glass and smacking his lips dramatically. “Tastes like juice. Wanna know my favorite juice? Mango juice. Mango juice is my favorite juice. Yup.”

“Does it look like I care?” Jeongguk asks, exasperated beyond belief.

Taehyung’s face crumples into a frown, and his bottom lip wavers dangerously. “Joonie hyung cared what juice I liked.”


“He cared about what type of cake I liked. My favorite color. My favorite type of sandwich. All the important things,” Taehyung lists. “He always came when I got sick. He gives nice warm hugs. I love Joonie hyung’s hugs.” A fond smile tugs at Taehyung’s lips and Jeongguk is on guard, wary of Taehyung’s lightning quick mood changes.

“I should go hug Joonie hyung. I haven’t visited him in a while. He probably misses me. Yeah, I’m gonna go see Joonie hyung, I’ll call him,” Taehyung nods sluggishly, and makes to get up. Jeongguk’s hands shoot out in a panic, grabbing Taehyung’s waist, and sits him down.
“N-no, I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Jeongguk says shakily. He doesn’t want to be the one to break the news to a drunk, emotionally unstable man that his brother’s been dead for five years.

“Aww, then can I hug you?” Taehyung slurs. And before Jeongguk can say *hell no*, Taehyung’s leaning forward and wrapping his arms around Jeongguk’s neck, pulling him close.

Jeongguk’s hands shoot out around Taehyung’s waist again on instinct, trying to stabilize them both when Taehyung’s practically crawling into his lap. The older man buries his nose into Jeongguk’s neck, taking a deep breath.

“You smell so good, Jeonggukie,” he half moans, rubbing his nose against the skin behind Jeongguk’s ear. “You always smelled good. Really sexy, and manly. I like that. You’re sexy, Jeonggukie.”

Jeongguk is mostly alarmed, but if he’s willing to admit it, he’s a bit pleased. There’s a dull throb of lust in his stomach and it takes all of his willpower to tamp it down. “I think about you all the time, you know? Like, every day. And sometimes, I touch myself, and I say your name, and then I pretend that you’re there instead, because you’re so sexy. I wish you’d touch me more. I know you want to.”

Taehyung giggles, breath warm against Jeongguk’s neck. Jeongguk’s body flushes hot against his will and he tightens his grip on Taehyung’s hips.

“I really want to have sex with you. All the time. I want to lick all your tattoos and get on my knees for you. Do everything you tell me to do. I want you to bite me and spank me and say dirty things to me. I want you so bad,” Taehyung whines, wriggling his body in Jeongguk’s lap.

“I want to be so naughty,” Taehyung licks a stripe up Jeongguk’s ear and Jeongguk’s heart hammers wildly against his chest. “I want you to wreck me and kiss me and fuck me until I cry,” He takes Jeongguk’s earlobe into his mouth, nibbling. “I want to do all that, but you won’t let me.

“You’re so perfect, Jeonggukie. You’ve always been perfect, but now you’re the perfectest. I just like you so much,” Taehyung moans and Jeongguk can feel Taehyung’s growing erection pressed against his stomach.

“I wish you’d like me too,” Jeongguk’s throat tightens as Taehyung presses their bodies closer together. “But you’re so mean to me. Why are you so mean to me Jeonggukie? Why won’t you kiss
me? Why didn’t you stay the night?”

And that snaps Jeongguk out of his frozen state. “Okay, that’s enough,” Jeongguk growls, tugging at Taehyung’s arms until the man lets go. He doesn’t want to listen to any more drunken rambling because he’s afraid Taehyung’s going to say even more things that he really doesn’t want to hear and consequently deal with. He eases Taehyung back onto the couch and the older man sinks down, sighing. Jeongguk stands up, face disarmingly hot, and there’s an uncomfortable tightness in his pants.

 Damn you, Kim Taehyung, Jeongguk curses, watching the man curl up into a ball on the couch, as though he hadn’t been rubbing himself all over Jeongguk just moments before. Tonight had gone from zero to sixty and back to zero way too quickly.

Jeongguk takes a deep breath, closing his eyes and wondering what sort of karmic injustice had made it so that Kim Taehyung, the most stressful man on the planet, lives next door.

Once he’s calmed himself down, he shakes Taehyung. “Hey, you need to get home,” Jeongguk says.

“I can sleep here,” Taehyung mumbles.

“Ha, no,” Jeongguk retorts, wrapping his arms around Taehyung and pulling him up to his feet. Taehyung is like some sort of koala, wrapping his arms tight around Jeongguk’s waist tucking his head underneath Jeongguk’s chin.

“Jesus Christ,” Jeongguk curses, stumbling, trying to manage both their weights as he guides Taehyung to his own door.

“Hey,” Jeongguk shakes Taehyung. The older man makes a noncommittal sound, keeping his eyes shut. “What’s your passcode?”

“Why should I tell ya?” Taehyung slurs. “So you can sneak into my room and watch me sleep?” He giggles at the thought. “Actually, that’s kinda hot. Wanna watch me sleep Jeonggukie?”

“No, what the fuck, just tell me your passcode so I can get you to bed,” Jeongguk hisses in annoyance. Taehyung giggles again but he mumbles the number sequence anyway, much to Jeongguk’s relief.
The door beeps and Jeongguk opens it, dragging Taehyung’s dead weight into the house. Jeongguk doesn’t really need to ask where Taehyung’s room is and knowing that he has that intimate knowledge of Taehyung’s space bothers him, but he brushes it aside.

Belatedly, he wonders whether this was the universe’s twisted way of getting him back for the coffee. He knew he shouldn’t have tried to be nice. Now Taehyung had all sorts of ideas. He’d attempted to be pleasant once and suddenly Taehyung’s showing up at his house, piss drunk, rubbing up on him and being a general nuisance.

“Okay, down you go,” Jeongguk says, lowering Taehyung onto the bed and tucking the covers over him.

“Thanks Jeonggukie,” Taehyung mumbles, blinking sleepily. “You should meet Joonie hyung some time.”

Jeongguk tenses, swallowing the lump in his throat, as he momentarily forgets his annoyance. “Y-yeah, okay.”

“He’d like you. I think more than he likes me,” Taehyung frowns. “You’re all smart and hard working, just like him. And I’m jus’ a lazy dis’ppointment,” He sighs, face crumpling “Look at me. Can’t play with a kid without him ending up in the hosp’tal. And now I’m drunk. Can’t take care of a kid. A company. Myself.”

Jeongguk wonders whether he should say something. If there’s even anything he can say in response to that. “I think he’s… very proud of you,” Jeongguk decides to say after a moment, because Taehyung’s on the verge of tears and the last thing he needs is Taehyung crying on him because he hates seeing Taehyung cry. He looks like a wounded little animal and it makes Jeongguk uncomfortable and oddly guilty.

“Think so?” Taehyung’s voice is painfully hopeful and Jeongguk wonders if he’ll even remember all this in the morning.

“Of course. You’re smarter than you think. And you’ve worked hard to expand past the solid foundation he built. He’s really proud,” Jeongguk tries to smile. “And what happened with Jimin wasn’t your fault. He’ll be fine. I’ll take care of it.”
“Yeah?” Taehyung’s lips wobble into a smile.

“Yeah. Know why?”

Taehyung’s eyes widen. “Why?”

“Because I have magical powers.”

“Really?” Taehyung squeaks. “That’s so cool!”

Jeongguk half wants to laugh because that was too easy. “Now I’m gonna use my powers on you and make you sleep, okay?”

Taehyung nods and Jeongguk wiggles his fingers in front of his face for good measure.

“Y’know, you’re really nice when you’re not being mean, Jeonggukie. That’s why… that’s why I like you so… m-much,” Taehyung slurs, and right after, he’s completely knocked out. Jeongguk sighs in relief and turns to go. He’s at the door when the guilt pangs at his chest.

“Jeon Jeongguk, you are a screwed up bastard,” Jeongguk growls to himself as he goes through Taehyung’s cupboards, looking for a glass and aspirin. He fills up the glass with water before walking back into Taehyung’s room. He sighs, looking down at Taehyung’s sleeping form, setting the glass and the bottle on the nightstand, before turning off all the lights and shutting the door behind him.

Is this what it’s become? Jeongguk laments, as he sinks down in his own bed wondering when he had allowed every crevice of his mind to be consumed with thoughts of Taehyung, when he’d allowed him to worm his way into his life like this. When he had actually started to care so much that not thinking about Taehyung was actually painful. Everything was so confusing, but there’s one thing he knew for sure.

“I’m in so much trouble.”
as always you're welcome to scream/yell/throw rotten fruit at me on tumblr, and there's a super cool smh tag where people have been asking all sorts of questions about the au!
“Hyungie!” Jimin squeals as Taehyung enters his hospital room with Hoseok, armed with a legion of stuffed animals.

“Hey pancake Jiminie!” Taehyung chirps back; setting the teddy bear, the minion, and the kumamon down carefully on the bed. “I brought a few of my friends to keep you company.”

Jemin immediately grabs the stuffed Minion and smothers his face into it, giggling in delight. “Are you going to stay and play with me, hyungie?” he asks, eyes wide.

“Taehyung…” Hoseok says, eyeing his tablet in warning.

Taehyung smiles tightly. “Not much today, Jiminnie. I have to go talk to adults today,” he explains, rolling his eyes. Jimin screws his face up in matching annoyance.

“Ew,” he responds, hugging the minion tighter.

“I know, right?” Taehyung can feel Hoseok rolling his eyes behind him, though Hoseok’s got his eyes trained down at his smartphone; no doubt sending some sort of email or arranging a meeting. “I came to say hi and make sure you wouldn’t be lonely when I wasn’t here.”

He scoots one of the chairs in the room towards the edge of Jimin’s bed. He’s a little agitated. He hates the sterile smell of hospitals, the grating beeping of the heart monitor. Jimin has an IV catheter strapped to the veins on the top of his hands and it makes Taehyung’s skin crawl with the phantom sensation of constant needles under his skin. The only thing that makes him feel more at ease is the Pikachu band-aid that’s on top of the medical tape holding everything in place.

“That’s a cool band-aid, Jiminnie,” Taehyung says and Jimin’s eyes disappear with the force of his smile.

“Dr. Jeon gave it to me,” he explains happily and Taehyung’s heart lurches. Just a little bit.
“Oh, did he?”

Jimin nods excitedly. “He has a whole box of them. Tomorrow he said he’d bring me dinosaur ones!”

Taehyung leans back. “Wow, dinosaurs?” He turns to Hoseok. “Can we get some of those for the office?” Hoseok snorts. He turns back to Jimin. “How are you feeling? It’s not too boring here, right?”

Jimin shakes his head vehemently. “It’s fun! Dr. Jeon always hangs out with me.”

“Really?”

“Yeah! I always ask him questions and he teaches me things! He lets me play with his stemscope!”

Taehyung bites his lip, “Stethoscope?”

Jimin giggles. “Oh yeah! And he told me about whales and dolphins and sharks. He has a huge book with all the fishes and stuff. Dr. Jeon knows everything.”

He leans in, like he’s about to tell a great secret. “Hyungie, I think Dr. Jeon is a robot.”

Taehyung can’t hold back the laugh at that. “Why do you say that?”

“He remembers everything! He has to be a computer or something! Remember that one movie we watched with all the robots and they knew all the answers to all the questions? That’s Dr. Jeon. He even knows why the sky is blue!”

Taehyung opens his mouth to say something, but just then there’s a knock on the door and Jeongguk strides in, looking down at the chart in his hand.
“Hey Jimin, how are--,” He stops in his tracks when he notices Taehyung and Hoseok in the room. He smiles at Hoseok, glancing shyly at Taehyung before walking over to the bed.

“Hi,” he says quietly, bringing his hand up as though to wave, but hesitates and ends up scratching behind his ear. The motion is so awkward and endearing Taehyung beams at him.

“Hey! How are you?” Taehyung asks.

Jeongguk gives him a small smile. “I’m alright. You?”

“Great!”


Jimin watches this interaction closely, “Dr. Jeon, do you have a crush on hyungie?” Jeongguk knocks his elbow against the edge of the bed and curses. Taehyung reaches forward across the bed to steady Jeongguk when he wobbles.

“W-why would you think that?” Jeongguk stutters, holding his elbow and looking mildly distraught. He looks at Taehyung, who’s still gripping his arm. “I’m okay, Taehyung,” he says, stepping out of his reach. Taehyung smiles sheepishly, settling back into his chair.

“I’m a kid. I know things,” Jimin replies smartly. Jeongguk shoots Taehyung an unreadable look and moves over to the computer.

“Did the nurse give you your meds yet?” Jeongguk changes the subject quickly as he opens Jimin’s file on the computer. Jimin nods, cuddling with the Minion.

“Made a new friend?” he asks, rubbing his elbow and grimacing.

Jimin nods. “I’m gonna name it Dr. Jeon,” he says and Jeongguk’s eyebrows shoot up. “So when the real Dr. Jeon isn’t here he can be my friend,” he explains, like it’s as simple as that.
Taehyung rubs his chest. The feels, he bemoans, because the idea of Jeongguk being so comfortable and winning Jimin over makes his heart ache. Jimin always had something like a sixth sense and he could always tell when someone was good and not. If Jimin liked-- loved-- Jeongguk then Taehyung knew Jeongguk hadn't lost his kind heart.

Jeongguk scans over the screen, frowning. Taehyung doesn't know whether he heard Jimin’s comment or not, considering the intense focus on the monitor.

“Dr. Jeon?” Jimin asks, voice small. That seems to snap Jeongguk out of it. He looks up and smiles tightly at Jimin.

“Sorry, kiddo. Mind if I talk to your hyung outside for a sec?”

Jimin nods and Taehyung frowns, getting out of his chair, following after Jeongguk as he steps into the hall.

“What’s wrong?” Taehyung asks immediately, voice hushed.

Jeongguk sighs. “His recent physical… isn’t as great as we were hoping. I think he must have either really exerted himself the last couple months or he just wasn’t ready to begin with.”

A twinge of anxiety creeps up Taehyung’s spine. “So what are you saying?”

Jeongguk looks Taehyung right in the eye. “I have to put him back in the wheelchair.”

“What?”

Jeongguk shoots a wary look at the door, a warning for Taehyung to lower his voice.

“Why?” Taehyung asks, more quiet this time. “He just got out of it. Do you know how happy he is when he’s up and walking?”

“I know, Taehyung. I’ve seen it. But I can’t risk that for him right now. I want him to be as safe and
healthy as he can. I wouldn’t do this if I didn’t have to.”

And of course, Jeongguk is right. Taehyung can’t protest. He’s not a doctor; he doesn’t know anything. “He’s going to be so upset,” he says weakly.

“I know that too. But I need you on my side here, okay? If we’re both on the same page it’ll be easier for him to accept it.”

“Yeah. Yeah, okay.”

Jeongguk nods, setting his back straight and pursing his lips as they both walk back into the room. Jeongguk crouches down so he’s level with Jimin.


“Something like that. But now I’m gonna tell you too, okay?” Jimin nods. “You know your hyung and I only want the best for you, right?” Jimin nods again. “So whatever we have to do, we do it because we want to see you healthy, okay?”

“What’s wrong?” Jimin says immediately, lips stuck out in worry.

Jeongguk sighs. “You have to start using the wheelchair again, Jimin.”

The swiftness with which Jimin’s face drops is alarming. “I don’t want to,” he says, voice deadly serious.

“You have to, though, Jimin. For a little while. Not for too long, just until you’re feeling better—”

“I don’t want to!” Jimin screams and Taehyung’s jaw goes slack, heart lurching in his chest. In the few years he’d known Park Jimin, he’d been nothing but an angel. He’d never seen him like this, throwing something akin to a tantrum. Jeongguk doesn’t look the slightest bit phased.
“Jimin, I know you don’t like it, but I know you want to be healthy and--”

“No no no no!” Jimin wails, pounding his hands against his mattress as tears streak down his cheeks. Taehyung feels rooted to the spot, not knowing what to do. He wishes he could make a joke, try to soothe the crying boy, but he’s frozen.

Jeongguk just keeps calm, reaching for Jimin’s hand-- the one with the catheter on it--and pulls out the tubing, before pulling Jimin’s sheets back and opening his arms. Jimin’s small frame is shaking with his sobs, alternating with shrieks and wails.

“Come on, kiddo,” Jeongguk says softly and Jimin looks up, eyes wet and red.

“I d-don’t want to go anywhere,” he says, hiccuping between words.

“But I have to tell you a secret. Don’t you want to know?” Jeongguk asks, eyes wide as though he’s genuinely shocked. Jimin nods, still blubbering a bit. Jeongguk widens his arms as an invitation and Jimin doesn’t hesitate to lean forward and let Jeongguk pull him into his arms.

Five minutes, Jeongguk mouths to Taehyung, who can only nod and watch as Jeongguk walks out the door with Jimin crying into his neck. He shuffles towards the door and peers out, watching Jeongguk make a round of the hall, murmuring something into Jimin’s ear as he goes.

“That escalated quickly,” Hoseok mumbles, stepping up next to Taehyung to watch Jeongguk and Jimin. Taehyung hums, because his tongue feels like sandpaper in his mouth. “Think the kid’ll be okay?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung croaks. “Jeongguk’s got him.”

And the words soothe him more than he’d expected. Jeongguk’s got him. Taehyung trusts Jeongguk, knows his capabilities. That no matter what happened he’d take care of it.

Something close to five minutes does pass before Jeongguk heads back towards Jimin’s room and Taehyung hurries back to his seat. Jeongguk nods to Taehyung, like he’s saying, everything’s okay, and he gently places a (now) very exhausted Jimin back onto his bed.
Jeongguk is careful not to jostle him as he fixes all the IVs back into the catheter and Taehyung reaches to pull the blanket over Jimin and settle him in.

“Dr. Jeon?” Jimin says sleepily, voice hoarse from crying.

“Well?” Jeongguk asks, fiddling with the saline and medication drips.

“Tomorrow I want two dinosaur band aids.”

Jeongguk smiles down at Jimin fondly. “You drive a hard bargain, kid.”

“I want three now.”

Alright alright. I’ll give you three. But you have to keep your promise, alright?” Jeongguk says, voice taking on a note of secrecy for Jimin’s benefit. Jimin nods sleepily and holds out his hand.

“Pinky promise,” Jimin says.

“Pinky promise,” Jeongguk affirms, linking their fingers together, and it’s almost comical how impossibly small Jimin’s soft, pudgy fingers are in comparison to Jeongguk’s wide, calloused ones. Taehyung bites his lip.

And with that done, Jimin promptly falls asleep. Taehyung gives Jeongguk a questioning look and he just shakes his head. Taehyung can’t fathom what Jeongguk could have said to Jimin to make him calm down so quickly. Maybe it’s not something for him to know.

“He’s okay,” Jeongguk assures Taehyung and it helps the churning in his stomach. He grabs Jimin’s paper file from where he’d placed it on top of the computer keyboard and makes a few notes on it before closing it, satisfied.

He looks up at Taehyung, stuffing his pen back into his breast pocket. He shuffles his feet awkwardly like he’s looking for something to say. “I-- Your check up is tomorrow…” he says.
“Thanks for reminding me,” Taehyung says, smiling.

“Don’t be late,” Jeongguk says, but there’s no malice behind it. It sounds a bit forced, like he’s trying to be light-hearted but it’s too strained to be humorous. Taehyung brushes it off. It’s better than how they were a week ago.

“Yessir,” Taehyung says, saluting, and Jeongguk reddens before heading towards the door.

“I’ll see you tomorrow then,” he says, nodding a goodbye to Hoseok as well.

“See you tomorrow.”

♥

“Breathe in.”

Taehyung takes in as deep a breath as physiologically possible and he ends up with a lung full of Jeongguk’s cologne. His body goes weak at that, heat pooling in his stomach, and he coughs in surprise at the sudden, knee jerk reaction to Jeongguk’s smell.

Jeongguk pulls back instantly, frowning. “Are you alright?” he asks, voice laced with genuine worry.

“Fine,” Taehyung croaks out, eyes watering a bit from the burning in his mouth.

“Can I get you some water? Do you need to lie down?”

“No no, I swear I’m fine,” Taehyung says dismissively, mildly embarrassed, but Jeongguk doesn’t seem to have a clue, so he plays it off. “Just had one of those sudden scratches at the back of my throat. You know?” Jeongguk eyes him with concern. “Anyways, sorry to interrupt. You can go back to doing your doctor thing now.”

That gets Taehyung a hint of a smile from Jeongguk and he thinks all is not yet lost.
“Alright,” Jeongguk says softly and leans in again. Taehyung resists the urge to shut his eyes, because Jeongguk is too damn close. Taehyung can see the scarring behind Jeongguk’s ear, count his eyelashes, smell his cologne. And Jeongguk is just so warm, his entire body radiating this comforting heat near Taehyung and it’s so nice, considering how frigid this room is.

Jeongguk presses his hand slowly—hesitantly—against Taehyung’s back as he presses the head of the stethoscope just barely to the left of center on Taehyung’s chest and furrows his eyebrows in concentration. The heat of his hand bleeds through the thin fabric of Taehyung’s gown. He suppresses the urge to shiver, though it’s hard enough trying to maintain his embarrassingly quick heart rate, much less any other reaction he might have when Jeongguk is close. He’s so focused on his own problems that he doesn’t notice the stethoscope tremble in Jeongguk’s hand.

“You’re so tense,” Jeongguk says softly and Taehyung wants to melt against the words. It feels almost silly, how drawn he is to the man. They’d only slept together three times— and only once had it actually gone well— and it still isn’t clear what they are, but Taehyung thinks he might be a little bit in love already.

“No, I’m not,” Taehyung says on reflex. Jeongguk smiles knowingly (What could he know?) and glances down at Taehyung’s hands, currently clenched tight against the edge of the examination bed. “Oh,” he says, unfurling his fingers in surprise.

“Am I making you uncomfortable?” Jeongguk asks and the anxiousness in his tone throws Taehyung off. This Jeongguk—gentle, awkward, hesitant Jeongguk— is someone who Taehyung had thought he’d lost a long time ago. He doesn’t know what to make of Jeongguk’s behavior in this situation.

“What? No I just—” Taehyung swallows and briefly considers the idea that he might make Jeongguk uncomfortable. “It’s been a long day,” he says finally, sighing.

“I second that,” Jeongguk says, looking a bit relieved, and Taehyung is disappointed when he steps back completely, draping the stethoscope around his neck.

“So what’s the verdict, doc?” Taehyung asks, trying to dispel the odd, thick feeling in the air as Jeongguk settles down on the stool by the computer and starts typing away at what Taehyung assumes is his chart.

“You look healthy. Though your blood pressure is a bit high. You measure it regularly, right?”
Taehyung nods. It’d become something like a habit in the last couple of months, checking his blood pressure every couple of hours. “It’s been around 140/80.”

Jeongguk nods. “It’s a bit high. I might increase your dosage of beta blockers.” Taehyung tries hard not to scrunch his face in distaste. He hated medication, since it had been such a consistent factor in his life growing up, and now he was on a whole cocktail of them as prescribed by one Dr. Jeon Jeongguk.

“Are you exercising regularly?” Jeongguk asks.

Taehyung smiles sheepishly. “About that…”

Jeongguk gives him a look akin to one of a disappointed mother. “Regular exercise is really important, Taehyung. It--”

“--helps regeneration of cells and a quicker recovery, I know, I know. I’ve just been busy!”

Jeongguk purses his lips and gives him another look. “I’ll try harder from now on,” Taehyung tacks on at the end and it doesn’t seem to appease Jeongguk in the least, but he goes back to typing at the computer anyway.

“It seemed pretty empty in the waiting room,” Taehyung says, after a minute of quiet, save for the rhythmic tapping of keys. “Am I the last one for the day?”

Jeongguk nods. “I’m… going to go see my noona afterwards,” he divulges, almost reluctantly.

Taehyung perks up at that. “I was going to go see hyung. Want to go together?”

Jeongguk stares blankly at Taehyung for a moment and he fears he might have overstepped some massive boundary. “Okay,” Jeongguk says quietly, much to Taehyung’s relief. “I can… drive you, if you want,” he adds quickly.

Happiness bubbles under Taehyung’s skin and he beams. “That would be great, thank you!”
Jeongguk offers him a small smile and it’s quiet as they wrap up the appointment. Taehyung waits for Jeongguk in the lobby, chatting with his receptionist— a really sweet girl named Wheein— after settling the date for his next checkup.

Taehyung smiles when Jeongguk walks out, leather bag in one hand, coat draped over the other, and all bundled up in a black coat and grey scarf.

“Good night, Wheein,” Jeongguk says, bowing his head as he goes.

“Good night, Dr. Jeon,” Wheein chirps. Taehyung waves as he follows Jeongguk out of the office space and into the hall to take the elevator down. Jeongguk’s office was on one of the top floors of a highrise building and most of the spaces had been bought by medical professionals for their private practice. Taehyung remembers being here a few times, on lower floors, to meet with various consultants when he was younger.

They step into the elevator together and ride down in companionable silence. Taehyung steals glances at Jeongguk out of the corner of his eye. Three months ago, he’d met this man for the first time in ten years and everything looked like it was shattered beyond repair.

Yet here they were, standing side by side, not necessarily friends, but moving towards something intimate. Taehyung bites his lip to keep himself from smiling. He’s itching to push forward, make progress, but he knows they have to go at Jeongguk’s pace. He’d always been the more reserved one, while Taehyung dived head-first into things. But he’s willing to wait for however long it takes. He doesn’t want to mess this up.

And Taehyung gets it. He understands Jeongguk’s hesitation, his awkwardness. They’re still on shaky ground and it was hard to tell what might trigger a bad memory from the past and set them back again if they weren’t careful. Careful, yes they definitely had to be careful. Youth was beautiful because there were no consequences. No ulterior motives, no scars, no secrets. Just love, no matter how fleeting. The adult world wasn’t like that. Everyone carried the burden of their past on their shoulders, and worries about the future. And love was harder to find, hidden under all those defenses made to keep the hurt out.

But it’s worth it, isn’t it? Taehyung wonders whether he and Jeongguk have a chance. Things wouldn’t-- couldn’t-- ever be the same, but maybe they could trust each other again. Taehyung doesn’t know whether Jeongguk trusts him, but he wants to earn it.

Lost in his thoughts, Taehyung doesn’t register getting out of the elevator and following Jeongguk through the parking garage until they stop in front of a black Audi. Jeongguk unlocks the car and
they settle inside quickly.

Taehyung takes a moment to register Jeongguk’s sleek black Audi. There was always something to be said about someone’s personality as a reflection of their car. And Jeongguk’s… has nothing in it. It’s impossibly clean, not a speck of dust to be seen, no half-full water bottles or spare change in the cup holders. Just a pair of black aviators and the lingering scent of his cologne.

“Your car is really clean,” Taehyung says aloud. Jeongguk gives him an odd look as he backs out of the parking space.

“I don’t like messes,” he says simply, driving expertly out of the parking garage and into the busy Seoul traffic.

Taehyung remembers brief flashes of the inside of Jeongguk’s home from when he’d been inside a few days ago. Everything was black and white with not a single thing out of place. Then again, Taehyung had been abysmally drunk and there were three Jeongguk’s spinning around in his blurry vision.

“I… should apologize for what happened a couple nights ago. I don’t… usually drink like that, but I was feeling sorry for myself and I’m sufficiently embarrassed. I’m sorry.”

The silence is thick in the car for a moment, save for the humming of the heater.

“It’s okay. I... understand why you did that.”

Taehyung looks at Jeongguk hesitantly. “Really?”

Jeongguk shrugs, staring forward at the road, the picture of calm, but his fingers grip the steering wheel tightly. “Yeah. If I was in your position, I probably would have done the same thing. So. It’s okay. You don’t have to apologize.”

Taehyung bites his lip, fiddling with his fingers.

“And--” Taehyung looks up again. “I’m glad you came to me. If it had been anyone else, I don’t know whether you’d have gotten home safely. You have really bad eating habits, you know that? I
feel like I need to make you a meal plan or something. If you don’t--”

“Shhh--” Taehyung says, gripping Jeongguk’s arm for a moment. Jeongguk gives him a quick glance, caught off guard. “Let me enjoy a moment of you being pleasant before you turn all annoying again,” he jokes, but Jeongguk’s face drops.

“Was I? I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it--”

It takes a moment to process the sudden change and Jeongguk rambles, apologizing every other word and Taehyung can’t understand why, but then it clicks.

“Dude it’s a joke. I was joking. You’re not being annoying,” Taehyung assures. Jeongguk inhales sharply, ears tipping red in the late afternoon sun. “I’d tell you if you actually crossed a line,” Taehyung smiles. “It’s actually touching how much you worry about me.”

Jeongguk scowls. “It’s ’cuz I’m your doctor. I can’t have you dying on me just ’cuz you have no common sense.”

Taehyung scoffs. “While I can agree with the validity of that statement, I’m still butthurt.”

“I’ll cook you dinner to make up for it.”

Taehyung thinks Jeongguk probably didn’t realize what he’d said until after he’d said it. “I-I mean. If you want. I don’t know if my cooking’s even that good. You probably had dinner already. Forget it, i-it was stupid I don’t know why I said that.”

Taehyung pouts. “Really? You want me to forget you said that?” Jeongguk drums his fingers against the steering wheel nervously. “’Cuz I was really looking forward to a home-cooked meal. Damn.”

Jeongguk is silent for a while. Taehyung wonders whether he’d overstepped a massive boundary again. “Do you want to? Have dinner with me, I mean.”

“I’d love to, if you’re okay with that. I’m pretty sure your cooking is way better than mine anyways.”
Jeongguk side-eyes Taehyung. “I wouldn’t call what you do cooking. It’s more like a potential nuclear disaster.”

“The microwave exploded one time, Jeongguk. It was one time!”

“You almost set your apartment on fire! Who puts metal chopsticks in the microwave?”

“I just forgot, okay?” Taehyung pouts, crossing his arms over his chest and staring out his window.

“It’s okay. If you promise to stay far away from the kitchen, I’ll cook you dinner.”

Taehyung grins. “Deal.”

♥

The light, teasing mood in the car turns heavy when Jeongguk turns into the cemetery parking lot. Visiting this place carries bad memories for both of them and just entering the space wipes the smiles off their faces.

“I’ll just go--” Taehyung points to Namjoon’s white mausoleum structure. Jeongguk nods, already a bit distracted. They part ways and Jeongguk heads over to Sojin’s grave.

“Hey, noona,” he murmurs, stuffing his hands in his pockets. It’s getting colder now, as winter approaches. The wind blows and the autumn leaves sweep past the grave stone.

_I have no idea what I’m doing._ Jeongguk thinks, frowning. He prided himself on his cool, calm exterior, but ever since Taehyung had cracked it, he felt unsure. It isn’t a bad feeling, but he does feel more vulnerable than ever before and it sets him on edge. He doesn’t want to push Taehyung. He wants to be careful. He doesn’t want to lose whatever they have, what they’re slowly starting to build.

*But what if I’m not good enough?* Every person who Jeongguk has ever cared about in his life has
left him in some form. Sojin was dead, Seokjin had left for Europe, and Taehyung… he had lost Taehyung. But now he had him back, but it was scarier than ever. It was only time before Taehyung left him again. There’s something about me, Jeongguk thinks, that makes everyone leave.

And the revelation feels like a punch in the gut. He lets out a startled breath, staring down at the engraved granite, reading the line Park Sojin over and over again. There’s a familiar burning under his skin and Jeongguk wonders why he comes to Sojin’s grave so often if he knows he’s just going to suffer every moment he’s there.

“I-I--” Jeongguk stammers into the air, pulling his hands out of his pockets and clenching them tightly. Shit. Shit shit shit. Jeongguk wonders why he has to be in his head all the time, why he has to doubt every moment in his life, and work himself up like this for no reason --

“Hey,” Taehyung says softly, stepping up beside him. Jeongguk doesn’t make any motion to acknowledge him, still staring down at the plaque. How can someone love me if I can’t even love myself?

But then Taehyung reaches for one of his hands, uncurls it, and tangles his own fingers in his. The warmth of it soothes Jeongguk, grounding him, and he lets out a breath, deeper and more calm this time.

“Hi, Sojin ssi,” Taehyung murmurs. “I only met you once but... you must be one of the most selfless, hardworking people I know. Thank you for protecting Jeongguk the best you could.”

Jeongguk swallows thickly, clutching Taehyung’s hand tight. When was the last time someone held his hand?

“We’re both kinda the same, I guess. We both left Jeongguk, probably when he needed us most. But you wouldn’t have, if you had the choice. You would still be here, by his side, I know that. And I guess… I guess you’re still watching over him, protecting him. How else could he have become the amazing man he is today?” Taehyung exhales sharply, his breath curling up in the air in front of him. “But I’m here now. I’ll stay by his side and we’ll take care of each other. I promise. So you don’t have to worry anymore.”

Jeongguk listens to Taehyung’s words half desperate, half disbelieving. How could Taehyung have known what he was thinking?
“Let’s go home,” Taehyung says after a moment of quiet, pressing closer until his chin is resting on Jeongguk’s shoulder. Time stands still, for one brief second, and Jeongguk wonders if this-- Taehyung’s comforting breath on his neck-- is his reality now. He doesn’t know where they stand yet, what they mean to each other quite yet, but he wants Taehyung close.

Jeongguk is so frightened, but everything feels so new when he doesn’t have the burden of rage on his shoulders. He wonders whether he’s doing and saying the right things, because now that he’s not angry, he’s just… confused.

But Taehyung’s hand is solid and warm against his, reminding him that for now, this is enough.

“Y-yeah. Let’s go home.”

♥

They drive back to The Tower in silence, both caught up in their own thoughts. Visiting lost loved ones could be fulfilling and soothing even, but it took it’s toll, on the body and the mind. It can make someone feel like they’ve left part of themselves behind. That was the way with the dead, it seemed. They occupy others’ minds and hearts, long after they were gone. Jeongguk parks in the structure and they head to the elevators quickly to escape the biting cold. It had turned dark so quickly and Taehyung sticks close to Jeongguk, craving his warmth as they slip back into the land of the living.

They stand shoulder to shoulder as the elevator goes up. For the first time, they’re not standing on opposite ends of the space, trying to keep away from each other. Now, the backs of their knuckles brush and Taehyung bites his lip to keep from smiling about it.

When the elevator doors slide open on their floor, they step out together, walking in companionable silence. Taehyung feels a little jittery as Jeongguk punches the code into his lock. It would be the first time he’d properly see Jeongguk’s home, the first time he’d be invited in, instead of intruding in Jeongguk’s space.

“You can hang your coat there,” Jeongguk says, pointing to the closet right by the front door. He sets his bag down on the table beside it and places his keys into a bowl. Taehyung nods, unwinding his scarf and watching Jeongguk move around his space.

Jeongguk’s house is much like Jeongguk’s car-- spotless and sleek, like it’s right out of a modern home magazine. But that’s what throws Taehyung off. *It’s too perfect*, Taehyung thinks as he hangs
up his coat and scarf before trailing after Jeongguk. The living room shows hardly any signs of someone living here. And neither does the dining room, save for the framed MD-PhD diploma hanging on one of the walls. Nothing looks like it’s been used and Taehyung figures Jeongguk wouldn’t be one for having company.

The kitchen, however, is a different story. Though it’s spotless and organized and sleek, Taehyung can tell Jeongguk spends a lot of time here.

“What do you want me to do?” Taehyung asks. Jeongguk looks up from rolling up one of the sleeves of his dress shirt and smiles.

“You can sit over there in the corner.” Jeongguk nods his head in the direction of the breakfast bar in front of him, a steep marble countertop with matching stools. “Away from the kitchen.”

Taehyung pouts, but scuttles over anyways, because Jeongguk is probably right. He hops onto one of the stools and turns it so he can watch Jeongguk. Without the white coat or the winter coat Taehyung can truly appreciate Jeongguk’s frame. He’s in a deep blue dress shirt and a black vest and tie, and he looks so painfully good in it Taehyung wonders if they can’t just skip dinner and get to the sexy parts. The vest hugs Jeongguk’s wide shoulders and the broad expanse of his chest. And with the sleeves rolled up, Taehyung can see the veins of his forearms and the outline of bulging biceps.

“What’s on the menu, chef?” Taehyung asks teasingly, unable to resist spinning himself around in his chair. Jeongguk smiles at him, amused.

“We can have whatever you want.”

Taehyung hums in thought. “Pasta? Like the healthy kind with actual vegetables. To appease my conscious for having take out too many times this last week.”

Jeongguk frowns as he slips a black apron over his head and ties it behind his back. Why does that make him look ten times hotter? Taehyung bemoans.

“You really shouldn’t be eating like that,” Jeongguk chastises, getting out a pot and filling it with water before putting it on the stove to boil. “You’d think someone with your kind of resources would have a chef or something.”
“I mean, I used to, but after I moved I just kinda… forgot.”

Jeongguk raises an eyebrow as he gets out a cutting board and a rather intimidating looking knife (which Taehyung figures he should stay far away from). “What about Hoseok? He’s your assistant, isn’t he?”

Taehyung sighs. “Well yeah but he’s super busy too, especially with all the heart center stuff going on right now. I don’t want to bother him right now.”

If possible, Jeongguk raises his eyebrow even higher than before, and gives Taehyung an odd look, before shaking his head and smiling fondly. “Well if you’re going to be that stubborn, then you might as well learn a thing or two.”

_Uh oh._ “What does that mean?” Taehyung asks, suddenly nervous.

“You’re going to help me with dinner.”

Taehyung’s face morphs into one of horror. “Can’t I just sit here and look pretty?”

Jeongguk scoffs, crooking his finger and beckoning Taehyung closer. “You can look pretty and cut vegetables. I’m being really generous here, feeding you and offering to teach you how to cook.”

“Oh my god,” Taehyung mumbles under his breath as he hops off his perch and stands next to Jeongguk.

“You’re gonna cut the veggies for me while I get the skillet ready, okay?” Jeongguk orders, pointing to the zucchini and cherry tomatoes on the counter.

“Uhm, okay… I’ll just,” Taehyung grapples with the knife and grabs the zucchini. He holds it up, inspecting it. “What am I even supposed to do with this?”

Jeongguk sighs, moving away from the stove to take the zucchini and knife out of Taehyung’s hands. He puts it down and cuts it into four long strips. “You can just cube it,” he instructs, handing the knife carefully back to Taehyung.
Taehyung takes the knife back hesitantly and takes one of the quarters, cutting it into small pieces.

“You don’t have to be so nervous,” Jeongguk says, laughing. “Here,” he murmurs, coming up behind Taehyung and it takes everything in his power not to drop the knife. Jeongguk covers his hands over Taehyung’s, grabbing two of the stalks and guiding Taehyung through the motions of it.

Taehyung doesn’t know whether to tense up completely or melt back against Jeongguk’s chest. It feels like too long since they’d been physically close like this and Taehyung is a little dizzy from Jeongguk’s cologne.

But as they keep chopping, Taehyung relaxes and is able to focus on the vegetables instead of the way Jeongguk’s arms brush up against his and flex with the movements. The task of cutting vegetables suddenly seems enjoyable.

“You know, if you just taught me to cook like this I think I’d be more enthusiastic about it,” Taehyung says and it’s the first attempt he’s made at flirting with Jeongguk. Jeongguk tenses up, as though suddenly aware of their very intimate position, and he backs away immediately.

“I-- uh… sorry,” Jeongguk mumbles.

Taehyung laughs. “Why are you sorry? I liked it.”

Jeongguk swallows thickly, as awkward as ever. “I-- Okay.”

And for a minute, it’s weird, as Jeongguk fiddles with the stove and the skillet, but things settle back to normal rather quickly. “Chop these carrots too, okay?” he says, putting two down on the cutting board when Taehyung finishes with the zucchini and the tomatoes.

Taehyung sets to work, but it only takes a few seconds for Jeongguk to come back again, this time pressing his entire body against Taehyung. Jeongguk takes his time running his hands down Taehyung’s hands to his fingertips, curling his hands around Taehyung’s again, but this time, Taehyung can tell everything he’s doing is on purpose. A pleased flush rises to Taehyung’s cheeks as Jeongguk wraps around him.

“You don’t have to chop it up so small. Just half it--” Jeongguk guides the knife down the carrot, “--then cube it like with the others. And go slowly. Don’t get too cocky yet.” The last part feels like it’s
not about the vegetables.

And then Jeongguk pulls away again to check on the pasta. Taehyung sets his mouth in a determined line. He needs a taste of his own medicine. Because no one is better at flirting than Kim Taehyung. No one is better at teasing and acting coy, getting people worked up just the way he wanted.

When he finishes chopping, he turns to find Jeongguk looking through the fridge. He smiles and slips up behind him. “What’re you looking for?” he murmurs against Jeongguk’s ear, letting his hand slip past the apron so he can thumb at the waistband of Jeongguk’s slacks.

“Uh--,” Jeongguk stammers. He suddenly can’t remember his original intentions, not with Taehyung rubbing right over his prominent v-line. He reaches out and grabs the first thing he sees. “Milk,” he says.

“Milk? Do you need milk for pasta?” Taehyung asks, pulling his lips down into a frown, though he wants to laugh.

“Oh, n-no, not really,” Jeongguk says, putting it back. “But for some recipes you do. I j-just forgot about this one.” Real smooth, Jeon Jeongguk.

Taehyung smiles. “Of course.”

They flirt easily back and forth like that with a lot more touching-- Taehyung brushing against Jeongguk when he walks by, Jeongguk placing his hand at the small of Taehyung’s back when they’re side by side. It’s like they’re playing some sort of game to see who can rile each other up the most.

In less than thirty minutes, they successfully make a meal, Taehyung’s body is thrumming with warmth from where Jeongguk had touched him and he doesn’t set off the fire alarm once.

“You know, I was expecting something to explode,” Jeongguk confesses as they bring their plates and glasses of wine to the dining table.

“Again, I’m butthurt, but yeah, me too.” Taehyung laughs, settling in across from Jeongguk and digging in. He takes a large bite, and groans in happiness as the flavors burst on his tongue. “I am so happy right now,” he says with his mouth full, table manners be damned.
He chews enthusiastically, pausing only when he notices Jeongguk staring at him oddly. “What?” he asks, swallowing.

Jeongguk’s eyebrows pull together. “Nothing just. I think I’ve sat here once before, with Seokjin? I’m not used to having company.”

Taehyung tilts his head. “Is that a bad thing?”

“No, it’s not that,” Jeongguk sits up straighter, scrambling to reword things. “It’s-- It’s nice. I like it. Having you here.”

Taehyung smiles, stabbing at a chunk of tomato with his fork. “You know, Jeongguk, for a nerd, you sure are smooth,” he says, brandishing the fork in the air, before popping the food into his mouth. Except that he misses his mouth and ends up stabbing his lip. He startles, putting the fork down, and winces.

“Oww,” Taehyung whines, pressing his fingers against his lip. Jeongguk looks like he’s trying very hard to hold back laughter. “No, go ahead. Laugh at me. Mock my pain.”

And Jeongguk does laugh. It’s a throw-your-head-back-and-clutch-your-stomach kind of laugh, reverberating through the entire room, and Jeongguk just looks so… relaxed and undone that Taehyung smiles despite the pain and the bruised ego.

And then Jeongguk snorts. It’s completely out of the blue and Taehyung jumps a little. Jeongguk looks a little mortified, but it just makes Taehyung burst out into laughter too. Soon, they’re both shaking with laughter.

It dies down after a minute or so. Taehyung wipes at the tears from the corners of his eyes. “We are actually the two most embarrassing people on the planet,” he says.

“Do you think it’s the wine?” Jeongguk asks, picking up his glass and inspecting it with a wide grin.

“I haven’t had more than two sips,” Taehyung says.
“Me neither.”

And then they’re both laughing again. Taehyung doesn’t even know what’s so damn funny, but he’s laughing and goofing off with Jeongguk and that’s enough to make him let go.

Dinner passes like that and it ends up taking them over an hour to finish the meal. The food is good, but the time spent with Jeongguk is even better. They devise a “plan of attack” (Jeongguk’s words) for cleaning up and Jeongguk washes the dishes as Taehyung dries them. They chat while they work and Taehyung is both amazed and pleased at how naturally charming Jeongguk is when he’s comfortable.

“Where do these go?” Taehyung asks, stacking the last of the dinner plates after he’d dried them. Jeongguk points to the pantry at Taehyung’s left.

“Top shelf,” he says, finishing up washing his hands. Taehyung hums and opens the pantry, reaching up to place the plates, one by one, but the last one is just a little too far up for him to reach (which is shocking, considering how tall Taehyung is).

But then he feels Jeongguk come up behind him, pressing against him in an all-too familiar position as he grabs the plate from Taehyung’s outstretched hand and slides it into place, before closing the cupboard. Taehyung bites back a smile as he turns and Jeongguk makes no motion to move.

“Did you do that on purpose?” Taehyung asks as Jeongguk’s hands settle on his hips. Jeongguk looks relaxed and comfortable and nothing like the awkward, hesitant man from earlier.

“No, but it definitely worked to my advantage, didn’t it?” Jeongguk shoots back, smirking, and his eyes are dark. There’s something in the air, warm and simmering. It’s different from the burning passion, scalding to the touch. No, this is something else. Something more intimate.

“Hm… depends on what it is you want,” Taehyung murmurs, sliding his hands up Jeongguk’s solid chest. The crisp fabric of his dress shirt feels like beautiful sin under Taehyung’s fingertips.

“You,” Jeongguk growls, leaning forward to kiss him, but Taehyung tilts his chin back, pressing his finger to Jeongguk’s lips.
“You can have me--” Jeongguk opens his mouth to say something, but Taehyung cuts him off, “--on one condition.”

Jeongguk frowns, eyes still a little glazed. “What is it?”

Taehyung smiles, just one corner of his mouth lifting up, and he tilts his head coyly. “We do it my way.”

“And what way is that?” Jeongguk presses his hips against Taehyung’s, their lengths pressing together so deliciously Taehyung jerks. But he won’t be deterred. He won’t let Jeongguk always have the upper hand. And he needs this. He needs this intimacy with Jeongguk.

He thumbs at the column of Jeongguk’s throat, before dragging his fingers down to the collar of Jeongguk’s shirt. He keeps his eyes on Jeongguk’s as he undoes the knot of his silk tie and lets it drop to the ground. He undoes the vest and slides it off Jeongguk’s shoulders, then pops the first two buttons of the shirt, eyes flitting to the newly exposed skin and back up.

And then he leans forward to brush his lips against Jeongguk’s, just barely. But it makes Jeongguk impatient, rolling his hips forward, and Taehyung gasps, before laughing breathlessly. “Fuck me from the front this time,” he murmurs, body jerking again as Jeongguk grinds against him.

“Slowly. Make me-- ah-- make me beg for it,” Taehyung says, losing his breath and his train of thought as the heat pools quickly in his stomach.

Taehyung feels Jeongguk’s lips curve into a smirk against his own. “That, I can do,” he murmurs, and it sounds so dangerous, so predatory, that Taehyung lets out a stuttered breath, and he finally finally presses his lips against Jeongguk’s.

And from there, Taehyung drops all attempts at control, letting Jeongguk wrap around him, consume him like the fire blazing under his skin. Jeongguk starts off slow, until Taehyung is moaning for more, pressing closer and squirming against him. And then his kisses are merciless, as he slips his tongue into Taehyung’s mouth without needing to ask, not when Taehyung’s opened his mouth for him, begging him to take him.

Jeongguk grips Taehyung’s hips and lifts him up so he’s perched on the counter and Taehyung hums into his mouth, pleased, and wraps his legs and arms around Jeongguk, pulling him closer and closer.
Taehyung tugs at Jeongguk’s hair as they kiss, wet and noisy and so so good. Jeongguk is intense as always, managing to wreck Taehyung so thoroughly in mere minutes that he can barely get a grip on himself when they break apart for air.

Jeongguk doesn’t stop kissing Taehyung, mouthing along his jaw and his neck, undoing just enough buttons of his shirt so he can pull the fabric down, exposing Taehyung’s shoulders, and he leans in, sucking desperately against the sweet skin.

“Jeongguk,” Taehyung gasps, tilting his head back and letting his eyes screw shut as Jeongguk laves his tongue against him, making his first mark of the night. Jeongguk pulls away once the skin is bruised to his satisfaction and looks at Taehyung, before leaning in for another deep kiss.

“Do you want me to fuck you on the counter? Or on the bed...?” Jeongguk asks, voice deep and husky, the way it gets when he’s just as far gone as Taehyung. Taehyung lets out a stuttered moan as he bucks up against Jeongguk’s body at the words. Jeongguk pulls back, teasing. “Your choice.”

It takes Taehyung a moment to calm himself enough to give a coherent answer. “Bed,” he mumbles, leaning forward, aching to have Jeongguk’s lips against his again and it seems to do the trick, because Jeongguk gives it to him; lets him have his kiss as he pulls Taehyung closer, secure against his body.

Just when Taehyung thinks he couldn’t be any more wrecked, Jeongguk hefts him up into his arms, not breaking the kiss, and walks them both out of the kitchen. Taehyung lets out a desperate noise, tangling his fingers into Jeongguk’s hair and tugging at the roots wildly.

Jeongguk seems to like that, groaning into Taehyung’s mouth, and Taehyung’s body is wracked with shivers, knowing Jeongguk is enjoying this just as much as he is. Taehyung doesn’t register what direction they’re going in, only focusing on the drag of Jeongguk’s mouth against his and only jerks back to reality when his back hits what he guesses is the bedroom door as Jeongguk grapples for the doorknob.

And then they’re in Jeongguk’s room and Jeongguk’s laying him down on his bed. Taehyung sinks into the mattress and the cool, soft sheets are a sudden change to the heat of Jeongguk’s body against him. He scoots up on the bed, trying to undo the rest of the buttons on Jeongguk’s shirt, but Jeongguk grabs his wrists, tight in one hand, and a whine bubbles at Taehyung’s throat.

“You said you wanted slow, right?” Jeongguk asks and Taehyung can’t tell whether he’s teasing or serious. He bites his lip, nodding jerkily. Jeongguk pushes him back against the pillows. “Then relax. I’ll take care of it.”
There’s a gentleness to Jeongguk’s voice that makes Taehyung tremble and he lets Jeongguk settle easily between his legs. He tries very desperately to keep eye contact as Jeongguk tugs his shirt from where it’s tucked into his pants, popping the buttons ever so slowly and then sliding it off, dropping it somewhere in the vast expanse of his bed.

Taehyung’s mouth runs dry, realizing that he’d never properly seen Jeongguk’s body until now, and it’s a sight to behold-- thick, taut muscle, and ridged abs, inked all over with swirling patterns, words, names, lyrics to songs Taehyung doesn’t know. It’s incredible how different Jeongguk looks like this-- grown up, so so handsome, and very intent on getting what he wants.

Jeongguk leans forward after a moment, kissing Taehyung again, and Taehyung’s hand curls around the nape of Jeongguk’s neck as Jeongguk steals all the air in his lungs. His moans are muffled by Jeongguk’s mouth and he swallows the noises, greedy for them. Taehyung scores his hands down the smooth, hard expanse of Jeongguk’s back, marveling at the heat and how the lust curls painfully in his stomach.

And then Jeongguk moves his lips down, dropping indulgent, open-mouthed kisses along his neck, licking at Taehyung’s bobbing Adam’s apple, and grazing his teeth over his collarbones. He brings a hand up to deftly work at the buttons on Taehyung’s rumpled shirt, kissing at the exposed skin as he goes.

Taehyung tangles his fingers in Jeongguk’s hair, tilting his head back and gasping as Jeongguk mouths at his nipple, hot and wet. Taehyung arches up when Jeongguk tugs at it with his teeth, letting out a sob and digging his fingers further into Jeongguk’s scalp.

“God, you’re so sensitive,” Jeongguk murmurs, pulling away to look down at Taehyung, mouth open like he’s in awe. Taehyung can feel Jeongguk drinking him in-- and he must look quite the vision, still mostly dressed, skin flushed to his chest, and a wet spot forming at the front of his trousers. Jeongguk looks wrecked too. His normally neatly combed hair is in complete disarray, hanging over his eyes, and it makes him look wicked.

It feels like an eternity as Jeongguk just stares at him, but in reality, it’s only a few seconds. Then he’s leaning in again, kissing Taehyung softly, moving down again. He licks at Taehyung’s other nipple and hums, pleased when Taehyung whines, and he kisses down Taehyung’s chest until he’s at his stomach. He kisses right below Taehyung’s navel and rubs his nose against the skin, nuzzling it. Taehyung lets out a stuttered breath. His chest tightens at the frighteningly intimate gesture and he wonders whether Jeongguk’s aware of what he’s doing and how it’s affecting Taehyung.

“You sure you want this, right?” Jeongguk asks, thumbing at the waist of Taehyung’s pants.
“Yes, please, Jeongguk,” Taehyung begs and Jeongguk nods, undoing the buckle of Taehyung’s belt and unzipping his pants, before pulling them off entirely and tossing them away.

Taehyung gasps as the cool air hits his exposed skin and he blushes wildly, seeing how damp his boxers had gotten. Jeongguk looks amazed too, like he’s seeing Taehyung for the first time and strokes his fingers along the curve of Taehyung’s erection.

Taehyung bucks his hips up, the lightest sensation sending thrums of energy up his spine. Jeongguk palms him roughly and Taehyung cries out, jerking against his hand, not expecting it, and trembles back against the sheets.

Jeongguk tugs at the underwear, pulling it off completely and pauses, letting out a sharp breath as Taehyung’s cock springs free and curves up against his stomach, glistening with precome. “Beautiful,” he murmurs, stroking his hands against Taehyung’s bare thighs and Taehyung’s eyes water at the praise. Jeongguk settles back down, right between Taehyung’s legs and kisses the base of his cock.

He works his way up, one hand gripping the length and then swallowing around it. Taehyung lets out the most inhumane whine and when Jeongguk sucks Taehyung bucks up his hips on instinct and Jeongguk has to use his other hand to hold Taehyung down.

It’s alarming how quickly Jeongguk brings him to the edge, blowing him with the same desperation that echos in Taehyung’s strangled sobs. The orgasm seems so close now, like an overstretched rubber band ready to snap at any moment.

“Jeon--ungh--Jeongguk I’m--”

And then Jeongguk slides his mouth off with a lewd pop and Taehyung comes crashing down from his high. A bewildered noise claws its way up the back of his throat and he bites his lip, watching Jeongguk watch him.

After a few moments, Jeongguk seems to be satisfied with his handiwork and straightens up. He slides his hands down from Taehyung’s hips to his thighs, rounding the curves of his knees and goes back down. He lifts one leg up and mouths at the inside of Taehyung’s thigh.

It’s too soft, too gentle, it’s so different from how Jeongguk had been just moments ago, rough and
commanding, dragging loud cries past Taehyung’s lips. Now he lazily works a string of hickies inside Taehyung’s thigh, nipping at the skin in a warning when Taehyung whines too loud and soothes it with his tongue.

Taehyung shakes and shakes, not knowing how to take the constant change in stimulus. It feels like he’s being shoved to the edge and dragged back, over and over again and he barely has time to get a grip before his world is tipping upside down again.

“You said you wanted me to make you beg, right?” Jeongguk asks darkly. He peers at Taehyung through his lashes, keeping their gazes locked as he licks his tongue against Taehyung’s thigh, catching the skin between his teeth and dragging it back.

Taehyung can only nod jerkily, gasping for breath, and trying not to cry out too loudly.

“How am I doing with that?” Jeongguk’s voice is teasing, like he knows exactly how well he’s doing, how crazy he’s driving Taehyung.

“Good, more-- p-please,” Taehyung mumbles out and Jeongguk hums in ascent, leaning forward to kiss him. It feels like ages since Taehyung felt Jeongguk’s mouth against his and his toes curl into the mattress. Jeongguk rolls his hips down against Taehyung and Taehyung bucks up, finding friction against Jeongguk’s stomach.

Belatedly, he realizes that Jeongguk still has his pants on and he tugs at them. “Okay, okay,” Jeongguk breathes, pulling back completely, and getting out of the bed. Taehyung watches, his breathing ragged, as Jeongguk walks to one of the drawers by the bed and pulls out a bottle of lube and a condom. Something about seeing them makes Taehyung’s chest tighten and his face burn.

Jeongguk places them on the bed and, keeping his gaze on Taehyung, unbuckles his belt. It seems to bring Jeongguk great satisfaction, watching Taehyung’s breathing hitch. The clink of the belt as it hits the ground echos through the room. Jeongguk slips out of his pants and briefs all at once and stands up straight, letting Taehyung get a good look at him.

The first of many thoughts that cross Taehyung’s mind upon seeing Jeongguk’s cock is, how did I fit that inside me?

Jeongguk pumps himself twice, head tilted back and eyes hooded as he gazes at Taehyung, and he looks like the definition of carnal sin. Taehyung lets out a sob, wanting so badly to touch Jeongguk.
He’s suddenly overcome by the need for Jeongguk to fuck into his mouth, to taste Jeongguk’s come in his mouth. But he knows he can’t have that yet.

“Like it?” Jeongguk asks and Taehyung doesn’t know whether he’s referring to his dick or the show he’s putting on, but it doesn’t really matter in the end.

“J-Jeongguk,” Taehyung sobs and it would almost be humiliating how visceral his reactions are to everything Jeongguk does but nothing really makes sense right now and he has no awareness besides the desperate, hot pulsing of his cock and the clawing need to have Jeongguk inside him.

His reaction—though, not an answer—seems to satisfy Jeongguk, because he climbs back into bed and looms over Taehyung. He’s struck by how ethereal Taehyung looks like this, spread out, naked, on his bed, so thoroughly wrecked and wanting him so desperately that tears cling to his eyelashes and whines bubble up his throat.

Jeongguk wonders why he hadn’t considered taking Taehyung from the front before. How can he go back now, knowing how beautiful he would be like this? Unable to help himself, Jeongguk sweeps down and drops an indulgent kiss on Taehyung’s eager and waiting lips.

Jeongguk could kiss Taehyung’s sweet mouth for ages and the week of sexual frustration rises to the surface as he lets go of that control. He doesn’t need to hold back here, not with Taehyung begging him to fuck him until he cries.

Prepping Taehyung is easy, considering how easily he opens up for him. He works mercilessly at Taehyung’s prostate and gets him so terribly close to his orgasm before gripping the base of his cock and denying him release at the last moment.

“J-Jeon--” Taehyung stutters out in disbelief, bucking up against him in wild desperation.

“Not yet,” Jeongguk warns, scissoring four fingers inside Taehyung. It feels like an eon for Jeongguk, stretching Taehyung out and feeling painfully aware of his own erection as Taehyung writhes underneath him.

“I-I’m ready, Jeongguk, no more please,” Taehyung whines after a few moments, pushing against Jeongguk’s wrist as the need to orgasm subsides. Jeongguk breathes out a sigh of relief, too low for Taehyung to hear. It takes everything in his power to keep his hands from shaking as he rolls the condom on and slicks himself up, drizzling more against Taehyung’s entrance and rubbing his thumb
across it appreciatively.

Jeongguk bears down on Taehyung, spreading himself out over him and nudges his cock against Taehyung’s hole. “You want this, right?” he asks, for what seems like the millionth time. But he needs Taehyung to be sure, about them, about him.

Taehyung nods. “Y-yes,” he gasps out and that’s all Jeongguk needs before he pushes himself inside, so slowly that the feeling almost chokes him.

He buries his face into Taehyung’s neck, focusing on the sting of Taehyung’s nails digging into his shoulder and the sweet smell of his skin to keep from coming right there. Taehyung’s heat pulses around him, so tight and perfect that it’s hard for Jeongguk to imagine anything more right than this.

After a few moments, Jeongguk pulls his length out and thrusts back in. “Yes oh god,” Taehyung cries out, arching up when Jeongguk presses himself in. His moans are enough for Jeongguk to build up a fast, brutal rhythm, hammering his length against Taehyung’s prostate. Taehyung’s cries get louder and louder, his back sliding up further and further with the force of Jeongguk’s thrusts. He feels himself ready to fall over the edge, but Jeongguk notices and slows his hips until he stops altogether.

“Jeongguk why--” Taehyung hiccups when Jeongguk pulls him up and settles him in his lap.

“You don’t get to come yet,” Jeongguk says, voice dangerous and gentle, as he slips a hand past Taehyung’s shirt (which he’d neglected to take off, all this time), stroking his side soothingly.

Taehyung whimpers, wrapping his arms around Jeongguk’s neck to kiss him properly and Jeongguk lets him have his way for a moment, taking it slow until the heady feeling of Taehyung’s climax goes away again.

Jeongguk drags Taehyung’s shirt completely off, mouthing at his jaw and grazing his teeth against the soft skin of his neck. It’s frustrating, like he can’t have enough of Taehyung in his mouth, enough of the sweetness of his skin against his tongue.

Taehyung rolls his hips down and Jeongguk leans his weight back on one hand so he can thrust up and he grips Taehyung’s hip, controlling the pace and thrusts up into him, slow to the point of mind-numbing agony.
Taehyung buries his face into Jeongguk’s hair, muffling his cries. “J-Jeongguk, please I need to come,” he begs and he realizes by Jeongguk denying him what he so desperately wants, he’s getting exactly what he asked for. Though he didn’t think it would be this intense, that his body would feel like it’s on fire, with Jeongguk’s hands leaving a scorching trail in their wake.

There must be something in his voice, something about how he trembles like he’s going to fall apart at any moment, that has Jeongguk agreeing easily. He lays back on the sheets and rolls them both over, so he’s on top again and kisses Taehyung quickly, before tucking his face into Taehyung’s neck again and fucking in so fast Taehyung completely loses himself.

If Jeongguk teasing him was a turn on, Jeongguk giving Taehyung what he wants is bliss. Jeongguk is ruthless inside him, propping Taehyung’s leg over his shoulder and ramming his cock against Taehyung’s prostate that much harder and all Taehyung can do is hold on for dear life, stretched completely to the limit and throw his head back, close his eyes, and let his orgasm take him.

“Oh god,” Taehyung sobs out when his climax finally hits him, arching up further than he’d ever thought his back could go and writhes against Jeongguk’s body. He feels like his brain is melting, like all of his nerves had just fried and only the solid heat of Jeongguk’s body on him keeps him from completely floating away.

Jeongguk keeps thrusting in, milking Taehyung’s orgasm, and he comes not long after, groaning so loud that the vibrations shake Taehyung to the core. They lay like that for a minute, Jeongguk panting into Taehyung’s shoulder and Taehyung slipping in and out of the haze of absolute bliss.

After regaining his breath, Jeongguk shifts, starting to pull away. “No,” Taehyung whines, voice hoarse and he grips Jeongguk’s arm and pulls him back.

“Tae, what--”

“P-Please don’t go,” Taehyung mumbles.

“I’m not, I just wanna get something to clean you up with.”

“No please, Just... Stay. Please ,” There’s something unbearably tight in Taehyung’s chest, a sob rising up his throat and Jeongguk must sense his desperation, because he concedes easily, rolling them over on their sides and tucking him close, pressing their foreheads together.
Taehyung shivers violently, struggling to press closer to Jeongguk and Jeongguk wraps him in his arms, stroking Taehyung’s hair and kissing his forehead. Taehyung’s breathing is still shallow and his face feels blotchy from the tears, but it’s so nice, it’s so so nice-- even with the come smearing everywhere-- and he wouldn’t trade this for anything in the world.

He reaches up to touch Jeongguk’s jaw, run his fingers down his throat and down to his chest, tracing the patterns of swirling ink. He’d never been able to look so closely before and everything about the tattoos fascinate him. He hopes he’ll have more time to take them in, but right now he can’t really focus.

It takes a few minutes, but when Taehyung feels more grounded, he squirms in Jeongguk’s hold. Jeongguk lets go of him immediately, like he’s afraid he’s done something wrong. It’s almost amusing how different normal Jeongguk is from bedroom Jeongguk. Taehyung finds himself loving both.

“I feel a little gross now,” Taehyung murmurs.

“I’ll-- get you a towel,” Jeongguk stammers, finally pulling his length out of Taehyung and peeling off the condom. He pads over to the bathroom in all his naked glory and Taehyung is grateful that he’s more himself so that he can drink in Jeongguk’s excellent ass and the dragon tattoo that takes up the wide expanse of his back and shoulders.

“Here,” Jeongguk says softly, coming back with a warm washcloth, and Taehyung struggles to push himself up. “No don’t--” Jeongguk reaches out to help Taehyung lean back against the headboard. “Let me,” he says quietly and Taehyung bites his lip from smiling too hard. The towel is warm and soothing against his skin and Jeongguk is so diligent and careful (it must be the surgeon in him), wiping off the come from his stomach, the slick lube from his thighs and his entrance.

Jeongguk gets up again when he feels Taehyung is sufficiently clean and tosses the towel in the hamper. Taehyung feels himself becoming more sad as the seconds pass, knowing what’s going to happen.

He swings his legs over the edge of the bed gingerly, wincing a little as he shifts and Jeongguk notices.

“What are you doing?” Jeongguk asks, frowning in concern as he approaches Taehyung.
Taehyung blushes. “I-- I don’t want to intrude more than I already have. I know you’re busy so I’ll just show myself--”

Jeongguk kneels down in front of Taehyung and grips his hands tightly. “Stay,” he says and there’s something almost vulnerable to the words. Jeongguk swallows, his ears tipping red. “If you want to. You can go, but you can stay too. I don’t mind.”

The hope bubbles up like euphoria inside Taehyung’s chest and he feels like he’s going to get whiplash from these rapid mood swings. “Do you want me to?” he asks, eyes wide and hopeful.

Jeongguk coughs awkwardly. “Only if you want.”

Taehyung tilts his head to the side, keeping their eyes locked. “That wasn’t the question. Do you want me to stay?”

“Yes,” Jeongguk says softly. “Please.” For a moment, Taehyung sees sixteen year old Jeongguk in front of him, open, trusting, wanting love so badly, and willing to give his all in return. Jeongguk hadn’t changed all that much it seemed, deep down inside. His true nature was just buried deep down inside, under all the layers of defenses.

“Then I would love to,” Taehyung says gently and Jeongguk smiles sheepishly at him. And it’s as simple as that.

Chapter End Notes

this was twice as long as any other chapter i've written for this it's 10k rippp anyways thank you for making it all the way to the end of this chapter ^_^ it's kind of a bit of a ride this feels really weird cuz this story is about a year old now? i published the first chapter on new years of 2015 but i actually started coming up with the idea/writing/storyboarding for it around this time in 2014 so ;; happy bday to snh? hheeehe. anyways im really happy it's at this point, and if you read from start to finish you can kind of see the progression of my writing style over the course of a year too which i think is kinda cool. the person who wrote chapter 1 is completely different from the person who wrote this chapter, chapter 20. it's interesting, i think haha. i can definitely see improvement but i have a long way to go still! this chapter couldnt have come together with the amazing and totally rad adi, dani, and tiff. thank you for caring about my story enough to put your precious time and effort into it and always give me extremely valuable feedback. you guys are extraordinary and i'm so grateful to know
i hope you all enjoyed this chapter (it was a long time coming). even though i dont have a chance to respond to most of the comments please know i appreciate them all and read them and smile <3 you guys make me really happy all that sappy stuff aside, here is my blog where you can ask questions/yell at me/cry with me about taekook. i even have an SMH tag for fun questions about this AU (what would jeon get tae for christmas??? what did tae wear on halloween?)
until next time ^^

*ps jeon in the seasons greeting preview = SMH jeon

*pps i made a twitter like two seconds ago

you <3
this is dedicated to sinbin. thank you for being so amazing and talented and for letting a smol bean like me sit at your cool table. and for putting up w/ so much shit all the time, the fandom doesn't deserve you. you are the real MVPs, seriously. i love you guys so much <3 and im always blown away by how much talent each and every one of you guys possess.

Jeongguk lets Taehyung use the bathroom first. Gets him a toothbrush from his storage closet (which could double as a bomb shelter, given how prepared Jeongguk seems to be), lets him shower first.

It's a bit awkward, since they don’t talk much, save for a few brief words. Taehyung knows Jeongguk isn’t used to this-- someone staying. In truth, Taehyung isn’t either. But he doesn’t think it should be this… awkward.

And now, Taehyung is lying in bed, trying not to seem obvious as he stares at Jeongguk out of the corner of his eye. Never has a bed felt bigger than in this moment, with Jeongguk settling down as far away from Taehyung as possible.

Jeongguk seems to be absorbed with something on his phone, his back turned to Taehyung, and it gives Taehyung a moment to take in the dragon tattoo, taking up the wide expanse of Jeongguk’s back, as well as to steep in his self-imposed misery.

Because Taehyung wants to cuddle. But he’s too afraid to ask.

“Uhm…” Taehyung perks up when Jeongguk clears his throat and turns his head. “Good night.”

The words are empty, awkward. Taehyung tries not to think about it too much. He smiles softly. “Good night Jeongguk. Sleep well.”

Jeongguk seems stupefied at the last words, eyes flickering with confusion and panic. “I-- Okay.” He turns himself away fully, pulling the covers over his shoulders, and that’s that.
It takes everything in Taehyung’s willpower not to sigh in disappointment. He should have known better than to expect intimacy with a man with an emotional wage of a brick. Biting his lip to keep from making any noise, he turns too, away from Jeongguk, because sleeping facing him seems too pathetic right now.

Taehyung closes his eyes and tries not to overthink-- the fact that Jeongguk wanted him to stay was leaps and bounds beyond what he’d hoped for. Jeongguk wanted him, at least to some degree, and that should be more than enough.

Jeongguk wasn’t the same, naive boy from ten years ago. He wasn’t going to open his heart so quickly. He was a man now, one who’d been through a lot, hardening him. He wasn’t going to easily give or receive intimacy or trust someone so much. It’s almost a miracle that Taehyung was in his bed, right now.

Except that Taehyung longs for Jeongguk’s touch, still. Like a fool. He couldn’t be satisfied, knowing Jeongguk was just a few feet away from him. Taehyung wants to stroke and kiss Jeongguk’s hair, feel his hands against his skin, feel his heart beat against his hands to know that all of this is real. Not some fantasy that Taehyung had created out of sheer desperation.

Taehyung squeezes his eyes shut, as though that will make him fall asleep faster. But all he can do is think about Jeongguk’s scent, woven between the very threads of the pillowcase he rests his head on, so heady and strong that Taehyung can almost trick himself into thinking he’s in Jeongguk’s embrace.

If only--

Taehyung hears the sheets rustle, and his body tenses. Jeongguk moves in the bed, and for a split second (one heart-wrenching second) Taehyung thinks Jeongguk is going to leave. But he feels Jeongguk shifting closer-- slowly, like he’s trying not to wake Taehyung.

Taehyung feels Jeongguk get closer and closer, until he can almost feel the man’s breath against the back of his neck. He senses Jeongguk settling down, resting his head against Taehyung’s pillow, so close, but not touching.

Jeongguk’s fingers brush softly against the back of Taehyung’s hair, and he tries desperately not to jolt at the contact. “Sweet dreams, baby,” Jeongguk murmurs, and Taehyung doesn’t know how he manages to hear it over way his heart thumps violently against his chest.
Taehyung curls his hands into fists against his side, trying to keep himself from turning around and throwing himself into Jeongguk’s arms. Jeongguk would no doubt be embarrassed, since Taehyung wasn’t supposed to hear. He decides to stay quiet for now, and he hopes Jeongguk will open up soon. Until then, his heart can rest easy.

♥

Taehyung wakes up warm, though a bit constrained. He musters up the willpower to open his eyes and look around, making to shove the sheets away from him. But then he registers that he’s not in his bed.

He’s not in his bed and these aren’t sheets that are threatening to suffocate him. It’s Jeongguk’s arms that are wrapped around him, pulling his body so impossibly close like he's terrified Taehyung will leave at any moment.

The back of Taehyung’s eyes burn.

He manages to extricate one of his hands, and very slowly reaches out to touch Jeongguk’s face.

There's a lump in Taehyung’s throat, growing larger as he tries to wrap his mind around the situation. Jeongguk asleep is contradiction-- he looks so young, and in that moment, he really does look all of twenty six. He’s relaxed, his lips stick out in a pout, and he just looks like a baby.

But as Taehyung runs his fingers along Jeongguk’s jaw, he meets with the roughness of stubble. Jeongguk licks his lips in his sleep, and his adam’s apple bobs with the action, making Taehyung look down the column of his neck, seeing the traces of black and red ink on skin. It makes his body burn.

Right then, Jeongguk shifts, and Taehyung, panicking, stills in his arms, shutting his eyes and willing himself to breathe evenly to feign sleep.

He can almost feel Jeongguk waking up, and his heart jackhammers against his ribs, wondering how
Jeongguk will react, now that it’s morning, now that he’s had time to decide whether he's glad or regretful.

Jeongguk’s body tenses, and Taehyung tries not to move.

“Wha--”

Jeongguk’s voice is low, rough with sleep, and so quiet that Taehyung barely hears him.

Taehyung expects to be jolted awake. He expects Jeongguk to shoot out of bed, screaming (maybe no on the second part). He expects to be pushed away, because that's what happens with them. A constant game of push and pull where they take two steps forward and one step back. Taehyung would be a fool to think things in the morning could go so smoothly.

But Jeongguk still hasn't moved yet, frozen in his disbelief, so Taehyung takes it into his own hands. He makes a low, sleepy noise and squirms closer, snuggling into jeongguk’s embrace and tangling their legs together. He makes a lazy noise of content and stills.

“Oh god.” Jeongguk’s voice wavers, thick with longing, arms tightening around Taehyung's frame, and for a moment, Taehyung can't process it, he can't believe that just happened.

Taehyung feels Jeongguk press his lips to his hair, slowly, like he's terrified Taehyung might wake up and realize.

Taehyung lets Jeongguk stroke his hair for a minute, basking in the innocent, genuine touches, but then, his glee becomes too much too hold in, and he can't pretend anymore, so he opens his eyes.

Jeongguk doesn't realize at first, too caught up with memorizing the slopes of Taehyung’s face. But then he meets Taehyung’s gaze, even and expecting.

He can only blink owlishly back.

“Good morning Jeonggukie,” Taehyung says, voice laden with amusement, and then it hits Jeongguk (like a freight train, but perhaps more painful) that Taehyung had probably been awake the
“Holy fuck--” Jeongguk all put flies out of the bed, scrambling away in embarrassment, and he falls to the floor with a great thud. Except that one of his legs is still tangled in the sheets, and half his body dangles off the edge.

Taehyung shoots up in alarm, peering over the bed. “Are you okay?”

Jeongguk is still for a moment, looking like his soul had just left his body. Then he jerks up, struggling for a moment to untangle his leg. “Just fine.” He blinks at Taehyung, ears tipped scarlet, then looks around helplessly, lost.

“I'm uh--” Jeongguk backs up, stumbling towards the bathroom, facing Taehyung, as though if he turned his back, Taehyung might attack him. “Gonna just. B-bathroom.”

“Okay,” Taehyung says, trying to bite back a smile at Jeongguk’s flustered state.

Jeongguk laughs nervously, and it sounds like he's choking. His back hits the doorframe of the bathroom, and he jolts.

“I'll be. Uh. Out in a bit.”

“You do that,” Taehyung concedes. “Have fun.”

Jeongguk smiles (he grimaces), and turns, only to walk into the doorframe. Taehyung actually snickers at that.

Jeongguk scrambles inside and shuts the door quickly, and Taehyung hears another thud, then hissing, then a “Motherfucking shit.”

It is, by far, the best morning after that he's ever experienced.

While Jeongguk busies himself in the bathroom, Taehyung takes the opportunity to appraise the
bedroom carefully. Everything is sleek, silver and black. The bed is big (something Taehyung experienced fully last night) but he didn't notice that the sheets were black. Somehow that's really sexy. Their clothes are strewn around the floor, and that's even sexier.

Taehyung leans forward, burying his face into the duvet to hide the smile, the bubbling euphoria. This morning was going better than expected. Jeongguk hadn't kissed him silly, hadn't suggested morning sex, like in Taehyung’s imagination. But Jeongguk hadn't pushed him away. Jeongguk wanted him here, and that was enough.

Jeongguk comes out of the bathroom ten minutes later, hair combed back, face free of stubble, and wearing boxers (unfortunately). He pauses when he sees Taehyung there, like he hadn't expected him to be there.

“I'll… make breakfast,” Jeongguk says, looking lost it's almost adorable. “While you're in the bathroom.”

Taehyung smile softly, sliding out of bed. “Sounds good.”

He walks towards the bathroom and pauses when he notices that Jeongguk hasn't moved. He's staring at Taehyung’s body, butt-naked, covered in red and purple marks (courtesy of Jeongguk himself). He resists the urge to smirk.

“You were gonna make breakfast, right?” Taehyung can't help the teasing lilt to his voice.

Jeongguk blinks, swallowing thickly, and nods. “Yeah uh. Omelettes?” He backs up, heading for the bedroom door. “I can make anything though, r-really.” He bumps into the wall.

“Omelettes sound good.”

“O-okay--” Jeongguk turns quickly and all but high tails it out of the room.

Taehyung takes his time showering in the morning. He uses Jeongguk’s body wash liberally, and he knows Jeongguk won't mind. There's something almost secure about this situation-- the worst was over. He’d been accepted, in Jeongguk’s own way, and that was enough.
He realizes, when he steps out of the shower wrapped in a big, fluffy towel, that he doesn't have clothes to change into. His eyes catch on the doorway to Jeongguk’s walk in closet, and he smiles, an idea forming in his head.

Taehyung walks into the closet, met with sleek black custom storage. Everything looks the same, and Taehyung knows he has his work cut out for him, finding a shirt and boxers, since Jeongguk, in his haste, had neglected to provide any.

*It's only fair*, he tells himself as he pulls the first door open, to find a neatly hung up array of blazers. He huffs and moves on to the next one.

Taehyung figures Jeongguk won't mind his *borrowing* clothes, because he's fairly sure Jeongguk has a possessive streak (even if he won't admit it) and Taehyung wants to belong to Jeongguk.

He makes it through half the closet, sorting through dress shirts and slacks and rows of leather shoes, to no avail. Out of annoyance and desperation, he kneels by a drawer, almost inconspicuous to a fault, and he pulls it open.

The drawer is filled with prostate massagers, dildos of varying shapes and sizes, cock rings, handcuffs, strips of silk, a tangle of leather and metal chains, and what looks like a *whip*, all the way at the back.

Taehyung falls promptly on his ass.

*“You don't fuck Jeon Jeongguk. Jeon Jeongguk fucks you.”*

Seokjin’s voice rings through Taehyung’s head, making him dizzy. He had missed it in the moment, but he remembers now, the dark edge to the model’s voice, the shine of something… different than anything Taehyung could ever think of.

His first reaction is shock, of course. Jeongguk was so straight-laced, so solemn. It was hard to imagine him doing anything that wasn't working. But then he remembers how quickly Jeongguk takes control, the ease with which he’s able to turn Taehyung into a bumbling mess, and suddenly it doesn't seem so surprising.

His second reaction is excitement. The adrenaline flushes through his body so quickly that he can't
quite get a handle on it. A whole new world had just opened up, and the weight of the knowledge sits satisfactorily on his shoulders.

“Jeon Jeongguk…” Taehyung mumbles, breathless. He manages to gather himself, and closes the drawer before getting up. *This is best left for another day.*

He manages to find boxers and a shirt and pulls them on, before almost skipping into the kitchen, the sudden revelation making him almost giddy. He finds Jeongguk in the kitchen, making omelettes as promised, wonderfully shirtless.

“Good *morning,*” Taehyung hums, sliding up beside Jeongguk at the stove. He wraps his hands around Jeongguk’s bicep, muscles flexing as he moves the pan around, but he stops when Taehyung touches him.

“What.”

Taehyung blinks up at him innocently, rubbing his hands appreciatively up and down Jeongguk’s arm. “I just said good morning.” He flutters his eyelashes, giving Jeongguk another saccharine smile, and Jeongguk looks like he’s going to pop a blood vessel.

“I-I juiced.”

Taehyung steps back, scrunching his face. “That’s the weirdest thing that’s come out of your mouth.”

Jeongguk grumbles and steps away, reaching for a glass on the counter, and hands it to Taehyung. “I made juice. Drink it.”

“But… it’s green.” It’s a dark, murky color, one Taehyung would attribute to swamp water. “Are you sure it’s not poison?”

Jeongguk rolls his eyes exasperated. “Just drink it. It’s good for your health.”

“Thanks doc,” Taehyung says dryly, walking around the island to sit at the counter. He sniffs it
experimentally, and finds that it smells mostly like pineapple. He takes a sip. “This isn’t bad!”

“I know, it’s a real shock.”

Taehyung takes a bigger gulp this time, shooting Jeongguk a thumbs up with his free hand. “What’s in this anyway?”

“Apples, carrots, pineapple, cucumber,” Jeongguk lists off, and Taehyung nods, drinking. “Spinach, kale, beets, wheatgrass—”

Taehyung gags, almost spitting out the drink in the process. He all but hacks out his lungs coughing, and Jeongguk waits for him to stop with the theatrics with a single eyebrow raised in judgement.

“Kale?” Taehyung wheezes, pounding his chest. “Are you trying to kill me?”

Jeongguk rolls his eyes. “Can you even taste it?”

Taehyung pouts. “No.”

“Then just drink it and pretend there’s no kale in it.”

Taehyung clicks his tongue, annoyed, and he sort of wants to not drink the rest, just to spite Jeongguk, but it is delicious.

“You need to start being more conscious of your health,” Jeongguk continues, turning his attention to the stove. “Have you started exercising yet? You should get a personal trainer.”

Taehyung sighs. “Okay mom.” He spins around on the bar stool, and only when he stops does he realize Jeongguk is looking at him oddly. “What.”

“You’re wearing my clothes.”
Taehyung looks down at the worn red sweater, with *Stanford* printed on it, and the boxers. “My other clothes are *dirty*, Jeongguk.” He rests his chin on his hand and smiles. “You don’t mind, do you?”

Jeongguk’s eyes seem trained on Taehyung’s shoulder, where the sweater had slipped down and exposed the smooth skin. Taehyung tries not to smirk.

“No.”

Jeongguk’s voice is strained, almost *pained*, and it amuses Taehyung to no end.

Jeongguk finishes cooking breakfast soon after, and they eat in relative silence. It’s only when the dishes are being put away that Taehyung speaks up.

“Hey, Jeongguk?” The man in question hums in acknowledgement as he puts the dishes in the pantry. Taehyung tries not to feel so insecure, and paints a big, unaffected smile on his face. “What are you doing the rest of the day?”

Jeongguk turns slowly, and Taehyung can all but *see* the cogs turning in his brain. “I have some work to do at home and I have to go to the hospital around six. Why?”

Taehyung tries not to let his smile waver. He’d been putting up a front all morning, trying to seem nonchalant because he’d had breakfast with Jeongguk, after sleeping in his bed, after having sex with him. All he wants is intimacy, but Jeongguk hadn’t touched him at all this morning. He’d been completely neutral, and Taehyung is glad he doesn’t seem angry, but he does seem uncomfortable. Taehyung doesn’t know how far he can push this.

“Just wondering. I’m working from home today too. I have a conference call at night but yeah--” Taehyung shrugs. “Mind if I hang out here with you?”

Jeongguk blinks at him. “Why?”

“It gets lonely, working by myself. I have this big office in my apartment but it’s so quiet in there I feel like I’ll go insane. I’d go to a park or something just for the noise but the paparazzi would probably have a field day.” Taehyung laughs.
“Uhm.” Jeongguk seems to consider for eons, but it’s only a few seconds. “It’s fine. Just. Be quiet, okay?”

Taehyung’s smile is completely real this time around. “Sure! I’ll go bring my laptop!” He all but flies out of the apartment and into his own, scrambling to grab his computer and his reading glasses before running back again, only to have to stop at Jeongguk’s door to knock.

Jeongguk looks bemused when Taehyung smiles up at him at the threshold, panting a bit in his excitement, and steps back, opening the door fully so Taehyung can come inside. Jeongguk had set up at the dining table.

“You can put your stuff--” Jeongguk points to the place across from him, but Taehyung plops down right next to Jeongguk. “Or you could just sit there.”

“I swear I won’t disturb you, okay?”

“Sure.” Jeongguk looks hesitant, but Taehyung is determined to prove himself.

They work quietly, side by side, for almost two hours. The first half hour, all Jeongguk does is stare at Taehyung out of the corner of his eye, obviously trying to be discrete, and Taehyung decides he won’t mention it. He’s treading on thin ice, and the last thing he wants is to take his teasing too far only to have Jeongguk push him away.

Jeongguk, on his end, is having a mental breakdown. He’d managed to say the most embarrassing shit, fall off the bed, and run into the wall (twice), all within an hour. Well done, Jeon. Whatever cold, detached aesthetic he’d maintained had been effectively obliterated with the level of dumbassery he’d managed to show.

And yet, Taehyung wanted to stick around. He didn’t seem to be phased in the slightest by anything, but he always was a good actor. Jeongguk can’t tell if Taehyung is judging him on the inside and only being polite to get free food.

But here they were, sitting together, just working quietly. Together. And Taehyung is wearing his old college sweatshirt, and boxers, and nothing else. The clothes are too big on his lean frame, but he looks so frighteningly beautiful like that, with the sleeves bunched up at the elbows, the collar slipping off his shoulder, hair in disarray. Jeongguk doesn’t have to look to remember the tantalizing
skin of Taehyung’s thighs, no doubt on full display.

_Holy shit._

Jeongguk decides now would be a good time to stop lusting before he gets a boner just _thinking_ about Taehyung. He tries to focus on his computer screen and pretend nothing is wrong, that nothing is different, because as with everything regarding Taehyung, Jeongguk has no idea what to do.

“Hey Jeongguk?”

Jeongguk jumps in his seat.

“Whoa sorry, didn’t mean to scare you.” Taehyung’s eyebrows are pulled together in worry. “You okay?”

Jeongguk feels winded. “Yeah, I’m fine. What did you need?”

“Nothing I just… You looked like you were gonna have an aneurism so I thought it would be a good time for a break.”

“A… break.”

_Smooth as always, Jeon._

Taehyung nods and leans closer, peering at Jeongguk’s screen. It takes all of Jeongguk’s strength not to lean away. “What are you even doing?” Taking in the words on the screen, Taehyung crinkles his nose. “That does _not_ look very happy.”

Jeongguk fiddles with the angle of the screen, if only so he has something to do. “I’m just… going over a proposal that one of my students sent in.”

Taehyung raises an eyebrow. “You have students? Didn’t know you were a teacher.”
“I’m… not. Technically he’s not like a student student. He’s a PhD candidate who works in my lab and since I own the lab, he has to report back to me.” Jeongguk scratches his head.

“Oh, the one where you make the heart valve thingies? Like the one I have?”

Jeongguk cringes. “Yeah… the… valve thingies.”

Taehyung clicks his tongue. “Sorry, jeez. I’m a businessman slash philanthropist, not a scientist, okay?”

Jeongguk just shrugs. “It’s weird sometimes because he’s older than me. So he doesn’t always take criticism too well.” Taehyung hums. “And I guess if I was in that same situation I wouldn’t be too happy either though.”

“So then what do you do?”

“I’m naturally mean-looking so no one says anything.”

And that makes Taehyung burst out into laughter. Jeongguk jolts in surprise, watching as Taehyung tilts his head back, his whole frame shaking. “W-why are you laughing? It’s true. Jimin told me.”

That just makes Taehyung laugh harder, and Jeongguk squirms in his seat, confused. Eventually Taehyung gets over himself, patting Jeongguk consolingly on the arm. “It’s alright, young one. Even though you’re mean-looking you’re also cute, so it balances out.”

Jeongguk can’t help the way his face flushes. “I-I-I’m not cute.”

Taehyung points a finger at his face. “You’re pouting. It’s totally cute.” Jeongguk swats Taehyung’s hand away in annoyance.

“Are you even doing work?” Jeongguk asks, desperate to change the subject. Taehyung makes a noise of offense and motions to his own laptop screen.
“Does this look like Pinterest to you?” Jeongguk’s eyes glance over the spreadsheet full of numbers.

“What is that?”

“We’re set to break ground on a new hotel in LA soon, and I’m going over the finances one last time.”

“Don’t they have like. A finance department for that?”

“Well, yeah. But a couple years ago the head of the department was caught skimming money. After I set his career in flames I told the department that I’ll finalize all the numbers. I like transparency in my company, and I need to make sure the figures add up. It’s a pain in the ass but if you want something done right, you gotta do it yourself, right?”

Jeongguk blinks at him, surprised. Taehyung raises an eyebrow. “What?”

Jeongguk clears his throat. “N-nothing. Just. You like. Completely flip a switch when you talk about business. Like you’re a different person and you’re all serious.”

“Well, I have to be. It’s my company.”

“What about when we were in high school?” Jeongguk says without meaning to. “You said you didn’t really care about that stuff.”

Taehyung’s smile melts away, eyes suddenly sad. He looks at his computer, thinking. “People change. Priorities change. Real life comes and kicks you in the ass and tells you to wake up.” He shrugs, and Jeongguk feels guilty. “After graduation, I realized I had to get my act together. And after hyung died, I was the only one who could take over Rise, and I didn’t want like. Fifty years of hard work going down the drain just ‘cuz I’m irresponsible.”

“Yeah, that makes sense,” is all Jeongguk can think to say. “Sorry.”
Taehyung shrugs. “Nothing to be sorry about. I wanted to be a better person, you know? Somewhere, deep down, I wanted to be someone you would be proud of.”

Taehyung’s eyes are always so honest, expressive, and no matter how much Jeongguk looks, he can’t see a lie in them. *He’s telling the truth.*

When Taehyung realizes Jeongguk isn’t going to say anything, he clears his throat and turns his attention back to his computer. “But yeah, number crunching is a bitch. But at least I’m good at it.” He laughs, and it echoes in the space between them and rings in Jeongguk’s ears.

♥

The rest of the day passes by in a strange blur of domesticity. Taehyung helps Jeongguk make lunch (and doesn’t set off the fire alarm), and they manage to be quite productive, even when half the time Jeongguk is stress sweating from having Taehyung so close.

Eventually, Jeongguk has to get up and get ready for work, and Taehyung has a conference call to make. Taehyung stays in his spot, typing away when Jeongguk gets up to go change. He’s still there when Jeongguk comes out of his room half an hour later, fully dressed.

“Uh… Taehyung?”

“Hm?”

Jeongguk doesn’t know why he hesitates. Doesn’t know why the idea of Taehyung not being there, in his home, of making him *leave,* is such an uncomfortable thought. “It’s uh. Time for me to head to work.”

Sometimes Jeongguk wonders whether it would be easier to revert back to anger, to sharp words and withering looks. At least then he wouldn’t stutter all the time.

“Oh! I’m so sorry, I totally forgot.” But the sheepish look Taehyung gives him, the way he gathers his stuff quickly and the beautiful golden skin of his thighs peak out from under *Jeongguk’s* clothes, reminds Jeongguk that for the first time in as long as he can remember, his heart doesn’t feel so heavy.
Jeongguk grips his leather bag tightly as he walks with Taehyung to the door, not quite ready to say goodbye. Taehyung makes the decision for him, stepping out quickly and heading for his own door, just a few feet away. He punches in the code and opens the door, before turning to smile at Jeongguk.

“Thanks for letting me hang out with you today,” he says so sweetly, and Jeongguk’s chest tightens. “Sorry if I bothered you.”

So many things had changed, in the course of a couple weeks. One of them being how easily an apology could slip past the tongue. And forgiveness, too.

Jeongguk shakes his head, adjust the strap of his back on his shoulder. “You didn’t. It was… fine.”

_Eloquent._

But Taehyung seems to understand what Jeongguk means, because he laughs, and the shine doesn’t seem to leave his eyes. _I’m so fucking screwed._

“I’ll-- I’ll see you around then,” Jeongguk says, managing a meek wave.

Taehyung smiles with his eyes. “I’ll see you. Have a good day--” He catches himself and twists his face comically. “Night? Have a good night at work? I’ve never said that to anyone before.” He laughs. “But yeah. Have a good night at work.”

Jeongguk tries to smile, but it comes out a grimace. They both hesitate there, and Taehyung’s eyes are hopeful. Jeongguk bites his lip. Suddenly the air feels like it’s suffocating him, so he turns to go.

But something holds him back. He stops in his tracks and turns around. “Tae--”

And that’s all he gets to say, because Taehyung just drops his stuff at the doorway and runs right at him, flinging himself into Jeongguk’s arms and kissing the daylights out of him. Jeongguk makes a noise of surprise, scrabbling to hold Taehyung up, and somewhere along the way, his bag drops to the floor.
Taehyung is all tongue and teeth, desperation spilling out in a low moan and a sigh, and in the
tremble of his fingertips as they tangle in Jeongguk’s hair. He can’t help but kiss back, drinking
Taehyung in, and all of his photographic memory can’t compare to the sweetness of Taehyung’s
mouth, the sizzling in his blood, the loss of control when Taehyung bites his lip.

They break apart messily, and Jeongguk stares at Taehyung, dazed. “W-what was that for?”

Taehyung pants, licking his lip, and Jeongguk’s eyes drift down to watch the way his tongue swipes
out. “I-I thought… I thought you were gonna kiss me. ‘Cuz you turned around and--”


“Oh.” Taehyung pouts. “Well… that’s awkward then.”

“No that’s not--” Jeongguk groans, deciding words just aren’t on his side today, so he does the
next best thing. He pulls Taehyung in and kisses him again, hoping actions will better convey his
mess of feelings.

Taehyung squeaks in surprise, wrapping his arms around Jeongguk’s neck as Jeongguk stumbles
forward, only to press Taehyung against the wall.

“Oh my g--” Jeongguk cuts Taehyung off mid moan, leaning into him, breathing him in. He can’t
remember kissing like this-- kissing for the sake of it, because Taehyung is just so beautiful and
Jeongguk wants him so much that every bone in his body feels like it might just shatter.

Maybe it’s pathetic, the way Jeongguk runs his hands feverently down Taehyung’s sides, squeezing
his ass, drinking in the moans, relishing the way Taehyung arches into him. Jeongguk can’t
remember kissing someone so hard that he forgot where he was, what he was doing and feeling
before the sheer euphoria of being this close, being this connected to Taehyung.

The kiss is noisy and sloppy and there is no finesse to it. Jeongguk wonders if it’s possible to suck
someone’s face entirely off, because he just might. They break apart, just as noisily, lips parting with
an obscene smack, and only when Taehyung tugs at Jeongguk’s hair.
“W-wow, okay,” Taehyung gasps out, eyes hazy, unfocused. Jeongguk grips his hips harder, because suddenly everything feels like it’s crashing down and Taehyung is the only one who can keep him safe.

Jeongguk leans in, desperate, kissing at Taehyung’s pulse point. “I wanted to do that all day.” His voice is rough, out of breath.

“W-why didn’t you?” The only consolation here is that Taehyung sounds just as out of it as Jeongguk.

“I don’t know.” I’m shy and I’m scared.

Taehyung pulls Jeongguk’s face away from his neck and cups his face. “You h-have to go to work.”

“Yeah I do.” Jeongguk doesn’t care all that much right now.

Taehyung giggles. “You should let me down now.”

“Okay.” Just a little while longer.

Taehyung thumbs at Jeongguk’s cheekbones. “Silly Gukkie. You should have kissed me earlier.”

“I know. But I would have wanted to do more than that.”

The grin that stretches across Taehyung’s spit-slick lips is wicked. “You can still do that. After work, that is.”

“My shift ends at three in the morning.”

Taehyung rubs his thumb along Jeongguk’s bottom lip. “Did I stutter, Dr. Jeon?”
Something about those words make Jeongguk feel punch drunk. “No.”

“You know my passcode, don’t you?” Jeongguk nods. “Then I don’t need to open the door for you.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll be waiting.”

“Okay.”

“And you better do more than just kissing.”

“Okay.”

Taehyung smiles and leans in to peck Jeongguk’s lips. It takes all of his will power not to press into Taehyung and kiss him harder. He figures it’ll be best left for… later. So he lets Taehyung down, but the minute Taehyung’s feet touch the ground, his knees give out, and Jeongguk reaches his arms around his waist to support him.

“Whoops,” Taehyung laughs. “Guess you’re really that good of a kisser.”

Jeongguk is not a petty man, but he would be lying if he said his ego didn’t inflate, just a bit.

“You okay?”

Taehyung smiles at him. “I know you were really looking forward to carrying me to bed, but I can manage just fine, doc.” He doesn’t move though, and leans against the wall. “But you’re going to be late for work if you don’t leave now. So shoo.”

Jeongguk steps away slowly, and it takes moment for him to regain his bearings, when he’s not so enraptured by Taehyung. He scrambles blindly for his bag and runs a hand through his hair. He’d combed and styled it but Taehyung had most likely ruined it, but he can’t bring himself to care all
“Uh. Bye Taehyung.” Jeongguk stumbles a little, walking backwards because he doesn’t want to stop staring at Taehyung just yet.

“Bye Gukkie. I’ll see you later.” Taehyung smiles, and his eyes are full of promise.

“See you.” Jeongguk wonders if he’s under some sort of spell, where he can’t seem to give a fuck about anything else but Taehyung, not when he’s bumping into the wall (again), not when he’s pressing blindly at the call button for the elevator.

“Bye,” Jeongguk says. He probably sounds like an idiot. But Taehyung melts, eyes soft and warm.

“Bye, Jeonggukie.”


Taehyung giggles and waves his hand. And Jeongguk just keep staring, until the very last moment, when the doors slide closed.

Chapter End Notes

-*grandpa voice* it's been 10 years
-jokes it's only been 4 n it's 3 if you count the daddy kink so it's all chill
-haha jeon is an idiot
-yet, i changed jungkook --> jeongguk bc i dont use jungkook anymore n it's confusing me imfaol
-thank you aubs n dani for commenting your reactions on the google doc instead of actually editing (i kid, i KID)
-hopefully the gap between this and the next chapter won't be so long. but who knows? who cares? i don't haha cuz irl stuff >>> fan fic
-please don't threaten me for updates. thank you for loving the story but seriously that's not kool guys
-please don't even ask about updates at all actually it really stresses me out
-i hope you all enjoyed this diabetus inducing chapter. consider it a consolation prize
-anyways it's late and im running out of points to make
-thanks for reading and for putting up with my shit ldhafsjdjkf
-i love you guys a lot and im always blown away by the support and love i am exposed
to because of this story. never doubt how much i appreciate you. and i do read all the comments, it's just difficult to respond to so many. but i do read them and i thank you guys!!
-u guys already know i have a tumblr n a twitter (or you guys should.... hm)
-ok for real now im leaving
“Good morning Taehyung ssi.” The doorman bows his head and smiles, and Taehyung returns the gesture.

“Good morning Sungwoon ssi!”

“What are you doing up so early?”

Taehyung smiles, stretching out his hands and breathing in the chilly morning air. He can’t recall ever being up this early, and wonders whether it’s always been this foggy. It’s strangely… nice.

“I’m going to go on a run today.” Sungwoon raises his eyebrows, smiling in amusement. “Don’t give me that look! I’m trying to rethink my health choices and take care of my body.”

“Well, that’s very good, Taehyung ssi. How long do you plan on being gone?”

Taehyung shrugs. “I don’t know much about running, but like... a mile? Since it’s my first time and all. So… maybe an hour?”

“Taehyung ssi, I don’t know if it’ll take an hour-- oh, good morning Jeongguk ssi.”

Taehyung’s mouth pops open in surprise as Jeongguk bows his head and steps up to Taehyung. “Morning,” he grunts, alternating stretching his arms across his chest.

“W-what are you doing here?” Taehyung asks, watching as Jeongguk bends down to touch his toes (Taehyung most definitely doesn’t oggle Jeongguk’s ass, but it’s quite tempting from the way he fills out those track pants).
Jeongguk straightens up, one eyebrow raised. “I live here. Am I not allowed to go on a run? Like I do almost every morning?” Taehyung blubbers for a moment. “Actually, shouldn’t I be the one asking what you’re doing here?” He appraises Taehyung’s jogging outfit-- a hideous neon orange windbreaker with matching jogging pants and Nikes, complete with a neon blue headband, pushing back his hair. *He’s cute.* “You look like a traffic cone.”

Taehyung gasps, affronted. “I will have you know, this outfit is completely in season right now. Okay? Do you know how much it cost? It’s designer.”

Jeongguk nods. “I mean, at least you know you won’t get run over by a car.”

“That’s so rude!” Taehyung whacks Jeongguk’s arm when he snickers. “I happen to love it, okay? I’d be the cutest traffic cone around.”

“Sure.” Jeongguk can’t help but smile at Taehyung’s indignance. If anyone could pull off neon orange, it’s Taehyung, but Jeongguk isn’t going to tell him this. *It’d be easier to tease him than tell him I’m completely and stupidly head over heels.* They stretch together quietly for a bit, before Jeongguk speaks up.

“So, you’re gonna run today? Finally taking my advice?”

“I happen to be very physically fit, and I take good care of my body.” Taehyung twists his upper body, stretching his torso.

“Last night you ate all of my fried rice *after* you ate dinner.”

Taehyung waves his hand dismissively. “I was stress eating.”

“It was *three days* worth of rice.”

“Details.”
Jeongguk rolls his eyes, realizing it’s in his best interest to let it go. “I should probably just come with you.”

Taehyung smiles, fluttering his eyelashes. “Aw, can’t get enough of me?”

Jeongguk scoffs. “More like I’m your doctor and I don’t want you to die ‘cuz you did something stupid.” Taehyung rolls his eyes. “Not to mention the streets might be safer without you running wild.”

“I resent that.” Taehyung sighs anyway. “Fine. You can accompany me on my run. How much were you gonna do?”


“Five mi—” Taehyung’s voice comes out like a wheeze. His eyes dart to the doorman, before settling back on Jeongguk. He smiles, and Jeongguk knows he’s about to hear some quality bull sh*t. “That’s perfect! I was gonna do five miles too!”

“Uh huh.”

“Fine, doubt me.” Taehyung starts walking down the street. “I’ll show you, and then you can eat my ass!”

“Taehyung!” Jeongguk calls out. Taehyung whips around, eyebrows raised.

“What?”

Jeongguk points his finger in the opposite direction. “The park is that way.”

“I totally knew that.” Taehyung speed walks back and past Jeongguk. “I was just testing you.”

“Sure.” This is going to be the longest run of my life.
Things are relatively uneventful for a while. They’re able to run together easily—though Jeongguk is more fast-walking than running, just to stay in step with Taehyung’s snail pace.

It’s not until they’ve done two rounds of the park that the dramatics start.

“Jeongguk--” Taehyung pants out. “I-I can’t do this. I’m g-gonna die.”

“Come on, Taehyung, we haven’t even been running that long.”

Taehyung stops in his tracks, clutching his sides. “It’s b-been three hundred days. We’ve been running nonstop. I don’t know if I can do this for much l-longer.”

Jeongguk stops too, turning to face Taehyung. “It’s been two minutes. I’ve run fifty miles, and I can run for four hundred more days.”

Taehyung lets out a dramatic wail. Jeongguk doesn’t have the heart to tell him it’s only been ten minutes. Taehyung points at him accusingly. “You haven’t even broken a sweat! What are you, Iron Man?”

“Seriously? What happened to proving me wrong and making me eat your ass?”

Taehyung bends back, whining, and his windbreaker bunches up at his torso. “It’s a figure of speech, Guk. I didn’t mean you were actually supposed to-- Oh.” He tilts his head forward to look at Jeongguk, mouth slack. “Were you actually going to eat my ass?”

Jeongguk raises an eyebrow. “I guess you’ll never know. It’s been three hundred days.”

Taehyung straightens up so quickly Jeongguk thinks he might have pulled something. “Suddenly… I feel so refreshed? I’m renewed, rejuvenated!” He all but skips past Jeongguk, before breaking out into a sprint. “Come on, Jeongguk. The future is now!”

Jeongguk suppresses a smile, before making to catch up with Taehyung. He wonders how long the
energy will last.

He gets his answer about five minutes later.

“I m-must persevere—” Taehyung wheezes out, dragging his feet, and Jeongguk just walks leisurely behind him, arms crossed. “I am a warrior. Jeon Jeongguk will eat my ass!” Jeongguk bows apologetically to the scandalized old lady sitting at a park bench, who manages to catch the tail end of Taehyung’s words as he runs (stumbles) past.

Jeongguk decides to have mercy when they finish the third round of the park, and the entrance comes into view. “Okay, that’s enough.”

Taehyung stops and doubles over, coughing. Jeongguk pats his back. “Did I do it? Was that f-five miles?”

“Yup. Congrats.”

Taehyung straightens up, still panting. “That wasn’t so hard.” He winces, cracking his back.

“Right.”

“That was a total breeze. Next time I should go for ten, yeah?”

“If you say so.”

They walk back slowly, and Jeongguk let’s Taehyung chatter on, making sure to keep a careful eye on him, because as funny as it was to watch Taehyung attempt to run, Jeongguk doesn’t want this to strain his heart too much. An odd sense of adoration blooms in his chest.

Jeongguk nods to the doorman as they walk back into the building, and Taehyung shoots him a thumbs up. The lobby is empty as they walk through, since it’s still quite early. Jeongguk grabs his mail from the front desk, and steps into the elevator next to Taehyung, unzipping his hoodie, sorting through the envelopes.
“So…”

Jeongguk looks up as Taehyung slides over to him, a devious smile on his face that promises nothing but trouble.

“Did I do well?” Taehyung wiggles his eyebrows, and Jeongguk stumbles back, until he’s backed up against a corner, and Taehyung leans into him, smacking his hands against the walls on either side of his head. Jeongguk holds the mail to his chest in a meek attempt at protection, staring blankly and leaning back as Taehyung completely steps into his space. “Do I get a reward?”

Jeongguk winces as Taehyung leans in to nip at his jaw. “T-Tae there might be cameras in here.”

Taehyung pulls back, smiling and wiggling his eyebrows. “No there aren’t. To protect the privacy of the residents and all that.”

“I forgot you owned this place.” Taehyung just shrugs, smiling, and leans in again, eyes intent. There’s a glow to his skin, a flush in his cheeks that makes Jeongguk want to swallow his tongue.

“So, are you gonna eat my ass?” Taehyung presses his hand to Jeongguk’s abdomen, thumbing below his navel. “Or I could get on my knees, right here? Either one is good with me.”

“You’d suck my dick as a reward for yourself?” Jeongguk raises an eyebrow. “Didn’t you do enough of that yesterday?”

Taehyung pouts. “But I’m such a slut for your dick, Jeongguk.” As if to drive the point home, he slides his hand down, brushing lightly against the bulge over his pants. “I’d quit my job and suck your dick all day if I could. In fact, I think I’ll do just that.”

Taehyung smiles, laughing breathlessly as he grinds against his hand, getting both of them off. He’s bouncing a little on his toes, eyes alit with mischief, and Jeongguk doesn’t know if he’s aroused or terrified. “Those endorphins are really kicking in, huh?”

Taehyung cocks his head. “What are those?”
Jeongguk swallows, because Taehyung’s hand is still very much on his cock. “Hormones that your brain releases when you exercise. They make you feel good and energized.”

“Well I feel like I could suck ten dicks!”

A sudden stab of possessiveness makes Jeongguk grab the back of Taehyung’s neck and pull him close. “Just mine,” he murmurs, voice low, and Taehyung grins, knowing.

He leans forward, brushing their lips together, tantalizing. “Of course,” he whispers, biting at Jeongguk’s lip. Jeongguk goes to grab Taehyung’s waist, but the bell dings just then, and the doors slide open.

Taehyung winks, stepping out of his space and shooting finger guns as he backs out of the elevator.

It takes Jeongguk five seconds to process what had just happened, and another five to get his legs to work and scramble out of the elevator right before the doors close.

“Taehyung,” Jeongguk growls, not really knowing how he went from smug to desperately aroused in the span of a minute, but he doesn’t really have time to think about that, not when Taehyung is practically skipping to his door, grinning at Jeongguk like he’s not the least bit affected.

Taehyung’s just punched in the code on his door when Jeongguk is pressed against him. He jolts a little, trying to mask the smile as he opens the door, and lets Jeongguk push him inside and press him against the door.

“You don’t get to run away from me like that, baby.” Jeongguk’s eyes are dark with intent as he presses into Taehyung’s space, mimicking their position in the elevator. Jeongguk’s mail is on the floor by their feet, and all Taehyung can concentrate on is the energy bubbling under his skin, the breathlessness from having Jeongguk so close.

“J-Jeongguk-- Taehyung laughs breathlessly as Jeongguk slips a thigh between his leg and presses in. “I wanna suck you off now.”

“Now?” Jeongguk asks, teasing. Taehyung bites his lip, nodding. “Right now?”
“Yes, Gukkie, just let me already,” Taehyung pouts, shoving against Jeongguk’s chest.

“You’re a brat,” Jeongguk murmurs, kissing Taehyung once before stepping back and letting him get on his knees.

“I’ve waited for this all morning,” Taehyung chirps, tugging at the waistband of Jeongguk’s track pants, and he pulls them down. He looks up at Jeongguk. “No underwear?”

Jeongguk tilts his head, eyes dark, and there’s something dangerously sexy in them. “Was I supposed to?”

Taehyung clamps his teeth down on his bottom lip to keep from moaning. He drags his eyes back down to Jeongguk’s cock, wonderfully thick and hard in front of him. He reaches forward and strokes it, almost reverently.

Jeongguk groans, squeezing his eyes shut and bracing his arms against the door. “Won’t you look at me, Gukkie?” Taehyung asks, watching as Jeongguk balls his hands into fists and stares down at Taehyung.

He smiles in satisfaction, before leaning in and taking the head into his mouth. He strokes Jeongguk’s length, twisting on the upstroke, while he plays with the head, running his tongue along the edges and the slit.

Once he gets used to the size, he relaxes his jaw, taking in more of Jeongguk’s cock. He tongues at the underside, and looks up, deceptively innocent and wide-eyed, and Jeongguk groans.

Taehyung wishes he could grin, but he redoubles his focus, bobbing his head up and down. There’s something wonderfully addictive about sucking Jeongguk off-- the taste of Jeongguk’s precome, the liberating submission of being on his knees like this.

It doesn’t take long to have Jeongguk winding his fingers through Taehyung’s hair, a warning of his approaching orgasm. Taehyung resists the urge to giggle and slides his mouth off lewdly.

“Wha--” Jeongguk swallows, trying to focus, as Taehyung pulls his pants back up and pats the
bulge, smiling. “You said you wanted to suck me off.”

Taehyung springs up and grins. “I said I would suck you off. Didn’t say I’d let you come.”

Jeongguk’s eyes widen with disbelief for a moment, before going dark. “Really, Taehyung?”

He shrugs playfully. “I mean. You can get your orgasm--” Taehyung says, maneuvering himself around Jeongguk, sliding off his jacket in the process. He starts to back up towards the hall. “But you’ll have to catch me first!”

Taehyung doesn’t give Jeongguk a chance to process before he’s bounding down the hall, into his room. He hears Jeongguk cursing, and approaching footsteps. He tugs off his sweat-stained shirt, flinging it blindly behind him in an effort to subdue Jeongguk.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” Jeongguk asks, barging into the room. Taehyung startles a little, grinning as he rummages through his drawer, on the opposite side of the bed.

“Spicing things up!” he chirps, tossing a bottle of lube at Jeongguk, who catches it reflexively. It’s enough to distract him, and Taehyung hops on top of the bed, jumping across it and running out the bedroom door again.

Taehyung knows Jeongguk is just steps behind him, and the thrill of it makes a tremor run down his spine.

He lets out a squawk when he feels hands on his waist, gripping him and tugging him in. Jeongguk lifts him up, and Taehyung kicks his legs out on reflex, gasping from the shock.

“Taehyung, I feel like this is a good time to tell you--” Jeongguk presses Taehyung against the wall, and Taehyung has to bite his lip from giggling. “I was a sprinter in college and--” Jeongguk presses into Taehyung’s space, stopping him from squirming. “I run marathons in my free time. So it’s safe to say that you shouldn’t try to run from me.”

Jeongguk thumbs at Taehyung’s throat, pulse throbbing under his finger. Taehyung grins. “That’s so hot Gukkie,” he murmurs, eyes alight with mischief. He can see it now, Jeongguk in those deliciously tight uniforms, soaked in sweat, face set with determination-- like he is now.
Jeongguk doesn’t respond to that, only leans in and kisses Taehyung, prying his mouth open and gripping his chin to keep him in place. His tongue sweeps the back of Taehyung’s teeth, and Taehyung all but melts into it, winding his arms around Jeongguk’s neck and letting himself get lost in it for a moment.

“Shit, Gukkie I want you so much,” Taehyung moans, running his fingers through Jeongguk’s hair and down his neck. Jeongguk groans, pressing impossibly closer, and hitches Taehyung up. Taehyung winds his legs securely around Jeongguk’s waist and lets him carry him towards the dining table.

Jeongguk sets him down abruptly, taken by surprise when Taehyung bucks against him. There’s a crash, and they break the kiss for a moment. Taehyung turns to see the vase on the table knock over and roll off the edge, shattering on the ground.

“We should clean that up,” Jeongguk says.

Taehyung lets out a breathless giggle and turns Jeongguk’s face towards him. “Later,” he says, cupping Jeongguk’s face and pulling him in. He drags his hands down Jeongguk’s chest, tugging at Jeongguk’s jacket and shirt.

They break apart for a moment so Jeongguk can tug his clothes off, and Taehyung takes a moment to touch Jeongguk, drag his hands down the solid planes of his chest and abs. Jeongguk wraps his arms around Taehyung, all-consuming him in a kiss, and Taehyung moans.

Jeongguk lifts Taehyung off the table easily, not breaking their kiss, and walks blindly towards the living room. Taehyung grinds against him, tugging at his hair desperately, and it’s enough to distract him, enough that Jeongguk’s knees hit the arm of the couch and it sends them both toppling into the cushions.

“Holy shit--” Taehyung gasps, laughing breathlessly, gripping Jeongguk’s neck. The couch is too stuffy against his overheated skin, and Jeongguk’s weight on top of him doesn’t make it any easier to breathe, but he likes it this way, feeling everything around him.

Jeongguk’s mouth is set in a determined line as he grabs the hem of Taehyung’s pants and briefs and all but tears them off.
“Y-you too,” Taehyung says, tugging at Jeongguk’s pants. He grunts, struggling to get out of them and take the lube out of his pocket. Taehyung pushes himself up, grabbing the bottle of lube, carelessly tossed between them by Jeongguk, and uncaps it.

“I’ll do it,” Jeongguk growls, grabbing the bottle out of Taehyung’s hands. There’s something unrestrained in his eyes, a complete loss of control, and it makes Taehyung’s skin burn.

“Don’t need much,” Taehyung says, letting Jeongguk settle on top of him, squeezing the liquid onto his fingers. Everything feels so rushed, so heady, and it’s addicting. “Fucked me pretty good last night.”

Jeongguk doesn’t wait for the lube to warm, and slips in two fingers at once.

“F-fuck,” Taehyung gasps, arching up. The stretch is comfortable, if a little cold, and it makes him jolt, but it only adds to the rush. He tangles his fingers in Jeongguk’s hair, tugging him close for a kiss. It’s too messy, lips slick with spit, and Taehyung bites down on Jeongguk’s lip when his fingers brush his prostate.

“Fuck, Gukkie go faster.” Taehyung moans, bucking up in desperation. He throws up his leg over the back of the couch, spreading himself open, as if to tell Jeongguk he’s ready.

“Dammit, Taehyung,” Jeongguk growls, when Taehyung grinds against his own aching cock. He spares a moment to appraise Taehyung-- skin glowing, cheeks flushed, body loose and limber and just begging to be fucked. He leans in, biting down on Taehyung’s neck as he slips in two more fingers.

Taehyung squirms against him, moaning lewdly, with not a care for how loud he’s being, and Jeongguk is dizzy from it, dizzy from the way Taehyung’s perfect lips fall open as he cries out.

“Goddammit Jeongguk, if you don’t get your cock in me right now--”

“I-I need to go get a condom--”

“Forget the condom Jeongguk, just fuck me already.” Taehyung has this fire in his eyes, face set in determination, and Jeongguk wonders if any man could say no to that.
“You w-want that?” Jeongguk has to stop for a moment to consider. He has to pull away, process.

Taehyung nods, biting his lip. “I want you to fill me up, Jeongguk.” He squeeze Jeongguk’s bicep, pulling him back. “I want you to come inside me, I want it all over me. god, Jeongguk I want to be a fucking slut--”

Jeongguk cuts him off with a bruising kiss, winding his arms around Taehyung’s waist to pull him up so he’s arching up. “Stop fucking saying shit like that,” he groans, Taehyung’s heel pressing securely against the dip of his back.

“W-wh- ugh--” Taehyung’s question breaks off into a garbled moan as Jeongguk squeezes his ass.

“Makes me go fucking crazy, like I’m gonna lose it.” Jeongguk’s are dark on Taehyung, a little crazed, and Taehyung’s never felt more alive than in this moment. He’s playing with something dangerous, and so incredibly satisfying.

“What if I want that? What if I want you to lose control?”

Jeongguk gives Taehyung a hard look as he breaks away to slick himself up. Taehyung licks his lips, so eager, and he feels like he’s already run a marathon by how hard he’s panting.

“Might regret it,” Jeongguk says, voice low as he bears down on Taehyung, grabbing his hand and secures it above their heads, tangling their fingers together. With the other hand, he teases Taehyung’s entrance with the head of his cock, before pushing in completely.

“O-oh shit Jeon--” Taehyung isn’t even given a moment to adjust before Jeongguk’s pulling out and ramming in again. “Fu-- ohh--”

Jeongguk is relentless and merciless, thrusting up into Taehyung. Their bodies are slick against each other from the sweat, and it feels so dirty and messy and perfect. Jeongguk kisses Taehyung with determination, swallowing all of his moans, and there’s nothing Taehyung can do but grip Jeongguk’s shoulder so tight that his nails will surely leave marks in their wake.

It doesn’t take much for the pressure to build in Taehyung’s core, his toes curling in anticipation of
his orgasm, but he doesn’t want that yet. He wants to drag this out longer, see how far he can push Jeongguk.

“W-wait—” Taehyung gasps out, pushing Jeongguk’s shoulder. Jeongguk pulls his head back, staring down at Taehyung with hazy, unfocused eyes.

“Wh-what?”

Taehyung takes a moment to really look at Jeongguk— the way his hair clumps together with sweat, the way his arms bulge and flex from holding himself up, the flush of his cheeks, the determined line of his mouth. Taehyung doesn’t think he’s ever seen anyone this sexy.

“I don’t want to end this y-yet.” Jeongguk just blinks down at him, waiting for him to finish. Taehyung smiles, smoothing his hand up Jeongguk’s chest and shoulder. “Let’s play another game.”

“Screw games Tae let’s just--”

“If you forfeit you’ve already lost.” Taehyung raises an eyebrow in challenge. “And you hate losing, don’t you?” He watches closely as Jeongguk narrows his eyes, chest heaving a little. Taehyung giggles, knowing Jeongguk’ll play along, and arches his back, clenching around Jeongguk, and it’s enough to distract him. Taehyung shoves Jeongguk off of him, and they end up rolling off the couch together, onto the floor in a messy tangle of limbs.

“Are you trying to kill me?” Jeongguk grunts in pain, and Taehyung smiles in satisfaction as he straddles him. Jeongguk looks up at him in bewilderment, and Taehyung realizes that they’d never been in this position before.

“My proposition…” Taehyung leans down to bite at Jeongguk’s lip, tugging it between his teeth. “My proposition is that whoever can make the other person come first, wins.”

Jeongguk scoffs, gripping Taehyung’s hips. “That’s easy. What are the stakes?”

Taehyung shrugs. “Bragging rights?” Jeongguk rolls his eyes. He sighs in exasperation. “Fine, the loser gets to be a sex slave for like, a week,” he says dismissively.
Jeongguk narrows his eyes. “Aren’t we already each other’s sex slaves?”

“True,” Taehyung concedes. He grins. “Betcha can’t get me to come first though.” And with a laugh, he’s scrambling off of Jeongguk, adrenaline coursing through his veins.

“Not happening,” Jeongguk growls, reaching out, and it doesn’t take much to have him dragging Taehyung across the carpet, back towards him. Taehyung laughs breathlessly, loving the way Jeongguk is all over him in an instant. Taehyung is on his hands and knees, and Jeongguk presses against him.

“Don’t play games with me, Taehyung. You’re gonna lose,” Jeongguk whispers, his breath hot against Taehyung’s ear. Taehyung squirms in his grip, only to have his ass spanked in warning. It’s light, relatively mild, but a mix of surprise and arousal makes Taehyung arch up in surprise, precome beading at the head of his cock.

“Oh, did you like that?”

Taehyung can barely get his tongue to work, much less breathe. “Y-yes,” he manages to say. “B-but it’s cheating.” Jeongguk tangles his hand into Taehyung’s hair and tugs his head back, clamping his teeth down on the skin of Taehyung’s exposed neck.

“Didn’t know there were all these rules.”

Jeongguk grinds his length between Taehyung’s ass, and it has his eyes rolling back. “I-I’m making them up a-as I go-- fuck--” Taehyung hiccups when Jeongguk slides back inside him, and everything feels so raw and real.

“Then I get to make one too,” Jeongguk growls, voice deceptively low as he rocks in and out of Taehyung. “You’re pissing me off so I’m gonna fucking wreck you, how’s that for a rule?”

Taehyung laughs breathlessly. “Depends on if you can even follow through.”

He knows he’s said the right thing when Jeongguk presses in harder than before, one hand next to Taehyung’s, bracing himself as he stretches over his body, the other hand wound around Taehyung’s waist and pushing his hips back to meet his thrusts. Taehyung winds his hand back and tangles it into Jeongguk’s hair, tilting his head back until it rests on Jeongguk’s shoulder.
“Fuck me, Jeongguk, god d-damnit--” Taehyung moans, and it spurs Jeongguk on, because his thrusts become harder, more erratic, and Taehyung knows his knees are going to be bruised and red in a few hours.

He can feel his orgasm approaching, so he clenches around Jeongguk, letting out a lewd moan. Jeongguk groans into his neck, sucking and biting at the flesh, and Taehyung tugs harder at his hair, crying out just a little louder than necessary, because he knows Jeongguk gets off on it-- his noises, the fact that Taehyung is being pleased.

“Yes fuck ha-arder--” Taehyung urges him on, feeling the orgasm build up again. He presses against Jeongguk, urging him to bite harder. Their bodies are slick with sweat, and it’s so dirty in the best way possible. His arm wobbles dangerously, and Jeongguk, despite his single-minded focus to fuck Taehyung into oblivion, notices.

He stops for a moment, only to pull out and flip Taehyung over until he’s on his back. “M-much better.” Taehyung smiles languidly, winding his arms around Jeongguk and bringing him in for a kiss as Jeongguk presses back in.

He moans louder into Jeongguk’s mouth, feeling the sounds reverberate against their lips, and after a while, he forgets that he’s supposed to be exaggerating, because Jeongguk really does make him feel this way-- like there’s liquid fire running through his veins, and all he wants to do is scream.

Taehyung’s orgasm hits him before he can even process it. He arches up, letting out a strangled moan, and his head spins from the waves of pleasure and the breathlessness. Jeongguk tenses up seconds later, biting down on Taehyung’s shoulder to suppress the groan as he releases inside Taehyung.

They lay on the carpet, unmoving, and everything is quiet, save for the sounds of labored breathing. Jeongguk is impossibly heavy on top of Taehyung, and yet, he doesn’t have the will to tell him to move. He wants to remember this-- this feeling of absolute bliss, of feeling filled to the brim, like he’s been marked.

“Fuck,” Jeongguk groans, nuzzling Taehyung’s neck for a moment, before making to slide out. Taehyung rolls them over instead, pressing Jeongguk’s back onto the floor as he straddles him.

He all but preens at Jeongguk’s dark gaze, sweeping down the marks on his neck, the flush of his cheeks, the sticky come, splattered across his stomach. Jeongguk smirks. “I won.”
Taehyung bites back the smile, chest still heaving. “Did you really?”

Jeongguk frowns, pushing himself up into a sitting position. “You came first. I won.”

Taehyung scoffs, winding his arms around Jeongguk’s neck. “It was by like. Two seconds.”

But Jeongguk’s face is set stubbornly. “Still. Those were your rules. I. Won.”

“Wow.” Taehyung leans in, running his fingers through Jeongguk’s sweaty hair, and Jeongguk’s eyes flutter for a moment, leaning into the touch. “You’re one of those competitive assholes aren’t you?”

Jeongguk grins, and the way his lips curve up makes something hot stir in Taehyung’s belly. “I wouldn’t be here if I wasn’t.”

“That’s true,” Taehyung hums, leaning forward to peck Jeongguk’s lips. “My body is gonna feel like shit tomorrow, isn’t it?”

“Probably,” Jeongguk says, chuckling, running his hands appreciatively down Taehyung’s body.

“It’s okay. I’ve exercised enough for the whole month.” Jeongguk snorts. Taehyung pouts in mock offense. “I had bomb sex and I ran five miles. That’s pretty good if you ask me. I probably burned like ten thousand calories.”

Jeongguk bites his lip and looks down. “Yeah… about that.”

“What?”

Jeongguk readjusts the weight on his arms and clears his throat. “We… didn’t exactly run five miles.”
“How much did we run then? Like four?”

Jeongguk gulps. “More like. A mile and a half? If I round up.”

“Damn. It felt like I ran five miles.”

“Maybe you should try yoga?”

“I guess running’s not my thing.” Taehyung frowns.

“Are you mad?” Jeongguk asks, looking at him hesitantly. Taehyung tilts his head.

“Of course not! I’m honestly pretty happy right now.”

Jeongguk leans back, eyebrows pulled together in confusion. “Why’s that?”

Taehyung shrugs. “I exercised and I got to have hot sweaty jungle sex with the sexiest man I know. So who’s the real winner here?” Jeongguk grips Taehyung’s hip a little tighter, relieved.

“You’re one of those asshole optimists, aren’t you?” Taehyung leans in, brushing their noses together, and smiles.

“I try to be. Life is more fun that way, don’t you think?”

“I’m starting to feel that way.”

Taehyung grins. “Good.” He scrambles out of Jeongguk’s lap, shoving him down. “Because I’m gonna race you to the shower and you’re gonna lose!”

Jeongguk blinks, surprised, watching Taehyung sprint through the hall. His manic laughter echoes through the apartment, and for once, Jeongguk doesn’t think it would be too bad to lose once in a
Yoongi walks up to the older man, who just hums, not looking up from his tablet. “Can I ask you a question?”

“Just did.” Hoseok taps at the screen with force, before locking it and looking up, eyebrows raised. Yoongi tries not to feel intimidated. He’d known Hoseok since he was a teenager, and they’d never interacted much— not until Hoseok became Taehyung’s assistant and Yoongi become Taehyung’s lawyer, and suddenly communication was much more frequent.

Hoseok had always existed behind the scenes, much like a ghost, and Yoongi had never payed attention until he had to. He still isn’t quite sure how to talk to Hoseok, who was a good ten years older than him, and yet, now they were colleagues.

“Well I’m going to ask you another one.”

Hoseok nods, and takes out his phone when it beeps. Around them, the noise of construction rings in the air. Yoongi, Hoseok, Taehyung, Jeongguk, and the investors, had come to observe progress on the renovations of the mansion.

Yoongi slips his hands into his pockets. “Do you think Taehyung and Jeongguk are sleeping together?”

That gets Hoseok’s attention. He looks up immediately, the phone in his hand completely forgotten, and he stares at Yoongi in bewilderment. “Excuse me?”

“Look at them.” Yoongi nods his head in the direction of the two men in question. Taehyung and Jeongguk stand close together, listening as the construction project manager talks. Once in a while, Taehyung will whisper in Jeongguk’s ear, and Jeongguk will lean close, brush his hand against Taehyung’s waist, subtle. No one would find it if they weren’t looking.
“You can tell they’ve had sex at least once. Right?”

Hoseok narrows his eyes. “Yoongi ssi. I don’t know why you would think to tell me this.”

Yoongi shrugs. “I mean. It’s kinda weird, isn’t it? They couldn’t stand to be in the same room a couple months ago. Now they’re like… giggly teenagers.”

“I-I never noticed.” Hoseok looks down at his phone resolutely, though he doesn’t make to unlock it.

“But you’ve been with them during most of their communication right? You must have sense something?”

Hoseok looks at Yoongi, lips pressed in a determined line. “I warned Taehyung not to get involved with Dr. Jeon. I can’t control his personal life, but Jeongguk concerns the company and this venture. Whether he decides to listen to me or not is beyond my control.”

Yoongi bites back a smile, pleased at Hoseok’s irritated state. He’d never seen the man so off balance. In fact, he’d never seen Hoseok particularly emotional at all. “But… you don’t have an opinion on them?”

“What does that mean?”

Yoongi shrugs, eyes drifting back to Taehyung and Jeongguk. “I dunno. They’re kinda… cute.”

Hoseok coughs in surprise. “Are you implying that they’re dating or something?”

“Hey, I didn’t say that. I just said they looked cute.” Hoseok’s eyes widen a fraction, and he fiddles with the phone, trying to school his expression. “Why, do you not believe in office romance, Hoseok ssi?”

“I have no opinion of it.”

“I mean if you think about it, it’s not really office romance, since they’re not exactly working at the
same job, right? So it’s not the same.”

“What are you saying, Yoongi ssi?” Hoseok’s voice is too even, too controlled for the odd spark in his eyes.

“Oh, kitten’s got claws.” Yoongi takes great satisfaction from the way Hoseok’s eyes flare. “Or if we’re gonna be more accurate, you’re more a cougar, aren’t you?”

“Yoongi ssi, I promise I can make life very painful for you--”

“Don’t think I haven’t noticed you checking me out.”

Hoseok scoffs, rolling his eyes. “You flatter yourself too much, Yoongi ssi.”

“My ass does look great in slacks.” Yoongi watches the way Hoseok’s eye twitches. “Don’t worry. I think you’re pretty cute too.”

Hoseok narrows his eyes, and for a moment, Yoongi feels a flicker of fear under his skin. Hoseok steps towards him, and it takes all of Yoongi’s power not to step back. That would mean giving in.

“I have no idea where you’re making these conclusions from, Yoongi ssi. But I don’t recommend you speak of them again.”

“I’m just teasing, calm down.” Yoongi swallows nervously. Now he can’t be sure whether the lingering looks were just a figment of his mind-- wishful thinking.

Hoseok tilts his head, gaze searing. “Don’t joke around with me, Min Yoongi. I promise you’ll regret it.”

And with a click of his heels, he turns, schooling his expression to something much more cordial, and walks away, leaving Yoongi reeling in his wake.

♥
“So uh… two weeks huh?”

Jeongguk stands at his doorway, hands in his pocket, trying vehemently not to scowl.

“Don’t worry Gukkie, it’ll go by before you know it.” Taehyung smiles at him, eyes kind. One hand rests on the handle of his luggage bag, the other clutches his passport, a printed ticket for Los Angeles tucked between the pages. “Just try not to miss me too much.”

Jeongguk stares down at his shoes, because he doesn’t really have anything to say about that. He knows he probably will miss Taehyung, as much as he’d hate to admit it. “Maybe I’ll be able to get some work done at home finally.”

Taehyung grins. “I’ll find a way to haunt you. I won’t let you rest.”

Jeongguk forces himself to smile. “A-are you sure you don’t want me to like drive you to the airport or anything?”

“No, silly,” Taehyung laughs. “I have a driver. Plus I don’t want to inconvenience you.”

“You’re not-- you’re not an inconvenience.”

Taehyung smiles softly, seeming to bloom at the words, and Jeongguk wonders whether Taehyung is always like that-- so receptive to kind words (no matter how unassuming).

“I’m okay, Jeongguk. Really. Maybe next time I’ll let you be my chauffeur.”

Next time.

Next time Taehyung leaves.

Jeongguk fidgets. “Just… have a safe flight. Don’t do anything stupid.” Taehyung grins widely at
“Right when I land, I know, you told me like five times already.” Taehyung’s words are light, but Jeongguk feels them like stones in his stomach. *When did I get so clingy? Why do I even care?*

“I’m just saying…” Jeongguk grumbles, because suddenly it hits him how he’s acting—like a petulant boyfriend. Were they boyfriends? Did sex and spending most of their free time together constitute some sort of title?

Taehyung steps forward, smile soft as always, and presses his lips gently against Jeongguk’s. Jeongguk wants to grab him, hold him, kiss him harder. Make Taehyung’s lips swell and tingle so that he’ll remember, even when Jeongguk is out of sight.

But he doesn’t. He’s frozen in his spot, and he doesn’t move his lips. When Taehyung steps back, he scowls. “Don’t miss me too much, Gukkie. Try not to cry too much.”

“I’m not gonna cry,” Jeongguk says indignantly. “Who do you think I am?”

Taehyung rolls his eyes, alight with good humor. Funny how he’s the only one who seems to be relaxed in the situation. “I think you’re gonna have separation anxiety.” Jeongguk scoffs and looks away, hands stuffed resolutely in his pockets so Taehyung won’t see the fists. He can hear Taehyung stepping away, the wheels of the baggage rolling across the floor.

Jeongguk doesn’t want to look when the elevator dings. It’s petty and he’s going to regret it in five minutes.

“And when you do, call me.”

♥

Jeongguk walks through the halls of the cardiac unit, striding with purpose. The nurses and residents give him a wide berth, knowing the stoic, determined expression and the consequences of somehow interrupting whatever it was that Dr. Jeon Jeongguk had going through his head.
Usually, said seriousness was due to a patient in critical condition, some sort of incompetence from his subordinates. At this moment, it was because Dr. Jeon Jeongguk’s phone had just gone off, with a text from a certain Kim Taehyung that read: just landed :) it’s so much warmer in LA :O

“Dr. Jeon?”

Jeongguk stops in his tracks and blinks down at the nurse who’d stepped in front of him. It was Choa, of course. She would be the only one in this unit who wouldn’t think twice about getting her work done, regardless of whatever mood Jeongguk was in when he stomped around the halls.

Choa hands Jeongguk a file. “The patient in 502 needs to be put on a ventilator again, his BP isn’t looking good.”

“The one who just had the bypass?” Jeongguk reaches into his coat pocket for a pen. He takes the file from Choa, flipping through the contents. “How’re his LDL’s?”

“Too high. We’re gonna have to talk with a nutritionist, I think it’s the diet.”

Jeongguk frowns, considering. “Increase his dosage of ivostatin. I know we have some name brand bull shit but give him the generic, he doesn’t need that on his medical bill.”

“Should I keep an eye on his heme count? He’s diabetic too.”

“Shit, what hasn’t this guy done,” Jeongguk mumbles under his breath. He makes a note on the prescription slip and closes the file before handing it back. “I want blood drawn every couple hours. See how he’s looking. Maybe the insulin and glucagon levels are messing with him.”

“Sure thing, doc.” Jeongguk nods his head and Choa brushes past him. He sighs, stuffing his hands in his white coat pockets out of habit, and his fingers brush against the phone.

Shit.

He all but sprints back to his office, closing the door and bracing himself against it before digging out the phone and dialing Taehyung’s number without even thinking.
“Miss me already, sweet cheeks?”

Taehyung’s voice is crackly over the speaker, but Jeongguk sighs in relief nonetheless. He’d been agitated all night, every worst case scenario whizzing through his mind, and knowing Taehyung is safe is enough to make him disregard the teasing lilt to Taehyung’s voice.

“Were you waiting for me to text you?” Taehyung asks, and Jeongguk scowls.

“No.”

“You responded pretty fast.”

“I happened to be checking my phone just then. It was convenient.”

Taehyung laughs, bubbly. Jeongguk’s ears are hot. He doesn’t tell Taehyung that he’d been checking his phone every minute for the last ten hours.

“How was the flight?” Jeongguk cringes, hating how unsure his voice sounds. He doesn’t do this—he doesn’t talk to people on the phone unless he has to. He doesn’t know how to make small talk like this.

“It was fine. The weather’s really nice here. It’s night time right now but it’s still warm out. Everyone’s in shorts and sandals.” Taehyung laughs in amusement. Jeongguk walks over to his desk and settles down in the chair, content to just listen to Taehyung ramble.

“What are you doing right now?”

“Huh?” Jeongguk sits up a bit, clearing his throat.

“It’s probably morning for you, right?”
“Yeah uh. Seoul is sixteen hours ahead of pacific standard time.”

Taehyung clicks his tongue. “That sucks. So you’ll be asleep when I’m awake.”

Jeongguk laughs. “Not exactly. My hours are all over the place so you never know. It’s seven in the morning but I’ve been awake for twelve hours now.”

“Oh right, I forgot you were a crazy surgeon for a second there.” Jeongguk scoffs. “Are you at the hospital right now?”

“Yeah I am.”

“How’s that been going?”

Jeongguk frowns, staring at the stack of files on his desk. “What do you mean?”

“Oh come on, Guk. I’m trying to make small talk here. Ask about domestic stuff. How’s your day slash night been?”


Taehyung bursts out laughing, and Jeongguk winces. “You have to be more descriptive than that otherwise it’s no fun. You didn’t call me just to say hi and then hang up, did you?”

“I--” Jeongguk swallows, wracking his brain for anything. “I’m supposed to be getting a new intern today?”

“You seem so unsure about that,” Taehyung laughs. “What do you need an intern for?”

“Well I don’t need an intern. After med school you have to do clinical rotations at hospitals and shadow doctors to figure out where you want to specialize so it’s all mandatory. They’re all so… chipper. It’s annoying.”
That makes Taehyung laugh harder. “Okay Mr. Doom and Gloom. I can just imagine it now, a starry-eyed kid trailing after you like a puppy. Please don’t kill them.”

“I’ll try,” Jeongguk says dryly. He would be lying if he hadn’t contemplated flinging a few interns out of windows in the past. “What about you? What are you doing?”

“Heading over to the hotel now, cuz someone called me right when I got off the plane. I haven’t exactly had a chance to do much.” Jeongguk blushes and thanks god no one can see it.

“I was concerned for your safety, alright?”

“It made me happy. I’m glad you did.” Taehyung’s voice is gentle this time, as though he’d sensed Jeongguk’s discomfort. “You’ve never called me before.”

“I-I never really had a reason to.” Jeongguk lifts up one of his meticulously lined up pens, clicking it nervously.

“And now?”

_I just wanted to hear your voice._ Somehow Jeongguk doesn’t think saying that would be a good idea. _Because I’m a clingy fuck and an idiot._

“I told you. Just wanted to make sure you were okay.”

“Okay, Jeongguk.” There’s a long pause, and Jeongguk wonders if he’s said something wrong. “Well. I don’t know about you but I miss you. You and your stupidly handsome face.” Jeongguk’s heart lurches inexplicably. “I mean. We’ve only been hanging out for like. Three weeks? And I already miss you. Is that weird?”

These days, Jeongguk feels incredibly stupid when it comes to almost everything regarding Taehyung, but it makes him feel a bit better knowing Taehyung feels the same way. Even just a little. “N-no. It’s not weird.”

Taehyung sighs over the line, and Jeongguk can almost see him blowing at his fringe, the way he
does when he’s irritated. *This is gonna be a really long two weeks, Jeongguk.*

“I-I guess so.”

*God I’m gonna have to send you slutty texts all the time--*”

“Good morning Dr. Jeon!”

Jeongguk almost drops his phone from the shock, staring at the lanky smiley boy who had just barged into his office.

“T-Tae I’ll have to call you back okay? Bye.” Jeongguk doesn’t wait for Taehyung’s response before cutting the call, slamming the phone down on the desk like it’s burned.

He blinks at the boy, who just beams back at him. “Who’re you?”

Jeongguk has to give the boy props for seeming unfazed by his hostile tone.

“I’m Kunpimook Bhuwakhul! Your new intern! One of the nurses said I might find you here,” the boy explains with a toothy grin.

Jeongguk cringes, because he’s been awake too long to deal with someone so loud. “Kunpimook--”

“BamBam.”


“BamBam! It’s my nickname, everyone calls me that!”

Jeongguk leans forward to rest his elbows on his desk, and rubs at the bridge of his nose, breathing in deeply. “Alright, BamBam, here’s what we’re going to do. You are going to go and find Choa,
who is quite possibly the most competent nurse in this unit, and she’s going to give you a rundown of logistics and give you something to do. And next time you need to speak with me in my office, you’re going to knock first, is that understood?”

BamBam nods enthusiastically. There’s a pause as he waits for further instruction. “Get out of my office.”

“Oh! Yes sir, gotcha!” BamBam bows before bouncing towards the door. “It’s an honor to finally meet you, sir. I look forward to working with you!”

Jeongguk manages to give him a thin smile. The moment the door is closed, he deflates, resting his head against the desk. “Why me?” he groans, the words slutty texts ringing in his brain.

Chapter End Notes

i have no answer for this
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

im back bitches

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“The framework is looking really good, hyung.”

Hoseok nods, a satisfied smile gracing his face as he presses the button to the top floor. The elevator doors slide shut, and Taehyung leans back against the wall, losing his prim posture.

“I think the project manager we hired is better than our last one,” Hoseok says. “Much more efficient.”

“True.” Taehyung sighs, and he closes his eyes, feeling the lethargy of jet lag and a week’s worth of non-stop board meetings and auditing.

“You should get some rest. We don’t have anything scheduled for tomorrow. Sleep in.”

Taehyung grins in relief. “Will do.” The elevator doors slide open, revealing a long, wide hallway, decorated with paintings and tables set with flowers. The carpet is plush and feels odd underneath Taehyung’s feet, and he wonders how exhausted he really must be to spend time thinking about the plushness of carpets.

“Good night Hobi hyung,” Taehyung says as they approach his suite. Hoseok nods and walks towards his own room, several doors down. Taehyung slides his key card into the slot and it beeps. When he hears the resounding click, he pulls the handle and opens the door.

As soon as it shuts, he lets out the most inhumane groan, and all but stumbles through the suite, tearing off his clothes as he goes. The suit jacket goes first, then the pants, both of which find their place strewn across a loveseat. Taehyung then unbuttons his dress shirt, but becomes distracted by the large bed in front of him, and he all but tosses himself onto the mattress.
For a moment, it reminds him of how Jeongguk tends to toss him onto his bed when they get too worked up, the way the air just rushes out of his lungs, and his skin prickles with excitement. This brings his tangle of thoughts to Jeongguk. In a moment of childishness, he whines, flailing his arms and legs around, because he misses Jeongguk, more than he’d care to admit.

It had only been a week, but Taehyung already feels like he’s hallucinating, smelling Jeongguk’s cologne on his clothes, feeling his lips against his skin. He flops over onto his back, resituating himself on the pillows and grapples for his phone, which he’d tossed carelessly onto the duvet as he’d divested himself of his trousers.

His fingers seem to have a mind of their own as he opens up the (rather short) thread of text messages. After their first phone call, Jeongguk had withdrawn a bit, back to his quiet, sentient self. He’d only texted Taehyung a handful of times, just to make sure he’s been taking his medication, that his ribs didn’t hurt, that he didn’t feel any shortness of breath.

Every time he got a notification from Jeongguk, his heart would beat just a little bit faster, hoping for something decidedly not safe for work, but it had yet to happen.

“Well, I guess I’ll just have to make the first move,” he mumbles, then pauses, looking around the room. “I’m talking to myself.” He clicks his tongue. “And I’m still talking to myself.”

Taehyung shakes his head and refocuses on his mission. He opens up the camera app, and squirms around on the bed, trying to find the best lighting. He runs his hands through his hair, pulling the careful coif over his eyes, and adjusts his dress shirt so only a sliver of skin is showing.

Biting his lip, he snaps a picture. After readjusting, he takes another. And another. He changes up his poses, biting his lip in one, putting his finger in his mouth in the next, arching off the bed a little. All in all, he amasses about forty photos, and goes through the painstaking process of choosing the most suitable one to send.

After about fifteen minutes of debate, he selects the best one (he will not admit that most of them look the same, he will not).

*Just got back to the hotel! So tired TT___TT*

He sends it to Jeongguk quickly, before he can chicken out.
Taehyung all but tosses his phone across the bed, because the moment of bold confidence is now gone, and all that’s left is the horrifying thought of *oh my god I’m sexting my doctor.*

He lies back against the pillows and stares at the ceiling, running through the millions of responses that he might get. He’s hoping for a sexy picture, maybe even a sexy phone call, but the rational, doubtful side of him reminds him that what he might get is a *fuck off Taehyung I’m working.*

Taehyung pouts at that thought. All that hard work for nothing? Jeongguk wouldn’t be that mean. He’d put so much effort into posing, and he did (dare he say it?) look sexy. Jeongguk shouldn’t be able to resist it.

But as the time passes, Taehyung’s resolve wanes. It occurs to him, suddenly, that Jeongguk might be at work. He might be sleeping. It was early morning in Seoul, he knew that for sure, but Jeongguk’s schedule was too unpredictable, despite the valiant efforts Taehyung had put in to try and memorize it.

A sudden buzz breaks him out of his thoughts, and he all but dives across the bed to grab his phone.

(1) *New Notification from Jeon Jeongguk*

Taehyung squeals and rushes to open it.

*I have to be at the lab in half an hour. Quit it.*

Taehyung lets out the most affronted noise. *How rude.* He tosses the phone aside and pouts, wholly disappointed. He shouldn’t have hoped for anything more from Captain Hard Ass. He wonders whether he should give up, or whether to take it as a challenge and rile Jeongguk up. (Maybe when he gets back from his trip he’ll get punished.)

But before he can make a decision, his phone buzzes again, and Taehyung grabs for it so fast it’s almost embarrassing. He opens up the chat, and he almost drops his phone on his face.

Instead of a scolding text, it’s a picture. Jeongguk’s sent him a picture of himself. It’s one of those full mirror selfies, the ones people take to show off their outfits, except that *Jeongguk* isn’t wearing
He’s in the tightest black briefs Taehyung’s ever seen, and his bulge is so obvious Taehyung really drops his phone on his face this time. Upon further inspection (Taehyung stares at the picture for a while), Jeongguk’s skin is wet like he’d just gotten out of the shower, the ink all over his skin glistening, the valleys and dips of his abdomen golden and pronounced, and Taehyung traces every fucking line of muscle on his legs and arms, bicep bulging as Jeongguk has his free arm running through his wet, mussed up hair, head tilted back, biting his lip.

There’s something dark in his eyes too, even through the pixelated quality of the photo, Taehyung can see it. That smug bastard.

He scrambles to type something vaguely coherent.

I want moreeeeee

He doesn’t care if he sounds whiny and ridiculous, because he feels whiny and ridiculous. The message is read within seconds, as if Jeongguk was waiting for Taehyung’s response.

No.

Taehyung squawks.

RUDE AF

This message is read just as quickly.

What does “AF” mean?

Taehyung can’t help the snort that escapes him.

It means “as fuck” grandpa
Jeongguk doesn’t respond to that. “I can’t believe that dick left me on Read,” Taehyung mumbles, then looks around the room again. He wonders if there’s a way he could side-eye himself.

Taehyung clicks his tongue, staring at the chat. *What can I do to make him pissed?* He wonders. He doesn’t have much experience sexting, but he’d read his fair share of erotica.

The ultimate sext would be to send Jeongguk a video, Taehyung thinks. He’s already moderately horny, so that wouldn’t be an issue. But before he clicks on the video function, he pauses. He’d seen many powerful men brought down by leaked screenshots. He didn’t want anything risky to happen to Jeongguk.

So he presses on the voice note function instead, slipping his hand underneath his boxers.

♥

Jeongguk’s phone buzzes as he walks into the parking structure. There’s a voice note from Taehyung, and Jeongguk can’t help the smirk that curls his lips upward.

The last time he could remember sexting was back during college, when he was trying to secure a booty call for the weekend. What he’s doing with Taehyung now isn’t even sexting, it’s probably the mildest thing they’ve done. And yet, a pleased warmth settles at the bottom of his stomach.

He settles into his Audi and connects his phone to the car’s Bluetooth. He clicks Play on the voice note, bracing himself to hear Taehyung whining and complaining about how rude Jeongguk was.

Jeongguk almost misses the first soft moan as he clicks his seat belt into place, but then another one follows, louder, and he freezes.

“**Mm--**” Taehyung’s little noises are sounds Jeongguk didn’t think he could miss until right now, with them resounding through his speakers.

“**I m-miss you.**” Taehyung hiccups through the recording, and Jeongguk can hear fabric rustling. He imagines Taehyung is in bed, palming himself. He shivers involuntarily.
“You’re so m-mean to me, you jerk.” Jeongguk can practically see Taehyung’s pout, and he clutches the steering wheel so tight his knuckles turn white. “I miss you so m-much but you’re ignoring me.”

Jeongguk wants to tell Taehyung that that’s not it at all, that he was just embarrassed after the whole BamBam debacle and he didn’t know what to do.

Taehyung lets out a startled whine, and Jeongguk imagines he dug his fingers into his slit. He always makes that same sound when Jeongguk does that to him, it’s not hard to predict what he’s doing to himself.

Jeongguk wonders when it got to the point where he knew how Taehyung was touching himself just by his noises. He shakes his head, willing away the burning that trails down his spine.

“Oh god oh god I--” The fabric rustles, and Jeongguk wonders whether Taehyung’s massaging his scrotum now, arching his back off the mattress because it feels too good.

Jeongguk stays absolutely still, he can’t be sure he’s even breathing at this point, and listens with rapture as Taehyung’s moans get higher and higher. He can tell Taehyung is close. If he closes his eyes, he can see the way Taehyung’s legs kick and tense when the orgasm is building up, too strong to bear.

“Yes baby ungh--” Taehyung chokes on his own moan, and Jeongguk’s entire body flushes with heat at the pet name. It’s a valiant effort not to palm his own dick through his pants. Taehyung lets out a noise akin to a squeal, before morphing into a groan.

Like a rubber band that’s been stretched too far, Jeongguk snaps and almost smashes the sound system in his car in an effort to turn it off. But even in the silence, Taehyung’s moans swirl around the car, like ghosts sent to mock him.

For the first time in Jeongguk’s life, his brain goes blank.

♥

Taehyung hits Send, smiling. The orgasm had done quite a bit to get the edge off, and knowing he
was torturing Jeongguk just made it that much better. He then drops his phone into his suitcase and zips it up to resist the temptation to check it. He had a feeling Jeongguk would have nothing to say.

♥

Jeongguk’s finishing up some work emails when his doorbell rings. His adrenaline spikes, because his body had somehow been conditioned to think it’s Taehyung every time he hears the sound.

*Taehyung isn’t supposed to be back until tomorrow,* Jeongguk then remembers, and he frowns, because he isn’t expecting anyone tonight.

He walks to the door and looks out of the peephole, only to see the one and only Kim Taehyung standing in the hallway.

“You’re not supposed to be here,” is the first genius thing that comes from Jeongguk’s mouth when he opens the door. Taehyung smiles sheepishly, hands stuffed in his coat pockets.

“Well…”

“You’re supposed to get back tomorrow,” Jeongguk says, mind still stuck on the fact that Kim Taehyung is *here*, right in front of him. He hadn’t seen Taehyung in two weeks, and he’d never thought time could go any slower than this.

Taehyung shrugs. “I got an earlier flight,” *Because I wanted to see you*.

“But…” Jeongguk splutters.

Taehyung rolls his eyes, used to Jeongguk’s petulance. “Well if you want me to come back tomorrow…” He makes a motion to turn, but Jeongguk grips his forearm.

“No, I just,” Taehyung turns, grinning, because he loves seeing Jeongguk flustered. His eyes drift to notice the luggage still at Taehyung’s side.
“You haven’t gone home yet?”

Now Taehyung is the flustered one. “I wanted to see you,” he answers honestly. He’d gotten over the fear that Jeongguk might think him overbearing and clingy. Jeongguk would just have to deal with it now.

Jeongguk stares at him for a long moment, suddenly catching onto Taehyung’s shift in mood, before his lips curve up into a pleased smile, eyes teasing. “You couldn’t have dropped your stuff off first?”

Taehyung bites his lip in relief, stepping closer to wrap his arms around Jeongguk’s neck, letting Jeongguk’s hands settle at his waist. “But I missed you,” he whines, before going up on his tiptoes for a kiss.

Jeongguk makes a noise of satisfaction at the back of his throat, pulling Taehyung tighter against him as he parts Taehyung’s lips, licking into his mouth indulgently. He missed Taehyung’s taste, his smell, the feeling of his body in his hands, at his mercy.

Jeongguk feels himself swaying, unstable from sheer bliss, and Taehyung startles, before pulling away to giggle. “You’re so excited to see me you almost fell over.”

Jeongguk doesn’t deny it, choosing instead to press closer to Taehyung, press their lips together, because after a lifetime alone, two weeks without Taehyung in his bed had become unbearable.

“You look sexy with your glasses on.” Taehyung smiles when they pull apart (again, unfortunately), tapping at the black frames that Jeongguk had forgotten to remove after finishing his work.

Jeongguk tips his head forward to kiss Taehyung again. “I look sexier with them off.”

“I think you look sexy no matter what you do,” Taehyung says truthfully. Jeongguk could be chopping celery, watching television, reading, anything, and Taehyung would still think it was the hottest thing on earth. He wonders how that’s possible. To be a sex god incarnate and make breathing a turn on.

Taehyung presses their mouths together, and it’s sweet relief, because he’d been strung out for the past two weeks, thinking about Jeongguk and all the things he would do to Taehyung’s body. There’s no one who could ever make Taehyung feel the way Jeongguk does.
“Are you gonna come inside?” Jeongguk murmurs against Taehyung’s mouth. “Or are we just gonna do this out here?”

And while Jeongguk fucking him against a wall sounds tempting, there are security cameras all over the place, and the only person who is allowed to see Taehyung wrecked is Jeongguk.

So Taehyung reluctantly pulls away, grabbing at his things before Jeongguk’s dragging him inside and slamming the door closed. His luggage is completely forgotten as Jeongguk pulls him flush against his firm body, and Taehyung laughs, because it seems like Jeongguk is just as impatient as he is.

“Don’t laugh at me,” Jeongguk growls, biting at Taehyung’s jaw. He lets out a shaky exhale, the mischievous smile turning slack as his mouth opens to moan. His eyes flutter closed as Jeongguk nips and sucks down his neck, and he tilts his head back on instinct, for better access, as Jeongguk’s hands slide down Taehyung’s pants.

Taehyung lets out a surprised moan as Jeongguk grabs his ass firmly, pressing their bodies that much closer, and Taehyung wonders if he can just melt into Jeongguk, allow himself to be owned, because it feels like even physical proximity isn’t enough.

There’s a heat pulsating in his pants, and he tugs at Jeongguk’s hair, rubbing their hips together because he doesn’t really have the time for foreplay today.

“Patience,” Jeongguk chuckles, and that one word makes Taehyung feel branded; there’s nothing quite like Jeongguk’s voice when he’s possessive. Taehyung’s knees wobble, and he lets out a pathetic little whimper, because he’s so past being ashamed of his need when it comes to Jeongguk. Especially when he knows Jeongguk thrives off of it, needs it and craves it just as equally.

He tugs Jeongguk’s mouth away from his neck to slot their mouths together, lips moving sloppily, like there’s not enough time in the day for them to be with each other. Jeongguk doesn’t even need to ask permission, because Taehyung’s opening his mouth wide in a desperate invitation.

Taehyung unwinds his fingers from Jeongguk’s hair to slip out of his coat, trying to keep their mouths connected as he undresses. He pulls off his shirt in the brief moment they pull apart for breath, and tugs impatiently at Jeongguk’s sweater. He’s quick to comply, before pulling Taehyung back into a kiss.
But it’s not really enough for Taehyung either, whose nerves feel like they’re on fire, and there’s this burning need in his gut that he needs to relieve quickly. So he tears his mouth away from Jeongguk’s, dragging it sloppily down Jeongguk’s firm chest and torso, sinking down to his knees and pressing his nose against Jeongguk’s crotch.

“Fuck, Taehyung,” Jeongguk hisses as the older man looks up at him with those puppy eyes—too innocent for what Taehyung wants—as he unbuttons Jeongguk’s jeans and pulls them down with the boxers in one go.

Seeing Jeongguk’s cock, thick and long, already half hard, makes Taehyung’s mouth water, and he takes as much as he can in at once. Jeongguk makes a choked sound, and Taehyung moans, swirling his tongue and hollowing his cheeks as he sucks like his life depends on it.

The sounds he makes are obscene, licking and slurping and bobbing his head as he takes Jeongguk’s entire length into his mouth, and his nose is pressed against Jeongguk’s stomach. He’s suddenly thankful for his lack of a gag reflex as Jeongguk thrusts into his waiting mouth.

“You’re such a fucking slut,” Jeongguk says, with nothing but desperation in his voice. His fingers tangle in Taehyung’s hair and he tugs Taehyung’s face forward experimentally. He’s rewarded with a strangled moan and more delicious friction on his cock.

The feeling of Jeongguk’s length pressing against Taehyung’s cheek is unbelievable, hot and hard in his mouth. He feels the tears prickling at the back of his eyes but it only spurs him on further, fingers digging into Jeongguk’s hip bones as he brings him to the edge.

“God, fuck, Tae, I’m-” Jeongguk grunts, tugging at Taehyung’s hair, and the pleasure of the sting just makes him more determined, sucking even harder. His jaw is so sore and he can’t quite breathe, but it’s okay. The desperation threatens to drive him insane, and every single dirty thought he’d had in the last two weeks culminates to this exact moment of sexual frustration.

“Tae, baby,” Jeongguk groans again, staring down at the beautiful man on his knees, holding his head in place as Jeongguk fucks himself into the older’s waiting mouth, and he doesn’t know how much more he can take of this. And then, Taehyung’s pulling away, lips coming off of Jeongguk’s cock with a lewd pop, and he looks up at Jeongguk, eyelashes wet, lips slick with spit and precum, looking so completely wrecked, Jeongguk’s heart threatens to stop.

“Come on my face,” Taehyung says, voice hoarse.
The words make Jeongguk balk in surprise, and he laughs, trying to suppress the threatening orgasm. “Are you serious?” It feels like college all over again, like drunken frat parties and wild desperation, like insatiable lust and the need to be filthy in the best way.

There must have been something in Jeongguk’s eyes that Taehyung takes as an affirmation, because he’s bringing a hand up to wrap around Jeongguk’s length, pumping earnestly until Jeongguk’s climax build and builds and the orgasm rams through him.

Strings of come land all over Taehyung’s face, on his cheek, his eyelashes, in his mouth, and his eyes flutter closed in bliss. Jeongguk keeps an iron grip in Taehyung’s hair as he watches the older’s pretty pink tongue darts out to lick at it, wiping what he can’t reach with his hand and keeping his dark, glazed eyes on Jeongguk as he licks his fingers clean.

Jeongguk’s never seen something so sexy in his life. He knows this exact image of Taehyung will be branded into his mind for a very long time.

For all of Jeongguk’s athleticism, he can’t catch his breath fast enough, not when it feels like Taehyung sucked his soul from out of his dick. Taehyung uses his fingers to swipe the come from where his tongue can’t reach, and licks it all clean. He then looks up at Jeongguk, completely pleased.

“What the fuck, Taehyung?” Jeongguk finally manages to say, tugging Taehyung to his feet.

“I just wanted to,” Taehyung says, as if that was explanation enough, and he winces, because his throat itches and his voice sounds funny.

Jeongguk runs his hand through Taehyung’s hair, sweeping it away from his forehead, and presses their bodies close. “You okay?” Taehyung only nods, blissed out.

“Want me to eat you out?” Jeongguk offers, because he can feel Taehyung’s arousal pressing against his thigh and it’s already making his own cock twitch again with interest. He hadn’t exactly had a plan for how reunion sex would go, but he’ll take Taehyung’s lead.

To Jeongguk’s surprise, Taehyung shakes his head. “Are you tired? Do you want to rest?” Taehyung shakes his head again, burying his face into the crook of Jeongguk’s neck.
“I found the drawer,” he mumbles, and Jeongguk almost can’t make out the words.

“The drawer? I have a lot of drawers, Tae.”

Taehyung giggles, wriggling himself closer. “No, the secret one. The sexy one.”

_The sexy_— “Oh.”

Jeongguk swallows. Well, shit.

“That’s… well—”

But the mortification doesn’t have time to settle in, because Taehyung pulls himself back to look at Jeongguk. “I want to use the stuff in it.”

“You want to—”

“Like the blindfolds and rope and all that fun stuff. Can I go get them?” Taehyung starts to pull away in the direction of the bedroom, but Jeongguk grabs his wrist.

“Taehyung that’s… it’s not just… something you can bring up suddenly like that.”

Taehyung notes the way Jeongguk’s face turns serious, all traces of arousal gone, and he pouts. What had he done wrong?

“Was I not supposed to see all of that? Because you’ve had your tongue up my ass so there’s no reason to hide your kinks—”

“They’re not just _kinks_, Taehyung.”
He blinks, confused. The entire mood had just shifted. Jeongguk lets go of his wrist and runs a hand through his hair. He looks quite the sight with his jeans unbuttoned, shirtless, glasses slipping down the bridge of his nose. Taehyung bites his lip, because he’d really like it if Jeongguk handcuffed him to the bed and fucked him into next Friday but clearly he’d said something wrong.

Sensing Taehyung’s confusion, Jeongguk sighs and flops down on the couch, patting the spot next to him. Taehyung moves cautiously, his previous arousal waning.

“Do you know what BDSM is, Taehyung?” Jeongguk asks, after a few moments of painfully awkward silence.

“You mean like the Fifty Shades of Grey stuff?”

At the mention of the book, Jeongguk’s face twists in disgust.

“Absolutely not. That book is the worst representation of BDSM i’ve ever seen. Please don’t even say that in my house every again.”

Taehyung pouts. “Okay, jeez, sorry.”

Jeongguk sighs, sitting up straighter, like he’s about to give a lecture. “BDSM stands for bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadism and masochism. It’s focused on bringing physical gratification through different practices, like pain and roleplay.”

Taehyung nods and tries not to be distracted by Jeongguk’s sexy professor voice. “The stuff in the drawer is just a few of the different things you can use in BDSM.”

“So let’s do it? I’m totally down,” Taehyung says. He would really like it if Jeongguk could fuck him soon, and he’s getting antsy.

Jeongguk runs his fingers through his hair, frustrated. “You can’t just… do BDSM, Taehyung. You have to talk about everything, what you want and what you don’t. You have to figure out what’s going to happen before it happens, have a safeword, and a lot more. It’s not a casual thing.”
“You sound like you have a lot of experience in this.” Taehyung doesn’t know whether to be amused at how serious Jeongguk is being, and jealous, because he’d probably done all of the stuff he’s talking about with other people. People that weren’t Taehyung.

“I… do.” Taehyung tilts his head at Jeongguk’s hesitance. “I’m uhm. I’m actually a uh-- professional dominant.”

Taehyung leans back and makes a noise of appreciation. “Okay that’s really sexy and cool.”

Jeongguk gives him a strained smile. “It’s not a casual thing, Taehyung. You have to really think about it and communicate otherwise you can get really hurt. The reason people even do BDSM is because it allows them to do unconventional things but still be safe.”

“But how is it not safe? If you put a blindfold on me how am I in any danger?” Taehyung’s previous horniness is now gone, replaced by curiosity. The image of Jeongguk, shirtless, holding a riding crop pops into mind and he has to keep himself from giggling.

Jeongguk groans. “Can we talk about this tomorrow? It’s late and I’m pretty sure you’re still hard.”

“No,” Taehyung says, voice firm. If they put it off, he knows Jeongguk will find a way to avoid the conversation. He crosses his arms, and Jeongguk sighs in defeat.

“Okay, well, in BDSM there’s this thing called sub space. When you’re acting out a scene--”

“A scene?”

“When you and your partner talks over what you’re going to do. Like for example, you may want to be tied up and blindfolded, but we’d have to talk about when, and what I’m going to do while you’re like that, and how long it’s going to go on.”

Taehyung frowns, considering this.

“Anyway, when you’re acting out a scene, the submissive person will go into this headspace, where they are basically powerless and accepting what the dominant is doing to them.”
“But how is that different from like… assault?” Taehyung asks, now worried.

“The difference is that there’s consent. That’s why you have to plan a scene. A dominant does only what the submissive wants, and the whole point is that there’s an exchange of power between the people. The sub willingly gives the Dom the power, and trusts them explicitly to keep them safe.”

“How is that fun for anyone? It doesn’t sound sexy, it sounds complicated.”

Jeongguk has to think for a moment. “You know that feeling when I fuck you really hard, and pin you down so hard you can’t move? Then you go all limp and let me do whatever you want?” Taehyung blushes and nods, but Jeongguk sounds so clinical.

“That’s basically what it is. For some people, that surrendering of their will is appealing and enjoyable. Sometimes it’s nice to be taken care of, and just let someone else take over. Sometimes feeling helpless can be terrifying, but if you have someone who you trust, and you know what’s happening, it keeps you from having a bad experience.”

Taehyung makes a noise of assent, turning the words over in his head. “But what about the pain? The sadism and masochism?”

“There’s a very thin line between pain and pleasure. Like when I spank you sometimes? Or when I don’t let you come and sometimes it hurts, but when you do come it’s the best? Like it shouldn’t feel good but it does?” Taehyung flushes, but nods. “That’s the tip of the iceberg. There are so many other things you can do and get even more pleasure from it. It’s really diverse.”

“That makes sense,” Taehyung murmurs, placated.

“But it can take a toll on your body and your mind. So you have to make sure that you have a safeword, something you can say if the scene is getting to be too much, if it’s going too far, and you stop immediately. And you always always have to have aftercare. Make sure you’re not injured, that you’re able to come out of your sub space and feel normal again.”

Taehyung doesn’t have to ask to know about aftercare. He’s always clingy after sex, and being taken care of by Jeongguk afterwards is always one of the best feelings.
Jeongguk gives Taehyung a minute to think it over before continuing. “So, do you understand why we can’t just suddenly blindfold you? I take this really seriously because I want you to be safe.”

“I appreciate that,” Taehyung says quietly. “And I understand. I’m sorry I was so dismissive of it.”

Jeongguk reaches out to grab Taehyung’s hand, and runs a finger over the knuckles soothingly. “It’s okay, you didn’t know. But now you do. If we do those things, we have to talk about it way beforehand. And we need to talk about this again before we do anything else.”

Taehyung’s eyes widen. “If? You mean you want to do that with me?”

Jeongguk frowns. “Of course. I’ve done it with people I don’t know personally, there’d be no reason why I wouldn’t want to do it with the person—” I care about the most. He clears his throat. “With you. There’s no reason I wouldn’t want to do it with you.”

Taehyung bites his lip to hide the smile. “So then, what are the different things we can do?”

Jeongguk blinks. “You really want to talk about it right now?”

Taehyung shrugs. “I mean I don’t really want to have sex anymore ‘cuz I’m curious and kinda tired. If you’re okay with it, I want to talk about it.”

Jeongguk opens his mouth, then closes it. He holds out his hand as a motion to wait, and gets up to go to the kitchen. Taehyung hears a rustling of drawers, before Jeongguk comes back with a notepad and a pen.

“You’re gonna take notes?”

“How else are we going to remember all the specifics?” Jeongguk asks simply.

“Okay, fine, nerd.” Jeongguk scowls, but starts writing on the paper anyways.

“Okay, so there are three different types of stuff we can do, so we need to narrow it down for now.”
Taehyung watches as Jeongguk writes *bondage/discipline, domination/submission*, and *sadism/masochism* in neat cursive.

“What would you like to try first?”

Taehyung considers this for a minute. “Uhm… the dom and sub stuff? I feel like that’s close to what we already do. So it’s more familiar.” Jeongguk nods and circles the words, then draws an arrow further down the page.

“So with dominance and submission, someone is the Dom and the other is the sub. Which would you like to be?”

Taehyung stares at Jeongguk. “Wouldn’t it already be obvious?”

Jeongguk sniffs and looks down at the paper. “It doesn’t have to be obvious. It’s about what you want to do.” Taehyung tugs and Jeongguk’s arm until he looks up.

“You’d be okay if I was the Dom?” He doesn’t mean to sound shocked, but it’s odd considering the idea of Jeongguk willingly submitting to anyone. Taehyung knows he’d have a hard time being that way with anyone, and maybe it has something to do with Taehyung himself. It makes guilt stab at his stomach, but he pushes it away. If Jeongguk wanted to address his aversion to submission and what part Taehyung plays in that, he would do it when he felt comfortable enough.

Jeongguk just shrugged. “Sure. I’ve done both. So I’d rather do what you wanted since you’ve never done it before. It’s whatever you’re comfortable with.”

But that answer isn’t good enough for Taehyung, so he pries further. “What are you most comfortable with being?”

“Dominant,” Jeongguk answers honestly. “I haven’t being a sub since I first started, really. It’s still a little… difficult for me to submit, and I’ve always had a hard time getting into subspace--” He’s quick to continue when he notices Taehyung’s frown. “--but I’m willing to try if that’s what you want.”

Taehyung stares hard at Jeongguk, trying to figure out whether he’d be lying. His expression is a little pinched, annoyed at Taehyung’s pressing questions. Despite their comfort with each other
physically, they still have a long way to go with emotional intimacy. There are still too many steps they need to take to build a functional, healthy relationship.

After a moment of thought, Taehyung shakes his head. “I want to be the sub.”

“Why?” There’s no accusation in Jeongguk’s voice, just soft curiosity.

“Because I think I would really like being the sub since I kinda tend to act that way normally.” Taehyung adds the next part softly. “And I don’t think either one of us would be ready for the other option.”

“Alright,” Jeongguk says simply, and writes down J: Dom, T: sub. Taehyung is a little surprised with how easily Jeongguk takes his confession, but he doesn’t question it for now. Maybe, like Taehyung, Jeongguk knew they both still have a long way to go with trust. “So now there’s a matter of what we’ll call each other. Usually when people roleplay, they use different pet names.”

Taehyung perks up, because he knows this much about himself. “I like it when you call me baby.” Jeongguk nods, and writes that down. “Uhm… kitten?” Jeongguk bites down on his lip to keep from smiling, but writes it down dutifully. Taehyung’s face burns a little.

“Anything else?” Taehyung shrugs.

“What else is there?”

Jeongguk looks up at the ceiling, considering. “Well, there are different types of pet names. There are the intimate ones, like baby, kitten, princess. There are ones that are meant to be more uh… intense, if you’re into that. Like slut, whore, bitch--” Jeongguk coughs awkwardly, suddenly a prude.

“Well, you already called me a slut like ten minutes ago,” Taehyung points out. Jeongguk’s ears turn red.

“It just… seemed like the right thing to do at the time. Leave me alone.”

Jeongguk sounds so petulant that Taehyung cackles. “Well I’m fine with any of those. Whatever
feels right at the time.’” Taehyung throws his arms around Jeongguk and kisses his cheek sloppily, giggling. “What about you, Gukkie?”

“Uh--” he coughs. “Well, I’m fine with anything. I’ve heard it all.”


“Looks like we found a winner!” he all but yells, pinching Jeongguk’s cheeks and pulling at them. Jeongguk tugs Taehyung away, scowling.

“Shut up. Stop kink-shaming me.”

Taehyung gasps. “You don’t know what AF means but you know what kink-shaming is?”

“It’s not the same thing!” Jeongguk all but whines, and slaps the notepad down, before getting up and stalking towards the hallway.

“But Gukkie, that’s so cute!” Taehyung sings, attaching himself to Jeongguk’s back.

“I’m not cute!” Jeongguk yells, squirming around and trying to remove Taehyung. “I regret so many things right now.”

“But how can you regret all that? I feel like we’re so much closer now.” Taehyung flops himself on Jeongguk’s bed, blinking at Jeongguk innocently as he strips off his pants.

“Please stop trying to act cute. You still have come on your face. It’s kind of off-putting.”

“I’m still cute even with come on my face!”

Jeongguk gives him an odd look and disappears into the bathroom. Taehyung slides off the bed and follows after him.
“So is that it?”

Jeongguk pauses in the middle of squeezing toothpaste onto his toothbrush. “Is what it?”

“Is that the whole BDSM spiel?” Taehyung watches Jeongguk in the mirror as he reaches for his own toothbrush.

“No, that like not even the beginning. There’s so much more to this.” He watches closely as Taehyung attempts (fails) to stifle a yawn. “But you’re really tired and this was a terrible time to have this conversation.”

Jeongguk senses that Taehyung hasn’t quite grasped the gravity of the things he’s talking about, but he also knows Taehyung had just gotten off of a long flight, and probably isn’t processing everything with his usual sharpness. If they decide to explore this part of their relationship, then he has to sit Taehyung down properly and go over everything he said and more until nothing is unclear.

He feels vaguely disappointed that this conversation had to happen this hasty, rushed way (he’d never had the BDSM talk in the middle of sex), but nothing regarding Taehyung was predictable, nothing happened conveniently, and he was so stubborn when he had made up his mind. Maybe I should make a PowerPoint?

“Tomorrow?” Taehyung asks, toothpaste foam dripping down his chin.

“Let’s talk about kinks over coffee, sure.” No time for a PowerPoint, then.

“Pinky promise?” Taehyung sticks out his hand, eyes shining with delight, and Jeongguk reluctantly links their pinkies, before twisting their wrists to press their thumbs together.

They get ready to go to bed in comfortable silence, and Jeongguk reminds Taehyung to use cleanser because there is still dried come on his face, much to Taehyung’s delight.

Taehyung slips into Jeongguk’s bed, snuggling up to his side. Jeongguk’s eyes are closed but he’s not sleeping.
“Hey Gukkie?” Jeongguk hums.

“I’m still like half hard. Help?”

Chapter End Notes

hello yes thank you for reading n if uve been here since like january 2015 on aff thank u for keeping up with this trash fic for 2 years! i cant believe it's been two years n i still havent finished this what the fuck but it's ok anyways im happy to be back n crawling out of that writers block. thank u everyone for your nice comments n support n cheers it really kept me motivated. and also dani n bon for being the best n sticking with me through this shitfest n giving me feedback n being honest with me, this story is nothing without you both. i have a couple of notes just about the logistics of the story in case things weren't clear: -tae's heart condition n everything surrounding it is pseudoscience! thats right! i made it all up! so you can imagine that some things wouldnt seem realistic to a trained eye. some ppl had questions about the surgery n i answered in an ask n explained that in my head i imagined it was a laproscopic surgery, which has a really quick recovery time and is minimally invasive. again, it's pseudoscience, so please don't read into it too much, it's not worth your time. there are, of course, various heart valve conditions n surgeries that are super real, but for the purpose of the fic i made something up. it happens sometimes in writing. writers make stuff up! idk if uve ever read harry potter but jk rowling did that a little bit too haha -taekook have a rilly great A+ 11/10 sex life if u couldnt already tell. but!!!! they still have a long way to go in terms of working through their issues. this is not a healthy perfect functioning relationship yet, im sorry if you got that vibe that everything was sunshine n rainbows. one of the main points of this story is that people can grow n learn n grow from being toxic to being a good person! just like in real life whoa how bout that. there's still so much to do n for them to work through. the fic is going to focus on that from now on, because i needed to develop their physical relationship for rhetorical reasons that i'm sure you can hypothesize if you feel like you want to. -hang out with me on tumblr! the comeback is almost upon us n it'll be cool if we could share the suffering together! ive been in the groove of doing some headcanons as well so if you have some swell ideas, feel free to drop by n share if you'd like! -rip jeongguk he was looking forward to making that powerpoint he took a class in uni for microsoft office n has the little certificate n everything he really knows his way excel too #sexy -lastly, this is fan fic. it's not that important. for me, it's an awesome escape and it has really helped me in my life and ive learned so much n met so many cool ppl so i dont want to decredit that. but for ppl who like to get up in arms over fandom politics n like to make vocal their dislike of other people's content, please look up at the tab, and find the "x", it's a handy little tool that's good for not seeing content you don't want to. so it's a waste of time to start shit. the only time it wastes is yours. if you have some qualms with my writing, the content, please feel free to privately message me with constructive
criticism! if ur lurking on social media just posting shit i dont rly care sorry abt that. i care abt improving my stories n spreading good and encouraging messages. it's just a waste of time. fan fic is not that important. im just a random asshole on the internet. im not important. there are better ways to spend time.
thank u for reading n for being here with me! happy late 2nd anniversary to SMH (its bday was jan 1st haha i forgot the cake). n if u havent already, check out my new story "boyfriend for rent"! it's just a light hearted fic with minimal angst it's just a good time. read if you'd like a laugh! i love you all n thank u n im glad to be back!
dear all,

it's been a while right? i don't necessarily think i owe anyone an explanation, but maybe this will shut down any further speculation once and for all.

if it wasn't clear when i deleted my bts blog, i have left the fandom, and i will no longer be writing taekook or bts anymore. that includes this story. some people might say that i promised i'd finish a story no matter how long it takes uwu!! and sure that might have been true, but that ignores all the context of my mental place, the environment in which i'm writing, and growing up. i was 17 when i made that promise. now im 21 and my life has changed, my opinions have changed, my tastes have changed, and more importantly, the audience has changed.

when i wrote my first fic and posted on aff, all i wanted to do was write a story that had dialogue and a plot that went the way i wanted. i always read stories and wished the plot could have gone a different way, or had particular dialogue. so i thought hey, let me write my own story where i can have things exactly the way i want! after i posted it, i was floored by how well it was received. it was the first time i had written in maybe 5 years, after out-growing high school werewolf romance on wattpad at the age of 12.

i continued to write because it became an escape, a place where things might go wrong, people might get hurt, but everything turns out alright in the end. the point of writing my stories was not to be perfectly realistic, but to portray the sort of magic of hope that i desperately wished for in my own life. it was the perfect escape, and i received nothing but love and support, and i'd never had that in my life before. this was the sort of validation that i could only dream of, and i got drunk off it.

i became ambitious-- i wanted to write bigger, better stories. i wanted to improve my writing, incorporate more of the complexities of life and characters, i wanted to befriend other writers and bloggers, and bask in the praise and attention, because my 17-18 year old self craved that so desperately that looking back on it, it was kind of pathetic. i said things that i didn't mean. i was insensitive, and i hurt people. writing in the fandom became an obsession, an effort to control one aspect of my chaotic, unhinged real life, and my mental health spiraled out of control and i didn't have the strength to shut things down in the many opportunities that presented themselves. i tried my best to correct my behavior, to apologize where it was due, and improve myself while also trying to improve my writing. but that's never enough, because the internet does not forgive easily, and social media and anonymous functions make people feel brave.

and then i noticed a shift. the people who were reading my stories, following me on my blog, their attitudes changed along with mine, people became harsher, more critical, more demanding and entitled. i became terrified, because the place that had once been my solace, was now full of anxiety and fear of rejection, of criticism. i began to doubt myself and my writing. i can't begin to count the times when i would go to my fandom friends in complete distress over mean comments on tumblr and on twitter. it didn't make sense to me. why did people seem to hate me so much? what had i done to incur so much wrath in a fandom by many people who didn't even know me?

these were the things that i would ruminate over for years, ultimately leading to hitting rock bottom in my real life, because the fine line between a creative outlet and my mental health had been completely blurred. for many reasons, i felt completely isolated and ostracized from other writers and from the reading community that had initially been so welcoming to me, and had once been my
home. i tried my best to change myself. maybe if i was more polite, maybe if i was more hypercritical of the way i was writing my characters and the stories, people would like me. people would accept me. people wouldn't be so harsh on social media. i became fearful, second guessing every single word i typed in a story or in an anon ask, hoping that my words wouldn't be twisted out of proportion and taken out of context.

then, i became angry. why did people have to fixate on me so much? what about me made so many people so angry? why were they always so intent on misunderstanding me? how could they demand so much of me, and yet despise me at the same time? they claimed to have supported me, but were quick to change their minds when i wrote things they didn't like (and not because they were problematic, but because my ideas didn't fall in line with theirs). people became unbelievably entitled, acting as though they owned my stories, my ideas, and constantly questioned my creative license at every step and turn. i was so so so bitter, even writing this i feel that residual hatred and distress that i felt back then. and my anger (which clearly showed itself through the way i would respond to unwarranted criticisms) became yet another "reason" for people to hate me. because they could be rude and entitled, but i wasn't allowed to be straight-forward and blunt in response.

so then, i gave up. every source of enjoyment that i initially gained through writing taekook just completely drained away. i felt like a shell. i was exhausted from trying not to let everything get to me and affect my real life too much, because even in that area of life i was facing an immeasurable amount of stress. this wasn't supposed to happen. this is just fan fiction. a stupid 17 year old with lofty ideas about romance and a love for 7 boys. that's all it was supposed to be. but then things became too serious. too many people became too involved and we all forgot that these are just words typed online, that i don't know you, and you certainly don't know me. why was everyone taking this so seriously? it was never supposed to be that way. i should be able to read comments on my stories without the fear of mean ones. my heart shouldn't start racing when i get a message notification on tumblr because im relatively certain it's going to be hate/harassment. i should have been able to go on twitter, make friends, interact with others. but for some reason, this all became much bigger than i had intended, and it drained me. that love that i had for writing, for bangtan, for the fandom, was shattered.

and so for about a year, i couldn't write. it terrified me. this was what i had become. and when i found the courage to post a new chapter to this story, after all that time, i felt like i'd been shot down all over again. i felt like i had to drag myself to write and to post anything. it was painful and i hated myself for letting all of this affect me so much, because it was never supposed to be serious. i felt childish for letting hate get to me, but then i was reminded that i am a human, even though it seemed like the audience had forgotten that (or refused to acknowledge it). it all built up and eventually at the beginning of the year i decided to take a hiatus from that-jeon-guy, because i had been so deeply embroiled in this fandom for three and a half years at that point. i hoped that much-needed space would help me gain perspective. and it did.

this is all too much. my young adult life is too short, too fleeting to be spending all this time in a community that only brings me pain and stress. i have so many ideas, so much hope, so much excitement, and staying here is like putting a wet cloth over a flame. after 4 years, i'd realized that this is not where i belong, i hadn't been welcome here in a long time so i need to stop trying and hoping and wishing. i've found a place where i feel like i can renew that love for writing and stories, because i have so many that i want to tell. after my hiatus, i realized that there's so much i want to do, but it's not going to happen here. it hadn't been happening for a while, but i didn't want to admit it to myself.

when i posted my authors note on the werewolf fic before i deleted it, and saw the reception, it was a confirmation to myself. i don't belong here. there is too much negativity following my stories. and being told how people were reacting on social media was that final nail in the coffin. people were
questioning whether a writer should be "allowed" to repurpose their stories, as though they had a say in what a writer does with their content, as though i owe strangers on the internet anything at all, as though their opinion counts towards how i personally felt about my stories. as though they had somehow contributed to my life in a way that makes me indebted to them. (full offense, but if jk rowling decided one day she wanted to turn harry potter into twilight fanfic, that's her right! no one gets to make that decision for her! certainly not internet strangers. and so if a nobody on the internet decides to take a shitty fan fic down for whatever reason, that is their RIGHT.) there was all sorts of petty, entitled, childish, ridiculous crap that just made everything crystal clear, all at once. so in the words of johnny nash, i can see clearly now, the rain is gone.

so as a new chapter opens up for me, i have to close the previous one. and to all the people who hated me and my stories and wanted me gone, congratulations, i guess. you did it, gold star! it seems all your hard work has finally paid off. i'd like to implore you to find a hobby that doesn't include projecting insecurities and anger onto strangers. i hope one day you can create something instead of tear down. from personal experience, i promise that it's a lot more fulfilling, and you will feel better about yourself. i've found my peace, and i hope you find yours. i'm starting to grow up and see the bigger picture. mine doesn't include you, and yours shouldn't include me either. your efforts and resilience could be utilized for far more productive things.

looking back, i can’t find myself to regret this rather unnecessarily tumultuous path that i’ve taken over the last four years. i learned a lot of life lessons, and more about people and how my behavior affects others. i grew a lot, my perspective has changed, and i will try to be better and improve myself while also being unapologetic about what i love and what i create. i will leave my current stories up on this account (orphaning my works takes away my right to take them down, and i want to have that control in case ten years down the line i think wow, that was kinda embarrassing, and decide to remove my fics). in case it wasn't clear, stop my heart will be discontinued. i will not be writing taekook anymore. i hope this will eliminate any questions about updates.

i ask that whatever negative emotions you may feel towards my decisions and just me in general (wild, considering people don't actually know who i am as a person?) can be kept away from any stories i post in the future, for whatever fandom. i thought a year and a half of not properly writing would give people time to cool off and deem me irrelevant once and for all, but the werewolf fic debacle proved me wrong. so i ask that whatever you feel be kept away from whatever i do in the future. i know this may seem harsh, but i do not care about your shitty opinions. i hope that you stop caring about me and that you let this go, because it's not worth it. it has never been worth it, and it continue to be the same in the future. i am a nobody, and what i do should not appear on your radar, so please let me have my peace. please do not go on my blog to try and talk about bts or taekook or anything similar, i do not want to hear it. and if this appeal to your sympathy doesn't register, please know that i will block. it's nothing personal, and it never has been, so please stop acting like it.

i will not apologize, because i stand by my decision. it has been a long time coming, and it is my right as the author, the sole creator of this content, to make decisions, without other people's input.

thank you to everyone who supported me in the last four years, sent me nice messages and comments. they fueled me for a long time, and i will always be thankful for that. there have been a lot of fantastic moments in the fandom, and i will treasure those and look on them fondly. as i move forward, i will try my best to be happier and do things better. i hope you all will be happy too.

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