Antigen

by Error401

Summary

A tan hand clamped around his wrist, jerking him out of his seat and to the side.

“Why do you smell like that?” the owner’s deep voice questioned, nostrils flaring.

Jimin hissed, desperately fighting his instinctual urge to jerk his arm away. He would have been more concerned about the strange question if he didn’t have something much more pressing to worry about. “Let go of me!” he said, panicked, watching with horror as the fingers squeezed even tighter. “Please, let go!” he begged.

Notes

For everyone who voted in the Fic I Won’t Write contest.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Jimin lived most of his life being careful.

He was careful in how he acted, what he said, what he wore, what he ate. Even down to the degree of movement of his limbs, cursing himself for having been born so naturally clumsy.

He had to be.

So, so careful.

He was so busy being careful that life passed him by without him even realizing it, the days flying like seconds and the years measured by sighs of relief. He hadn’t been sure he would make it so long without…without incident.

It was staring down at the acceptance letter in his shaking hands that had woken him up. Was he really living at all if he was so careful and afraid all the time? Was he really living at all when he refused to make friends, worrying over hypothetical looks and judgment and disgust? And if that was living…

It was empty.

He told himself that he would change. He promised himself that he would be brave. But it was always easy to lie when he was the only one involved.

And so, even on into university, he just…“lived.” He didn’t live.

Carefully.

He woke up, hurriedly dressed, went to class, watched his steps. Avoided risk. Always avoidance.

Another year of nothing.

He sighed as he slid carefully into his seat, opening his laptop and arranging a notebook and pen to the side, just in case. He sighed again as he noticed the large bruise decorating the top of his thigh, peeking out from under his shorts. The first day, and already…

Things like this made it so much easier to rationalize being careful. He frowned, tracing the broken capillaries with the tips of his fingers.

He startled when the double doors flew open, nearly slamming into the wall on either side. Jimin swallowed, watching nervously. The few people littering the room began to whisper among themselves.

He relaxed when he recognized the cause. “They’re so affectionate,” Jimin muttered, rolling his eyes at the group of six who clambered loudly and dramatically into the lecture hall, a flurry of hands and hugs and loose clothing. It wasn’t that he knew them, exactly, but they were hard to miss, probably recognizable to most people on campus. They never went anywhere without each other.

He’d gotten a few glimpses of them his first year, but there had only been five of them, then. They were known for being loud and intimidating, scaring off anyone who tried to get close. They were admired for their good lucks. They were hated for standing out. Jimin stayed far away.

They had never been in any of his classes before, so he had never had to try very hard. But one
semester of English was a university requirement, and Jimin had wanted to get it over with. Maybe they had, as well.

A new head of dark black hair was now among the other, lighter colors. A freshman? Jimin fought the urge to chew on his bottom lip. He didn’t want to bleed for the entirety of class. It didn’t matter. It wasn’t any of his business.

He sat up straighter as they made their way to the row of chairs behind him, unnerved as he felt a few pairs of eyes on his back. They chattered about nothing, and he tuned them out, rolling his pen across the long table.

“Hey,” one of them hissed, much closer than Jimin was expecting.

Jimin tensed up, startled again. He turned around slowly. “Me?” he questioned softly, pointing at his chest.

The other nodded happily. This one had light brown hair. That was the only way Jimin could differentiate them. “Can I borrow a pencil? These stingy traitors won’t give me one. And it’s the first day! It’s not like I’ve been forgetting all year.”

“S-sure,” Jimin said, hunching his shoulders as he hurriedly combed through his backpack. Finally getting his fingers around one, he pulled it out, reaching to offer it behind him.

A tan hand clamped around his wrist, jerking him out of his seat and to the side.

“Why do you smell like that?” the owner’s deep voice questioned, nostrils flaring.

Jimin hissed, desperately fighting his instinctual urge to jerk his arm away. He would have been more concerned about the strange question if he didn’t have something much more pressing to worry about. “Let go of me!” he said, panicked, watching with horror as the fingers squeezed even tighter. “Please, let go!” he begged.

“Joon, what the fuck are you doing?” the shortest among them said, narrowing his eyes. “Let the kid go!”

The room had fallen silent.

“You don’t understand!” Jimin nearly cried. “Let go of me right now!” He could see the red creeping from under the hand, already bruising.

The hand released him, and Jimin quickly pulled his wrist back to his chest, whimpering at the damage that had been done. A clearly visible hand print, dotted with deep red broken capillaries. “Oh no,” he muttered, trying to pull his sleeve down. “Oh no, this looks bad.”

“I didn’t…” the one who’d grabbed him stared, wide eyed. “I didn’t mean—”

“Hyung, what did you do?” the one with the bright orangey hair asked, his voice unsteady.

The professor walked in, pausing at the strange atmosphere among the students. “What’s going on here?”

No one said anything.

Jimin quickly returned to his seat, mind racing.

It…it would probably be fine. It…he’d had bruises before, so this one…was…probably…He
couldn’t tear his eyes away from the spreading discoloration. It was no longer a hand print, but a giant swathe of his arm. Hos…hospital? But he hated the hospital. Would he let himself risk dying just because he didn’t want to go to the hospital? He would give it a few hours. If it didn’t stop, then…

Then it may already be too late.

No. No! It…it was fine!

He didn’t hear one word the professor uttered.

He was snapped out of his daze at the sound of zipping, people shoving books and notebooks into bags. Quickly, he stuffed his own belongings into his bag, wincing at the soreness of his arm. He pushed past people to sprint from the room, probably earning more bruises in the process but needing to leave.

“Hey, wait!” Jimin heard behind him. He didn’t stop. Just…just get past the quad, watch for the uneven cement on his way home, open the drawer, pull out the--

“Yah!” the voice called again, vibrating with the edges of a growl.

Jimin was forced to come to a stop as someone sprinted in front of him, throwing their arms out to the side. The one with the orangey hair.

“I need to go,” Jimin said, eyeing him uncertainly, clutching the strap of his bag tighter. “Please, don’t…”

“Don’t what?” he said curiously, tilting his head.

“If you beat me up, I could die,” Jimin said quietly. “So please…” Twenty-one years of avoiding bullies, and he starts getting picked on in college?

“Do what?” the one with orangey hair said incredulously. “Hyung, he thinks we’re gonna’ beat him up!” he yelled, earning several odd looks.

“Shut up, Taehyung,” the shortest one said. “So noisy,” he grumbled, eyes flicking to Jimin, who curled in on himself under the pressure. “Hey, are you okay?”

“I…” Jimin swallowed, unsure of what to say, especially as his eyes landed on the one who’d grabbed him in the first place.

“I’m sorry,” that one said, bringing a hand up to rub awkwardly at the back of his neck. “I thought…you were someone I knew,” he said shortly, gaze falling to Jimin’s arm. “I didn’t…I didn’t mean to hurt you,” he said.

“No, it…” Jimin said, swallowing. “I get hurt easily,” he said.

“That looks bad,” the one with black hair said quietly.

Jimin attempted to cover his bruised arm with his unbruised one, but couldn’t quite manage to hide all the red.

“Please, I need to get home,” Jimin said nervously, looking between the one in his path and the five behind.

“We aren’t holding you hostage!” the soft-looking blonde one said, brows furrowing in concern.
“Taehyung, move out of his way!”

The boy in front of Jimin lowered his arms, stepping to the side.

Jimin didn’t trust it. If he moved, would they pounce?

“You forgot your pencil,” the one who’d asked to borrow it originally said, holding it for Jimin to take.

“K-keep it,” Jimin said.

“Hey,” the one who’d grabbed him said, taking a slow and deliberate step forward. “I didn’t mean to scare you, either. Really. I’m sorry,” he said again. “If there’s anything I can do to make it up to you —”

“Stay away from me,” Jimin said immediately, taking a step back. “Just…please, stay away.” He turned on his heel, speed-walking away again. He couldn’t afford any more episodes like this.

It made Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 10:00 A.M. rather awkward.

Because no matter where Jimin sat, they managed to find a way to sit directly behind or in front of him.

It made him nervous.

It made him careless.

And by the end of week two, it felt like he’d been through a meat grinder. Looked like it, too.

And they could see it. Of course they couldn’t just leave it alone.

“Okay, I can’t take this anymore,” the shortest said. “Kid, what the fuck is going on with you?” he deadpanned, kicking a chair into Jimin’s path so he couldn’t run away. “This time, to be clear, we’re holding you hostage.”

“Yoongi!” the soft looking one hissed.

“Is someone…doing that to you?” the one who’d grabbed him asked, broad shoulders bent with guilt and…something else. Were his teeth bared?

“No!” Jimin said quickly, wrapping his arms around himself. “If anyone, you did!” he said defensively.

“No?” he said, stricken.

“You can’t just go around grabbing people who—“ Jimin cut himself off, breathing heavily. “Look, just…can’t you please just leave me alone?”

“He owes you a debt,” the pencil one said, pointing to the one who’d grabbed him.

“No, he doesn’t! He doesn’t owe me anything!” Jimin said. “…he sighed, seeing no other choice. “I have hemophilia. I bruise easily, and when I bruise, the bleeding doesn’t stop for a really long time.” He held up his arm, which was still a sickly yellow. “This? This wouldn’t have happened to anyone but me. You don’t owe me anything,” he finished.

“Hemophilia?” the shortest one repeated, as though chewing on the word. “That probably explains
the smell to you, Joon,” he looked towards the grabber.

“What—I don’t smell!” Jimin said angrily. “Now, can I go?”

“If you bruise so easily, you need to be more careful,” the one who’d grabbed him—Joon—said.

“I don’t need your patronizing,” Jimin said darkly. “I’ve lived with this for a really long time, and I was doing fine before all of you showed up.”

“Yoongi,” the soft one said again, a warning in his tone. “Let him be.”

“You shouldn’t be so rude, kid,” the one called Yoongi said, ignoring him, narrowing his eyes. “You never know who you’ll piss off.”

Jemin couldn’t fight the shiver that passed through his body, looking at him with fear. Something about him made Jimin incredibly nervous. Granted, it didn’t take much to do that when a well-placed scratch could bleed him out.

“Hyung!” Joon said, deep voice cautionary. “Don’t do that.”

Yoongi gave him a look. “Your soft spot’s gonna’ get you killed, Namjoon,” he muttered, shaking his head. He reached out and pulled the chair from Jimin’s path, slamming it back in place.

“If you beat me up, I could die,” the orangey one said.

“Wh-what?” Jimin said.

“You said that to me. You meant it,” he said, tilting his head.

“Of course I did,” Jimin frowned, readjusting his bag on his shoulder. “I’m…I’m leaving,” he said, looking around to see if anyone would stop him. None of them moved.

“I’m sorry,” Joon said again, softly, as Jimin took his first step down.

“You don’t owe me anything,” Jimin said more firmly, meeting his eyes. “And that includes pity.”
He gripped his pen tightly between his fingers, eyes glued steadfastly onto the tiny type of the book open on the table in front of him. He tried to ignore the little hairs rising on the back of his neck as the dark-haired freshman stared at him from a few tables over.

It wasn’t working.

Sighing, Jimin let the pen fall to the table, turning in his chair to face him. The younger narrowed his eyes, nostrils flaring. Jimin frowned. “One, I don’t smell. Two, can I help you with something?” he said.

“I was just studying English,” the other said, not even bothering to pretend that he hadn’t been watching Jimin. “It’s…hard,” he said, brow furrowing. “I just…don’t get it.”

“All of your friends are in the same class,” Jimin said. “Why don’t you just ask them for help?”

He sighed, looking down hopelessly at his notes. “I don’t…they already think I’m…” he shook his head. “And I don’t know anyone else here.”

Jimin frowned in sympathy. The freshman looked even younger, suddenly. “I’m not good at English,” Jimin finally said, watching his face fall. “But maybe we can work it out together?” The freshman perked up. “What’s your name?”

“Jungkook,” he said softly. “I just moved to Seoul for school from Busan. Everything’s weird here. People talk funny, everything’s made of glass and cement, the food’s…” he trailed off. “It’s not like home.”

“Busan?” Jimin said surprised. “I’m from Busan.”

“Really?” he asked, eyes wide. “But you speak like you’re from Seoul.”

“You catch on quick if you want to avoid being made fun of,” Jimin shrugged. He gathered his things from his table and set them on Jungkook’s. “I’m Jimin,” he said. “It’s my second year here at school, but my first taking English. Were you working on what we did this week? Present conjugation and vocabulary?”

“Yeah…” Jungkook nodded shyly. “I’m not dumb,” he said quickly. “I just…it…”

“Have you been staring at me for the past hour because you wanted to ask for help?” Jimin said, mouth quirking at one corner. “Why didn’t you just ask?”

“I didn’t want to bother you,” he said, ducking his head. “Not after hyung…” he glanced at Jimin’s arm.

“How’d you become part of their little club, anyway?” Jimin asked. “They seemed pretty…exclusive last year. They aren’t bullying you, are they?” Jimin asked, suddenly concerned.

“What? No!” Jungkook said quickly, cheeks stained red. “Our families are all friends,” he said nervously. “We’re supposed to look out for each other.”

Jimin’s eyes narrowed in confusion. “Supposed to?”

Jungkook coughed, looking suddenly panicked. “You…your arm is better, isn’t it? I don’t really
know anything about hemo…hemophobia. You bruise easy?”

“Hemophilia,” Jimin corrected, eyes sparkling with amusement. “And yes, it’s better, thankfully. The version that I have isn’t as bad as it could be.”

“But still bad,” Jungkook pressed, eyes flicking to the visible bruises on Jimin’s arms and legs. “Namjoon hyung still feels awful about it.”

“But still bad,” Jimin agreed, unwilling to say more. “Now, what problem were you on?”

It was official. They were both terrible at English. But together they managed to work out the answer to most of the problems, an easier process when they could talk about their reasoning rather than think it through in only their brains. Jungkook looked relieved and happy. Jimin fought the urge to pet his hair.

“Are you hungry, Jungkook? Thirsty? It’ll be my treat,” Jimin offered. From the way his eyes lit up at the offer, Jimin worried that he wasn’t being spoiled enough by those people.

“Really?” he asked again, in the exact same tone he’d used before.

“It’s probably too late for coffee, but how about juice?” Jimin said.

“Ice cream?” Jungkook countered. “The hyungs never want to go with me!”

How could Jimin say no to that face? “Ice cream it is,” Jimin nodded.

Jungkook practically jumped from his chair in excitement, quickly shoving his book and papers into his bag. Jimin was startled by how much bigger he looked when he was standing up. He may have had a baby face, but his height and the way his shirt stretched across his chest made him look dangerous.

“Ready, hyung?” Jungkook asked.

Jimin raised an eyebrow at the name, even as his heart warmed. “Hyung?”

“Oh,” Jungkook said, quickly staring down at his feet. “I’m sorry, I’m just used to…”

Jimin’s mind was screaming danger and avoid, but even that couldn’t override the surge of caring that Jungkook brought out in him. “No! I was just surprised. Of course you can call me hyung!” Jimin said.

Jungkook smiled, his overbite endearing as he pulled open the glass door to the study rooms. “You first!”

Jimin nodded indulgently, swinging his bag over his shoulder. When he passed in front of Jungkook, the younger held out a hand in front of him to stop him before reaching for Jimin’s bag, tugging very gently. “I’ll carry this,” he said seriously. “It’s heavy, right? Won’t it bruise?”

Jimin was used to living with bruised shoulders, but he wasn’t used to someone offering to help. “You don’t have to—”

“Please, hyung? In return for the ice cream?” He flexed his arm and pointed to the muscles bulging there. “It won’t be heavy for me.”

“O…okay…” Jimin said uncertainly. He didn’t really want to hand over his bag, but now he was a little afraid of Jungkook’s insistence. Besides, Jungkook didn’t sound like he was doing this out of
pity, but out of a genuine desire to be helpful.

Jungkook seemed happy at his acquiescence.

Jimin followed after him.

He stuttered to a halt as Jungkook froze on the first step outside of the library. Jungkook’s nostrils flared as he turned his head to the side—Jimin wondered if that was a habit—and he reached behind him to hand Jimin’s bag back to him.

“Jungkook?” Jimin questioned, unnerved, taking it by a strap. “What—“

“Ready to go home, kid?” someone said. Jimin couldn’t tell who it was, unable to see over Jungkook’s shoulders. “You were studying for a while. I expected you to give up long before now.”

“Can’t I be out for a few more hours, Yoongi hyung?” Jungkook said. “I was just…we were just…”

“Curfew’s in place for a reason,” the other said. “I didn’t waste half my night waiting for you so you could run off somewhere else.”

Jimin frowned at the way Jungkook’s shoulders slumped.

“Yah, let-let him go out if he wants to!” Jimin said, trying and failing to move Jungkook to the side. “He’s a grown adult, and he can do what he wants!”

“Hyung—“ Jungkook whined at Jimin.

“Well, well,” Yoongi said, and Jungkook finally budged to allow Jimin to see the shortest of the group and the tallest, Joon, staring up at him. “I thought you didn’t want anything to do with us?”

“I don’t want anything to do with you,” Jimin shot back, steeling his nerve. “But I’m talking about Jungkook.”

“Jungkook is none of your business,” Yoongi growled. “C’mon kid, let’s go.”

“But—“ Jimin said.

“It’s okay,” Jungkook reassured him. “We can go another time?” he asked hopefully.

Jimin softened. “Yeah, okay.”

Jimin sighed as he watched Jungkook skip down the steps, Yoongi throwing an arm around his back and shooting a glare at Jimin. Jimin glared right back. And slipped from the top step.

His first thought, as his stomach lurched with realization, was that this was his punishment for being caught up in the moment and forgetting to be careful. His second was that he hoped one of the three would at least call an ambulance before leaving him to die of internal bleeding. He’d taken his desmopressin spray that morning, but he knew it wouldn’t be enough to clot the large bruises that would no doubt result.

He opened his eyes again when he realized that he wasn’t in severe pain.

Joon’s brown eyes were staring down at him intensely, cast with a yellow light from the fluorescent lamps at the library’s entrance. Jimin swallowed, words caught in his throat as he realized he was wrapped securely in the other man’s arms. “Th-thank you,” he managed, shaking slightly as he was set back on his feet at the base of the stairs. “That would have…been bad,” he said, rubbing his arms
up and down to revive them from the cold shock. Joon’s nostrils flared. “Seriously?” Jimin muttered.

“You okay, kid?” Yoongi asked, and Jimin looked up, surprised. He didn’t think he would care. Then again, just because he was mean, that didn’t mean he was heartless.

“I think so,” Jimin said, looking down at himself and then up at Joon. “Nice…nice catch,” he smiled weakly. “Now you really don’t owe me anything.”

Yoongi snorted out a laugh.

“What’s so funny?” Jimin asked suspiciously.

“Hyung helped you,” Jungkook said. “If you’d have fallen, because of your homo…thing…you’d have…you could have died, right?”

“Maybe?” Jimin said uncertainly. “But probably not, I mean it just would have hurt for a while as long as I got to a hospital with factor eight. And even then, I may not have needed to go to one at all.”

“But you could have died,” Jungkook pressed, eyes flicking to glance at Joon.

“Did you want me to?” Jimin asked, exasperated.

“He saved your life,” Yoongi said. “Now he owns your life. It’s how things work in our family.”

“He…what?” Jimin said fearfully.

“Oh, relax, kid,” Yoongi rolled his eyes. “Just means the idiot’s taken it upon himself to look out for you. Because he’s an idiot.”

“Yah,” Joon growled, finally speaking up. “Did you want me to let him fall?”

“I don’t understand any of this,” Jimin said tiredly, backing away from them. “I’m just…gonna’ go home,” he said. “We’ll get ice cream soon, Jungkook,” he promised.

“Be careful,” Joon said automatically, wincing when he realized what he’d said. “I mean, I didn’t mean, I just meant…” he sighed. “I don’t want you to get hurt,” he said seriously.

“I live right off campus,” Jimin found himself saying. “I’ll be fine.”

“You weren’t fine on campus,” Yoongi muttered.

“But what if there’s a mugger? Crimes have been picking up around campus lately.” Joon asked seriously. “I did some research on your…condition. If they have a knife, and then you get stabbed, then—“

Jimin’s mouth fell open. “You gave me a bruise, and you felt so bad about it that you went out and did research on hemophilia? And now you’re making up hypothetical scenarios that could kill me?” he said incredulously. “Do you think that the life I’ve managed to live up until now was all a fluke, or something?”

“Idiot,” Yoongi nodded sagely.

“I was curious,” Joon said defensively. “I didn’t mean anything bad by it, I just…” he sighed, giving up. “Like you said, I just felt bad. I’m sorry if that makes you uncomfortable. That wasn’t my intention.”
“I…” Jimin trailed off, suddenly feeling guilty. “No, I’m sorry, I…I’m just not used to…being caught,” he said, shrugging. “I’ve spent so long trying to make sure people didn’t think I was a freak for being like this, that…” he shook his head. “Anyway, I’ll be fine walking home. I’ll see everyone in class.”

“Wait,” Joon said, fingers twitching as though they wanted to reach out. “I’ll walk with you.”

Jimin frowned, taken aback.

“Namjoon, what the hell are you doing?” Yoongi questioned. “I get it, it’s…” he glanced at Jimin, “…instinctual, but curfew is—“

“It won’t take that long,” Namjoon argued.

“You’re gonna’ go no matter what I say, aren’t you?” Yoongi said.

Namjoon nodded.

“Hello? Don’t I get in a choice in this?” Jimin said. “This is…this is weird,” he said, uncomfortable.

“Namjoon hyung is a good person,” Jungkook said. “Please, Jimin hyung, just let him take you back. He’ll make sure nothing happens to you.”

“Nothing was going to happen to me in the first place!” Jimin said, thoughts racing as they didn’t know how to handle this. He’d never had to deal with something like this before.

“I’m sorry,” Namjoon said. “Please let me walk with you?” he asked, eyes begging.

“I…” Jimin sighed. “I’m leaving, and you can do what you want.” As he turned on his heel, he felt Namjoon fall into step next to and a little behind him.

The walk was silent, Jimin shooting glances at the much taller man before turning his gaze forward again. When he paused to hop over a puddle of water, he saw Namjoon’s nostrils flare again. “Why do all of you do that?” he finally asked. “You’re giving me a complex that I smell bad!”

“You don’t!” Namjoon said hurriedly. “Our family is sensitive to smells, so it just…it just became a natural way of taking things in. You don’t smell bad! You smell…different.”

“That’s what you said when you grabbed me,” Jimin remembered. “Something about how I smelled.”

Namjoon ducked his head in shame. “I’m sorry,” he said again. “Usually, when we smell something different, it means it’s something bad. At least, that’s always been the case. So when your smell happened, I…I was worried that it meant the same thing.”

“Something…bad?” Jimin said, confused. “You have psychic smell powers?”

Namjoon chuckled, the rumble deep in his throat. “Something like that.”

“And all I get are these darn bruises,” Jimin smiled wryly. He stopped walking. “Listen, I don’t know whatever things your ‘family’ does, but you aren’t responsible for me. I can take care of myself, when I’m not being distracted by your crazy group.”

“I’m sorry, I know it must seem…” Namjoon said. “Please just put up with it.”

Jimin stared. “Put up with it? That’s all you have to say to me?”
“Jungkook likes you,” Namjoon said. “He called you hyung. Where one of us is, we all are. So… yes, please just put up with it.”

“I can’t do this,” Jimin sighed. “This is my building. You can leave now. I’m safe.”

Namjoon didn’t move. He pointed to the door.

“Really?” Jimin said. “Look, fine! Going inside!”

Out of spite, he took the stairs on the way up.
Jimin frowned down at his leg, eyebrows drawn together at the swelling and tenderness in his knee. Growing steadily more and more uncomfortable as class dragged on, it hurt to move, Jimin biting down on his bottom lip as he extended and retracted his leg.

It had been fine that morning. No pain, no bruising, no nothing. He hadn’t had a joint bleed in years, not since he was just entering high school. He sighed, already dreading the factor VIII infusion that awaited him in his refrigerator. Sure, it stopped him from bleeding to death, but at what cost? He really hated needles, but they were a necessary evil.

The bruising would probably show in a few days, but he needed to stop the bleeding before it did any permanent damage.

Well, any more permanent damage. He’d already resigned himself to arthritis in the future.

He smiled wryly, thinking. Despite how careful he was, there were still people who thought he was a delinquent because he was always covered in bruises. They would be really disappointed if they ever saw him in a fight, considering his first move would be to run away. Well, when his joints weren’t bleeding, anyway.

He sat for a few more minutes as the rest of his class cleared out, mentally mapping the easiest route to his apartment for a busted leg. It wasn’t any different than all of the times he’d had to come up with excuses as to why he couldn’t play contact sports with his classmates, why he shouldn’t drink, what the number of the closest medical center with factor VIII was, which of his veins were the least likely to roll when he gave himself injections, a million and one excuses for the bruises.

He stood slowly, putting as much weight as he could on his good leg before staggering forward, leaning on desks until he was able to lurch for the doorframe, already panting from exertion. This was a horrible idea.

Jimin sighed, ducking his head shyly before being able to bring himself to get anyone’s attention. “Ex-excuse me?” he said, barely getting the words out.

The boy walking past him paused, giving him an annoyed glance. “I—I sprained my ankle, so I…umm…would you help me get to the door?” he asked, face flushing.

He looked Jimin up and down, mouth twisting into a frown. “Never…never mind…” Jimin muttered, already horribly embarrassed, hopping as he used the wall for support.

“…Hold on,” Jimin heard, and he turned his head to see the boy pulling out his cell phone. “My
hyung broke his leg last year, he might still have the crutches—“

“Oh, no, I—“ Jimin found himself saying, swallowing. He couldn’t use those, they would hurt too much under his arms. He pulle out his phone quickly, pretending to answer a call. “Hyung? You can come get me? That’s great!” he said, overenthusiastic. “I—I’m sorry for bothering you, but I’m okay now,” he told the student, panicky.

“Whatever…” the boy shrugged, eyeing him strangely before continuing on his way.

Jimin groaned, covering his eyes with the back of his forearm. So stupid.

Sighing for the hundredth time, he used the wall as a guide, huffing with each step as he finally made it out of the building.

Gingerly, he put one foot in front of the other. Sweat dripped from his forehead from strain, Jimin grinding his teeth together to resist biting down on his lip in concentration. One more step. One more step. Just one more.

Jimin startled awake, nearly rolling off of his couch, where he’d fallen asleep because it had been too much of an effort to get to his bed after infusing his factor. He pressed a hand against his forehead, grimacing at the hair that stuck to it, matted with sweat.

The sound of a fist pounding against his front door.

“What…” Jimin muttered, confused. No one ever came to visit. Not ever, unless he ordered take out. Did he somehow manage to sleep dial his favorite pizza place…? He patted around, but his phone didn’t materialize.

Judging by the orange-tinted light spilling through the curtains, Jimin had already slept through his classes. He might as well eat sleep-dialed pizza.

He struggled to stand, using the arm of the couch for leverage. His knee seemed better, even if it was just in his head, the swelling practically gone. That was good. He could avoid another needle for the day. More importantly, he could avoid a doctor visit.

Scratching at the bandage clinging tenuously to the crook of his arm, Jimin cracked the door open. His eyes widened. “Wh…” Jimin exhaled, mouth gaping. “What are you doing here…?”

Two noses wrinkled in tandem.

Considering he hadn’t showered, he probably deserved that, for once.

“How’d you even know where I live?” Jimin said, exhausted and annoyed and in residual pain.

“Namjoonie hyung was worried about you,” Jungkook muttered, looking off to the side. “Are you alright?”

“I’m sorry if we’ve…overstepped,” the other said. He was one of their group, but Jimin didn’t remember his name. “Joon thought you would be annoyed if he was the one to make sure you were alright, so here we are.”
“He sent you to check on me?” Jimin clarified. “That…that’s…” Crazy, he thought. Or maybe it was just because he wasn’t used to it. Did…did people normally check up on other people they barely knew?

“Since the beginning of the semester, you were always in the lecture hall before everyone else,” he said. “You’ve never been late, much less missed a class. He just wanted to know that you were okay.”

“Oh,” Jimin said, cheeks staining red. “I’m…fine. I just had a bad day yesterday, and I wasn’t feeling up to going to class this morning.”

“Your thing?” Jungkook asked, eyes flicking to the bandage on his arm.

“Yeah…” Jimin sighed, offering them a weak smile. He reached up to push some of his greasy hair away from his face, feeling a little self-conscious now that he was more awake. “But I’m fine. Really. You didn’t have to come all the way here.” He paused. “How did you know which apartment was mine?”

Jungkook looked nervous, but the other one answered smoothly. “We knocked on every door until we got to this one.”

“You…” Jimin said incredulously.

“Anyway, are you sure you’re alright by yourself?” the other said, face drawn in concern. “You still look sick.”

“I always look sick,” Jimin sighed. “But yes, I’m sure. Like I told you before, I’ve been dealing with this for a long time without anyone’s help, and I don’t need it.”

“Maybe so,” the other said, frowning. “Have you ever considered that other people might want to help?”

“Jin hyung,” Jungkook said softly, pulling at his sleeve. “Come on, he doesn’t want us here. Sorry for bothering you, Jimin hyung.”

Jimin’s resolve weakened at the dejected expression on Jungkook’s face.

“That’s not…” Jimin sighed, squeezing the hem of his shirt in his fingers. “Look, I just…it’s complicated to explain. When you have what I do, sometimes things can start bleeding on the inside of your body, even when you don’t do anything bad to cause it. And my body doesn’t make enough of what causes blood to clot and stop bleeding, so I have to replace it with…medicine. That kind of random thing happened yesterday at school. I came home, I…took my medicine, and now I…I’m pretty sure the bleeding’s stopped, for now,” he said, looking down at his knee. “There’s nothing you can do to help me. I just…have to live with it.”

“That’s awful,” the other said. “To constantly have to worry about…” he shook his head slowly. “Have you eaten? I don’t know much about this, but I do know that when you lose any blood, you should eat.”

“I will,” Jimin assured him. “But now I just… I just want to be alone,” he said quietly.

“Alright,” Jin agreed, wrapping an arm around Jungkook’s shoulder. “Then we’ll see you in class on Monday?”

“Mm,” Jimin nodded, watching as they turned around, heading down the hallway. “Umm—“ he
said, catching their attention. “Thank you…for caring.”

An unusual expression flashed on Jin’s face before he smiled, nodding. “I’ll copy the notes you missed,” he said. “Come on, Kookie.”

Jimin smiled a little as he shut the door behind him. It was…nice. Really…strange. But nice.

He spent most of the weekend resting, sprawled over his bed or the couch and moving as little as possible. He was annoyed with himself as his eyes kept drifting to the door.

What, was he stupidly hoping that someone would visit him again, when he was the one that chased them away in the first place?

On Monday morning, as he was leaving for class, he nearly had a heart attack when a boy with bright red hair jumped towards him from around the corner of his building. He frowned when the boy burst out laughing, only then recognizing him as another one of Namjoon’s friends, who’d looked a lot more orange just a few days ago.

“Yah, your face!” the boy laughed, eyes tearing up.

“Meanie,” Jimin muttered, continuing along the sidewalk.

“Hey, wait, we can walk together!” the boy said, falling in step beside him. “I’ve been bored out of my mind waiting for you to come out!”

“Let me guess, you’re supposed to keep watch on me, too?” Jimin said, sighing.

“Huh?” the boy said, confused. “No, I just thought we could be friends?”

Jimin paused, taken aback. “F-friends?”

“Mmhmm,” the boy said, kicking at a plastic bottle that littered the cement. “I’ve never seen someone try as hard as you not to have any. It’s kinda’ impressive, actually.”

“I don’t…I don’t understand,” Jimin said.

“I mean it’s clear that you’re hopeless at making friends, so I’m offering my friend services, free of charge!” he said, throwing his arms up in the air.

“You feel sorry for me, is what you mean,” Jimin frowned. “No thanks.”

“That’s not true!” he protested. “I just want to be your friend! I really want to! Can’t I? Pretty please?”

“Why?” Jimin said, glancing at him as they stepped onto campus. “You have half a dozen of your own friends, don’t you?”

“But I don’t want them!” he wheedled, “I want you! Be my friend!”

Jimin flushed as people began to glance at them, eyeing the red-head jumping up and down. “Yah,
stop it,” he muttered.

“Only if you promise to be my friend,” the other grinned.

“I don’t even know you,” Jimin said.

“Kim Taehyung! Twenty two! Capricorn!”

“Geeze,” Jimin huffed, unable to hold back a smile. “You’re annoying.”

“The beauty of friendship,” Taehyung nodded sagely, slapping him on the shoulder.

Jimin jerked away, hand immediately moving to cover the area. “Ah, please…” he said, frowning. “Don’t…do that.”

“Oh,” Taehyung gasped. “I’m…I’m sorry, I just…I forgot…” he said, face falling with shame.

“That’s…why I don’t have friends,” Jimin sighed. He set his bag down on a bench nearby and pulled at the collar of his shirt. Light red, but not too bad. Maybe it wouldn’t even bruise. Hopefully.

“Fuck,” Taehyung said, and Jimin was startled to see the drops of water escaping from his eyes. “I never meant…I’m so stupid, I’m…I’m sorry, Jimin.” He rubbed roughly at his face, his skin turning a splotchy red.

“Hey, I-I know you didn’t mean it,” Jimin said quickly, taking Taehyung’s hand in both of his own. He couldn’t stand to see anyone cry. “It’s okay, I promise.”

“Your hands are soft,” Taehyung muttered, sniffling. “They’re nice.”

Jemin gently pulled away, reaching up to pet Taehyung’s hair. Taehyung reminded Jimin of an animal, the way he pushed his head into Jimin’s hand. “Are you okay now?”

“Can we really not be friends?” Taehyung asked, this time hesitantly. “I was wrong, you’re really good at friend stuff.”

Jemin sighed. “Fine.”

Taehyung grinned.

“But you’re on friend probation.”

Taehyung pouted.

“Come on, or we’ll be late,” Jimin said, picking up his bag again. “I apparently have a reputation to keep up.”

“Yeah, Namjoonie hyung was really worried when you didn’t come to class,” Taehyung mused.

“Why does he care so much? I really…don’t understand,” Jimin sighed.

“Hyung’s…well, he gets…I mean, he’s…he has a hard time not looking out for people when he feels responsible for them. It’s kind of just his nature. He doesn’t get attached to people often, but when he does, he feels it deeply.”

“But why me?” Jimin asked quietly. “Out of everyone…”
“Hmm…” Taehyung shrugged. “Does there have to be a reason for anything? You’re nice, and you’re cute, and it seems like you could use a little backup now and then. You can’t go through life alone, that’s just not how it works.”

“But I’ve…been doing fine…” Jimin said uncertainly. “You don’t even know if I’m nice! And I’m not cute!”

“Keep telling yourself that,” Taehyung said, winking. “But really, hyung felt like he owed you protection after doing that to your arm. And probably, in the course of feeling that way, he did that thing that he does where he makes *everything* his responsibility.”

“But that sucks,” Jimin said. “I’m just an obligation, then.”

“Did you want to be something more than that?” Taehyung said, grin widening.

“I’m revoking your probation.”
Jimin couldn’t help glancing back at Namjoon.

Despite the way he’d acted before, despite sending people to check up on Jimin, he hadn’t once looked in Jimin’s direction for the past week. It wasn’t that Jimin wanted the attention.

It wasn’t.

It was just…confusing.

“Jiminnie, did you get the latest crime alert email?” Taehyung whisper-hissed next to him, looking at his phone under the lecture table. He’d taken to claiming the seat next to Jimin rather than sitting with the rest, despite Jimin’s refusal to respond to his note-passing during class. “That poor freshman ended up in the hospital.”

Jimin nodded, swallowing. Things really seemed to have gotten worse around campus lately. “Be extra careful,” he said to Taehyung. “I don’t want you to get hurt, okay?”

“Me?” Taehyung blinked. “I’m always with them,” he jerked his thumb. “I said that because you’re always alone!”

“Oh,” Jimin said.

“But you care about me?” Taehyung said, grinning broadly. “You’re so cute, Jiminnie!”

“Shut up,” Jimin grumbled, turning away. “I hope you get stabbed.”

He looked up in surprise when Jungkook sidled up to him after class. “Hyung?” Jungkook asked shyly.

“What is it, Jungkook?” Jimin encouraged, smiling.

“Can we…I mean…can we study…again? It was really helpful last time, and…umm…I understand if you’re busy…”

“I’d love to study with you,” Jimin smiled gently. “Later tonight? Library?”

“Seven…seven is good…” Jungkook smiled tentatively back.

“Seven it is!” Jimin said, waving as he left for his next class.

“He gets so shy around you,” the one Jimin had learned was Hoseok said, shaking his head. “He beats me up for the remote, but he acts like he’s five when he talks to you.”

“Maybe he just likes me better,” Jimin shrugged cheekily.

“Wow,” Hoseok said. “Too cocky, this one.”

Jimin laughed, almost overwhelmed by the warm feelings bubbling up in his chest. Was this what it was like to have friends? Real ones? He was finally starting to understand why people wanted this so much. Even if it was just for five minutes after a mandatory English class.

He tilted his head when he noticed Hoseok was still staring at him. “Something wrong?”
“No,” Hoseok said, smiling to himself. “Nothing. I was just…looking.”

“Stop being a creep,” Yoongi muttered, bumping into Hoseok from behind. Yoongi didn’t speak to Jimin, but Jimin was okay with that. At least he wasn’t threatening him anymore.

“I resent that,” Hoseok said, pursing his lips. “See you later, Jimin,” he threw behind him, following Yoongi and Jin from the lecture hall.

“Hey,” Namjoon said quietly, and Jimin spun quickly to face him, nearly losing his footing. “Ah, sorry,” Namjoon said, looking at the ground as he lowered his arms, which had reflexively risen to catch Jimin if he fell. “I can’t seem to…get this right, can I?” he sighed.

“What?” Jimin said. “No, I mean…it’s fine.”

“I was just…are you…all better? From before,” he said, rubbing awkwardly at his arm. “I noticed your bruises were…I mean…not that I-I was looking, I just-I noticed because you-you wear shorts and short sleeves a lot, and…umm…”

“For now,” Jimin said. It was almost endearing, how hard Namjoon was trying to avoid making Jimin uncomfortable. “You never…umm…you never know when something’s gonna’ happen, though. But please don’t worry about the bruises, they’re…I’m used to them.”

“Right…” Namjoon said, mouth twitching into a frown.

“It really…bothers you that much?” Jimin found himself saying.

“What?” Namjoon asked.

“That I get hurt,” Jimin said. “Or, well, that I hurt myself…is probably more accurate.”

“Oh…” Namjoon said. “It bothers me that I…can’t fix it. I can’t stop it from happening, and I don’t know how to make it better when it does. I hate that. That there’s something out there that I can’t fix. I can still see…” he said, shaking his head.

“What?” Jimin asked curiously.

“When I hurt you,” Namjoon said, shoulders hunching. “I see it. It keeps replaying in my head. I’ve never felt more like a monster than I did when I saw that panicked look on your face, and I just…” he sighed. “Sorry. My judgment is usually better than that, and I…I have no excuse for it, except that I reacted without thinking.”

“I highly doubt a monster would feel this guilty,” Jimin said gently. Maybe he’d ignored it before because he was annoyed with the situation and afraid for his health, but Namjoon really did have a big heart. Probably too big, even if Jimin didn’t understand it. “It’s really okay. I understand that you didn’t mean any harm. Just…at the time, I was…” Scared, like always.

“There are a lot of different kinds of monsters in the world, Jimin,” Namjoon said, adjusting his grip on his bag. “Just because some of them feel guilty, it doesn’t mean that they’re good.”

Jimin didn’t know what to say, watching silently as Namjoon walked past and pushed open the lecture hall door. What was that supposed to mean?

“You don’t have to fix anything,” Jimin called out, just as Namjoon stepped through it. “People aren’t objects, you know. They don’t break, they just…” Jimin trailed off.
“He runs, he ran, he will run,” Jungkook muttered, gnawing on the end of his pen.

“If that breaks, you’re going to swallow a mouthful of ink,” Jimin chastised, pushing the pen away from his mouth.

“Yeah,” Jungkook agreed sheepishly.

“It’s happened before and you’re still doing it?” Jimin said.

“Taehyungie liked my blue teeth,” Jungkook said, mouth pulling into a lopsided grin.

“Taehyung likes eating food with his feet—during class. I wouldn’t use him as a reference point,” Jimin said, shoulders quaking from holding in laughter. He glanced down at the next sentence and the verb they were meant to conjugate. “She swims, she…” he paused racking his brain. “She swam? That sounds weird, but I think it’s right.”

Jungkook flipped to the back of the textbook, running a long finger down the page. “Swam,” he confirmed, the word sounding awkward between the both of them.

“See? We’re already guaranteed good grades,” Jimin grinned.

“How come no one’s around?” Jungkook said, twisting his head to survey the empty library floor.

Jimin giggled. “Jungkook, this is university. People don’t study until they realize they only have a few weeks to learn everything they should have been learning over the course of the semester.”

“Oh,” Jungkook said, brow furrowing. “Then are we…doing it wrong?”

“I promise you, Jungkook, what we’re doing is infinitely better than the alternative.”

Jungkook stood up quickly, pushing back from the table and sending his chair clattering to the floor. His nostrils flared as his eyes panned the shelves of books, brow furrowing.

“Jun…Jungkook?” Jimin said, nervous and more than a little confused. “What’s wrong?”

Jungkook said nothing, his suddenly piercing gaze settling on the stairwell door.

Jimin’s heart skipped a beat when he heard someone pushing it open from the other side.

“Kookie?” Jin said, looking between the both of them.

Jungkook’s shoulders lost some of their tension, but he didn’t relax completely, still eyeing his hyung

“I know, Kookie. Sorry to interrupt your studying, but we need you back at home,” Jin said, making sure to offer a small smile to Jimin. Jimin tried his best to smile back, but he could only manage a weak one.

Jungkook nodded curtly, reaching down to pick up the chair and push it back into the table.

“Is everything…okay?” Jimin asked uncertainly.

“Fine,” Jin smiled tightly. “Just…ah…a small family emergency, but nothing too serious.”

“Oh,” Jimin said, bringing his hand up to his mouth. “I’m sorry, I hope everything works out.”

“Me too,” Jin said, watching as Jungkook shoveled his things into his bag.

“And—“ Jimin said, hesitating. “Be-be careful, please. On your way back.”

Jin blinked, tilting his head and then breaking into a warm smile. “We will, Jimin, thank you. And please remember to take care of yourself, too.”

“I’m ready,” Jungkook said, shouldering his bag. “Bye, Jimin hyung.”

Jimin nodded, resting the side of his face in his hand as he watched them go. He glanced at the time on his phone, sighing as he mentally wrote out his to-do list for the night. They’d only been studying for a short time, so how was it that two hours had already passed?

The library was eerie as he wound his way through the stacks, returning the dictionary he and Jungkook had borrowed. He hated that just being in the dark could scare him so much, but it wasn’t like he could help it.

Campus was still very much awake at night. Small groups of people chatted or ate with each other, notebooks flipped open and benches under street lamps occupied. The coffee shops were crowded, Jimin able to easily see in through the glass panes of buildings and imagine the smell of freshly roasted beans with a hint of cinnamon.

Jimin’s stomach growled loudly, and he pressed a self-conscious hand to it. Take care of himself. Right.

His feet crunched against a few dried leaves on the sidewalk, a light breeze rustling the landscaped trees and cooling the thin layer of sweat coating the back of his neck. He was glad he lived so close to campus, even if it could get really noisy on the weekends. Otherwise, he would just be tempted to curl up on a couch in the library rather than going home at all.

A low, rumbling growl. Definitely not his stomach.

Jimin froze.

Breath quickening, Jimin glanced around him. A few people walking through the small patch of grass, one of them laughing. The trees shifting. Nothing. It was nothing. Probably just his imagination. He shuffled forward, picking up his pace as his eyes settled on his goal of the convenience store down the street from his apartment. He barely caught himself as his shoe lodged into a crack on the cement, chastising himself for his stupidity.

The last thing he needed was a skinned knee bleeding him out. How embarrassing.
He could have sworn... he heard the growl again.

He felt much better as he slid into the brightly lit store, blasted by unnecessarily frigid air conditioning. Smile brittle as he nodded to the cashier, Jimin knew he would need something stronger than soda to get him through the night. As long as he drank from the comfort of his own kitchen, things would be fine.

He shook his head as he grabbed a six pack, a bag of snacks, and a few microwavable meals. Somehow, he doubted Jin would approve. Frowning, he stared down at the food in his arms. Since when did that matter?

After paying for his sad looking dinner, Jimin stepped nervously outside. Everything was calm, if not quiet, the distant honk of horns still audible even, or maybe especially, late at night.

“Late meal?”

Jimin jumped, turning quickly to spot Yoongi leaning against the outside wall of the store, arms crossed over his chest. “Y-yes,” he answered, clutching the bag of groceries a little more tightly to chest. “What... what are...”

“Same,” he answered gruffly, eyes dark as he practically glared at Jimin. “I was just... enjoying the night.”

“Oh,” Jimin said, shuffling his feet. “Wasn’t there—” he cut himself off, pressing his lips together.

“What,” Yoongi said, narrowing his eyes.

“It’s just... I thought you had a... a family emergency...” Jimin trailed off, feeling timid under the pressure of Yoongi’s gaze.

“Oh, that,” Yoongi said, the corner of his mouth quirking. “They don’t need me for that.”

“O-oh...” Jimin said, the plastic bag crinkling as he shifted.

Yoongi stood up straighter, his nostrils flaring as he approached Jimin. Jimin couldn’t help but take a step backwards. Yoongi tilted his head. “Why did you do that?”

“I-I just...” Jimin said, swallowing. “You make me nervous,” he said quietly.

“Me?” Yoongi chuckled. “Believe me, I’m the last thing you should be worried about.” He pulled his phone from his pocket, glancing down at the screen. “Anyway, shouldn’t you be getting home?” he said pointedly, looking down the road in the direction of Jimin’s apartment. “I’ll watch until you get inside.”

Jimin was once again struck by the stark contrast between what his body told him to feel about Yoongi and how the older man acted towards him. It didn’t make much sense. Yoongi had done nothing but be kind to him, his words biting but his actions caring. “But then what about you?” Jimin said.

“You think someone’s going to mess with me?” Yoongi said, amused. “Get your ass inside, Park.”

Jimin ducked his head, offering Yoongi a small smile before heading for his apartment. As he walked, he could feel Yoongi’s eyes on his back, but it was equally as comforting as it was unsettling. He turned back one last time as he opened the main door, Yoongi’s eyes still glued to him.
Throwing a hand up in the air as a mocking salute, Yoongi disappeared into the night, stepping from under the light of the store and melting easily into the darkness. Jimin shuddered.

If Yoongi was the last thing he should be worried about, Jimin didn’t want to know what was at the top of the list.
They were huddled together as Jimin entered his English class, speaking in low voices like they didn’t want to be overheard.

Jemin was surprised that they beat him to the lesson, but he didn’t think much of it. It’s not like he had a monopoly on being early.

Curiosity tugged at him as he claimed a seat in the row in front of them, but it didn’t look like they wanted anyone to hear what they were talking about, so instead he plugged his ears with headphones and opened his laptop. Someone had uploaded a contemporary dance version of The Nutcracker online, and Jimin was curious to see what direction the troupe had taken.

Jemin had always loved watching people dance, had wished that he could move that way. But with his condition, it was too dangerous to do much more than lift free-weights and run at a moderate speed on a treadmill. Falling down was just a natural part of practicing dance, and Jimin would never be able to risk that.

He would never be able to do what he really wanted. He guessed he should be used to it by now, but it still hurt.

“—imin?”

“Huh?” Jimin said, startled, pulling out an earbud. “Did you say something?”

“Just wondering what you were looking at,” Hoseok said, leaning over his shoulder and nearly brushing cheeks with Jimin as he read the title of the paused video. “The Nutcracker, huh?”

Jemin flushed, both at their proximity and at the judging tone. “H-hey, I think it’s cool,” Jimin said defensively.

“You should come watch one of my shows some time, and I’ll show you what cool really is,” Hoseok said, waggling his eyebrows.

“Oh, umm—“

“Move,” Taehyung grumbled, yanking Hoseok out of the way by his collar and claiming the seat next to Jimin. “You’re too close, hyung! He’s *my* friend!”

“Did you just—“ Hoseok spluttered. “You wanna’ die?!“

“Anyway, Jimin,” Taehyung said, completely ignoring Hoseok. “If you walk home after dark, let me know, okay? I’ll come and we’ll go together."

“Huh?” Jimin said, confused by the sudden subject change. “Why?”

“Do you ever read your emails?” Taehyung huffed. “Another person was attacked yesterday, while they were walking home from the library. That can’t happen to you. With your…you know…”

“Yesterday…” Jimin said, frowning. That was three times in a week. What was campus security even doing? “This is…getting serious…” Jimin said, brow furrowing in concern.

Taehyung’s hands shot out quickly and aggressively, but he grasped Jimin’s own in a gentle hold. “We won’t let anything bad happen to you,” he said, eyes determined.
“Why…do you think something’s going to?” Jimin said nervously.

“Of course not,” Namjoon said, and Jimin glanced up to meet his hardened gaze. “Nothing will. Taehyung, stop it.”

Taehyung seemed to wither under Namjoon’s glare in a way that he hadn’t under Hoseok’s. “Sorry, hyung.”

“Move for a second,” Namjoon commanded, and Taehyung didn’t question it, abandoning his seat as Namjoon climbed out of his own and moved to Jimin’s row. He pulled out the chair and slumped into it, letting out a heavy sigh.

“Are you…okay?” Jimin asked.

“Mmm,” Namjoon grunted, noncommittal. “Listen,” he said, hesitating as he looked down to meet Jimin’s eyes.

“Yeah?” Jimin said, fidgeting in his seat.

“Something…happened,” Namjoon said. “Something happened that I didn’t intend…that I…didn’t really have any control over.”

“You’re freaking me out a little,” Jimin said nervously, heartrate picking up.

“I know you…don’t like me very much,” Namjoon continued.

Jimin frowned. It wasn’t that he didn’t like Namjoon, he just didn’t know what or how to feel about him, at all. He was scary, and then he was annoying, and then he was…gentle. It was confusing. Very, very confusing. Especially for someone like Jimin, who had no frame of reference.

“That’s not—” Jimin tried, but Namjoon shook his head.

“Only of the mouth,” Yoongi groaned from behind them.

“No, you don’t have to try and make me feel better. I know you don’t like me. I haven’t exactly done anything to deserve it. But…I’m going to try to change your mind.”

“Umm…” Jimin said helplessly.

“I-I mean, I’m not going to push you,” Namjoon said quickly. “If you want space, I’ll give it to you, no questions asked. But I just…” he sighed, rubbing at his forehead. “I wanted to let you know that I’m going to try. To…to be likeable. To you.”

“Fuck’s sake,” Yoongi groaned from behind them.

“Hyung,” Namjoon said sharply.

“It sounded like you were about to tell me you had cancer, or something,” Jimin said, letting out a soft sigh of his own.

“Only of the mouth,” Yoongi muttered.

“It’s just…I really would like it if we were able to get along, at least,” Namjoon continued. “Even if it can’t be…anything more than that. I…can we be friends? Can we try? I’m not good at tip-toeing around people, and more importantly, I don’t want to do that to you.”

“Okay,” Jimin said timidly. “I…I think I’d like it if…we were friends. T-trying to be.”
“Oh,” Namjoon said, blinking, the corners of his mouth pulling into a smile, cheeks dimpling. “That’s…that’s great!”

“But, I just,” Jimin said, looking down at his lap. “I never really had people like you as friends. Like Taehyung. I’m not…I’m not very good at it, I guess? I don’t think I am.”

“Not good at being…friends?” Namjoon clarified. “How’s that possible? Taehyung won’t shut up about how much he likes you.”

“I never really had any before? I just had, you know, classmates. I was too…afraid, I guess. You know how kids are. How cruel they can be to be people that are different. I didn’t want that to happen to me, so I never let anyone get close enough to find out,” Jimin admitted, swallowing nervously at how much he was revealing. But it felt good to finally tell someone. “And…you know, I’m kind of…living on borrowed time, as it is.”

He heard a soft intake of breath that sounded a lot like Seokjin.

“I’m selfish,” Jimin said. “I always look out for myself first, because it’s what I’m used to doing. Other people…I mean, I’m not…” he trailed off awkwardly.

“That’s what friends are for, Jimin,” Namjoon said lightly. “They look out for you, so you can spend less time worrying about yourself and more time living in the moment. But even so, I’m not asking you to do anything other than be yourself. And maybe…” he hesitated, “maybe spend some time with me?”

Jimin blinked, mouth opening slightly and something strange squeezing at his chest cavity and turning upside down in his stomach.

“Excuse me,” Taehyung said, popping his head over Namjoon’s shoulder. “I just wanted to point out that he’s my friend.”

“Yes, you’ve made that abundantly clear,” Namjoon said, rolling his eyes.

“If you want it, I mean, Taehyung can send you my number,” Jimin offered. “I’m not good at responding to messages on time, but…”

“I want it!” Namjoon said quickly, reaching blindly behind him to fist Taehyung’s shirt and drag him closer. “Give it!”

Jimin huffed in amusement and attempted to hide his flushed cheeks behind his hand.

“Hyung,” Jungkook said, and Jimin turned his head quickly to look at the row behind him. “Can I have it too? That way you can call if you want someone to walk with you who’s not Taehyung. I’m not good at answering messages, either. But I’ll come if you call me.”

“Sure, Jungkookie,” Jimin grinned. “It’ll be easier to study that way, too.”

“But you have to tell us!” Taehyung said, struggling to get out of Namjoon’s headlock. “I’m serious, Jimin, you can’t go around by yourself after dark, okay? You’ll make all of us too worried.”

“How will you worry if I don’t tell you?” Jimin teased, closing his laptop as the professor strolled into the room, eyeing Namjoon and Taehyung’s tussling critically.

“Sit down, idiots,” Yoongi ordered from above.
“Please,” Namjoon said, releasing Taehyung and looking at Jimin seriously. “I won’t let anything bad happen, but please be careful. Please let us know. It’s what friends do.”

“Okay,” Jimin said dazedly. “I mean…I’ll try my best to remember.”

The lesson of the day was more complex verb tenses and medical vocabulary. A lot of the words were uncomfortable for Jimin to pronounce. He would have to practice.

Jimin liked the idea of being a biology major more than the reality of being one.

The required classes were difficult, and he spent all of his free time studying. School had never come naturally to Jimin, so he did his best to work as hard as he could to keep up with everyone else. It was hard, but he thought it would be worth it if it meant helping people like himself in the future.

When he wasn’t in class or at home, he was in the library, because he had the tendency to space out at home instead of doing work. And even then, he sometimes lost himself in his mind, forgetting the hour and the day while he was focusing on something else. It was why he had a schedule of alarms programmed into his phone, and it was really the only reason he owned one, besides for emergencies. He wasn’t used to texting anyone other than his parents. He never had to do it before. But he found himself wanting to do it.

He was startled when his phone alerted him to his biology lab in an hour.

Jimin sighed, noting the time and opening up a new text message.

*Hello Taehyung,* he began. He stared at it for a moment, erasing it.

*Tae*

That was better. More friendly, right? Wow, he was really awful at this.

*Tae, forgot I had a biology lab tonight. Ends around 8:00 PM. You said to tell you, so.*

Before he could second guess himself any more than that, he pressed send.

Gathering up his messy piles of books, pens, and paper, Jimin shoved his collective clutter into his bag, slinging it over his shoulder and sighing at the ever-present pain there. Honestly, he would give a lot to go through a single day without something hurting. Then again, maybe not, because then he’d have to live with knowing what it was like.

That would be twenty times worse.

Jimin quickly flicked through the syllabus he had saved on his phone, checking the lab topic. “The length of DNA molecules, huh,” Jimin muttered, sighing and closing his eyes for a moment. Well, at least it didn’t involve anything that would make it likely for him to accidentally hurt himself.

He stopped for coffee on the way to the laboratory building, heavily inhaling the scent of roasted beans. He didn’t even particularly like the smell all that much, but something about it made his heart feel lighter.
“Kid?” someone questioned behind him, and Jimin turned to find Yoongi standing next to him in line.

“Oh,” Jimin said, ducking his head in greeting. “S-sunbae…” Jimin said, the word sounding awkward even as he formed it.

Yoongi snorted. “I really make you that worried, huh? I’m a little impressed with myself. But you have permission to call me hyung. I’ll make a special exception.”

Jimin smiled shyly at Yoongi’s haughty confidence. His face was sweet, in its own way, but the second he opened his mouth, he dispelled any illusions of sweetness. “Okay, hyung. Do you have class soon?”

“Nah, I just need caffeine to operate,” Yoongi said, crossing his arms over his chest. “You?”

“I have a lab in half an hour or so,” Jimin confirmed.

“Lab?” Yoongi said, eyes widening marginally. “Are you in the science department, Park?” His nostrils flared, and Jimin was so used to it that he didn’t even feel offended.

“Yeah, I…I was thinking about medical research eventually because…you know…” he trailed off.

“Right,” Yoongi cleared his throat. “So, I should have your phone number, too.”

“Huh?” Jimin said.

“Your phone number,” Yoongi said impatiently, holding his hand out.

“Oh, umm, okay,” Jimin said, fumbling for his phone and setting it in Yoongi’s hand. Yoongi sent himself a text message from Jimin’s phone, nodding to himself and handing it back.

“If anything strange happens, you call me immediately, okay?” Yoongi said, not meeting Jimin’s eyes. “Out of everyone, I’m here the most working on projects. So. I give you permission to call if you need to.”

“Thanks,” Jimin said. “I mean, thank you for offering, hyung.” He paused, but he couldn’t help himself from asking, “But why does everyone keep saying that something is going to happen? Really, do you know something that I don’t?”

“Oh, I’m sure I do,” Yoongi smirked. “Just…just keep an eye out, Park.”

“I will,” Jimin promised. He wanted to ask more, but it was his turn to give his order, and he didn’t want to hold up the line. Why was everyone acting so strange lately? Like they all saw some disastrous thing that Jimin couldn’t. It was making him paranoid.

Jimin tried incredibly hard to make himself interested in the lab, but it was difficult to do when the microscopes weren’t as powerful as they should have been, and he was pretending to see something that just wasn’t visible. His partner, Jooheon, just shrugged at him helplessly as the teaching assistant listed the things that they were supposed to be seeing under the viewing lens.

In the end, they had to do an internet search for images of DNA to be able to fill out their lab report, and Jimin sighed at the lack of curiosity he had in the subject. If this was what he was going to do, shouldn’t he at least be a little more excited about it? He was just finding everything unnecessarily tedious.
With a heavy heart, he handed in their lab report, feeling a distinct sense of dissatisfaction. Well, maybe the next one would be more interesting. Still, this was stuff he should know if he wanted to help fix anything in the future.

Jimin said goodbye to Jooheon as they went their separate ways, shivering slightly as a cool breeze gusted when he pushed open the door. He pulled out his phone to check the time, frowning when he saw that the battery was dead. It was probably the cold air of the lab that did it.

Sighing, he wondered if Taehyung would get mad at him for walking home alone, but as there was no one waiting for him and no way to contact anyone, he didn’t really have much of a choice. Besides, eight o’clock wasn’t late. It was barely evening, and there were still plenty of people walking around.

Jimin shoved his hands as far as they would go into his tight jean pockets, wondering when it had gotten so cold outside.

A few leaves crunched under his feet as he passed the coffee shop, nodding to Jooheon as he spotted him lined up inside. He had a near miss brushing shoulders with a tall man on the sidewalk, narrowly avoiding crashing into the hurrying figure.

He started on his real walk home, looking around warily as he clutched his backpack strap tighter. Everything seemed normal. The street lights were all illuminated. At least there was no growling this time. Swallowing, Jimin shook his head. It was stupid to be afraid of a walk he’d taken two hundred times. Or maybe it was never stupid to be afraid of anything if everything could kill you.

He hunched his shoulders and continued down the block, taking Yoongi’s advice and actually paying attention. Still, even as the illuminated convenience store came into sight, nothing happened. For which he was eternally grateful.

His first step into the pool of bright light was thwarted when something wrenched him by the shoulder and pulled him to the side of the building, slamming him painfully against the rough brick wall.

He cried out as a cold nose pressed against his neck and inhaled deeply, nuzzling against his skin as he struggled to make any kind of sense as to what was happening.

“You smell strange,” the voice whispered more than spoke, its tone airy and inoffensive even as Jimin’s body was pressed even more harshly. “Like dog. And…something else.”

“Please, stop, please,” Jimin managed, tears already leaking from the corners of his eyes. “I don’t have much money, but you can have it, so please stop,” he begged.

“Money?” the voice said, and the head pressed into his neck drew back slightly to tilt to the side in question. “No. No money,” the man said, and Jimin’s mouth dropped open as he finally caught sight of him, marginally illuminated by the street lights. He was tall, dark haired, pale, and…beautiful. Angular face, dark hooded eyes, sharp cheekbones, full lips.

“Then w-what do you want?” Jimin stuttered, trying not to move and make him angry. He didn’t look strong, but from the force exerted on him, Jimin knew that he was.

“Food,” the man whispered in that tone of his. “You will live.”

Yanking at Jimin, he dragged him further behind the building where there wasn’t any direct light, Jimin barely able to stumble behind him.
He leaned close again, towering over Jimin and bringing their noses close enough to touch. From his peripheral vision, Jimin saw the man raise his hand, which grotesquely morphed from smooth pale skin into something else entirely. Fingernails elongated into curved sharp points, bones cracked and reformed, flesh became hard and scaly.

“What’s going on?” Jimin whimpered, terrified and unable to move.

“I am hungry,” the man said simply, reaching out to Jimin with the clawed hand.

Shaking, Jimin struggled with all his might, but the man’s body was as immoveable as stone. “If you scratch me, you could kill me! Please, please don’t!” Jimin said.

“Kill?” the man said curiously. “No. Just eat.” Without further preamble, there was a sharp, stinging pain as a clawed fingernail dragged itself across Jimin’s chest, slicing open his shirt and a deep layer of skin.

He could only cry in desperation and horror as the grotesque hand was placed over the heavily bleeding slice, rubbing at it as though to make him bleed even more. “Please, no, please,” Jimin repeated.

The man inhaled deeply, as though drinking something in that only he could experience. He remained like that, letting his eyes fall shut as Jimin cried and struggled, feeling himself get weaker and dizzier as his blood continued to pour out freely.

The man opened his eyes slowly after a moment, lips tightening as he gazed at Jimin’s hunched body. Jimin was no longer supporting himself, only the man’s hand keeping him upright against the wall. “I am full, but it does not stop.”

“Please,” Jimin said hoarsely. “Hospital, or I-I’ll die, please…”

“Die? No, should not die,” the man muttered.

A low, rumbling growl.

The man whipped his head around, brow furrowing as he tried to identify the source of the noise. “What? No. Not your time. Our time.”

The growl sounded again, this time much louder and more aggressively.

The man glanced at Jimin one last time before releasing him, letting him slump to the ground weakly. “Should not die,” he repeated, as though trying to convince himself. Jimin watched with disbelieving eyes as he seemed to melt into the shadows, gone in an instant.

The rumbling growl cut off, but Jimin was still shaking in terror. He already had to deal with one monster, and he wasn’t ready to deal with another one.

“H-hello?” he said, unable to get his voice to come out very strong. “Hello? Please, I need h-help,” he tried, voice breaking at the pain. “Please…anybody…” he begged, desperately pressing his hands over the cut, blood slipping easily through his fingers and pooling on the cement. A terrifying amount.

“Jimin? Is that you?”

Jimin’s eyes shot open. He hadn’t even realized that he closed them. “Namj-joon, help…” Jimin said blearily. Was it really Namjoon, or was Jimin just seeing things?
“Jimin, fuck…” Namjoon growled, and then he was right next to Jimin on the ground, cradling his torso. “Hold on, okay? I’ll get you some help. Jimin!”

Jimin smiled as his vision started to spot. He’d lost so much blood. “I don’t…know if I’m going to make it…” Jimin slurred, desperately trying to stay conscious. “What a…way to go…”

“Jimin, hold on!” Namjoon said desperately, and Jimin could feel the rumble of his voice as his head was pressed against Namjoon’s chest. “Fuck, fuck, fuck!” Namjoon cursed, carefully cupping Jimin’s cheek. “Jimin? Come on!”

Jimin tried to say something, but he couldn’t get any words to come out.

As he closed his eyes, he could only feel the sensation of lips mouthing at his skin.
Jimin didn’t know what had awakened him. Just that, as awareness filtered through the exhaustion, he was consumed by an overwhelming ache radiating from his back. It was the familiar ache of bruised flesh, but concentrated, a deep and resounding echo of pain sliding along his spine.

He groaned as his fingers and toes curled of their own volition, grasping tightly to the dark sheets that were tucked snugly around his body.

“Stay still,” a low voice said gently.

Jimin pried his eyes open, vision blurry and thoughts syrupy-thick from confusion. “Namjoon… sunbae?” he managed, recognizing the blond hair more than anything else. The room was dimly lit by a lamp on the nightstand next to the bed, coating it in a soft orange glow.

“Yeah, it’s me,” Namjoon said, expression twisting into something unpleasant. “How are you feeling?”

“Hurts,” Jimin rasped, experimentally trying to sit up, only for an attack of discomfort to send him back to where he started. “I…what…” he trailed off, heartbeat picking up speed as he began to remember. “I should be dead,” he whispered. “I know I was, I…I was bleeding, and…I should…” he began to breath harshly, chest squeezed by an invisible pressure.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Namjoon said, eyes widening and hands hesitantly placating as they found their way into the air. “Please, you’re okay now.”

“But…how…how am I okay?” Jimin said, hating himself for the way his voice cracked and his eyes pricked with anxiety. “That thing…there was that thing…I should be dead…”

Namjoon’s mouth narrowed to a thin line, bringing his large, tanned hands to rest lightly on the bed next to Jimin’s right side, but not moving to touch him.

“Why…why aren’t you saying anything?” Jimin said. “What the hell is going on?” he questioned half hysterically. “What—“ he cut off, wincing at the pain his agitation was causing him.

“I’m sorry,” Namjoon sighed. “If…He would have normally taken your memory, but…you were dying, and…Yoongi hyung had to run him off…”

“Namjoon, please,” Jimin said. “I was…I was b-bleeding, and…” he choked out. “And then you came, and…what happened? What happened?” Because it couldn’t have been real. It couldn’t have…been…

“Jimin,” Namjoon barked out, and Jimin turned his head quickly to face him, feeling like he was having some kind of panic attack. “Everything’s okay. Trust me. Everything’s okay, I promise,” he said, tone a little desperate as he settled a hand on Jimin’s shoulder. “I’ll explain everything, I will. Just…please…just breathe, okay? You’re still…your back is…”

Jimin swallowed, fighting back the urge throw up as his lungs practically shuddered on their own. “What’s going on?” he managed, voice coming out high and pitchy.
“There…” Namjoon began, rubbing the back of his neck nervously, “there are some things out there in the dark, Jimin. Things that don’t always make sense. Things that are scary.”

“Like…monsters?” Jimin said softly.

Namjoon hesitated before nodding slowly, fingers exerting the barest pressure on Jimin’s shoulder before he dropped his hand to resettle in his lap. “They normally move on after a few weeks of hunting, but…I guess it was easy prey, a campus full of vulnerable people who think they’re safe when they’re out at night.” He sighed, looking down. “They’re not.”

“Prey?” Jimin repeated, suddenly struck by a full-body shiver. “Th-that…that can’t be…”

“The ones hunting right now, the one that attacked you, they feed on fear. They don’t need to hurt you to get their fill, but it speeds the process along considerably. I’m not sure what you’d call them in Korean. They’ve had many names across a lot of cultures. Vampire, maybe? Except they only care for blood to the extent that it makes you afraid.”

“I remember…” Jimin said, shaking his head. “He seemed…so sure that he wasn’t going to kill me.” Jimin remembered the scaled arm and the claws and the fear.

“He wouldn’t have,” Namjoon said. “He’d have eaten your fear, erased your memory, and then you’d have woken up in the hospital like all the others, thinking you were mugged, or something. Except…they have stronger senses than humans, but not to the extent—” Namjoon cut himself off as he looked at Jimin nervously.

“What?” Jimin said fearfully.

“Not to the extent that what?” Jimin asked dazedly. He wasn’t sure what his mind was doing, but it seemed unwilling to process the information Namjoon was giving him. How could it be real? How…how could monsters be real? “I don’t…are you like…” Jimin struggled, transposing the face of the monster over the face of the man he knew.

“Another complicated question,” Namjoon said, smiling sadly. “As a group, we’re a mix of a lot of things, really. But I’m not in a position to talk about the others without their permission. I’m…we’re…at a very base level, we…we’re animals, I suppose. It’s a very unusual genetic marker, and…even in our families, it’s not common, but…” He twisted his hands together nervously. “We just…we’re stronger. We live longer. We hear, smell, see better. We’re not always rational, driven more by our instincts than we should be. And we…sometimes, we…look scary,” Namjoon finished lamely.

“A-animal,” Jimin repeated numbly. “I heard…there was growling…”

“Yoongi likes to keep watch over our…our territory, sometimes. That was him, warning the fear monster away.”

Jimin blinked as he remembered the terrifying growl. He was sure he’d heard it when he was heading home before. Was that Yoongi the whole time? Trying to warn bad things away?

“And then he called to me, and I found you, and…and you…you were bleeding so much, and…” Namjoon stuttered. “I did the only thing I could think to do.”
“What…what did you do?” Jimin pressed. “How…how am I even alive right now? I…I would need my factor eight immediately, and—” He shifted painfully to push the sheets down, eyeing the black oversized shirt he’d been dressed in. Hesitantly, he peeked through the opening of the collar, but he saw nothing but orange light-tinted skin. “But there’s nothing at all…”

“I used…saliva…” Namjoon said, ducking his head as his cheeks flushed red, even in the orange light.

“Y-you…” Jimin said, brow furrowing. “You did…you…”

“We also heal faster,” Namjoon explained. “I just…I thought…it worked before on the others, and maybe if I used…then it would help…” he trailed off. “And…it…it did work! It fixed you! It stopped the bleeding, and everything. I just…I didn’t want to do your back without your permission, so I only fixed what was life-threatening.”

“You licked me,” Jimin said, baffled. “And it…stopped bleeding? It…it worked?”

“Yeah,” Namjoon said. “I don’t know why, but ever since I…since the first time I touched you…the animal side of me has considered you family. I don’t…I don’t know why that is, but I can rarely explain anything it wants, which is incredibly frustrating. It…it saw that you were hurt…that I hurt you…and then it decided that we should protect you like one of our own.”

“Oh,” Jimin said, stunned. “I…sorry…I didn’t mean…for that to happen…I…”

“No,” Namjoon said immediately. “No, it’s not your fault! I…I’m the one that hurt you first, and it…it really didn’t like that. And I know…I’ve seen how you like to be independent, and I didn’t want to ruin that, but…I don’t know, Jimin,” Namjoon said, sighing helplessly. “I hate that I can’t…I can’t explain this thing. But I…I mean, the other side of me likes you too, it’s not just…”

“This is…a lot,” Jimin said, wincing as he readjusted himself on the bed. “I mean…I…I don’t know what to say, or even…I feel like I’m going crazy.”

Namjoon was silent for a moment, as though giving Jimin time to think.

“But you…” Jimin said suddenly, swallowing the lump that appeared in his throat, “you can fix it? You can stop it?”

“Fix…?” Namjoon questioned uncertainly.

“My…my hemophilia,” Jimin said, suddenly on the verge of sobbing. “Whatever you are, you…you can fix me? You can make it stop hurting?” He was almost ashamed of how desperate he sounded, but it was a true, heart-wrenching desperation.

“Well not…not permanently, but…the symptoms, the bruises, yes,” Namjoon said sincerely. “Is that…do you want me to…?” Namjoon said, standing shakily from the chair next to the bed. He sat instead on the edge of the bed next to Jimin, eyeing him cautiously. “It might…it might be awkward for you. I’m…I guess you could say that I’m more used to the feeling, but…”

“Do it,” Jimin said breathlessly. “Please, I…I want to know what it’s like.”

“Well, frankly, it’s kind of gross, but—“

“Not that,” Jimin said. “I…I just want to know what it’s like not to hurt all the time.”

“Oh,” Namjoon breathed, eyes widening. “Okay, then I’ll just…” he chewed on his bottom lip. “Let
“O-okay,” Jimin agreed, gritting his teeth as he began to move. The pain was almost prohibitive, but Namjoon carefully steadied his body as Jimin turned his face to the side where it rested on a pillow.

“I guess I didn’t actually expect you to react so well to all of this?” Namjoon said, the pads of his fingers pressing lightly into Jimin’s skin as he pushed up the large shirt. “I thought for sure you’d be running away screaming.”

“I can’t run like this, sunbae,” Jimin mumbled, tensing nervously, almost afraid to look behind him. “Maybe I’ll run after I’m better.”

“Jimin?” Namjoon said. “I’m going to…my face is going to change, and it can be scary, so…please don’t look at me while I do this, okay?”

“Okay,” Jimin agreed, shivering again as the air conditioning reached his bare skin.

Namjoon’s broad hands rested against the curve of Jimin’s back, and he was only now realizing what a vulnerable, intimate position he’d agreed to put himself in. Then again, if Namjoon wanted to hurt him for real, no matter the circumstances, Jimin doubted he would be able to do anything to stop it.

There was a soft snap, like knuckles popping, and Namjoon’s hands added a little more pressure where they rested. The fingers stroked in what Jimin assumed was supposed to be a soothing manner, but they just ended up making him ticklish.

He jumped as the broad side of a wet tongue met the flesh of his back. It was a strange, alien feeling, and the tongue that traced his skin seemed unusually large compared to what he imagined a human tongue to feel like. Jimin braced himself as the warm, sticky sensation moved carefully over every inch of exposed skin. The latent panic had subsided, only to be replaced by an anachronistic sense of euphoria as his pain faded away. He’d never felt this way before. He’d never spent a moment without something causing him to hurt.

The tongue lathed from the base of his spine to below his neck, sending an impromptu shudder coursing through his body. Why did it feel so good? Was it something in Namjoon’s saliva?

He must have dozed off, because Namjoon was shaking him awake, an amused expression on his face as he licked his lips. “All done. How…how do you feel?”

“Okay,” Jimin agreed absently, blinking slowly.

“Hyung,” Jimin said slowly. “Thanks for fixing me. I…” he sniffled, overwhelmed by the lack of pain.
Namjoon looked conflicted for a moment. “Really, Jimin, it’s…it’s no problem. You…this is going to sound so messed up, but…you taste sweet, so…”

“Gross,” Jimin scrunched his face up in displeasure. “But…I guess I can’t complain when…”

“I’ll just…leave you to go to sleep, alright?” Namjoon said, standing from the bed. “Call if you need anything. We’ll hear you.”

“Okay,” Jimin said, burying his face in the softness of the pillow as he breathed an exhausted sigh. “Okay,” he repeated, basking in the sense of wholeness that permeated his body.

It was scary, but he was finally free.

At least for the moment.

Chapter End Notes

If you haven't read any of my other works yet, you'll probably like them if you like this one.
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Some part of Jimin knew that he was awake.

That he could move if he tried. That there was something strange about the warmth blossoming in his abdomen and the pinch of desire writhing through his body.

His own hands traced his skin under the covers, sending goosebumps trailing in their wake as he squirmed to find a more comfortable position. His thigh muscles were practically shaking as he spread his legs on instinct. A little confused whimper slipped past his lips as sweat dripped down the sides of his face.

He’d never felt like this before.

It was terrifying, but at the same time he couldn’t stop. It felt so good. He was so hungry for it.

His heart was beating harshly against his sternum, and he felt light-headed as he struggled to take a full breath. His hands spread against his stomach, wanting to go lower, but wanting to draw it out as long as possible. Since when was his skin so soft? Since when was he able to touch himself without it hurting? Why did everything not hurt? Just as his fingers began to inch past his waistband--

“Hoseok!”

Yoongi’s sharp voice, lowered to a rumble, had Jimin’s eyes shooting open, his chest heaving as he blinked in confusion and the haze of longing.

“Get out!” Yoongi ordered darkly, expression thunderous.

Jimin let his eyes shift to the side, where Hoseok’s face was flushed with something like shame. “I didn’t…I was just so hungry…I’m sorry,” he said, eyes absent their usual warmth. “It will never happen again, I swear, I—“

“Now!” Yoongi demanded.

“I’m sorry, Jimin,” Hoseok whined, eyes filling with tears as he fled from the room.

Jimin could only stare at Yoongi as the man stood uncomfortably in the doorway. “I brought breakfast,” Yoongi said awkwardly, “before Seokjin could eat it all.”

“Oh…” Jimin breathed, suddenly all too aware of the current state he was in. “Umm. Wh-what’s going on?”

“You…remember Namjoon explaining things last night, right? You didn’t block it out as some kind of trauma, did you?” Yoongi asked.

“No, I…I remember,” Jimin said, blinking slowly. “I remember.”

“Yeah, well. Some things cause fear in order to eat it. Hoseok…causes other things in order to eat them. We try to keep him fed, but he says humans are much more satisfying. He hasn’t eaten in a few days, but I didn’t think he would resort to this instead of just asking for it.”
“Eaten…?” Jimin whispered.

“Kid’s stuck with eating lust,” Yoongi said, watching Jimin’s face carefully. “I’m glad I didn’t get hit with that particular genetic hammer.”

Jimin flushed, feeling confused and betrayed and vulnerable and overwhelmed. “Could I take a shower?”

After a moment of silence, Yoongi’s eyes softened. “It’s right through that door,” he nodded his head to a door in the left wall. “I’ll bring you some clothes.”

Jimin nodded timidly, waiting until Yoongi stepped from the room before drawing the covers back from his body. He wasn’t in pain from any bruises, but his muscles ached with tension and exhaustion. His toes came into contact with chilly hardwood, and he shivered as the cool air brushed against his now-sensitive skin. The air conditioning was no joke.

He tip-toed into the bathroom like he was a trespasser, locking the door behind him and immediately reaching into the grand, glass-doored shower to turn it on and warm the water up. Though, with how fancy it looked, it probably immediately started at the perfect temperature.

He took a moment to stare at his reflection in the mirror.

He was oddly pale except for his cheeks, which were flushed red in discomfort and arousal. His eyes were tired and watery, dark circles sinking into the skin around them. Somehow, he’d already managed to chew at his lip, small beads of blood spilling from the wound and not likely to stop anytime soon. He’d probably done it when…

Shaking his head, desperately ignoring the still-present heat torturing his lower-half, Jimin pulled off the oversized, borrowed clothes, dropping them into a heap on the gray tile. He was used to self-denial, used to ignoring urges that he really wanted to fulfill. He reached a testing hand into the shower, and, satisfied with its temperature, stepped inside, closing the door behind him.

Rather than make any serious attempt at getting clean, Jimin’s legs refused to hold him up anymore. He pressed his back against the marble-looking wall and slid down until he was sitting on the floor, letting the hot spray patter over his body. Despite the steamy heat, a cold tremor wracked him as he curled up, seeking comfort.

Vampires, huh? People who were animals? Monsters that were…real?

Long, thin, pale fingers turning into grotesque, scaly claws, ripping at his skin. The flat of a tongue lapping at his blood, spreading indescribable warmth and comfort.

He let out a hysteric huff of laughter, running his hand through his now-wet hair, fingers digging into his scalp.

He hadn’t been afraid of his friends. Well, at least after he had gotten to know them. They were the first real friends he ever had. Namjoon had saved him. Yoongi had apparently been trying to save him all along. They were all kind to him. They looked out for him. Jimin had never had something like that before. But…

Hoseok was his friend, his hyung, but he’d still…

Jemin felt dirty just thinking about it. But even more than that, he was angry. On some level, he knew Hoseok didn’t mean any harm, but that didn’t stop the invasive feeling of betrayal. The vampire hadn’t meant any harm, either, but it still nearly killed him.
He resisted the impulse to curl his fingers around his upper arms as a surge of want forced itself to
the surface. That someone had the power to make him feel that way against his will was terrifying.

It didn’t seem like they had much control, these monsters. They just acted. Sometimes without
thinking. Just because they were hungry. And that scared him. He couldn’t live that way. He had
always been afraid of living that way. Afraid of people like that.

Namjoon had even admitted it. The night before was hazy, but Jimin could still remember that word.
Instinct. Namjoon had said they were instinctual.

Jemin was not. Jimin had to think. Jimin had to be careful.

He glanced down blearily, watching as the bruises formed on his skin from the earlier aggressive
self-caresses. There were a few streaks of broken capillaries, a few shadows of fingerprints, the usual
blossoms of red fading into blue. If it proved anything, it was that he couldn’t trust them. He just
couldn’t, not if he wanted to keep living.

Before he knew he was even doing it, heaving sobs were shaking his entire frame.

He almost died. He really could have died. It hurt so bad, and he’d been so scared. So, so scared.
He’d been certain he wasn’t going to make it. That someone would find his bloodless body behind
the convenience store, and then everyone would forget about him and move on with their lives.

Monsters were real.

Namjoon…Namjoon had the power to fix him. To fix everything.

But was it worth it?

A frantic knocking at the door had his heart jumping into his throat, jolting back to awareness as the
heat fogged the room.

“Jemin? Jemin, are you okay?” Namjoon’s voice called. “I don’t mean to bother you, but—do you
need help? Are you hurt?”

Jemin opened his mouth to answer, to reassure him somehow, to stop him from coming in, but
nothing wanted to come out except noises and sniffles.

“Jemin, I’m opening the door,” Namjoon warned.

Jemin winced as a loud crack echoed through the bathroom, the sound of the doorframe splintering.

Namjoon was afraid.

It was only Namjoon, but Namjoon was one of them.

“Jemin?” Namjoon said worriedly, peering through the steam and the glass door. “Are you okay?
Did you hurt yourself?”

“No,” Jemin managed, curling up even tighter. “I’m fine. You can leave.”

“If you’re fine, then why are you on the floor?” Namjoon said gently. “You can’t pretend these
things don’t matter with your condition!”

Jemin couldn’t work up the will to say anything as Namjoon cracked the door and turned off the
shower. Namjoon reached behind him blindly before bringing a towel into the shower, draping it
over Jimin as he kept his eyes fixed to the floor.

When Jimin was covered, Namjoon raised his eyes to look him over. “Are you bleeding anywhere?” His gaze settled on Jimin’s still-bleeding lip in concern. “Did you fall?”

“No,” Jimin said tightly, anxiety hammering around inside his chest. “I just…I’m confused.”

“About what?” Namjoon said softly. “About…what I told you?”

“About everything!” Jimin suddenly raised his voice.

“Okay,” Namjoon said placatingly. “Okay, we…we’ll talk about it, okay?” He glanced around, frowning. “But maybe we can get you out of the shower first?”

Jimin hesitated, flushing as he looked down at his body. “Okay,” he finally agreed, pressing one hand to the wall as he used his other to hold up the towel. His muscles were locked in place from the stress, making it take longer than usual. Namjoon watched him carefully to make sure he didn’t fall, backing away from the door as Jimin stepped out.

Jimin glanced over at the door, which was practically off its hinges. Namjoon was strong. He was in way over his head.

“What is that?” Namjoon said, voice low and gravelly, pupils noticeably dilating. “You are hurt!”

Jimin followed his line of sight to one of the bruises. “Did…Yoongi hyung not tell you?” Jimin said uncertainly.

“Tell me what?” Namjoon said.

“Hoseok hyung,” Jimin hesitated. It didn’t feel right to tell Namjoon when there was murder in the other man’s eyes. But Jimin, for whatever reason, believed that Namjoon would keep him safe. Would stop it from happening again. Selfishness would always win out. “He was hungry, I guess,” Jimin finished lamely, hunching inward. “And I guess I did this to myself in the process.”

“That fucking—“ Namjoon growled, fists clenching. He closed his eyes, breathing deeply, jaw clenched. “Jimin,” he said, opening them again. “Jimin, I’m so sorry. I swear that something like that won’t ever happen again. Hoseok doesn’t mean to, he just—he gets so hungry, sometimes. And we try, but we’re not enough. That still doesn’t excuse it, but…I’m just…I apologize on his behalf.”

Jimin shrugged. “I guess…I guess I’m lucky to even be alive, so…” he trailed off, trying to calm his racing heart. His thoughts were a maelstrom of confusion.

“I hesitate to even offer, after…” Namjoon said, brow furrowing. “But, if you want—and only if you want—I can fix it for you.”

Jimin pursed his lips, glancing down uncomfortably. It was too much, too soon. But he would be lying if he said he didn’t want to feel that pain-free euphoria again. “Okay,” Jimin said quietly.

“Okay?” Namjoon asked, seeking confirmation in Jimin’s eyes. “You can say no and I won’t be offended. I just want to help. That’s all I ever wanted.”

Jimin nodded sluggishly. “Just…go slow?”

“Of course,” Namjoon said, leading them over to the twin sinks and helping Jimin settle on top of the countertop. Namjoon hesitated. “Close your eyes for me?”
Jimin complied, frowning. He wondered how horrible it must look, for Namjoon to refuse to let him see it. What he really looked like. What the monster looked like.

Gentle, warm hands peeled away the towel, settling the fabric in his lap and leaving the rest of him exposed. “Are you ready?” Namjoon asked, speech rumbling deep in his chest. “Tell me to stop if you’re uncomfortable.”

“Mmm,” Jimin hummed, bracing himself.

The tongue worked its magic once again, lathing over Jimin’s skin with wetness and sunshine. And it really was like magic. Maybe a drug on which he was quickly becoming hooked. If monsters were real, then magic tongues weren’t so strange. Or maybe Jimin was just having a complete mental breakdown.

“Jimin?” Namjoon said, breaking the spell slightly. “Your mouth…it’s still bleeding.”

“Oh,” Jimin breathed.

“So…” Namjoon said, breath tickling Jimin’s cheeks. “Is it okay?”

“Is what okay?” Jimin mumbled.

Namjoon chuckled at the dazed sound of his voice. “Is it okay if I fix it…there?”

“Hmm,” Jimin said, not really understanding what the problem was, as long as he could keep feeling like this.

He soon realized what the problem was as Namjoon’s lips pressed softly against his own, his tongue flicking carefully against the bleeding wound.

It was like something exploded inside of Jimin’s brain, raining fire and light and sheer, utter embarrassment.

Namjoon pulled away, leaving a red-faced Jimin in his wake. “All better?” Namjoon questioned. “You can open your eyes now.”

Jimin had forgotten that he’d closed them. He felt exhausted all over again. “Good as new, I guess,” Jimin said. “Umm, could I borrow some more clothes?”

“Oh! Oh, of course, I…of course,” Namjoon shuffled awkwardly, ducking his head as he scuttled from the bathroom.

Jimin was having a difficult time reconciling this man with the monster.

Chapter End Notes

I’ve been busy, and finals are around the corner. Thanks for not hating me.
Chapter 8

It was awkward.

That was all Jimin could think as he sat at their large, round dining room table.

The white square dinner plate in front of him was heaped with food, but he could only bring himself to push it around with his chopsticks as Seokjin looked at him expectantly. Taehyung and Jungkook bickered among themselves off to the side, and Hoseok, Yoongi, and Namjoon had left earlier, giving him pitying looks as they passed by.

By Korean standards, their home was the biggest that Jimin had ever been inside, with half a dozen bedrooms and an equal number of bathrooms, three floors of space, and interior decoration that screamed money. Jimin had no idea where they were, but it couldn’t be in the city. Right?

“Does it taste bad?” Jin questioned uncertainly. “I usually only cook for myself, so I made it to my taste. We can get you something else, if—“

“No!” Jimin said quickly, scooping up a piece of kimchi and shoving it into his mouth. “It—it’s fine! It’s good! I’m still just…” he sighed, shoulders slumping. “This is all just a lot.”

“I understand,” Jin said, eyes softening. “It’s quite a shock, even to us, when we come into our own. You were attacked and almost died, Jimin. We won’t hold it against you if you freak out a little. A lot,” he amended.

“I just…” Jimin began, trailing off indecisively. “I don’t know what I should be doing. If there’s a way I’m supposed to be feeling, I don’t know what it is.”

“I don’t think there’s a standard way to react when learning your classmates are, well, different,” Seokjin said calmly. “Would it make you feel any better if I answered any questions you may have? Joon has the worst habit of being academic and then running away. I can probably explain things better.”

“Okay,” Jimin nodded timidly. “So, food…” he glanced down at his plate. “You eat it?”

Seokjin laughed, slapping his hand against the table, which startled Jungkook. “We do. We eat a lot of it. Only Hoseok and Yoongi need anything else.”

Jemin glanced up sharply. “Yoongi hyung, too?”

“Don’t tell him I told you, but he also has a strange relationship with fear,” Seokjin said conspiratorially. “He pretends he doesn’t, though.”

Jimin frowned, thinking. Was that why he was so afraid of Yoongi, even when the other had done nothing to cause it? Was it some kind of supernatural reaction?

“And Namjoon said that…he called you animals?” Jimin said.

“Ah,” Jin sighed. “Yes, I suppose that is the best way to put it. Because we’re like this, we’re stronger and faster than most things. When that side of us takes over, our physical appearance also changes. Our nails and teeth sharpen, our hair gets a little longer, our bones groan and shift as our shoulders even broaden. It hurts for a fraction of a second, and I couldn’t explain to you why it happens. There’s not much I can say to explain why any of this happens.”
“Namjoon wouldn’t let me look at him,” Jimin said softly.

“He’s shy,” Seokjin said. “He li…well, I mean, he thinks of you as a friend, and he doesn’t want to scare you.”

“I don’t see how anything could be scarier than what happened last night. At least, I think it was last night?” Jimin looked at Jin in askance.

“Actually, it was two nights ago,” Jin said.

“Great,” Jimin sighed.

“Don’t worry, I got all your notes taken care of,” Taehyung interjected.

“But we don’t even have the same classes except English?” Jimin said.

“I have my ways,” Taehyung said with a nod and a wink.

“Hyung,” Jungkook said suddenly. “Are you okay?”

“Umm,” Jimin said, caught off guard. “I think so? Namjoon fixed everything, I think, so…” he glanced over his arms, checking for missed bruises out of habit.

Jungkook flushed scarlet. “By fixed, you mean he…?”

At Jungkook’s embarrassment, Jimin also felt his cheeks burning. “Yeah.”

“I feel like, as the first friend, I should have got to lick him first,” Taehyung said wryly.

“Shut up!” Seokjin rolled his eyes, swatting him on the arm.

“I’m just saying,” Taehyung muttered, reaching out to play with Jungkook’s hair. “And why are you acting all shy, Kookie, it’s not like we haven’t done w—“

“Hyung!” Jungkook said, slapping a hand over Taehyung’s mouth.

“Aside from that thing,” Seokjin said, jerking his chin towards Taehyung, “we’re pretty normal, Jimin. We don’t live crazy, fantastic lives. We just keep to ourselves and avoid the other things that are out there when we can. Anything else, well…that’s for our future selves to deal with. I expect you’ll be receiving an apology, soon.”

“Apology?” Jimin said, brow furrowing.

“Things the other night clearly did not go as they were expecting. No doubt they’ll be worried that you’ll report them to the authorities, and then they’ll be forced to move on.”

“You mean, those fear…vampire…things? They’re going to try and talk to me?” Jimin exclaimed. “But, I…I don’t want that! I never want to see them again!”

“Hey, hey,” Seokjin soothed. “It’ll be okay. We’ll make an effort to always be around for the next few weeks so you won’t have to be alone if it does happen. They aren’t going to try again, they don’t want anyone dead.”

“But…” Jimin said, already chewing at his lip, blood beading to the surface. “I’m scared,” he admitted, fingers curling into fists under the table.
“Oh, Jiminnie,” Seokjin said. “Everything will be alright. We won’t let anything happen to you.”

“That didn’t stop something bad from happening before,” Jimin said softly.

“Hey,” Taehyung said gently, reaching out to press a finger lightly to Jimin’s bottom lip. “You’re bleeding, Jim.”

“Oh,” Jimin said reaching up to replace Taehyung’s finger with his own. “Sorry, I…stress chew. Not so great when you have a condition like mine.”

“Jimin, Hakyeon and his group really aren’t evil,” Seokjin said. “They just have unfortunate biological needs. They’ll just want to make sure you won’t tell other people about them.”

Jimin huffed. “Who on earth would believe me, anyway?”

“I would!” Taehyung said.

“Shut up,” Jin repeated. “Jimin, do you have any more questions?”

Jimin had a lot of questions, but he had no words with which to form them. The ever present, “How can this even be real?” and the more popular, “What am I supposed to do now?” He really wanted to forget that any of it ever happened. He wanted to go to class and joke around with them like normal.

“Umm,” he finally said, shifting in his seat, “why…are you like this? Why can you do what you can do?”

Seokjin sighed. “I wish I had a good answer for you. The truth is, none of us really know why. It just so happens that each of our families produces something like us every decade or so. We…are considered a mark of pride and honor for them. They send us here to learn from and bond with each other, and then…” he sighed again. “Well, that doesn’t matter right now. What’s important is that we mean no harm to anyone, and that you don’t need to be afraid of us.”

“Right…” Jimin whispered. Much easier said than done. “Then, why does Namjoon’s…animal side?…think of me like family? I really…I still don’t understand that, even if he tried to make some sense of it.”

“Another mystery for us, as well,” Jin said. “But it’s undoubtedly true that Namjoon’s other cares for you deeply.”

Jimin shifted uncomfortably.

“It’s obviously because he—“ Taehyung began.

“Kim Taehyung!” Jin said, voice hard. “No speculation allowed.”

“It’s not speculation if it’s obvious,” Taehyung muttered.

“Namjoon has always been…strong,” Seokjin said carefully. “He’s always been a little stronger, a little faster than the rest of us. That means that his other side can sometimes take over in a more obvious way than ours. But that also means it does things that we don’t understand. We’re in the dark about it as much as you are.”

“I somehow doubt that,” Jimin said, shaking his head. “It’s pretty dark for me.”

“And I’m really, truly sorry about that. If I had answers, I would give them to you,” Seokjin said sincerely. “And if there’s anything I can do to make you feel better, just say the word. I know, I
know that this is a lot. Please, if we can do anything, we’re here for you. All of us.”

Jimin smiled weakly. His head was still a mess of denial and anxiety and traumatic flashbacks to bleeding out behind the convenience store. Every time he inhaled, he still imagined a sharp slice of pain across his chest. His heartbeat quickened. “I should probably get home,” Jimin said, standing suddenly, his chair scraping against the hardwood floor. “It’s, umm, late, and I, umm—” he stuttered.

“Hyung, are you really okay?” Jungkook questioned. “You can spend another night if you need to. We don’t mind, honest!”

“I don’t know,” Jimin sighed, rubbing at his forehead. “I honestly don’t know. But I…I probably will be. I always am. I don’t really have a choice.”

“And…” Seokjin said carefully, “you’ll make sure to keep this between us, won’t you?”

For some reason, Jimin felt hurt at the insinuation. Then again, they didn’t really know each other that well, at all. For all they knew, Jimin would go around telling everyone that his kind-of school friends had animal powers. For all Jimin knew, they would hurt him for it.

“I don’t have anyone else to tell,” Jimin said quietly. “You guys are…pretty much it. Is my stuff in this house somewhere?”

“I’ll get it,” Jungkook said, practically sprinting out of the dining room.

As Jimin pushed his chair back under the table, he turned only to bump straight into Taehyung’s chest. When he’d gotten there, and how he’d done it without Jimin noticing, was yet another mystery. Taehyung reached out quickly to steady him, hands barely putting any pressure on his arms in a concerted effort, Jimin presumed, to be careful.

“Want me to fix that, now that you know?” Taehyung questioned, looking down at Jimin’s mouth. It was really unfair that everyone was taller than him.

“I…ummm…think I’ll be okay,” Jimin said, face flushing. He still remembered the brush of Namjoon’s lips against his from that morning.

Taehyung pouted but relented, stepping backwards and turning towards the doorway. “I’m going to grab my phone. Meet in the garage?”

Seokjin nodded.

“You have a garage?” Jimin said.

“We kind of need it for the cars,” Seokjin said absently, picking up Jimin’s still-full plate and briefly returning to the kitchen to dispose of it. He came back into the dining room and gestured that Jimin should follow him. “Are you sure you’re feeling well enough to go home?”

“Cars?” Jimin said, flabbergasted. “As in more than one?” He ignored the question. Even if he didn’t feel well, he needed to be in his own, safe room again. He needed something to be normal again. He followed Jin through several rooms until he pushed open a door on the side of the house.

It revealed, as Jin promised, a large garage with a smooth concrete floor and tools lined on the walls. It smelled like metal and something else Jimin couldn’t quite place, something floral that didn’t seem like it would belong in a car garage.

They weren’t crazy, expensive models, but there were definitely three cars parked in the garage.
“The others took the SUV,” Seokjin said, grabbing a set of keys from a hook on the wall. “We’ll just take the sedan, then.”

All Jimin could do was swallow and nod.

“Can I drive?” Taehyung practically shouted, popping his head through the doorway that connected to the house.

“Ha, no,” Seokjin deadpanned. “How many times did you fail, again?”

Taehyung pouted again, a low whine issuing from the back of his throat. “I passed eventually!”

“I’m not unconvinced that you bribed someone to make it happen,” Jin countered.

“Here!” Jungkook said, pushing past Taehyung and thrusting Jimin’s backpack forward. “Ugh, your clothes are in here, but they’re pretty…destroyed. I just wasn’t sure if you would still want them, and I didn’t want to throw them away without your permission even if Joonie hyung said I could, and I tried to get all the bloodstains off of your bag too, which I think went pretty well because nothing is obvious and I’m pretty good with laundry, but there might still be a few—”

“Geeze, Kookie, breathe,” Taehyung said, slapping him on the back.

“Thanks, Jungkook,” Jimin said, smiling tightly as he indeed spotted some faded bloodstains on the bottom of his backpack. His blood. “I…I really appreciate it.” He was throwing all of it away as soon as he got home.

“No problem!” Jungkook said, smiling brightly.

Jimin had been wrong when he assumed that they lived outside of the city, but he’d never thought a neighborhood like this could exist inside of Seoul. Full of abnormally large houses, manicured lawns, bright blue swimming pools. Jimin had never thought of himself as poor, but he couldn’t help but feel the weight of the gap between them.

Most of his parents’ spare income was put into savings in case he needed more treatment, or in case he had an accident and had to go the hospital. He always felt bad for that, but he felt even worse that he couldn’t change anything, even if he wanted to. All he could do was be careful and hope they never ran out because he hurt himself one too many times.

Who knew that all it took to solve the problem was…

“—imin?”

“Huh?” Jimin said, jolting to attention.

“Ugh, never mind, just…make sure you get some rest when you get back home, okay?” Seokjin said. “I don’t know if Joon already told you this, but healing itself can take a toll on your body, especially with your…illness. Even if you decide not to go to class tomorrow, we’ll make sure your professors know that you’re sick, so take all the time that you need.”

“Okay,” Jimin said softly.

Seokjin kept up a consistent barrage of chatter as he drove towards campus, the traffic crawling along slowly. Jimin stopped paying attention, zoning out as his head emptied its thoughts and his eyes caught on objects of interest that scrolled past the window. He just needed to not think for a while.
“Jimin?” Seokjin said gently. “We’re here.”

Jimin glanced at him, surprised to see that they were already at his apartment building. He couldn’t help but look down the street as he climbed out of the car. He didn’t know what he was expecting, but it definitely wasn’t the convenience store looking completely normal. Everything looking completely normal.

His phone vibrated where he’d shoved it into his pocket, and Jimin retrieved it with unsteady hands.

*This is Namjoon. Please text or call if you ever need me. I'll be there. I promise.*

Jimin sighed at the seemingly heartfelt words.

“Do you need any help going up the stairs?” Jungkook asked.

“I’ll be fine,” Jimin said dully, fatigue hitting him like a battering ram. “I’ll be fine.”

The second he was through the door, he was face first against the cushions of his couch. He really wanted to groan, to cry, to scream, but he didn’t want to disturb his neighbors.

To get away from all of his thoughts, there was nothing to do but sleep.
Chapter 9

The anxiety hit him like a slap to the face. Harsh, and somewhat unexpected, considering that he’d been sure he could manage.

He’d been through so much with his condition that he’d really thought he could cope with anything. That he’d be strong enough to avoid falling into that pit of despair that always lingered at his back. It turned out he did have a breaking point, and that was finding out that monsters were real.

And that they would go looking for him.

It was too much.

Jimin groaned, pressing his face into his pillows and trying to force himself to go back to sleep. At least when he was asleep, he didn’t have to think about anything at all. Thoughts were dangerous and scary. Sharp claws and dying and warm tongues. It was a mistake, the whole thing was a mistake.

He groaned again as his heart continued to pound, working himself up from the stress and the tension. Jimin sighed, sitting up and massaging at his chest. He was getting lightheaded from his racing pulse. Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted his phone, which he retrieved with trembling fingers.

He tried to unlock the screen, but it was dead. A few nights spent without charging.

Jimin froze, phone slipping from his suddenly numb fingers at the noises that rang from his kitchen. Was…was it them? Had they come for him already?

A sharp, terrifying image of the beautiful monster flashed before his eyes.

Surging up from his bed, Jimin fumbled around in the dark until his fingers brushed against his phone charging cable. He managed to plug it in without electrocuting himself, silently begging his phone to absorb energy faster. After two solid minutes of panicked breathing, the screen finally came to life.

The first text open in his messages was Namjoon’s, the one that he had never answered. Of course. Namjoon there’s someone in my house. Jimin swallowed, sending it quickly as a cold sweat broke out against the back of his neck. His phone vibrated.

I know.

It’s me.

Sorry.

“Fucking—” Jimin breathed, rolling his eyes as he squeezed his fingers around his covers in irritation. He was already good enough at giving himself heart attacks, he hardly needed help.

Jimin climbed slowly out of bed, frowning when his joints protested. He shuffled into the kitchen, peeking his head around the corner of the hallway. Namjoon was nowhere in sight, but the table was set with containers of steaming food. “Namjoon?” Jimin said uncertainly. “Sunbae?” When nothing but silence greeted him, Jimin took hesitant steps forward.
His attention found a bright pink sticky note on top of his table.

*Jin asked that I leave this for you. I'm sorry if I scared you. Please rest well. KNJ.*

Jimin sighed, staring down at the food. It’s not like he didn’t appreciate the gesture, but no one had to break into his apartment just to make sure he ate something. His eyes flicked curiously towards his front door, which was still locked. Great, he definitely wasn’t going to have nightmares about people breaking in after that.

Jimin’s stomach chose that moment to grumble loudly. Giving into temptation, he sat down and began shoveling the food into his mouth. It felt like he hadn’t eaten in years.

Still, there was also an unexpected element of ease, even despite the anxiety. It was because he didn’t have any bruises. Not yet, anyway. And so before the next disaster happened, he supposed he’d better enjoy it.

Jimin shuffled back into his room, having no will to go to school. He should. He knew he should. But the thought of going outside was enough to give him a panic attack. He checked his phone again.

*Let me know when you’re ready.*

Jimin frowned. *For what?*

*Anything. I’ll be there.*

Jimin swallowed, staring at the words that seemed so sincere. Everything about Namjoon seemed sincere.

But everything about Namjoon was dangerous.

It was ingrained for Jimin to avoid dangerous.

Could he avoid Namjoon? Did he want to? Especially when Namjoon could fix him.

There was another message notification. *Do you want to work on pre-lab stuff? No pressure dude but it’s due tomorrow and I’m dying.* Jimin blinked. Jooheon. Shit. He’d been MIA on his half of the work while he’d been out of it.

*Sorry! I’ve been sick for a few days. Library?* Jimin typed quickly.

After receiving a thumbs-up emoji, Jimin threw on some comfortable clothes and splashed cold water on his face, running his hand through his hair until it was somewhat flattened from its prior crazy state.

He glanced down at his phone again, weighing the pros and cons of telling Namjoon.

Pros: protection from monsters.

Cons: protection in the form of a monster.

Jimin sighed.

*I’m going to the library to do some work.*

Unplugging his phone from the charger, he shoved the charger, his computer, and his biology
notebook into his school bag. He grimaced at the bloodstains still visible on the bottom. He hadn’t had time to buy a new one when he was sleeping away his trauma. He would have to make do until he had the chance to get a replacement.

By the time he scooped up his keys by the door, his phone was buzzing again.

*I’ll wait for you outside.*

Jimin frowned. Again, it wasn’t like he minded the intention, but he did mind that they were taking over without any of his input. Maybe it had something to do with Namjoon’s “other” side. Even though he wasn’t the oldest, the others seemed to defer to his decision-making. Was it because he was the strongest?

Jimin shook his head. Speculating about supernatural creatures was about as useless as he would be in a fight against one.

Fuck. They were real. He wasn’t sure he was ever getting over that.

By the time the dangerously rickety elevator had made its laborious journey to the ground floor, Jimin’s palms were uncomfortably sweaty with anticipation. It would be awkward. He wouldn’t know what to say. And he knew that Namjoon wouldn’t exactly help in that department, either.

He hesitantly pushed open the door, eyeing the sidewalk for Namjoon’s distinct figure. He was dressed in jeans and a thin turtleneck for the cool weather. Jimin shivered and then sighed when he realized he’d forgotten his jacket.

Namjoon blushed when they made eye contact, immediately looking down at the ground as Jimin made his way over. It was actually kind of…cute. Fuck. Monster. Monster.

“Hi,” Jimin said softly, readjusting the strap of his bag.

Namjoon’s eyes flicked to the movement. “Hi, Jimin,” Namjoon offered him a small smile. “I’m really sorry I scared you earlier.”

“So why…” Jimin hesitated. “Why didn’t you stick around?”

“Did you want me to?” Namjoon said, something slight and hopeful lacing his words.

Jimin shrugged, ignoring the strange sense of guilt settling in his stomach. “I wouldn’t have minded the company, I guess.”

“Right…” Namjoon sighed, eyes settling on Jimin’s bag again.

“What?” Jimin said, confused, looking down at the strap.

“Huh? Oh, nothing. It—it’s nothing. You were headed to school?” Namjoon said.

“Yeah, I…I owe my lab partner some work,” Jimin said, starting for the direction of campus. “I’m normally on top of things, but I guess almost dying will do that to a person.”

“I’m sorry,” Namjoon said.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Jimin sighed, crossing his arms over his chest in an attempt to dispel some goosebumps.

Namjoon was quiet for a few minutes, but the silence didn’t feel uncomfortable, even over the
elephant vampires in the room. Instead, Jimin admired some of the trees that had fully changed color for autumn. A week earlier, only a few had been brown and orange, but now they were all bursting with color. Before he realized he was doing it, he was already opening his mouth to speak. “I love autumn, but I always get a little worried before winter.”

“Why’s that?” Namjoon said, brown eyes widening in curiosity.

“Well, the more snow there is, the better chance I have of falling down,” Jimin huffed. “And, you know,” he waved a hand up and down his body, “I’m like this.”

Namjoon frowned, but his eyes were kind. “If you need any bruises taken care of, I’m your guy.”

“I don’t know,” Jimin said, “Taehyung seemed pretty interested.”

Namjoon’s frown deepened. “Did he try anything? I can have a talk with him if—”

“No, it’s fine,” Jimin insisted. “He was just fooling around. I think. I never really know. I think that’s what people call charm.”

Namjoon’s lips jutted out in what Jimin would have sworn was a pout. “I don’t have any right to keep you, but I don’t like the idea of anyone else healing you.”

Jimin’s heart stuttered. “And…and why’s that?”

Namjoon hesitated. “We’re at the library.”

“Oh,” Jimin blinked, looking over at the building.

“Do you mind if I wait for you?” Namjoon said.

“I mean, I don’t mind, but I don’t know how long I’ll take,” Jimin said, shuffling his feet.

“That’s fine,” Namjoon smiled. “I’m a student too, you know. I can keep myself busy.”

“Oh, umm, right,” Jimin nodded, turning to climb the stairs carefully. “I’ll text you, then.”

“Jimin,” Namjoon said.

Jimin paused, turning his head over his shoulder to look at him. “Hmm?”

“I…it’s nothing, sorry,” Namjoon said shaking his head.

Jimin suppressed the urge to question him, reminding himself that it was better to stay out of things that weren’t his business. He couldn’t just change his whole survival strategy because of these people.

Jimin spotted Jooheon on the reference floor, snoring loudly at a table and surrounded by a stack of encyclopedias. Shaking his head in amusement, he set his things quietly on the floor and stole the file folder at Jooheon’s side.

His lab partner had filled in a good third of the diagrams, his messy handwriting barely legible. But, like Jimin, Jooheon cared a lot about science, and so Jimin had no doubt that the information had been carefully researched.

Jimin sighed as he looked through the blanks, filling in some of the information he knew offhand. By the time he was done, he had another third of the pages filled in. Eyeing the heavy books around
Jooheon, he decided to take a page from his partner’s book and seek out reference books with the other information. Surely there was something around that had some nice, detailed, labeled pictures.

He wandered through the reference stacks, squinting in the dim lighting as he read some of the titles. Chemistry. Pharmacology. Geology. Geography. Ah, there it was. Biology.

Jimin stepped into the row, fingers tracing the broad and dusty spines until he spotted one that sounded promising. He sighed. Top shelf. Figured. Balancing on his toes, Jimin reached up for the tome.

He startled violently as another hand reached over him and easily pulled the book from the shelf, a cloud of dust kicking up in its wake.

Jimin turned from the surprise, stumbling into a broad, warm chest.

“You okay?”

Jimin blinked, stepping away quickly and looking up—and up—into the stranger’s face. “Umm, I… yeah,” he muttered, flushing. “You scared me.”

“Ah, sorry,” the man said, large ears going red at the tips as he pushed shaggy brown hair out of his eyes. He was handsome, practically glowing as he bounced on his heels, towering over Jimin but not in a threatening way. It just seemed like he took up more space than a normal person. He gestured to his chest, where a name badge was pinned. STUDENT LIBRARY ASSISTANT PARK CHANYEOL. “People have a hard time getting to those top ones, and I just wanted to make sure you didn’t hurt yourself.”

“No, umm, no catastrophes yet,” Jimin said awkwardly, glancing at the book that was in the other man’s large hand.

“Oh! Here!” he said quickly, thrusting the book at Jimin, who accepted it gingerly. “Wow, your hands are small,” the other man said.

Jimin frowned.

“Oh! Shit! Sorry! I-I didn’t mean—sometimes I just say things, and they come out, and I’m really dumb! Sorry!”

Jimin sighed. “Don’t worry about it. It’s just a fact, after all.” He offered the man an uncertain smile. “You can’t be that dumb if you work at the library.”

“Hey, I don’t have time to read books when I’m always reshelving them,” Chanyeol joked. He flexed an arm, bicep bulging dangerously under the sleeve. Jimin swallowed. “You don’t get these from reading.”

“Ugh, yeah, I guess not,” Jimin said slowly. “Umm, thanks. I should…” he gestured with the book.

“Oh! Oh. Of course. Sorry.” The large-framed man backed out of the row, gesturing for Jimin to move in front of him. “Can I help you find anything else? Though, to be perfectly honest, I’m kind of new here myself.”

“No, I’m…I’m okay,” Jimin said. Chanyeol still followed like a puppy at his heels until Jimin settled back at his and Jooheon’s table, Jooheon blinking himself awake.

The smile slipped from Chanyeol’s face as his eyes quickly settled on Jimin’s bag. His nostrils flared.
Jimin’s heart skipped a beat. Surely…surely not. No way. Chanyeol’s smile quickly reaffixed itself as he looked at Jimin again. “You sure you didn’t hurt yourself?”

The blood. He could smell the blood. Jimin’s blood.

“I’m fine, thanks,” Jimin said stiffly, hand already clutching at his phone.

“Okay, well I…I’ll be around,” Chanyeol said, giving him a little wave. Jimin nodded, avoiding eye contact.

“Jimin?” Joohone slurred. “When’d you get here?”

“Not that long ago,” Jimin said, quickly opening a text message. *Is there someone like you that works in the library?*

“Man, I should start going easy on the going out,” Joohone yawned, wiping at his eyes and the drool leaking from his mouth.

*What do you mean like me?*

Jimin sighed. *You know what I mean.*

Joohone pulled the folder towards him, reading Jimin’s work. “Cool, man! Only a little more to go.”

“Hopefully this helps,” Jimin said, pushing the book to the center of the table.

Joohone turned to the index, smiling when he came across familiar terms. “Score!” Flipping through the pages, he opened the book to a detailed diagram of blood vessels.

*Did something happen?* Namjoon texted.

Someone smelled me, Jimin replied. *They did that thing that all of you do!*

“Does this look right to you?” Joohone said, pointing at a few figures.

Jimin glanced up, distracted. “Yeah, I—that looks right, I think.”

“Well, it’s going to have to be, ‘cause I don’t wanna’ do this anymore,” Joohone said, copying the words. “Ugh, school sucks.”

Jimin watched pensively as Joohone filled in the blanks, glancing over his shoulder in paranoia at the thought that there was yet another thing out there that could murder him if it wanted.

“Jimin?” Joohone prodded.

“Huh? What?” Jimin said.

“Geeze, you’re clearly still sick. Sorry to drag you out here, man. I think I got the rest of this, you should just go home and get some sleep.”

“I…” Jimin hesitated. This whole thing really wasn’t fair to Joohone. But Jimin was afraid. “Okay.”

Gathering his things, Jimin said goodbye to Joohone and weaved his way to the lobby. He nearly jumped out of his skin at the large hand that wrapped gently around his wrist. A stark contrast to their first meeting.
“It’s just me,” Namjoon said softly, thumb brushing against Jimin’s wrist. “You’re so cold, Jimin. Are you okay?”

“I…maybe?” Jimin sighed, relaxing a bit now that Namjoon was there. “I’m trying not to freak out right now.”

Namjoon’s nostrils flared as he stepped closer. “Someone…like me…?” Namjoon muttered, brow furrowing in thought. “No…not like me.”

“So that’s what it was,” Chanyeol said, still smiling as he approached them. “I was wondering. He was too cute to smell like dog. Didn’t seem like one of you. Would have been a shame to hurt him.”

Namjoon bared his teeth in a defensive snarl. “You have no business with me or him.”

“People are getting hurt, dog,” Chanyeol said derisively, friendly demeanor melting away. “We can’t look the other way any longer.”

“That has nothing to do with us,” Namjoon said.

“That remains to be seen,” Chanyeol said. “Regardless, your little friend smells like you. Like you, and like blood. And something else. I’m surprised you let him walk around like that.”

“What the hell is going on?” Jimin said, fingers unconsciously seeking out Namjoon’s.

“There are monsters, Jimin,” Namjoon said quietly. “And then there are people who hunt them. Though I’m not sure they qualify as people any more, when they’re more like the things they hunt.”

“Ouch,” Chanyeol said, pressing a hand to his broad chest.

“Come on, we’re leaving,” Namjoon muttered, lacing his fingers with Jimin’s.

“Doggy?” Chanyeol called. “Don’t let me catch you at night.”

Namjoon’s face was thunderous as he pushed out of the double doors, but he kept his grip on Jimin’s hand gently. He pulled them into the coffee shop, taking slow deep breaths as though he was trying to calm himself down.

“Sunbae?” Jimin asked hesitantly.

“They’re all talk,” Namjoon said, though it sounded more like he was trying to convince himself. “They must have come because of the attacks. Because of the coven. They shouldn’t bother any of us, because we don’t hurt people. We never have, and we never will.”

“He didn’t sound like he cared about that,” Jimin whispered.

“Hey,” Namjoon said, raising a hesitant hand to rest on top of Jimin’s head and stroke his hair. “No matter what happens, I told you that we would protect you, didn’t I? That’s true no matter what.”

Jimin swallowed. “I don’t think it’s me that needs protecting.”

Namjoon smiled fondly, the hand on Jimin’s head sliding down to cup his face. “We’ll be okay, Jimin. No one can touch me. And because of that, no one will touch you.”

Jimin really wanted to believe him.

“Are you two going to get a room, or what?” Yoongi deadpanned, staring at them from a table by
the window.
Jimin frowned, brow creasing as he calculated the number of vials remaining in the refrigerator drawer. There were only a few left after his monthly prophylactic treatment, and they were edging towards their expiration dates.

He sighed, closing his eyes and rubbing at his forehead, already feeling a headache coming on. Shutting the refrigerator door, he shuffled over to the living room to gather his things for school. He’d finally found the time and scraped together enough to buy a new backpack.

Being a hemophiliac was fucking expensive. If he and his family weren’t receiving aid from a national foundation, all four of them would be living on the streets to afford his Factor VIII. As it was, it already cost a ridiculous amount, even with the help.

He huffed in amusement at the brief, vulgar thought of asking Namjoon to salivate into a jar. If anything, it meant that he was already becoming too dependent on someone else. It wasn’t Namjoon’s responsibility to fix him every time he broke himself.

His left hip ached something fierce after bumping into a desk, but he stubbornly refused to look at the ugly bruise that had no doubt taken up residence there.

“Jimin,” Taehyung greeted as he stepped outside, enthusiasm uncharacteristically half-hearted and eyes shadowed by exhaustion.

Jimin narrowed his eyes in confusion. “Tae,” he said, head tilting in question.

“Did you do your homework?” Taehyung asked listlessly. “Who knew there were so many different vegetables? I didn’t even know half of those words in Korean.”

“Yeah,” Jimin said uncertainly. “I, umm, I guess I’m used to an extreme health diet, ’cause…it would be bad for my blood pressure to get high when I can’t really do too much physical activity…so…I know a lot…about vegetables…” he trailed off, watching Taehyung’s slumped shoulders. Should he ask what was wrong? That…that sounded like something a friend should do. And they were friends. And he should try. Monsters had feelings, too. “Taehyung, are you okay?”

“Oh,” Taehyung perked up slightly. “I’m…yeah.”

“Okay,” Jimin said, looking away awkwardly.

Taehyung shifted. “It’s just—” he sighed.

“Yeah?” Jimin said quickly.

“Things have been tough, lately,” Taehyung mumbled, words slurring into each other. “People—bad people—keep showing up here. Namjoonie hyung is working so hard to keep the worst ones out, but there’s only so much he can do. And on top of that, because of the bad people, the hunters are here. They don’t care at all what’s good or bad. If it’s not one hundred percent normal human, they want it dead.”

“I met one,” Jimin said softly. “He works at the library.” His thoughts drifted to the incredibly tall and frustratingly handsome Park Chanyeol, who’d seemed wholly inoffensive until he’d threatened Namjoon. Would someone who’d seemed so friendly really be capable of killing someone? While Jimin had been afraid of his friends at first, his thoughts had never once landed on a desire to harm
them in any way. Then again, he’d been too focused on himself, like always.

“At school?” Taehyung said, aghast. “And Joonie hyung let this happen?”

“I don’t think he let anything happen, but…like you said, he can’t control everything. The library is an equal opportunity employer,” Jimin said wryly. “And from his name tag…I think he’s a transfer student.”

“Agh,” Taehyung growled, hand running viciously through his hair. “They can never just leave us alone.”

“But why do they, I mean…they seem to be able to do the same things that you do, so why…” Jimin wondered.

“We were born this way, Jiminnie,” Taehyung smiled sadly. “They…they did something. They traded some part of themselves in order to become strong.”

“Traded…?” Jimin said. “Traded with whom? For what?”

“Those are the million won questions,” Taehyung shook his head. “Come on, we better get to class.”

Jimin frowned at the unsatisfying answer. There should be a reason and an explanation for everything. Since gaining new friends, there had been far more questions than answers. More anxiety than relief. The scientist in him was boiling with curiosity.

As they walked, Jimin watched Taehyung, unable to take his eyes off of the hunch of his broad shoulders, like he was trying to make himself smaller. “Taehyung?” Jimin said, the name slipping from his mouth before he was able to think about it.

“Yeah, Minnie?” Taehyung said, brown eyes drooping with melancholy.

“It’ll be okay,” Jimin said softly. Nothing had killed him yet, despite fate’s best efforts.

The corner of Taehyung’s lips pulled into a smile as he reached behind him and latched gently onto Jimin’s fingers. “Yeah,” he breathed. “Come on.”

Their hands were still connected as they climbed into their seats, Taehyung keeping them clasped under the desk as the professor began lecturing in hybrid Korean and English. Jimin’s cheeks flushed when he felt the stares of the others on the back of his neck, but he didn’t try to pull away. Taehyung wasn’t hurting him any, and he seemed to need it.

As the lecture ended, goosebumps pimpled Jimin’s skin as fingertips brushed against his arm. He was surprised to see that Yoongi had been the one to touch him, his usually flat affect replaced with agitation. “Hyung?” Jimin questioned, ducking his head in greeting.

“We need to talk,” Yoongi said, flicking his head towards the door.

Jemin’s eyes subconsciously sought out Namjoon, who was watching them closely. He could probably hear what they were saying. But it didn’t look like he was going to stop it. Jimin swallowed down the usual spike of fear that Yoongi’s presence provoked.

“Umm, okay,” Jimin agreed, quickly shoving his things into his bag and following Yoongi into the hallway. Yoongi didn’t pause, as Jimin had expected, but continued deeper into the building, peering into an empty classroom before ushering Jimin inside. “Hyung, what’s this about?” Jimin said nervously.
Yoongi sighed, reaching into a jean pocket and pulling something small from it. “I make you afraid of me, right?” he said.

“What?” Jimin blinked. “I… I mean, you… kind of, but I… I know you wouldn’t do anything—”

“I’m like one of them,” Yoongi continued. “One of those things that attacked you. Not exactly, but… some part of me draws out fear in others.”

“Oh,” Jimin swallowed. Some part of him must have already known that. “Hyung, I don’t—”

“Take this,” Yoongi said, holding his hand out, palm up. In its center was an old engraved coin, stained with rust-red and darker brown splotches that contrasted sharply with Yoongi’s pale skin. “Keep it with you at all times.”

“What is it?” Jimin questioned, narrowing his eyes to get a closer look at it. The stain looked too thin and translucent to be paint, but if it wasn’t paint, then…

“Is that… blood?” he whispered, stomach dropping.

“Mine,” Yoongi nodded, twitching his hand to encourage Jimin to accept the coin. “My blood resonates with fear. If you’re ever in a position where calling someone isn’t an option, if you touch this, then I’ll feel it. Your fear. It’s morbid, but it’s effective. All of the others have one, as well. You’re not special.”

Jimin haltingly reached for the coin, grimacing at the feel of the flaking blood on his skin. He quickly thrust it into his own pocket. “Thanks?” Jimin said. He would have to process his feelings about carrying a coin dunked in blood at a later time.

“We’ve reached a point where threats are creeping in from all directions,” Yoongi said quietly. “It’s total anarchy. A rebellion. I don’t want you to end up as collateral damage, Jimin.”

“Hyung,” Jimin said, strangely moved.

Yoongi sniffed, rubbing at the back of his head. “You have another class, don’t you? Get going.”

“Okay…” Jimin nodded, turning towards the door. Swinging it open, he nearly bumped into Namjoon’s chest as he stepped outside. “Sunbae!” he gasped, surprised.

“Sorry,” Namjoon said bashfully, stepping back from the door and pulling Jimin gently along with him. “I just wanted to make sure everything was okay.”

“It’s fine,” Jimin reassured him. “I just have to get to Anatomy before I’m late,” he said, glancing down at his watch.

“Oh. Oh! Right, of course,” Namjoon nodded. “I’ll see you later, then.” He chewed on his bottom lip, looking like he wanted to say something else, but he kept his mouth closed.

Yoongi nodded, brow furrowed. They were all acting more than a little strange that day. But he would never find anything out if he didn’t push at least a little. Make an effort to understand the others. “Did you, umm… did you want to hang out? Later?”

Namjoon’s eyes widened. “Yes! I mean, of course I— when? Where?”

“I’ll text you when I’m out of class, okay?” Jimin said, offering him a small smile.

“Okay, I’ll… I’ll be around.”
Jumin frowned as he turned, catching Namjoon cursing under his breath. That wasn’t the reaction he’d been expecting his smile to provoke, but Namjoon was a strange person.

Jumin had to sneak into Anatomy, cringing as the professor coughed, clearly noticing his late entrance. He took his usual seat with his head hanging low, quickly fishing out his notebook and pen to take notes on the professor’s presentation. A deep snicker behind him sent a cold shiver up his spine, because nothing about it sounded kind.

Jumin shook it off, twisting his shoulders to release some tension as he paid staunch attention to the details of the arteries and tried to avoid imagining how quickly he would die if one of his own were pierced. At least with biology, science could explain a lot of things. Jumin didn’t have enough protein in his blood, and so it didn’t clot. Then again, he doubted science could explain humans who were more like animals, and monsters that ate fear.

His hand was aching by the end of class, having taken so many notes that the muscles were sore. As everyone packed up, he texted Namjoon to let him know that he was done with class and to meet him at the campus café when he wanted to hang out. Jumin stood, slinging his bag over his shoulder with a wince.

“Boo,” warm lips whispered against the shell of his ear, and Jumin flinched violently, brushing his bruised hip against the desk as he jumped away.

“Fuck!” Jumin hissed, hand pressed against his panicked heart as Chanyeol grinned down at him.

“Wh—what are you doing here?”

“Learning about anatomy,” the man said, waving a textbook in the air. “Fancy meeting you here, Jumin.”

“How do you know my name?” Jumin demanded, his voice coming out a lot more meek than he’d intended.

“The dog announced it,” Chanyeol said, eyebrow quirking at Jumin’s tone.

Jumin frowned, gingerly rubbing at his side as the pain radiated outwards. “He’s not a dog,” Jumin muttered. Eyeing Chanyeol warily, he clutched his bag tighter and backed towards the classroom door.

As Chanyeol didn’t make any threatening movements, Jumin quickly made his way into the hallway, maneuvering through the hordes of students changing classes. While Jumin struggled with the ebb of the crowd, Chanyeol apparently had no problem, following a few feet behind him as he finally breached the front of the building.

“What are you doing?” Jumin said accusatorily.

Chanyeol tilted his head. “Existing?”

Jumin gritted his teeth. He’d planned on meeting up with Namjoon, but it would be a horrible idea to intentionally lead them towards each other. “Well, go do it somewhere else,” he said nervously. He rounded the corner of the building, hoping the other would go, but he still followed behind him.

“Why?” the other questioned. “Got something to hide?”

Jumin heaved a sigh before turning on his heel towards the sidewalk. Before he could blink, he was yanked backwards into Chanyeol’s body, one of Chanyeol’s large hands digging bruises into his wrist. Jumin froze in fear for a moment before he pushed himself away from Chanyeol’s chest,
stumbling until he lost his footing and ended up on the cement.

“You were about to get hit by a bike,” Chanyeol said defensively, pointing to a speeding student further down the sidewalk. He sighed, looking down at Jimin. “Do you need help?”

Jimin ignored the question as he swallowed, pulse fluttering erratically as he stared at his knees and palms in horror. Thin lines of red were already flowing through the scrapes, and even where his skin wasn’t lacerated, he already knew there would be bruises at the points of contact with the ground. “Oh no,” Jimin panicked, slick palms scrabbling for his cell phone. “Oh, fuck.”

“Come on, you’ll be fine,” Chanyeol sighed, reaching down to pull him up.

“Don’t touch me!” Jimin said, startling the other man with the intensity in his normally mild voice. He pressed one of his bleeding hands harshly to one of his knees, hoping to slow the blood flow as he used the other hand to unlock his phone. His fingers were beginning to slip, and he only just managed to get the screen to recognize his touch. If he hadn’t infused a treatment just that morning, the blood flow would have been ten times worse.

“Hey,” Chanyeol said uncertainly. “What’s wrong with you?”

Jimin easily found Namjoon’s contact, eyes watering in frustration when the screen wouldn’t cooperate. Finally, one of his many desperate taps registered with the glass. The phone rang for an agonizingly long time before Namjoon finally answered. “Jimin? I was just on my way to the café.”

“Sunbae,” Jimin said, trying to calm his breathing. “I fell down by the Sun Ah science building, and I’m bleeding. Can you—can you come get me, please?” Jimin hoped that he understood what he was really asking. Before this, Jimin would have either had to call an ambulance or limp home in a desperate attempt to reach his factor in time. But Namjoon would help him, right? Jimin wasn’t sure he was above begging.

“Of course, I’m coming right now,” Namjoon said. He must have heard the desperation in Jimin’s voice. “It’ll be okay, I’ll be there soon.”

“The…” Jimin trailed off, glancing nervously at Chanyeol, “the hunter…is here…He didn’t do it, it was an accident, but…you should know.”

“Okay,” Namjoon said. “Okay, I’ll deal with it when I get there. You’re not in danger right now, are you?”

“I don’t think so,” Jimin swallowed, watching in a sort of numb detachment as red rivulets made their way down his wrists. “Starting to feel a little…light-headed…” He was unable to tighten his grip as his phone was stolen by Chanyeol.

“What’s wrong with him?” he heard Chanyeol ask as he pressed his now-free hand against his other knee. In the grand scheme of monsters and hunters and anarchy, he would always feel pathetic for being so utterly defeated by his own body. “He just fell down, and now he’s bleeding like crazy! What? Blood disorder?”

Jimin watched as Chanyeol ripped off his flannel button-up, leaving him in a white t-shirt. With his bare hands, he easily tore the fabric into four pieces. Pushing Jimin’s hands aside, he wrapped each knee, and then each palm tightly enough to hurt.

“I didn’t expect to be tourniqueting on my second week of classes,” the man said wryly, nostrils flaring as he raised his blood-covered hand towards his face.
“If you hadn’t grabbed me, I wouldn’t have fallen,” Jimin managed, teeth chattering.

“If I hadn’t grabbed you, you’d have been gored by a bicycle,” he retorted.

Jimin frowned, closing his eyes tiredly.

“Hey!” Chanyeol barked, startling Jimin awake. “Keep those eyes open, leaky.”

Namjoon skidded to a halt in front of them, chest heaving and eyes nearly glinting red. Chanyeol stood to his full height, on the defensive, but Namjoon ignored him in favor of dropping to his knees next to Jimin. “Hey,” Namjoon said softly, running a hand through Jimin’s matted hair. “You look miserable.”

Jimin whined, cold sweat beading his forehead. “Sorry to ask this again, but…”

“You never have to be sorry,” Namjoon said, carefully undoing one of flannel pieces on Jimin’s palm and bringing the hand to his lips. He paused, glancing up at a transfixed Jimin. “Close your eyes for me?”

Jimin swallowed and nodded, dropping his lids. “It’s dirty—”

“Shh,” Namjoon said, tongue already soothing the sharp, burning pain.

“This is disgusting,” Chanyeol muttered, shuffling his feet.

“No one asked you to stay,” Jimin stuttered, enveloped by a wave of exhaustion.

Namjoon quickly took hold of his other hand, making short work of the remaining scrapes.

“I was talking about his face,” Chanyeol said lightly.

Namjoon grunted in annoyance, but otherwise focused on Jimin, hands gently peeling up the pant leg of the first knee. Jimin frowned at the deep rumble that came from his chest. “What is it?”

“So many bruises,” Namjoon’s gruff voice answered. “I know you can’t help it, but it hurts to see you like this.”

“Me more than you,” Jimin huffed, wincing in reflex as lips brushed his kneecap. By the time Namjoon had started on his second knee, he was already half-asleep, the warmth and healing sucking too much energy out of his body.

“He’s out like a damn light,” Chanyeol commented.

“He’s small, and he’s lost a lot of blood,” Namjoon grunted. “Why are you still here?”

“Well, I had to make sure you didn’t eat the kid,” Chanyeol said wryly.

Namjoon’s chest rumbled again, and Jimin could feel it from how Namjoon was propping him up. “How many times must my family explain? We harm no one. And most importantly, I would never harm him.” Namjoon shifted Jimin until he had his arms under Jimin’s knees and neck, lifting him up easily. “You need to find yourself a different target before you make me angry.”

“Is that a threat?”

“Yes,” Namjoon answered unflinchingly. “Now get out of my way.”
Jimin whimpered and shifted as his hip pressed against Namjoon’s stomach, bruise aching.

“What’s wrong?” Namjoon said softly.

Jimin blinked up at him slowly. “Just a bruise,” he slurred.

Namjoon sighed, looking down at him fondly. “I’ll take you home, and then we’ll fix it all over, okay?”

“Mm,” Jimin nodded, already falling back asleep. As long as Namjoon was there, everything would be fine.
Chapter 11

He drifted in and out in a haze of warmth, sensing more than knowing that Namjoon was the one sitting on the side of his bed, holding his hand. Namjoon’s hands were rough, but his grip was gentle, and while Jimin should have been annoyed or uncomfortable with the prolonged contact, even in his lucid moments he wasn’t. He wasn’t.

He didn’t know how long he’d been only half-conscious, but he found himself forced fully awake by Namjoon’s insistent voice. “Jimin, come on, you have to eat or drink something,” he said, resting a hand on Jimin’s shoulder but not shaking it. “Get up, sleepyhead.”

Jimin groaned but was able to sit himself up and lean against the headboard of his bed. “What time is it?” he rasped.

“Early evening,” Namjoon said, showing Jimin his phone screen. “You were out for a while, but you needed the rest. And even then…” he hesitated. “I still haven’t had the chance to work on the bruises. I-I didn’t want to do anything without your permission.”

“I…thanks…” Jimin said quietly, flexing some stiffness from his fingers, which were still stained by a few patches of blood. “You always help me, even though you don’t have to,” he sighed.

“Why do you say it like that?” Namjoon said, one eyebrow quirking upwards.

Jimin offered him a wan smile. “Ignore me, it’s just the self-pity talking. And you don’t have to worry about the bruises—like I’ve said a million times, I’m…I’m used to it. And I can’t get used to you fixing everything all the time.”

“Why not?” Namjoon said, frowning. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Maybe not now,” Jimin sighed. “But you’re going to graduate and—and move on with your life! It’s not like I can interrupt every time I get a papercut.”

Namjoon huffed, amusement playing across his features. “Of course you can.”

Jimin frowned in confusion. “Sunbae—”

“Why are you going to call me hyung?” Namjoon said. “You already do that for everyone else, why not me?”

“Because…it’s different…” Jimin struggled. “We’re different…aren’t we?” he said uncertainly.

Namjoon froze, a startled expression on his face. “What do you mean?” he said carefully.

“No, I just meant—” Jimin closed his eyes and exhaled slowly. “I just meant that, from the beginning, you’ve said that your other side…likes me. You always take care of me. You’ve risked the security of your family for…for someone like me. And I…to call you the same thing…it’s just different, isn’t it?”

“Yeah…” Namjoon said softly. “We’re different. Does that bother you?”

“Should it?” Jimin asked instead, a strange, unidentifiable emotion blossoming in his chest.

“I hope not,” Namjoon said, shaking his head. “I thought we’ve been doing pretty well at this whole friend thing.”
“Yeah…” Jimin agreed, voice still coming out raspy and quiet. “I just…I’m afraid of relying on you too much. Relying on any of you. I’m always afraid in general, but…but I…” He frowned, angry at himself and his own weakness. It wasn’t his fault that he was born with a blood disorder, but it *was* his fault for letting it completely rule his life and turn him into a selfish person.

“You’re an honorary family member now, don’t you know that?” Namjoon said. “You’re allowed to rely on us, considering how much we annoy you. I can’t speak for anyone else, of course, but being relied on makes me feel useful. Wanted, or needed. My, umm, my *other*—he likes doing things for other people, because it feels like his vocation. I think I’d go crazy if I had to focus on myself, because my head can be a scary place.”

Jimin blanched. Taehyung had said something similar about friendship. “But I’m *not* like that. I told you—I’m selfish. And I don’t want to rely on you when I know you’re just going to leave. You don’t know what it’s like to live like this. I’m not saying that I think your life is easy, especially with all the things you have to deal with, but you have *no* idea—” he cut himself off with a sigh. “It’s really hard, sunbae. It hurts, and it never *stops* hurting. So I can’t get used to you fixing it, because the thought of going back to the pain would be…it would just be too much for me.”

“Jimin, I swear to you that—”

“Don’t!” Jimin said quickly. “Don’t make promises that I know you won’t be able to keep.”

Namjoon’s head shot up, his back straightening, and Jimin thought he had offended him before Namjoon stood swiftly from his chair, nostrils flaring. “They’re here.”

Jimin’s heart skipped a beat. “Wh-who?”

A steady pattern of knocks sounded against Jimin’s apartment door. “Stay,” Namjoon ordered, tone brooking no argument. Jimin nodded uncertainly, but Namjoon was already slipping from his bedroom.

“What do you want?” Namjoon practically growled, loud enough to be heard outside the door. “You’re not welcome here. I think you’ve done enough damage.”

“I waited so that he would not be alone,” another voice said, muffled but light, almost sweet. “We must speak, Namjoon.”

“You must do nothing but be on your way,” Namjoon said darkly.

“Do you really want to have this conversation for the whole hallway to hear?” the voice said wryly.

Jimin heard Namjoon’s heavy sigh all the way from the bedroom. “This isn’t my home. I will ask for permission, but if he says no, then you leave.”

“That…is fair,” the other voice acknowledged.

Jimin kept his eyes wide open as Namjoon stalked back to the bedroom. “What’s going on? Who is that?”

Namjoo sighed, mouth forming a thin line as he pressed his lips together before answering. “When you were hurt…remember I told you about the coven. The—the vampires.”

Jimin shivered as his blood ran cold. “Is that…?” he whispered. Never could he have predicted that he would be having a conversation like this in his lifetime.
“Yeah,” Namjoon nodded. “But not the one who hurt you. This is…the oldest. I’ve…We’ve met. I don’t think he’ll do anything to you, especially not when I’m here. He says he wants to talk. But if you want him gone, I will make sure that he goes.”

“He would just come back though, wouldn’t he?” Jimin questioned. That was what Seokjin had suggested. “And what happens if you’re not here when he does?”

“…Does that mean you want me to let him in?”

Jimin glanced down at his lap, flexing his fingers before climbing carefully out of his bed. He winced at the soreness in his limbs from the remaining bruises, but found that he could walk just fine. “I’ll… I’ll do it, but if he tries any of the fear stuff…”

“He’s gone,” Namjoon promised.

Jimin took in a deep breath, wiping his blood-stained hands against his blood-stained jeans before making his way slowly to the door. He rested his hand on the knob, arms shaking as his mind flashed back to the fear and the terror of that night. He jumped when he felt Namjoon’s large hand on his back, but its presence and warmth helped calm him down immensely.

Twisting the knob, he pulled the door open slowly, nearly gasping at the sight. The man was young and beautiful. His very deep, golden skin was perfect and poreless, lit with its own inner glow. His nose was straight, his lips rounded and full and pink. He was much taller than Jimin, around the same height as Namjoon, and was dressed from head to toe in black, from his shoes to his long overcoat. It was a level of beauty Jimin had seen only once before, in the face of the pale man who had attacked him.

“Hello, young ones,” he said lightly, voice on the higher side, but still full. His dark eyes flitted by Namjoon before settling on Jimin. “May I come in?”

Jimin swallowed down his anxiety, nodding jerkily before stepping backwards and allowing the other to enter his apartment, steps silent despite his booted feet. If anything was clear, it was that this man was much more articulate than his attacker had been. The stranger looked around the small space with interest, walking towards the couch and sitting as though he belonged there. Namjoon rolled his eyes but waited patiently behind Jimin, deferring to his choices.

Jimin stood for a moment, steeling his nerves. He had no particular desire to be closer to his guest. He was sure the man could have eaten a whole meal from his fear.

“I think this conversation will be easier if we sit,” the stranger said, voice tinged with irritation as he waited for Jimin to do something. “Please.”

Jimin felt partially frozen, but managed to convince himself to move and sit down on his tattered chair. Namjoon took a position leaning against the headrest behind him. The stranger nodded in satisfaction. “I will introduce myself. My name is Hakyeon, and I am here to apologize to you on behalf of my child.”

“You…” Jimin blinked. He didn’t know what he’d expected. Maybe a threat or two. But certainly not an apology.

“To be clear, I am not apologizing for the necessary part of the act that is demanded of us in order that we may live. I am apologizing because, unaware of your circumstances, my child would have killed you, were it not for Namjoon,” Hakyeon explained calmly. “In his youth, he has not yet learned the complete difference between the scents of health and illness. We…I have impressed upon
him to only choose those who are strong. However, he was...so hungry, and there is nothing visibly wrong with you. I promise to further the education of my entire coven, to ensure that this does not happen again.”

Namjoon huffed in dissatisfaction.

“What would you have me do, wolf? Let my family starve?” Hakyeon hissed poisonously.

“There are other places to seek and find fear,” Namjoon said lowly. “You need not provoke it!”

“Yes,” Hakyeon said, “but it is never enough. What you are suggesting may keep them alive, but they would not be living. They would be hungry. In constant pain. You would not wish such an incomplete existence even on an enemy, wolf.”

“You give me too much credit,” Namjoon replied.

“What is it that you want from me?” Jimin finally said. “Just to apologize?”

“That, and...to ensure that you do nothing to harm my family.” He held up a hand at Jimin’s beginning protest. “I know that it is unlikely, considering your knowledge of others,” he glanced above him at Namjoon. “But I must be sure. I would do anything to protect my family. That is not a threat, young one, but I must know if we have to move on, or if we can remain here. They have grown...attached.”

“You have nothing to...to fear from me,” Jimin said, wincing at his own choice of words even as he said them. “But,” Jimin glanced up at Namjoon, unsure if this was something he should be saying, “maybe you should leave, anyway. To be safe.”

Hakyeon’s eyes narrowed. “Why do you say this?”

“Hunters,” Namjoon said gruffly. “They’ve caught on to you.”

Hakyeon’s tanned skin grew three shades lighter as his eyes widened in surprise and disbelief. Still, he spoke calmly, even as he picked at nonexistent lint on his silk shirt. “Have they? How do you know?”

“They’ve moved onto your hunting ground,” Namjoon said. “They’ve made contact with me. They know that you’re here, and they’re looking into...others. It would be best if you leave.”

“I see,” Hakyeon said quietly. “If you had said you were going to turn me in, I was going to ask for more time. I cannot leave. Not yet.”


“I know what I am risking, Namjoon,” Hakyeon said menacingly. “But my youngest is not yet fully formed.”

Jemin looked between the two in confusion, as Namjoon sighed and rubbed at his neck. “How much time do you need?”

“Three months, at least,” Hakyeon said quietly. “Why do you think I have not yet been able to seek new hunting grounds? I am not stupid. But by telling you this, it is clear that I am desperate. I cannot move my child while he is forming, Namjoon.” His dark eyes looked wet as he clenched his large hands in his lap. “You owe me nothing, and I ask nothing of you. Only that we continue the terms of our truce and that you do not interfere.” He sighed. “Thank you for the warning, I did not know that
they had arrived. I will take precautions. And as soon as possible, I will leave.” He raised his sad eyes to look at Jimin. “And young one…thank you for living. Taekwoon would not have been able to live with himself if you had perished.” Standing gracefully from his seat, he offered a shallow bow to both Jimin and Namjoon. “Until we meet again, though I hope that it is unnecessary.”

Jimin was expecting Hakyeon to head for the door. Instead, he disappeared in a mist of shadow. One second he was standing in front of them, and the next he was enveloped in the blackest darkness Jimin had ever seen, just swallowed completely up.

Jimin gasped in surprise even as Namjoon reached down a hand to rest on his shoulder and reassure him. Namjoon moved from behind the chair to take what was Hakyeon’s seat, wrinkling his nose in distaste.

“How—” Jimin stuttered, eyes as wide as saucers.

“He’s the oldest of his kind that I have ever met. No doubt he’s learned some parlor tricks after living that long. They get those stupid vampire stereotypes from somewhere, after all.”

“So he didn’t even really need to knock,” Jimin sighed. Namjoon reached out slowly and rested his hand on top of Jimin’s, as though giving Jimin the chance to object. Jimin welcomed the attempt at comfort, even if it was a bit awkward.

“As much as I hate that you were hurt, remember that I told you that they were not evil.”

“But what did he mean? Why can’t he leave? Even if someone is sick, or something, surely they can travel slowly?”

Namjoon smiled sadly. “Are you feeling sympathetic for them already? No, they…Granted, I don’t know everything, only rumors, but stories say that when they become like they are, they form something like a chrysalis. Like an insect. I suppose that moving it would have deadly consequences for the person inside.”

“I see…” Jimin said. “He was…different than I expected.”

“He is different than most of his kind,” Namjoon emphasized. “He’s learned to control himself, and he tries to teach the rest. But many never learn control. Most never want to. And then the hunters find them.” He frowned. “And as a result, I guess they find all of us.”

“Have they ever tried to hurt you?” Jimin said worriedly.

“Me?” Namjoon huffed. “No. I… I am one of the few who can be reasoned with, despite their big talk and their threats. And with the size of their hunting groups, I’m not sure that they can hurt me. I’m not bragging when I say that I’m powerful, Jimin. I’m also not proud of it. I was born this way, and I didn’t earn any of it. But the way things work in our world is that the one with power is the one on top.” He squeezed Jimin’s fingers lightly. “I only worry for those that I care about. I’m, umm, kind of a wimp when it comes to you guys.”

Jimin felt his heart flutter. “You’re already including me in that category? It’s only been a few weeks, sunbae.”

“And it took me less than an hour to care,” Namjoon shrugged. “I don’t make the rules, you can blame nature for that one.” He looked seriously at Jimin as he considered his next words. “Now, about the bruises…”

Jimin flushed, even knowing that Namjoon had already seen him practically naked. “U-umm—”
“I may have an idea that doesn’t involve a tongue bath,” Namjoon smiled wryly. “If you just need to ingest, I thought we could try a bit of a grosser kiss. If I bite my tongue, and you get some of my blood, it may have a similar effect as my saliva. I thought about it after… the bathroom. I can’t guarantee success, but you’re the scientist, right? We can experiment a little.”

Jimin made a face. “That sounds dirty, hyung,” he whined. “But if you think I’m scared of a little blood, you’d be wrong about that. It’s just my own that scares me.”

“So you’re not scared to kiss me?” Namjoon challenged, leaning forward.

“The Big Bad Wolf you are not,” Jimin huffed. “I’m just sorry you have to… you know…” he swallowed, embarrassed.

“Know what?” Namjoon said.

“I don’t know, subject yourself to kissing me?” Jimin shifted uncomfortably. “It’s not like I’ve had a lot of practice.”

“I’ve failed,” Namjoon sighed dramatically.


“If you think that kissing you makes me suffer in any way, then I’ve clearly been doing something wrong,” Namjoon deadpanned.

“Shut up,” Jimin ducked his head, self-conscious.

“It was just an idea,” Namjoon shrugged. “We don’t have to do anything that you don’t want to. I just want you to feel better.” Suddenly, he stood, shuffling towards Jimin’s kitchen. “But first, you have to eat real food. One cannot live on Namjoon alone.”

Jimin groaned, rolling his eyes. “You’re awful, sunbae.”

“Yeah,” Namjoon agreed. “Also, you should probably come and cook your own food so that I don’t burn your apartment down.”
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jimin stared at the large finger held out to him, grimacing at the droplets of blood gathering on the surface.

“I know, it’s awkward, but it’s better than kissing me first, right?” Namjoon shrugged, cheeks tinted pink. “What’s wrong? Weren’t you the one who said he wasn’t scared of a little blood?”

“I’m not sure licking your fingers is any better,” Jimin sighed. “And haven’t you seen any movies, before? I’m not scared, but…isn’t this how people, you know, turn into supernatural creatures, or something?”

Namjoon huffed in amusement at Jimin as his finger healed itself, leaving behind traces of dark dried blood. “People don’t…turn,” Namjoon said, sitting himself on the arm of Jimin’s old couch. “At least, I’ve never heard of anything like that happening. Like I said, all of this, it’s completely genetic.”

“So your family is like this, too?” Jimin asked quietly.

“Not…not exactly,” Namjoon sighed. “It’s complicated. I’ve heard stories that my great-grandfather was like me, but my parents are normal, as far as I know. The gene is carried down through the women in the family, and I guess they just…wait for an abnormality to happen. There’s a book…” he trailed off, shaking his head. “Well, that doesn’t matter. What matters is that it’s not infectious.”

“Then explain why a vampire needs a chrysalis to become a vampire if stuff like this is genetic,” Jimin frowned, playing with his fingers as he looked down at his lap. It wasn’t that he didn’t trust Namjoon. It was more that he couldn’t just get rid of his cautious personality, and the scientist in him was screaming at the stupidity of ingesting an unknown chemical.

“I know nothing awful will happen because the other me wants this so badly that he’s practically screaming at me. And he would never let anything bad happen to you,” Namjoon added, moving to sit next to Jimin on the couch.

“That’s not—” Jimin protested weakly, cutting himself off with a sigh. “And I’m supposed to just take his word for it? Does he know something the rest of us don’t?”

“I guess not,” Namjoon agreed quietly. “And I’m not going to force you if you don’t want to try it. It just means more licking on my part if you get hurt again. Which, to be honest, I don’t really mind it,” he shrugged, turning even redder.
Jimin felt himself flush scarlet, too, stomach doing somersaults. “Umm…sunbae?” he began, unable
to suppress the urge to chew at his lip nervously.

“Hmm?” Namjoon said, turning his body to more directly face Jimin.

“I don’t…I mean I never…learned how to do this,” Jimin said uncertainly.

“This?” Namjoon said, tilting his head in confusion.

“Whatever…whatever we are,” Jimin said, gesturing between them. “I don’t know how,” he
admitted, embarrassed. “I already told you about how I never had friends, and that I didn’t have a lot
of…experience. Well, I never dated either, I never even…I never even kissed anyone before, until
you healed me,” he reached up to press his fingertips against his chapped lips. “I mean—I don’t w-
want to assume—” Maybe he was just imaging everything, after all. His own self-perception was
that he was damaged goods, someone that no one would want because of how much work he had to
put into just living. After all, who would want someone that they couldn’t even touch?

Namjoon smiled at him gently, reaching a hand out to pull Jimin’s fingers away from his mouth.

“You’re not assuming,” Namjoon said. “And…I mean, we’re friends now. But we’re working on
something…aren’t we?”

Namjoon seemed just as uncertain as Jimin. What a pair they made.

Jimin nodded shyly, strangely feeling like he wanted to cry. It was just, he never thought that
something like this was even possible for him. And suddenly, it seemed like he wouldn’t be alone
forever, like he’d expected. He had friends. He had Namjoon. And it was…warm, even if it was so
strange and unbelievable. “But you can’t leave,” Jimin whispered.

“Hey,” Namjoon said, squeezing Jimin’s hand gently. “I don’t plan on it.”

Jimin swallowed, curling his fingers around Namjoon’s.

It had taken a week after hearing Namjoon’s suggestion to work up the courage to try it, but here he
was, chickening out at the possibility of fixing himself. If this worked, it had the potential to work
forever. To make it like he never had hemophilia. To stop paying millions of won for Factor VIII. To
stop being scared to death of making little mistakes, or of being clumsy.

He stared down at the splotchy bruises decorating his legs, not even knowing where they came from.
They were just always there. He always did something wrong.

But to live without pain…

Wasn’t something like that worth the risk?

“I…” Jimin began, looking up at Namjoon. “I’ll do it. I’ll try. But if I get radioactive spider powers,
you better take some responsibility.”

“Of course I will. I think that would be kind of cool, actually,” Namjoon grinned. “Just don’t tell
Hoseok—he’s deathly afraid of spiders.”

“I’m definitely using that against him later,” Jimin smiled back, readjusting himself on the couch
nervously. “Okay,” he breathed. “Sorry, but, would you mind—” he gestured to Namjoon’s hand.

“Anything for you,” Namjoon said mildly, removing his hand from Jimin’s grip. In a split second,
the fingernail on his pointer finger elongated into a sharp point. Jimin was trying really hard not to
drop into scientist nerd mode, wanting to discern everything about how that was even possible. Rapid cell generation? But then how did it go back to normal?

Jimin watched as Namjoon pierced a finger on the opposite hand, blood once again beading at the surface. “I’m sorry you had to be a pin cushion today,” Jimin grimaced. “Pricking yourself is the worst, believe me, I know.”

“I can barely feel a thing,” Namjoon shook his head, offering his finger to Jimin once more. “Remember, we don’t have to do this today if you don’t want to. We don’t have to do it ever, in fact.”

“No, I’ll try,” Jimin said, determined. He used both hands to grab onto Namjoon’s, bringing it closer to his face. He could already taste the metallic tang on his tongue as he stared at the red dot. Closing his eyes, he stuck his tongue out to let it brush lightly against the pad of Namjoon’s finger.

The metallic taste was stronger than he had imagined, and he had to fight the urge to gag at the idea of ingesting someone else’s blood. But it was over in an instant, the blood dissipating just as soon as he swallowed and cleared his palate.

Jimin released Namjoon’s hand, opening his eyes and glancing down at his body.

“Do you…feel any different?” Namjoon questioned.

“…” Jimin hesitated, reaching down to caress a bruise. “Not really?”

Namjoon frowned, reaching out to gently touch a bruise peeking out from Jimin’s shirtsleeve. “It didn’t work?”

Jimin shrugged, sighing. “I guess not.” Really, he shouldn’t have let himself feel so hopeful. It was stupid, it was…

“Jimin?” Namjoon said, voice concerned, and only then did he realize that his cheeks were wet, his eyes burning with pressure.

“Ah, shit,” Jimin said, wiping uselessly at his face. “I’m sorry. I don’t even know why I’m like this.”

“There doesn’t have to be a reason,” Namjoon said, wrapping an arm around Jimin’s shoulders and drawing him in close. “I know that this means a lot to you. Maybe we just have to try more blood? It could be that such a small amount wasn’t enough to heal everything.”

“Right, yeah, that makes sense,” Jimin said, voice cracking embarrassingly. “Ah, I’m a mess over nothing.”

“It’s not nothing, stop pretending that it doesn’t matter,” Namjoon said, frowning. “I know you really wanted this to work. I did, too. But there are still tons of things to try, and we’ll get it right, eventually. In the meantime, we’ll just have to make do with the grosser way.”

“Right,” Jimin sniffed, wiping his nose with his sleeve. “Right, well, no use crying over spilled… blood…” he grimaced.

“You’ve really got a way with words,” Namjoon deadpanned.

“Shut up,” Jimin huffed, pushing half-heartedly against his chest. He glanced at Namjoon again. “So…how much blood should we try now? We’re really getting into cannibal territory.”
“Well, clearly more than a few drops,” Namjoon mused. “Maybe if we put it in something it would be less gross? Like dilute it with water?”

“I would still just feel like I was drinking an equivalent volume of blood,” Jimin shuddered.

Namjoon sighed. “Okay, then I guess it’s the old fashioned way.” He lifted the pointed finger again.

“Wait! Wait!” Jimin said, reaching out to stop him by resting his hand on Namjoon’s. “Please don’t just stab yourself before we come up with a plan.”

“Did you have another idea?”

Jimin hesitated, thinking. Maybe he did. Standing from the couch, he moved to his medical cabinet to retrieve a syringe. It wouldn’t be fun to use, but it would prevent Namjoon from having to constantly slice himself open. Returning the couch, he held it out to Namjoon. “Would it be okay to take a lot at one time with this?”

Namjoon looked down at the sterile plastic packaging uncertainly. “It’s still so alien to me that you just have these,” Namjoon shook his head, tearing the plastic open. “Sure, we can do this. I’ll have to do it to myself, though. I don’t think you could pierce my skin on your own.”

“Okay, then let me just…” Jimin reached out to take one of Namjoon’s arms and turn it over. Pressing carefully against the skin of his inner arm, he felt around until he located a good target vein. “Here,” he took Namjoon’s other hand and brought it over to feel it himself. “Do you feel that, there? That’s where you should aim.”

Namjoon stared at him for a moment, not saying anything, until he blinked and seemed to snap himself out of whatever he’d fallen into. “It’s a shame I don’t get sick,” he shook his head. “I think you have excellent bedside manner. You sure you don’t want to be a doctor?”

“Well, I do,” Jimin said, flushing. “Just not that kind of doctor, the kind that sees patients. I was thinking research?”

“You don’t sound very certain,” Namjoon said.

Jimin sighed. “I mean, I’ve always wanted to learn more about conditions like mine and better ways to fix them. But classes have been really boring, hyung.”

Namjoon grinned. “Don’t count it out just yet, they have to weed out the quitters before you get to the good stuff, right?” He stilled. “Did you just call me hyung?”

“N-no,” Jimin said. “Hurry up and stab!”

Namjoon chuckled deep in his throat as he followed Jimin’s guide to his vein, easing in the needle in without so much as a flinch and withdrawing the plunger, filling up the little plastic tube with deep red blood. A few seconds after pulling it out of his arm, the wound closed over once more.

Jimin took the syringe from him, examining its contents with a critical eye. “How much do you think I should take?”

“Definitely not that much to start with, we want to avoid those spider powers,” Namjoon joked.

“So a few mills, ma—”

“Jimin!” Namjoon exclaimed. “Wait, Jimin, look!”
Jimin jumped at the loud volume, but quickly looked to where Namjoon was pointing. The bruise on his arm was gone. He gasped, pulling up his legs to stretch out on the coffee table. They were… clear. No bruises. No nothing. “It…worked?” Jimin whispered.

“It worked!” Namjoon said happily, pulling him in for a firm hug. “I knew it would! Didn’t I say it would?”

“It worked,” Jimin repeated, nose pressed into Namjoon’s chest, his scent spicy and body temperature warm. His limbs felt limp as he sat there, eyes watering once more, Namjoon squeezing his body close. He’d forgotten what it felt like, to be that close to another person.

Namjoon pulled back slightly, eyes bright with excitement. “How do you feel?”

“Normal, I guess?” Jimin said, dazed. He set the syringe down on the coffee table, looking down at his arms again. It didn’t hurt. Where Namjoon had gripped him, nothing hurt. Nothing was discolored. No broken capillaries. “Not any different than usual.”

“Now we just have to see how long it lasts,” Namjoon mused, standing and picking up the syringe. He walked into the kitchen to open the refrigerator and put the syringe inside. “I’ll be honest, I don’t know much about blood storage, but that should do for now, right?”

“Considering you have weird blood, who knows?” Jimin said, standing up to join him in the kitchen. He reached up tentatively to touch Namjoon on the shoulder. Namjoon turned around quickly, looking at him in askance. “Feel free to say no, but…”

“What is it?” Namjoon said, inching closer as if being drawn in.

“Would you—would you hug me again?” Jimin said. Before he’d even gotten the entire question out, he found himself wrapped in warm arms again. He sighed into Namjoon’s neck, raising his arms to wrap around Namjoon’s waist. “It’s been such a long time, hyung,” he said, voice breaking again. “Not even my parents would touch me, in case it hurt me. Not my brother. Not anyone.”

“Hey, it’s okay,” Namjoon soothed, lips touching Jimin’s hair. “It’s okay now, I’ve got you. And I’ll stand here and hug you as long as you want, okay? I’m not going anywhere.”

Jimin could only squeeze tighter, reveling in the feeling of human contact that he’d been denied for so long. It was like heaven, to be in someone else’s arms and feel safe and comforted and protected.

He gasped as a sharp pain shot through his head, as piercing as a migraine, as he dropped his arms from around Namjoon. His knees would have folded, as well, had Namjoon not caught him mid-fall, sweeping him into his arms and sprinting to lay him down on the couch.

“What is it, what’s wrong?” Namjoon said, hands hovering over Jimin’s body.

“Spider powers, probably,” Jimin groaned, clutching at the right side of his forehead, which throbbed with a pulsing pain. “I don’t know, my head just—” he hissed, fingers and toes curling at the intensity of the pain.

“What—what can I do?” Namjoon questioned, panicked.

“We’re idiots,” Jimin groaned. “Why did we think me eating your blood was a good idea?” he wheezed, head feeling like it was splitting open. “We didn’t know what could happen!” He didn’t know if he was screaming, or if was just the rushing in his ears making thunderous noise.

“Ah, fuck,” Namjoon cursed, before leaning down and capturing Jimin’s lips with his own. Jimin
gasped into the messy kiss, Namjoon’s tongue reaching deep into his mouth, eyes fluttering as the pain began to ease off slowly, leaving him with only a regular pain level headache.

“I’m sorry,” Namjoon said, pulling away, his eyes shining. “I didn’t know what else to do.”

“It…it’s fine,” Jimin breathed heavily, still rubbing at his head. “It helped. But I never want to feel that ever again.”

“But I don’t understand what went wrong,” Namjoon frowned. “Everything was perfect, and then it wasn’t.” His frown deepened as he reached down to stop Jimin’s rubbing. “There’s…I mean…”

“Is it bruising again already?” Jimin said sadly, letting his arms fall to his sides. “Like I said, we don’t know what we’re dealing with,” Jimin sighed. “It could have been caused by literally anything.”

Namjoon scowled, resting his large body on the edge of the couch. “I thought for sure…” he looked down at Jimin. “Can I get you anything?”

“The sweet embrace of death,” Jimin whined, closing his eyes and hiding his face in the couch cushion.

“I’ll do you one better,” Namjoon huffed. “How about we order takeout?”

Chapter End Notes

if you got mean things to say, pls save them for tomorrow, today's no good
Chapter 13

It was, unequivocally, a bad idea, and he knew it. He knew it was a stupid thing to do, and yet he found himself staring at the blood-filled syringe where it rested in his fridge.

It didn’t make sense for him to try it again by himself. After all, he got that horrible headache the last time, and who was to say something worse wouldn’t happen if he did it again. But something… something inside of him was itching to try it again. Maybe if he just took a little more, then there wouldn’t be any problems at all.

The thoughts almost scared him a little. It wasn’t normal for him to think that way, so far from his usual overabundance of caution.

Before he’d even registered his own movement, the cool plastic was in his hands. If its main effect was to heal, then it was far more likely than not that he would be fine. But why? Why did he want it so much? It was almost like…

He hurriedly set the syringe back down. After staring at it for a few moments, he turned to his kitchen drawers and rifled through them, finally locating a box of plastic bags. Withdrawing one, he brought it over to the fridge and picked up the syringe once more. Carefully, he expelled a few milliliters of liquid into the plastic and then sealed it tight.

If he wasn’t getting anything out his lab courses, he might as well try and learn something on his own terms.

Taehyung was loitering outside of his building, perking up as his nose wrinkled cutely, even before Jimin pushed open the glass door. “Jimin! Ready to learn some words?”

“Always,” Jimin chuckled, resting his hand lightly on Taehyung’s. Taehyung was still too worried about touching him too hard, but he was always happy when Jimin was able to initiate and control the pressure.

The weather had officially made a turn for the freezing cold, sweaters necessary even in direct sunlight. People walked as fast as possible on their commutes, faces and ears stinging red. He noticed Taehyung’s gaze flitting from one thing to another, never quite settling in one place.


“Right,” Jimin sighed, disappointed at the obvious lie. Wasn’t he at least owed a little bit of trust at that point? “Has anyone ever told you that you’re a bad liar?”

Taehyung huffed, offering him a wry smile. “I’m actually a good liar, but it just so happens I’m bad at lying to my friends.”

“So?” Jimin pressed.

“Please don’t make that face,” Taehyung whined. He sighed, running a hand through his bright hair. “We’re just at a standstill. We don’t want to fight with anyone, and we don’t want to be the spark that sets off the explosion, you know? So we…I…am just trying to be careful.”

“I see,” Jimin nodded slowly, leaning into Taehyung as a particularly strong gust of wind struck at
their bodies. He knew he’d have to face Chanyeol in Anatomy, and while he wasn’t looking forward to it, he also wasn’t exactly afraid. After all, Chanyeol even seemed worried when Jimin was hurt. And despite all of his posturing, he hadn’t actually hurt Namjoon or anyone else. Maybe there was some hope for compromise. Maybe.

He couldn’t help but blush when his eyes met Namjoon’s, mind immediately flashing to the warmth of the hug that he’d practically forced on the other man. It was too embarrassing. Hopefully it was easily hidden by the sting of the wind.

“Good morning, Jimin,” Namjoon smiled, his own cheeks tinged pink.

“Morning,” he mumbled, sliding into his seat and beginning to unwrap his half-dozen layers of clothing. Maybe he was overdoing it, but extra layers were a good excuse to have extra protection in the event of bumping into things or falling down.

He glanced back at the others to see Jungkook and Seokjin practically asleep at their tables, head tilting in curiosity. “They had a late night,” Yoongi grunted in explanation. “We’ve scheduled a heavier patrol.”

“Oh,” Jimin said, frowning at the dark shadows stretching under their eyes. “For how long?”

“However long it takes,” Namjoon said quietly, folding his notebook open as he glanced at them. “Just give them a few more minutes before class starts.” His eyes narrowed as he returned his attention to Jimin. “I didn’t realize that you’d still smell like me so strongly.”

Jimin had to swallow the wave of guilt that washed over him at the thought of the plastic baggie with Namjoon’s blood in his bag. “Oh? It, umm, must be because we…"

“You did what?” Taehyung exclaimed, bringing the back of his hand to his forehead in order to mimic a swoon. “Where are my pearls? I have a sudden urge to clutch.”

“Oh, shut up,” Jimin giggled, pushing him half-heartedly. “Because we spent the afternoon together is how that sentence ends.”

“How come we’ve never spent the afternoon together?” Taehyung complained.

“Oh,” Jimin said. “Did you…did you want to?” The idea of friends was still so new and foreign that it hadn’t even crossed his mind that Taehyung would want to come, and stay, over.

Taehyung gaped. “Jimin! Of course, I want to! That’s prime bonding time! Well, then, and like after midnight eating pizza and drinking tequila, but we’ll get there eventually!”

Jimin had to restrain his laughter as the professor walked inside, beginning their usual setup process. Yoongi nudged the drowsy Jin and Jungkook, sending Jungkook practically shooting from his chair.

“Something you’d like to share with the class?” the professor drawled.

Jungkook’s face flashed bright red as he quickly sat back down, staring determinedly at his lap. Jimin felt bad for him, his shyness painful to watch.

He checked his messages after class, finding one from Jooheon asking about their next lab report. Jimin sighed, hit with guilt once more. Even with so many crazy things happening, he couldn’t just forget about the rest of his responsibilities. No matter how much he might want to.

*I’m good for today. Library again?* Jimin quickly texted back. He took the fifteen responsive emojis
as agreement.

Jimin sighed as he repacked his things, mentally bracing himself to see Chanyeol again. If the blood-smell was noticeable to Namjoon, then there was no doubt in his mind that Chanyeol would have something to say about it, as well. Jimin hadn’t had to face him since the bike incident, and he had no real idea of what to expect now that Chanyeol knew about his hemophilia. Part of him was terrified that the hunters would use that knowledge against his friends somehow.

“Hey,” Yoongi said, one eyebrow quirked. “What’s all that?”

“Wh-what?” Jimin said nervously.

“Why are you so freaked out?” Yoongi elaborated. “I can taste it from all the way over here. I’m not trying to pry, but I literally can’t help it.”

Jimin blanched. Right. Yoongi could feel fear.

And Jimin hadn’t told any of them that Chanyeol was in his class.

“I, umm,” Jimin stuttered. “I forgot that there was a quiz in my next class that I didn’t study for.” It wasn’t his most well-told lie, but it was at least believable. Lying felt like the right option at the moment. They were already under enough stress without worrying about something they couldn’t do anything about.

“There’s been a lot on your plate lately,” Namjoon said, reaching out cautiously to rest a hand on Jimin’s forearm. “I’m sorry that all of this has been so distracting. I know it can’t be easy.”

Jimin shook his head, offering them a small smile. “It definitely hasn’t been, but I don’t want you to think that I regret it. I might have felt that way at first, but… I feel like I’m living now.” He said the last few words quietly, but considering what they were, they probably heard it, anyway. “Anyway, I should get to class and see if I can study a bit before I fail that quiz.”

“Okay,” Namjoon said, slowly withdrawing his hand. “We’ll see you later, then.”

“I’ll text you about hanging out!” Taehyung grinned.

Jimin nodded, glancing at Jin and Jungkook. “I hope you guys can get some sleep.”

Jimin kept his head down as he slipped into Anatomy, but he could still feel the weight of Chanyeol’s gaze on the back of his neck. “I guess the dog kissed it all better?” the man said wryly.

Jimin stiffened but kept quiet. It would do no good to be confrontational with someone who could easily hurt him and knew about his weakness.

“The silent treatment, huh? That’s a real shame. I had some questions for you.”

Jimin said nothing, unpacking his textbook and notebook.

“A little birdie told me that you were one of the victims of the attacks that have been happening recently. That explains all that blood I smelled on you when we bumped into each other at the library. Your blood.”

Jimin frowned, feeling uneasy, but it’s not like the hunter could use that against him. Namjoon and the others didn’t hurt him, they saved him.

“And the dog explains why you’re still alive, considering your…condition. So, here’s my first
question, Park Jimin. Shouldn’t you, out of all people, understand my position?”

Jimin swallowed, continuing to ignore him as the class began, furiously writing notes and sketching body systems as the professor pointed out details on the projector screen at the front of the class. Of course he didn’t think protecting people from evil things was wrong. If he had never met Namjoon when he was attacked by the thing in the dark, then he had no doubt he would be on Chanyeol’s side. But, after getting to know everyone, it was clear that hunters didn’t discriminate between what was good and what wasn’t. Instead, it seemed like they went after anything that was different.

Jimin quickly packed up his things, but he wasn’t quick enough to dodge Chanyeol’s grab of a fistful of his sweater. “Let go!” Jimin demanded, forced to remain pliant to avoid hurting himself in a struggle. “I don’t have anything to say to you!”

“Three more people have been put in the hospital since we’ve been here,” Chanyeol said seriously. “None of them can remember a fucking thing thanks to the memory manipulation.”

“So what does that have to do with me?” Jimin said, nervously eyeing Chanyeol’s hand where it held him in place.

“That brings me to my second question, Park Jimin. You remember, don’t you?” Chanyeol said.
“You were never taken to a hospital, there are no records. The dogs have been all over you, and you know what they are. It didn’t finish, did it? It didn’t change your memory.”

Jimin couldn’t suppress a shiver, recalling the grotesque morphing of the scaled hand, the claws, the overwhelming fear. How the older vampire had visited his home and asked for his silence. Was just trying to protect his family. “It was traumatic,” Jimin said shakily. “I don’t remember much except being afraid. I can’t help you with anything. Even if I did remember, I couldn’t help you.”

The grip on his sweater tightened, and Jimin let out a shaky breath. He was afraid that he had misjudged Chanyeol’s willingness to hurt him. “You’re lying,” Chanyeol hissed. “Why are you trying to protect actual monsters that are hurting people? Please, Jimin, explain it to me. Are the dogs threatening you to keep quiet, or something?”

“My friends would never threaten me,” Jimin insisted. “And…” he clamped his mouth shut quickly, shaking his head. Chanyeol just wanted to trick him into saying something he shouldn’t.

“And what?” Chanyeol said lowly, arm muscles flexing as he yanked Jimin forward. Jimin winced as his chest made contact with Chanyeol’s fist as the momentum threw him into it.

“And things aren’t as black and white as you seem to think they are,” Jimin said.

“There’s nothing grey about attacking and hurting people,” Chanyeol glowered.

“Not even if you would die without it?” Jimin said quietly.

Chanyeol’s jaw clenched. “Then I would just die.”

Jimin smiled sadly. “Then that would make you braver than most of us, monsters and humans alike.”

Chanyeol frowned, grip easing as he released Jimin’s now-crumpled sweater. “Tell your dog friends that if they step one toe out of line, then they’re finished.”

Jimin quickly stepped out of his reach, readjusting his bag on his bruised shoulder. As he got to the door, he turned to look at Chanyeol one last time. “There’s nothing grey about attacking and hurting people,” Jimin parroted.
He tried to move faster than his usual cautious pace in case Chanyeol tried to catch up with him, but as far as he could tell, he wasn’t being followed. He still didn’t know what make of the hunter who seemed so determined to kill monsters but nevertheless was willing to listen when Jimin defended them. Who tried to help Jimin when he was injured. His head was beginning to hurt from all the grey.

His first instinct was to head for the science building, as access to the labs was limited by keycard permission only. Not to mention, it felt like Namjoon’s blood was burning a hole at the bottom of his bag.

Jimin tapped his student ID against the access pad, stepping into the noticeably colder building. He felt a little better once the door latched shut behind him, even though logically he knew that someone could probably easily figure out a way to gain access. After stepping out of the elevator on the lab level, he detoured to the nearest bathroom. The building was relatively empty, as most lab courses didn’t begin until mid-afternoon.

He ran the cold tap and splashed a little water on his face, trying to bring some life into his cheeks. As he bent over, he frowned at the slight ache building in his chest. Pulling down his loose shirt collar, he sighed at the little red broken capillaries dotting the skin there.

Of course he couldn’t go a day without collateral damage.

He sighed again as he delicately palpated his shoulder, bruising from his bag returning like it had never left. As he pressed lightly in an attempt to disperse the luckily clotted blood, his gaze was drawn to his bag placed under the sink.

Before he knew what he was doing, his bag was in his hands and the zipper was already dragging open. The plastic was smooth underneath his fingertips, the dark blood oozing with the motion of his hands. Just one drop and he would be all healed up. Two, and maybe it would be even better.

But why? Why did his body want it so much, when the result was to cause him pain? Why didn’t he just pick up his phone and call Namjoon? Tell him that he’d run into a door, or something equally convincing. Namjoon would fix it for him, and he wouldn’t have to do the incredibly stupid thing that he was contemplating.

The ache in his chest spurred him on like the morning hadn’t.

He dropped his bag carelessly onto the tile and carefully unsealed the plastic, staring down at the blood inside, wondering why his stomach wasn’t turning at the thought of eating it again. Instead, a cold sweat broke out on his forehead as he reached trembling fingers towards the opening. Carefully, he grimaced as he collected a drop on each of two fingertips. The red began to trail down his fingers, thin lines cutting across his pallid skin.

It didn’t taste like it had the first time, where he’d felt a little grossed out at the metallic tang. The metal was still there, of course, but there was also something else. It was something sweet, almost. Something warm that seemed to coat his throat on the way down, satisfying that itch that he’d been suffering since the last time. He waited a moment, staring hard at his reflection to observe when and how the process would begin. His heart raced as he could feel his body healing, as before his eyes his bruised shoulder cleared of marks and even the dark circles under his eyes seemed to lighten.

His hands were shaking. Both of them trembled as he held them up in front of his face as his heart continued to pound, the blood rushing in his veins. His stomach twisted into knots, nausea pressing up and into his esophagus. Shaking, sweating, nausea, headache, tachycardia. Craving blood. He knew those symptoms. They’d talked about them in biochemistry, and…It was almost like…It was
Withdrawal.

He knew what was next, squeezing himself into a stall and sitting down on the toilet seat rather than risk falling from the freight train of pain that was soon to come. He rocked slightly back and forth, attempting to sooth his body that was busy freaking out. Stupid. Of course it was withdrawal. Namjoon’s saliva and blood didn’t heal him with magic, but with science. There must have been some kind of biochemical or biological compounds in both of them that promoted rapid and extensive cell regeneration.

In other words, Namjoon’s blood was like a drug. And after only one taste, he was already powerfully addicted.

His body seized as the headache assaulted his temples, sudden and uncompromising. He pressed harshly into his skull with his fingers in an attempt to relieve the pressure, but there was no running away from the intensity of the pain. A few more drops and he could get it to stop.

He shook his head sharply, gritting his teeth together in order to avoid biting at his lips. It would go away. It would go away eventually. He just had to resist.

He clutched as his clothes, at his hair, splintered his fingernails dragging his hands down the stall walls, but nothing made it better. Eventually, he had to crawl from on top of the seat to the floor so that he could lean into the bowl and throw up, the headache provoking an equally intense bout of nausea. His hair and shirt were soaked with sweat, and he must have looked like a complete mess.

He didn’t know how long he sat on the floor, but he was startled into full consciousness when a few people entered the bathroom. He hurriedly searched his pockets to check his phone, shocked when he realized that over an hour had passed since he’d been curled up in the stall.

The headache had tempered to a bearable level, and that was the only reason he was able to pull himself to his feet. He quickly zipped his bag closed, unlocking the door and approaching the sinks as the other two men washed their hands. They gave him an odd glance, no doubt due to his haggard appearance, but otherwise left the bathroom soon after.

Jimin looked like he’d fallen into a swimming pool, everything damp and drops of sweat still spilling down the sides of his face. His face and neck were flushed, his eyes red and watery from throwing up. His hands didn’t shake as badly, but they were still unsteady as he ran them over his face and arms.

And the worst part was—he still wanted more.

End Notes

I post updates/previews/other short pieces at freebullets.tumblr.com

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!