**finger cuffs**

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**finger cuffs**

by [nonheather](https://www.archiveofourown.org/users/nonheather)

**Summary**

Taehyung falls in love every day but this time, he insists, it is real. But all of his friends are vehemently against the object of his latest affection.

"Can you give me one?"

"A reason?" Yoongi hums shortly. "You're sensitive. You fall for anyone in a matter of seconds. And he throws people away like used tampons. There's three."

**Notes**

You already know where this is going.

My twitter omg i made one just for you guys

See the end of the work for more [notes](https://www.archiveofourown.org/works/7225507#notes)
Chapter 1

"boy or girl?"

startled by confusion, taehyung looks up from his strawberry banana/chocolate milkshake. "come again?"

jeongguk rolls his eyes, not looking up from his phone. the way his thumbs are moving rapidly, taehyung knows he must be playing fucking bejeweled again. ever since he got the highest score on the diamond mine two weeks ago, he's been greatly overcompensating by playing nearly every moment. taehyung doesn't know how seokjin can stand it.

"your latest hard on," jeongguk enunciates 'hard on,' taehyung is convinced, to make the other customers turn a judgmental eye toward him. "you've been smiling all the time. and it's not just 'my name is taehyung and i'm perpetually elated' smile. it's the 'i have someone in my life smile.' so...boy or girl?"

this time, taehyung rolls his eyes. "it's actually the 'someone in my life is really cute and i'm having perpetual daydreams' smile but whatever. same gist. boy."

jeongguk smirks and scoffs at the same time before setting his phone down on the table looking more smug than mariah carey. he reaches for his own milkshake and takes a sip, pinning taehyung with his pensive stare. "name?"

"i don't know," taehyung admits bashfully, that familiar giddy and hopeful smile appearing on his face again. "he's a dancer, i think. i always see him leaving the dance hall."

"what's he look like? i might know him."

this awakens taehyung's interest but he'd be hard pressed to admit that his ears legitimately perk up. but he remembers that the person sitting across from him is a conniving little shit who only ever manages to spend time with the object of his affection by way of manipulation. "if i tell you, will you actually help me or will you just use it to blackmail me into doing ridiculous things?"

taehyung could see it now: jeongguk threatening to tell the ethereal dancer about taehyung being borderline obsessed with him in order to get their shared dorm to himself for the night. not that he could get anywhere with his crush past brotherly hair ruffling.

jeongguk rolls his eyes again. taehyung wishes he would roll them out of his head. "i've got better things to do than impede on your boner source. besides we both know you can ruin your chances better than i can...c'mon, what's he look like?"

embarrassed, taehyung feels a blush creep up on his cheeks as he thinks of the dancer. every time he saw him or daydreamed about him (and he did daydream about him a lot), he would hear elton john's tiny dancer because the first time taehyung laid eyes on him, he was wearing faded blue jeans. plus, he was pretty eyed and, from what taehyung could tell at observer distance, he was short and immaculate. an incredibly handsome tiny dancer.

jeongguk snaps his fingers right in taehyung's face. "back to reality."

"oh," taehyung flinches then chuckles, eyes down and smile small. "he's perfect."

jeongguk waits for a few beats, an expecting silence falls on them. upon realizing, that is
taehyung's only description, he narrows his eyes and frowns. "yeah, that's not gonna help me."

taehyung shrugs. "i dunno, he's short, fit. he's got dark hair that he either has pushed back which, oh god, gets me every time. or sometimes he wears a hat and, as good as it looks, i like the days when he isn't wearing one. depending on the weather, he can either look pale or tanned but he's always gorgeous. he's got these eyes that," taehyung stops to moan, throwing his head back. "they're like black pearls. i bet they shine even more when he's smiling but i've never seen him smile. he's so--" "finger cuffs?"
"what?"
"have you ever seen this guy with anyone?" jeonnguk presses, his eyes own eyes having taken on a deep concern. "around any friends or?"

"he's usually alone," taehyung answers quickly, disappointment filling him up. "why? does he have someone? oh my god, the hours i've invested imagining our life together. in my dreams, he's a cuddler."
"tae...you can't," jeonnguk stops to look away for a moment, biting his lip in contemplation. "he's bad news. don't bother with him, alright? i'd prefer you go back to having a crush on seokjin than have one on finger cuffs."

"is that his name? finger cuffs?"

"no," jeongguk shakes his head and sighs. he looks frustrated like he's having trouble explaining something to a child. "it's...never mind what his name is. just stay away from him. i promise you he's no good."

"is he an ex-con? holy shit, he looks so sweet."

"listen--"

"i didn't say anything when you, like, fell in love with seokjin after i told you i liked him," taehyung isn't at all bitter about what happened their freshman year at university. he used to be for a long time but eventually his infatuation with the eldest graduate student ended. but it still bothered him sometimes that jeongguk allowed his feelings to get the best of him despite taehyung's confession. but, he supposes, it's impossible to not fall for seokjin to some degree. "now i've completely moved on and you're telling me not to?"

jeongguk scratches the side of his neck. "i'm telling you he's no good."

"tell me his name and let me decide for myself."

at this, jeongguk frowns but he raises his own condition: "i'll tell you his name and you restrict the research to social media. at least do that before you make a fool out of yourself."

"you let me wear a ronald mcdonald costume to masquerade ball, since when do you care about me making a fool out of myself?"

"i just don't want you to get hurt, okay? promise? just social media for now?"

taehyung promises without promising and jeongguk gives the name.
park jimin.

knowing his name adds an entire level to the fantasy world taehyung has been living in. he imagines the cuddling but this time, he can pretend to be resistant and say "jimin, not now." it's ridiculous but it makes him smile. knowing his name makes seeing him leave the dance hall all the more difficult because he has to physically restrain himself -- pressing his hand against his mouth -- from calling out his name.

every day he sees him either enter or leave the dance hall alone. some days he wears shorts and a hoodie, some days he wears a loose tank and joggers, all days he looks dazzling.

it's not that taehyung is actively following jimin or that he knows his schedule because he doesn't. it's just that the fashion hall is directly across from the dance hall and taehyung is, more often than not, the go-to model for majority of the fashion designers. every day after class, some days before work, he goes to the fashion hall to model for student projects. some of the modeling is just standing in the middle of a classroom while he's roughly sketched out and some of it is actually trying on students' clothing and modeling it off for their presentations.

it's a thankless job that he got courtesy of min yoongi who photographed him for his portfolio and put one of the better pictures on his instagram. which has over 7,000 followers even though he only follows like 10 accounts (and only likes the pictures from seokjin's account).

initially taehyung complained about all his time being used but being across from the dance hall and getting to see park jimin shut him up very quickly. it became the highlight of his day.

"what are you doing?"

taehyung whips around, pulling a complete 180 until he finds the source of the gruff voice and meets the perpetually stoic expression of min yoongi. "oh, hey."

"don't tell me you've taken to stalking people again," yoongi frowns...or maybe he doesn't. it's hard to tell for taehyung because it honestly looks as if yoongi is constantly frowning.

"shouldn't matter to you since it's not jin hyung anymore."

"true, but you managed to replace your spot as his number one stalker with that detestable roommate of yours."

the jin effect, as taehyung liked to refer to it, took many victims and spun out different complications depending on who fell under his spell. currently -- well for the past three years -- its victims have been, in chronological order, yoongi, taehyung, and then jeongguk the copycat.

it would take him ages to explain the situation to anyone outside his circle of friends so the rough version is: yoongi like seokjin. taehyung like seokjin. taehyung tell roommate jeongguk. jeongguk like seokjin. taehyung like mystery dancer. yoongi hate jeongguk. jeongguk hate yoongi.

it's romance for cavemen.

"what can i say?" his mouth is fixed for a snarky remark but nothing comes out because there he is.

in all of his sweaty, slicked back hair glory. today he does have a snapback but he's holding it in one hand while he uses his other to dig through his duffel bag. as always, he looks preoccupied, unsmiling but not necessarily upset. taehyung notices his earphones and starts to daydream about what kind of music the angel listens to. would he like older music like bob dylan? does he listen to
tchaikovsky? Would he prefer the rap skills of kendrick lamar or drake? Would he like rap?

"No," yoongi groans. "No, no, you can't be serious."

"What?"

"That," yoongi points out an obvious finger that taehyung is quick to push down. "Is the one you're crushing on?"

"If you could not announce it to everyone--"

"I knew you had questionable taste but jesus christ."

taehyung's eyes follow jimin until he's out of sight and only then does he turn to yoongi. "Did he kill a man? A woman?" taehyung gasps and covers his mouth. "A puppy?"

"I'm guessing you heard you should be staying away from him."

taehyung nods and begins his walk to the library. He doesn't need to get anything from there, he's just avoiding the return to his dorm room. "Haven't been given a reason yet but yeah."

to his surprise, yoongi doesn't push the matter like jeongguk did. He instead silently falls into step, playing with his camera like he's actually doing something instead of avoiding awkward conversation. But taehyung wishes he would just put down the camera and talk.

"Can you give me one?"

"A reason?" yoongi hums shortly. "You're sensitive. You fall for anyone in a matter of seconds. And he throws people away like used tampons. There's three."

Taehyung knew for a fact that two out of those three things were true but, in his defense, him being sensitive is just a result of him being a great empathizer. But there's no excuse for how easy it is for him to fall in love. He was ready to propose to seokjin after the older let him borrow a pencil. "But it's different this time."

"Oh, it took you ten minutes to fall in love instead of two?"

"Besides what do you know," taehyung continues, completely ignoring yoongi's insult. "Maybe he doesn't throw people away, maybe he just doesn't keep poisonous people in his life. What do you know about his relationships?"

With all the smugness a single human can muster up and then some, yoongi shakes his head. "More than you."

And that was that.

His friends may have been frustrating at times, conniving most of the time, and all around headaches but he trusted them. Besides yoongi was right. If he just gave it a day, maybe two, he'd be having new daydreams about someone else. Like the new hire at the smoothie shop. So, he leaves it there, the infatuation and the questions, on that day in early september to stay.

Then fucking october comes and jimin walks into his job. It's during the afternoon rush when the college students are looking for a cheap alternative to a nutritious lunch and the meat heads need sustenance after a long work out so the line os long. Despite the fact that he was taking a large
order from a group of five -- a group of demanding, demeaning muscle-heads at that -- he's all too aware when jimin walks in.

for some reason, even though the door had been opening and closing rapidly throughout the frenzy, when it opened for jimin, taehyung's head snapped in that direction. he was disappointed when his heart skipped a beat but also oddly excited about the possibility of interaction.

his eyes flit toward the register next to his where jackson is, as always, cheerfully taking the order of a girl in yoga pants that hugs all the right places. he looks back at the line and calculates how fast or slowly he would have to move with the current transaction to get jimin at his register.

so he proceeds to breeze through the order of the meatheads with flourish, passing off the cups quicker than he ever has. as the group passes off along with jackson's customer, taehyung glances again to see jimin three customers away. he slows down with the latest customer to their disappointment, waiting out for jackson to cater to the remaining two. and when jimin is the next person in line, he finishes the transaction at full speed.

and then he's there.

standing right in front of taehyung's register, jimin stands staring up at the menu behind the counter. hair pushed back, snapback to the back wearing round wire rimmed glasses, he looks better than anything taehyung could have dreamt up. and just like that he's back to reciting a marriage proposal in his mind.

"what can i get for you today?"

the way he stutters and loudly gulps after posing the question is bad enough to put him to shame for an eternity. he can feel his face redden when jimin looks away from the menu and at him. "can i try the, uh, matcha kale and peach?"

taehyung hums and starts writing the code down on the cup. normally, he'd just leave it at that but he'd hate for jimin to leave so soon. "any...um, accommodations?"

"sorry?"

"preferences," taehyung corrects quickly. "you know like extra kale or protein powder?"

jimin shakes his head solemnly while looking down and ransacking his pockets, doesn't even crack a small smile to lighten the awkward tension. "no, i'm good."

as jimin shuffles through his belongings, taehyung realizes he's still holding onto the cup. he swallows hard as he considers and quickly abandons the thought of writing his phone number on the side. instead, he hits the discount button on the p.o.s. and puts in his employee numbers just as jimin hands over his debit card.

taehyung shakes his head once the transaction is complete and the total price reads $0.00. "on the house today."

usually the reaction taehyung gets when he pays for someone's drink is a pleased, surprised smile, a delighted laugh, a cute pout and a soft "thank you so much". usually the customers are happy to have saved some money, to have a financial guardian angel. and it usually makes taehyung hate his job a little less. but jimin looks at him like taehyung just shot his dog and wore the fur to work.

"can i please just pay for it?" he tries to hand over his card once more.
taehyung opens his mouth. then shuts it. then opens it again. no one has ever turned down this kind
gesture of his, no has ever asked him to take it back. besides he's pretty sure once a transaction has
been put in, it can't be taken back without calling the manager or shift supervisor. and taehyung
really doesn't want to bother namjoon. "i...i'm sorry, i already put the discount in. i can't take it
back."

jimin sighs. "can you get a manager?"

"um," taehyung swallows hard once more and turns to look at jackson who's looking at him with a
raised eyebrow. need any help? an expression that all retail and restaurant employees know well.
"please don't make me get my manager. i'm really sorry, i just thought...you looked like you were
having a bad day--"

"okay," jimin spins his credit card and puts it back in his pocket. "it's fine. thanks."

"you're welcome," taehyung chokes out, looking down at the computer screen. jimin starts to walk
away and taehyung does something really stupid. "jim--i mean, can i get your name?"

the save is too late, jimin heard the beginning of his name, he heard the familiarity in taehyung's
voice and the fraudulence in his question. and to taehyung's shock, jimin's face reddens as he looks
around the store before looking back to him.

"write whatever you want," he says, defeated.

later jackson will ask him what the whole thing was about and taehyung would shrug, sadly
explaining what happened. then jackson would shake his head, scoff, and mutter "fuckin' finger
cuffs".

according to the articles written by bitter old people with nothing better to do, the internet and
social media take up about eighty percent of a young adult's life. but apparently, if taehyung's
stalking results are anything to go by, jimin is among the tenuous population of young people who
don't engage in social media at all.

taehyung hums when facebook and weibo don't yield any results. well, they yield plenty but none
of the results are the angel he's ready to propose to. "why do you have to have the john smith of
korean names?"

he'd searched every result on facebook for any possible match but, even though there was a myriad
of park jims, he couldn't find his park jimin. without a facebook or weibo account to base it on,
finding him on instagram, snapchat, or anything other media platform was impossible. he frowned
and shoved his computer off his lap before pausing his music. his mouth is fixed to ask jeongguk a
question when--

"ignore him," he hears jeongguk say from his side of the room. "he's talking to himself again."

taehyung turns his head to see jeongguk lying on his back, feet up against the wall, head hanging
off the bed with his phone pressed to his ear. he's probably talking to seokjin yet again believing he
has the slightest inkling of a chance.

"oh yeah," jeongguk perks up. "i got the perfect score on that exam."

taehyung rolls his eyes and starts up his music again.
jeongguk is convinced that by acting like a pest of a little brother, seokjin will eventually come out of his stupor and express his undying love for him. that is, he thinks, if he can get yoongi out of the way. which he won't. because yoongi is as stubborn as he is misanthropic.

in between songs, taehyung hears bits of jeongguk's end of the conversation which include subtle doting, not so subtle bragging, the occasional suggestion ("oh those crepes are so great, we should grab some sometime. maybe catch a movie.") and, lastly, the inevitable disappointment.

"oh," he sees jeongguk suddenly sit up abruptly but dejectedly. like his spirits have just been crushed. "yeah, i understand. . . okay, good night."

"yoongi's back?" taehyung shakes his headphones off just as jeonnguk hangs up the phone.

"yep," he tosses his phone on his bed. "i don't get why he has to suck up hyung's time. always there...sucking from his blood...like some kind of parasite."

"what do you expect?" taehyung stands up and goes straight for the mini fridge, rifling between expired yogurt and juice boxes to find something that gets rid of cupid arrows. "you're not the only person who wants to get in his pants."

"you don't think...?"

"you have to finish your question for me to give you an answer."

jeongguk blinks. "you don't think they're--er, they've done it?"

"you have to finish your question for me to give you an answer."

jeongguk blinks. "you don't think they're--er, they've done it?"

"so," taehyung looks up, plopping down on his bed. "do you, uh, happen to follow jimin on...anything?"

"not this again!"

"come on," taehyung pouts and kicks his feet against the floor like the four year old he is not. "if i hadn't introduced you to seokjin, you wouldn't be able to stalk him now."

"first of all, i don't stalk him, alright?" jeongguk sits up and starts waving his hands like people often do when they're getting overly defensive. "i call him and have deep conversations about the world. and sometimes i wait for him outside of his class to walk--"

"stalk," taehyung corrects.

"...him to his job or wherever he needs to go. we have a perfectly healthy relationship."

"sure."

"and second of all, me and seokjin--"
"seokjin and i," taehyung corrects.

"shut the fuck up," jeongguk throws his pillow right at taehyung's face. "me and seokjin are two totally different people from you and finger cuffs. yours is a relationship that doesn't even exist. and it's with an awful person that you should be ashamed to have a crush on."

"you're a dick."

"a dick who at least talks to the person he's suiting, thank you very much."

taehyung slouches and sighs. "please answer the question. do you follow him or not?"

"finger cuffs doesn't have any social media," jeongguk picks up his phone again and, for a second, taehyung thinks he's gonna check but then he hears the familiar bejeweled theme. "he deleted them a while ago."

"so you used to follow him?"

"not exactly."

"i hate playing this game with you," taehyung picks up his laptop again and furiously types in the login to jeongguk's facebook. "you're being a pain in the ass. acting like giving me his number or giving me something to help me in my dangerous pursuit is going to ruin your life."

"it's not a game, i'm just protecting you."

"that's bullshit," taehyung answers immediately as he goes to settings and proceeds to change jeongguk's profile picture to a way more unflattering one that he took a week ago when the younger passed out at a party.

taehyung does try to get rid of every single thought exclusive to jimin but it doesn't work at all. it depressingly goes as far as dreaming about being late for class because jimin wanted him to stay up the entire night and watch battlestar galactica. jimin lives in his mind like a plague. he's still in the process of trying to decode what it could mean three days later as he's getting dressed in some fashion student's poor idea of a winter collection.

"hyung," his voice echoes throughout the bathroom as he shrugs on the outfit in the too small stall. "do you think sexual frustration can be embedded in your psyche in the form of romantic nightmares?"

seokjin busts out laughing from the neighboring stall and taehyung imagines it ricochets throughout the entire hall. "what the fuck?"

"i'm serious," taehyung grunts at his stubborn zipper. "in your experience, does it ever happen?"

"well, a lot of things can be reflected in dreams. sexual frustration, social anxiety...intentions of first degree murder."

"i can't go to jail if it's just a dream, right?"

"no," he hears seokjin pull up the last zipper and exit his stall. "but if you act on it, it qualifies as premeditated murder."

"shit," taehyung exits his own stall and comes face to face with his reflection in the dirty mirror.
"in that case, my weekend is completely free."

"kookie piss you off again?"

"i honestly don't see how you deal with him," taehyung leans closer to the mirror until he can see his pores and then even closer so he can have a fit about it. "he's pretentious. he's ostentatious. and he's the only person i know who can be overzealous and under-zealous at the same fucking time."

"give it another 24 hours," seokjin suggests, adjusting his collar even though he has the kind of face that makes him look perfect in anything. to give an example, he once dressed up as a character from the hills have eyes and he still looked delicious. "you two will be best friends in no time."

"of course we will, that's the problem," taehyung pushes the door open for the two of them. "i always forgive him even when he fucks me over."

seokjin feigns a pout and pinches his cheek. "he's keeping you from getting laid again, isn't he?"

"yes," taehyung continues to grumble even as they step into the expecting classroom and go behind the makeshift walls of that create the runway illusion. "maybe even from falling in love. i'm telling you this guy has my heart in his tiny, nimble hands and i can't even tell him."

"if you can't tell him, how exactly is kookie's refusal to give you the dirty details on his whereabouts keeping you from proposing?"

as they step into the makeshift dressing room of the makeshift backstage of the makeshift runway, the music gets louder. as if to better taehyung's mood, the song currently playing is beyonce and he finds he can't be too upset. not when queen bey is lifting his spirits.

the lights get dimmer and taehyung is more than willing to admit that the orange glow of the dimmed fluorescents look magnificent against seokjin's profile.

"it may not be exactly barring me from confessing," taehyung discloses, raising his voice to be heard over the glaring music. "but it certainly isn't helping. if i could have his number or some kind of contact information, don't you think it would be easier?"

"how?"

"i could text him," taehyung shrugs. "that's romantic, right? an anonymous text from an unknown number. 'you're as beautiful as the sun rising under the morning mist', i dunno."

"you have to know whether they'd like a thing like that. who is it anyway?"

"park jimin."

"jamie?"

"no. he's a dancer. short, dark hair, magnificent eyes."

it may be almost completely dark by this point but the disappointment in seokjin's eyes is damn near blinding. "oh."

"ok, why do people keep doing that when i say his name?"

seokjin, at the very least, is about to answer his question or it seems that way which taehyung is exceedingly grateful for. but then, by the written word, his answer is taken away by a pushy, wannabe production assistant shoving seokjin onto the stage.
taehyung doesn't have any classes with the angel of dance and expensive snapbacks because his life is simply not that great. so the only times he ever gets to see him are when he's either standing outside of the fashion hall to stare right into the eye of the dance hall or...well, that's it. because, until now, jimin has only walked into the smoothie shop once. but today...

today taehyung's life is great.

even if jimin does look slightly disappointed at having to go to his register again, taehyung considers his life, at this nanosecond, to be great. "what can i get you today? matcha kale and peach?"

jimin frowns and taehyung groans inwardly. as if he wasn't already unintentionally following every step in the stalker handbook, he had to remember the drink jimin ordered over three weeks ago. the angel shakes his head and taehyung notices the beanie there and has to pinch himself so he doesn't squeal. he has a bad tendency to squeal at all things adorable.

"no," jimin looks back up at the menu and gnaws at his bottom lip until it turns white, until taehyung is pretty obviously staring at it with an open mouth. "i'll try the blueberry mint."

taehyung writes the code down dutifully before looking back up nervously. "do you want kale instead of spinach?"

jimin stares evenly, blankly. despite the obvious steel in his eyes, taehyung stares with his mouth hanging open because he's been describing those eyes terribly. black pearls weren't it. but beautiful dark brown diamonds hits the mark a little closer. "i'll take it as is."

"sorry," taehyung looks back down at the p.o.s. and, partly because he never learns from mistakes and partly because he wants to be nice, he punches in the discount again until the price reads $0.00.

jimin continues to rifle his backpack for his money when taehyung sends his cup down the line. he stretches his arm out to hand him the money -- cash this time -- but is once again waved off.

and taehyung gets the same reaction that he did last time. "i wanna pay for it."

"it's on the house," taehyung tries to smile politely but it withers and fades once he realizes jimin has no intention of returning it. he gets, instead, another hard stare that he tries to break. "i wanted to--"

jimin rolls his eyes, throws his cash in the tip jar, and walks away without a word. he takes a spot on the other end of the bar and awaits his drink. he puts one earphone in, leaving the other free so he can hear his order. it's an act of courtesy that most customers aren't kind enough to do.

taehyung peeks into the tip jar and sees a ten dollar bill and feels his stomach plunge out of guilt. unless jimin was the heir to a million dollar fortune and handed everything on a silver platter -- and he doesn't seem the type -- ten dollars was a lot of money for a college student to be throwing away. he was on the brink of handing the money to jackson, who was manning the bar and handing jimin his drink, when he sees jimin's uneasy expression.

he's holding onto his drink and so is jackson, like they're frozen mid pass off. jackson's saying something that taehyung can't pick up and jimin's face is fading into deeper shades of red. then jimin pulls his drink away and delivers a quiet but impactful "fuck off" before storming out.
every tuesday around three o'clock, namjoon gathers all the tips from the previous week and splits it up between each employee. taehyung has always been painfully honest about the amount of his tips, whether they were ridiculously high or nonexistent. but this time, when the clock strikes 2:30 and he knows he should be preparing to drop his tips, he does the first dishonest thing he's done at work. he takes jimin's bill out and shoves it in his pocket as non discretely as he can.

he hears jackson click his tongue and turns his head to see him shaking his in disappointment. "that's all you brought in today?"

"what can i say? customers hate me."

"i told you, right?" jackson throws an arm over his shoulder and gets uncomfortably close to his face. "how many times must i tell you? to get the tips, you show the tits."

"right, right," jackson takes the tip jar and counts at the cash before transferring it to the till bag. "at the very least, just charm them. if you start thinking with the goal of having every customer leave with a genuine smile on their face, you'll see your profits spike."

jackson is, by taehyung's definiton, what happens when potential meets pride and results in unparalleled ego. though jackson is funny and can be down to earth, he knows he looks good and he knows he's good at everything and it shows in every aspect of his character.

"good to know," another voice chimes in behind them and jackson pretty much jumps from his side, continuing to count out the bills with fake focus. "you guys don't want to make me look bad, right? what if taecyeon comes in and sees that i'm letting you guys do whatever you want in front of the customers?"

"you'll probably get a raise," taehyung muses because it's true. namjoon is clumsy and, despite his high iq, he can be an idiot but he has certain merits that make him undeniable to any and all authority figures. "like when you didn't show up to class a single day your senior year and graduated with honors."

namjoon pushes his head. "shut up. remember who hired you when no one else would."

"hey, the ice cream shop was on the verge of offering me a deal i couldn't refuse."

they weren't. that's precisely why taehyung had to cry to his mother so she could ask around and get him a job under the supervision of his least favorite cousin. well, his favorite cousin that he won't admit is his favorite cousin because said favorite cousin is already overspilling with himself.

"sure," namjoon turns to jackson. "while we have time, go pull some of the bistro boxes. gotta get ready for the second wave."

as jackson trots off like the dog that he is, namjoon looks as taehyung like he's trying to peer into his soul. or like he's trying to analyze his skeletal system to see if it would do him any good to donate it to science.

"something on my face?"
"trust me there doesn't need to be anything on your face for people to feel compelled to stare at it."

"just that handsome, huh?"

"just that much of an eyesore," namjoon corrects. "so, i didn't want to ask you in front of captain underpants but why are withholding tips?"

taehyung sinks. "you saw me?"

"well, you were kind of obvious," he pushes at his shoulder. "come on, fork it over."

"can you keep it in the back please? not with the tips?"

"of course i'll do something as ridiculous as that, remind me why i would though."

out of fear of his privacy being compromised, because there are already enough people who know about his latest infatuation, taehyung checks to see if jackson is returning. "is it rude of me to offer free drinks to customers?"

"rude? no. a little against company policy? you bet."

"i offered this guy a free drink today," taehyung looks off into space, replaying jimin's disappointed expression. "and he didn't want it. which is weird, right? it's weird to not want a free drink?"

"raises an eyebrow but not two."

"right. so instead of being thrilled and all cutely grateful, he got mad and threw the money he was gonna pay with in the tip jar. and it was ten dollars and...i just want to return it to him."

namjoon blinks, crosses his arms, then ruffles his hair. "he willingly put money in the tip jar? not against his will, correct?"

"correct."

"and you want to return it because...why?"

"please," taehyung groans. "just...i wanna return it to him."

namjoon gets a look in his eyes like he's just solved a really complicated quantum physics equation. he smiles. "you like him, that's why."

"no, i don't."

"yes you do," namjoon reaches into taehyung's pocket and takes the bill out before walking away. "but it's cool, it's cool."

"i don't," taehyung calls after him.

"yes you do," namjoon turns around and starts walking backwards which never ends well. "this is gonna be in my locker. thank me when, you know--"

taehyung nods and shortly thereafter he hears the all too familiar crash of namjoon falling into something. he doesn't feel bad for laughing.
"let me borrow five hundred dollars."

taehyung chews on the tapioca balls with a languish that would make hoseok, currently tightly wound, envious. "even if i had that kind of money, i would never lend it to you."

"to think i used to pine after you," hoseok points still not looking up from his phone. he zooms into the product he's got pulled up on ebay to see every detail. "look at this, it's an actual replica of john lennon. i need this figure more than i need a college education. if i could take back all the money i've thrown into this place, i would do it."

"shut him up," jeongguk blurs out exasperated. "i can't hear myself think."

"you can't hear anything because you're brain dead, moron."

jeongguk offers a shitty response and incites a storm of sharp words that taehyung has trained himself to tune out. he was supposed to be walking to class alone in the first place but because he can never deny his insatiable craving for boba, he ended up stopping to get a cup. and, of course, hoseok was already there practically humping wheein's leg for a free drink and a kiss.

and from there, jeongguk joined in (which no one asked him to do) and now all three of them are walking the campus green in their own worlds. taehyung isn't thinking about jimin, he's proud to say. in fact, all he's thinking about is the reminder not to think about jimin at all.

when taehyung looks up from his own phone, he notices jeongguk is walking away from them.

"who won?"

"no one," hoseok nods to the direction where jeongguk is walking and points out seokjin on the other side of the clearing.

movement catches taehyung's attention from the corner of his eye and he sees yoongi on the opposite side. "this is about to get interesting."

jeongguk stills at the same time that yoongi notices him and they both stand for a short moment. both their eyes flick to seokjin's direction once more before jeongguk is using his four years of cross country during high school to sprint across the green.

hoseok and taehyung turn to yoongi and laugh because it's quite obvious that the guy has no intention of running. instead he rolls his shoulders back and continues walking at a steady pace.

"how long are they gonna do this?"

taehyung shrugs as jeongguk catches up to seokjin and pulls him into a hug. "i would be pleased if they did it for the rest of my life. free entertainment."

"don't they know how stupid they look?"

"they don't," jeongguk tries and fails to steer seokjin away from yoongi who's approaching them quickly. seokjin has already noticed and called him forward. "even if they did, it wouldn't matter. because jin hyung is absolutely clueless. he means well though."

hoseok laughs when jeongguk glares. "i never looked that desperate to you, did i?"

"nah," taehyung waves a hand. "you were cute. like a needy puppy. with wheein, however, you look desperate. and ugly."
they continue on their path while the other three disappear in the film hall i.e.: seokjin's hall. taehyung continues the recitation of his current rule.

"i guess desperation looks good on me then. because we had our third date last night."

"ew," taehyung twists his face up. "who the hell has a date on a weekday?"

"big talk for someone who has date on no days of the week."

either by mistake or design or due to the cliched screenwriting of rom-com aficionados, jimin appears at that very moment. he's wearing a thick red tommy hilfiger pullover that taehyung imagines slipping on post coitus. then he pinches himself for getting carried away with his imagination.

"i'm working on it."

and then hoseok does something that surprises taehyung more than the twist ending of the crying game. he smiles at jimin.

"hey," he greets kindly as he passes.

and then jimin does something that serves as the second biggest thing to surprise taehyung more than the twist ending of the crying game. he doesn't smile but he nods his head and returns the greeting quietly.

when jimin has passed, taehyung waits for hoseok to mutter something rude and unintelligible under his breath but no. hoseok just returns to their conversation. "working on it, huh? who's the lucky lady? lad?"

"he just walked by you."

"oh shit," hoseok turns around and looks at jimin's retreating figure. "wow, really? that's cute. why didn't you say hi?"

"technically i'm not supposed to know him. haven't properly introduced myself, have no classes with him, i just see him leave the dance hall and try not to stare."

"try and fail, right?"

"always."

hoseok nods. "of course. good luck then."

"that's it?" taehyung feels like jumping for joy because this is the first and only stamp of approval he's gotten. not that he needs it. but it'd be nice to be with someone that his friends didn't hate. "good luck?"

"yeah, you'll need it. jimin is...i mean, he's obviously cute. and he's sweet. he can be pretty funny, i think you would enjoy a lot of witty exchanges with him. but..."

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"yeah, you'll need it. jimin is...i mean, he's obviously cute. and he's sweet. he can be pretty funny, i think you would enjoy a lot of witty exchanges with him. but..."

"but you have to try, right?"

"always."

"i'm trying."

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"yeah, you'll need it. jimin is...i mean, he's obviously cute. and he's sweet. he can be pretty funny, i think you would enjoy a lot of witty exchanges with him. but..."
"why? he's shy? i can do shy, i'm perseverant."

"he just has a big wall up, you get me? if you're serious about him then get ready to be turned down a thousand times."

taehyung smiles so big his cheeks start to hurt and he pulls hoseok in for a hug, squeezing him tight, lifting him up, and spinning him around. "thank you, thank you, thank you!"

"do you have his phone number?" he asks after he sets the older down.

hoseok nods. "but i'm not giving it to you."

the third time jimin comes into the store, taehyung almost misses him because he's taking his ten minute break. as he's snacking on one of the bistro boxes in the back, the one that will certainly come out of his paycheck, he replies to missed texts and catches up on the news.

he's in the middle of explaining the importance of not touching his shit to jeongguk when jackson waltz into the backroom. "your ten over yet?"

"it just started," taehyung almost whines but he doesn't because he's a functioning adult. "i have seven minutes left."

"okay," jackson sighs. "because there's a customer out here who refuses to come up to my register."

that grabs taehyung's attention. each customer that goes to jackson's register have made it a habit to only go to his register because he was so fantastic. there were no customers who didn't enjoy his service.

"you're full of shit."

"okay, just thought i'd let you know."

he leaves it at that and taehyung continues catch up on important events in the world -- kitten videos -- until his break is up. when it is and he is stepping out of the backroom, he freezes as he catches an unclear glimpse of jimin waiting by his register.

"fuck me," he mumbles before reaching into namjoon's locker and nabbing the ten dollar bill. he runs out of the backroom but stutters in his steps before turning around and running back to retrieve his apron.

as he makes another run for it, he sees jimin take a step away and, because he was raised in a barn according to seokjin, he yells out his name.

jimin turns to him just as he steps in front of his register and signs in.

"hey," taehyung greets. "welcome back."

jimin doesn't say anything, he stares for a beat and then looks up at the menu again. "aloe vera and lemongrass, please."

"you got it," taehyung starts writing on the cup but he does so deliberately slow. almost like molasses. he's trying to decide how he can get jimin to stay longer when he remembers that he has his money. "oh. i was gonna return the gracious tip you left the other day. do you want me to just take it out of that or...can i give you the whole ten?"
"sure. take it out, thanks."

if he can't give him the drink for free, at the very least, taehyung figures, he can give him a discount.

he wants to say something though. he wants to ask why jimin waited for him, wants to ask how he's been, wants to ask him out to dinner and a movie but he can't. because even though it's chilly out, jimin is only wearing a zip up hoodie that hangs off his shoulder and reveals his biceps.

taehyung stills his processing the payment which his biggest mistake because the lack of movement doesn't go unnoticed by jimin who shifts and covers his arm. taehyung looks up immediately. “i’m so sorry.”

“can you just give me my change please?” jimin is red in the face, eyes down as he zips up his jacket.

taehyung scrambles to get the cash together but takes his time counting out the change. he looks up again. “i’m sorry.”

“i heard you the first time.”

“no, really, i’m usually not that rude. by that, i mean i usually don’t get caught staring at, um…let’s face it, you’re like a modern day adonis and i’ve seen you around and…shit.”

taehyung slams the register shut with more force than necessary and gently slides the money over to jimin. jimin is still close mouthed and stoic and doesn’t look at all close to accepting the apology. he walks away, stuffing his money in his jogger pockets and just when taehyung is planning what to have his cousin say at his funeral (because there’s no way he’s not burying himself after this), jimin comes back.

“i want to pay for my drinks,” he says.

taehyung tilts his head. “okay?”

“seriously,” jimin licks his lips and taehyung tries to ignore that flip in his stomach. “i want to pay for my drinks. i appreciate the gesture, it’s kind. or at least i think it might be. but i’d like to pay for my drinks.”

“okay,” taehyung nods. “i’ll…i’m sorry.”

“me too,” jimin says after a while. “if i was rude. which i was, i know. but i’d—“

“no more free drinks, i got it.”

jimin nods, taps his hand against the countertop. “see you.”

“i’m in love,” he sings when he lays down on his bed that night. “he walked in carrying hope with him in his duffel bag, his hat full of charm, and he blew a kiss with his smile—“ jimin didn’t smile but embellishments in memory are a hell of a thing “—and said ‘see you’.”

“is he okay?” seokjin asks jeongguk who shrugs.

“you’re not talking about—?”
“i am,” taehyung sits up confidently. “and you can suck it!”

when jimin starts to come in on a regular everyday basis, taehyung understands why he’d told him he would like to pay for his drinks. if taehyung knew he planned on becoming a regular, he would have bothered to fix his hair for the morning shifts.

everyday he ordered something different and everyday was every morning and every afternoon. so even when taehyung wasn’t working the morning shift, he’d get to see him. and on the days that he was working the morning shift, their exchanges were quiet and succinct. jimin’s morning face often blew his mind and without the benefit of being awake for long, taehyung often forgot not to stare.

"um," jimin, as always, takes a few moments to gaze up at the menu looming behind taehyung's head. "honeydew mint."

taehyung starts writing.

"could you add a bit of kale to that please?"

"a preference?" taehyung smiles wide. "of course."

note: jimin likes kale.

jimin hands over his card and taehyung starts the process, taking more time than he actually needs to but jimin doesn't seem to mind. "knock knock."

it's a risk and taehyung knows it. in all the times that jimin has walked into the store, taehyung has never told a joke or had a bit of banter that jimin acknowledged in the least. it seems like the seconds tick by in slow motion but eventually jimin, most likely too tired to put up his wall, asks: "who's there?"

taehyung smiles wider, containing it is hard. "kale."

"kale who?"

"obviously i have time to kale," he laughs. jimin doesn't. his smile fades and he hangs his head. "i'm sorry. that wasn't funny, i found it in a kale book--"

at that, jimin sputters and soon a delightful smile breaks out onto his angelic, cherubic, perfect, ideal face. and the smile is better than anything taehyung's imagination could have served him. jimin's eyes disappear and yet it's easy to see them twinkle. taehyung feels like he's watching the sun rise.

"you have a kale book?"

"when i was trying to eat healthier," taehyung nods, still in a daze. "i'm sorry if i'm out of line but you have the most beautiful smile."

and as if those are the magic words needed to crush all things beautiful, jimin's smile fades. "thanks."

another apology is creeping out of taehyung's mouth when jimin takes his card and walks away.
"shit shit shit shit shit," taehyung exhales heavily when he takes a seat in the backroom. namjoon and taecyeon look at him questioningly but neither of them say anything on account of it being him. "shit shit fuck fucking shit shit shit on a fucking--"

"is he having a seizure?" taecyeon asks namjoon who shakes his head.

"taecyeon hyung," taehyung reaches a hand out as he hyperventilates like death is near him. "i can't work anymore today. i'm suffering from heartache."

"he's in love," namjoon says to the cash he's counting in his hand. typical manager responsibilities. "with a customer."

"taecyeon brushes the hand from his shoulder and rolls his eyes. "stop being dramatic."

"he's in love," namjoon says to the cash he's counting in his hand. typical manager responsibilities. "with a customer."

this alerts taecyeon who swivels around in his chair and glares at taehyung. "no free drinks."

"he wants to pay for them anyway," taehyung moans. "i thought i was in love before but holy shit he smiled and i'm gonna blow my savings buying him a ring."

precisely because no one is talking to him, namjoon decides to throw in his over-analytical: "you know this is why your relationships never work out. you idealize everyone too much, you put everyone on a pedestal then your hopes are crushed when you realize they are, in fact, human."

"but park jimin isn't human," taehyung sighs and caresses his chest. "he's an angel. he's a celestial being that's graced the human population with his presence. his smile is like the sun. hyung, i looked directly into it, i might go blind--"

"park jimin?"

oh.

the disappointment is unmistakable.

"why would you have a crush on him?"

"you know park jimin is a really common name," taehyung sits up from his position on the floor, leaning his back against the wall. "i'm starting to think that my park jimin and everyone else's park jimin are two different people. my angel has a demon evil twin and that's who you guys are thinking of."

"stop calling him yours," taecyeon scrunches his nose. "i bet you haven't even talked to him outside of the store script."

"hey! i tried to say hi one time."

"park jimin is a--"

"stop," taec instructs using the authoritative voice that he rarely ever employs. "he'll find out for himself. don't ruin his first love of the week."
in the weeks that followed, all interactions with jimin had been contained in their daily vendor/buyer communication. each day, jimin would try something different, almost never repeating a single order twice. one morning, he even allowed taehyung to recommend his favorite one: a peach mango hybrid with spirulina and kale.

taehyung is not ashamed to say he watched jimin closely with a laser stare to gauge his reaction. the way the corners of his lips turned up ever so slightly made the rest of taehyung's day.

in those weeks, taehyung hadn't gotten any closer to really conversing with jimin about anything other than smoothies and vegetable substitutions. although, on two separate occasions, jimin spoke out of script and taehyung believed he made some kind of breakthrough with his silence.

on a slow day during after the lunch rush, when the customers had thinned out, jimin walked away after buying an avocado-apple blend only to come back with his head down.

"um," he'd swallowed hard as he stared down at his shoes -- checkered vans that day. "i wanted to thank you."

taehyung raised his eyebrows and refuted the itch to point a finger at his chest to clarify. "me?"

"yeah," jimin looked up but still avoided eye contact. "you always write my name on the cup and...thank you for that."

that day taehyung was too surprised and his heart was beating too fast for him to even muster up a reply. with the lack of any vocal acknowledgement, jimin walked away and taehyung, once again, melted into a pool of jelly.

then a few days after that, jimin spoke out of script again with a completely different reaction than gratitude.

"how much is it?"

thoughts of all the thesaurus entries he never read ran through taehyung's mind because it was painfully embarrassing that every encounter with jimin ended up with him stuttering and repeating "what" like a broken record.

"what?" he'd stuttered out.

"the bet," jimin sighed, exasperated as if he had been forced to explain something as simple and common as a blue sky. "i mean...why you're being so nice to me, it's a bet, right? can i just pay the price? that way you don't have to pretend."

even though taehyung loved his friends dearly and he valued their thoughts and opinions, he was beginning to feel nothing but hatred for them at jimin's obvious lack of self-confidence. it was clear that everything they all had to say about jimin was not only a commonality amongst the school campus but it was why taehyung only saw jimin alone.

"i...i'm not pretending--" and then, like the broken record he became in jimin's presence -- he
stuttered once more. "i'm sorry."

he wanted to say more, wanted to express a different kind of regret, wanted to apologize for not only making him uncomfortable but apologize for everyone else. but, even though he's usually a smooth talker, quick-witted and sharp, his tongue is always tied in jimin's presence.

taehyung looked down because he was almost certain looking into jimin's eyes was making speech impossible. "if i made you uncomfortable...i know i can do that sometimes."

there was silence for a bit and taehyung looked back up to see jimin looking up at him earnestly. "there's no bet?"

taehyung shook his head. "there's no bet, i just--"

think you're magnificent and have been fantasizing about holding your hand for about two months. think you're beautiful and ethereal and everything that's currently right in my life.

"--i just think you're nice," he said instead.

and that was that. jimin paid for his smoothie -- vanilla lime green --, murmured a subdued thanks, and left.

"down boy," taehyung mutters.

his voice is tired as he hasn't been getting much sleep lately, throwing hours upon hours into his final project. as a computer science major, his speciality, so the cliche goes, is procrastination. yet he's been working tirelessly on completing his project so that when finals do roll around, he can do nothing while jeongguk suffers.

their rivalry is too extreme but it's the best part about their relationship.

currently, jeongguk is visibly seething, smoke practically blowing from his ears as he watches seokjin all over yoongi. it isn't like they're all over each other cuddling and canoodling like those couples in their honeymoon phase. not even close. seokjin is actually just smoothing down yoongi's hair. he'd walked into seokjin's dorm looking like he had a fight with an airbender and lost.

even though it's just platonic hair fluffing, jeongguk is glaring like they're fucking right there by the door.

"shut up," the younger mutters. from experience, taehyung knows he wants to say more but he doesn't. he wouldn't risk saying anything with yoongi in ear shot. taehyung's eyes shoot down to the younger's hand, bunched up and faded white.

it was a gesture taehyung was familiar with because it was a gesture that meant he was ready to fight. he can't count on one hand how many times he got bruised up trying to defend his friend's idiocy. but even then, taehyung wasn't much of a fighter.

instead of ignoring his bratty attitude like he really wanted to, taehyung offers a distraction. "so, uh, how do you know jimin?"

just as expected, jeongguk glares at him, completely abandoning the vomit inducing sight of yoongi and seokjin's embrace. he sizes him up. "still?"
"it's been like two days."

"you kind of fell in love with him in september," jeongguk slumps deeper into his chair and huffs out of his nose. they're two signals of his uncapped anger but his fist loosens up. "so, yeah, not two days."

taehyung fakes an excited smile, places a hand on his chest. "you've been stalking the development of my infatuation? guk..."

"this has been going on too long," jeongguk pulls out his phone and starts scrolling through his contacts. "if you need to get laid, you can go through my black book. unless...you might not want sloppy seconds--"

"i don't care about that."

"--there's a party tonight," he continues like he wasn't interrupted. "i wasn't gonna go but i'm taking you. get fucked and flush out everything about him."

at some point in the time between taehyung's initial starstruck encounter and his extensive social media research, jeongguk had gone from calling jimin 'finger cuffs' to flat out refusing to say his name. "i'm okay."

"you don't have a choice."

"threatening people again?" it's yoongi's voice that responds and the two turn to see him taking a seat on seokjin's loveseat. and seokjin sits next to him. "i thought you were past that now, kookie."

"it's jeongguk," jeongguk declares, glaring intensely. lucky enough seokjin is too distracted trying to unravel his earphones. "and it's for his own good."

"phone," seokjin lays out a hand, palm up, on yoongi's lap and curls his fingers once, twice until yoongi hands him the iPhone. he plugs the earphones in and puts both earbuds in. "it better be good."

"only the best for you," with his eyes staying on jeongguk's deeply sullen expression, yoongi starts to slowly slide his hand up seokjin's thigh.

jeongguk visibly shakes. for a second, taehyung considers making a run for it. he would have a chance if he booked it now, he could escape jeongguk's quick hands with ease. the tension only gets thicker as he continues to consider until seokjin, finally paying attention to something other than the video, swats yoongi's hands away and twists his face.

"stop being weird," he whines quietly, eyes still trained on the small screen. taehyung knows it's a video portfolio for yoongi's side gig as a cinematographer and he knows, because yoongi is kind of brilliant, that it looks as breathtaking as 2001: a space odyssey. so he really has to fight hard not to go and join seokjin in watching the video unless he wants jeongguk to give him shit about it later.

jeongguk smirks. "nice try."

yoongi responds with a look that says 'look who he's sitting next to, dumbass.'

and therein starts the intense stare off. no words, nothing said, nothing verbal anyway. but insults were flying between them like shards of glass leaving them angrier and lacerated. if taehyung hadn't been so tired, he probably would have been up for the entertainment. but today wasn't the kind of day for silent arguments, the thick tension was going to choke him. and, while he'd
probably welcome death at this point, he still has standards.

so he pulls jeongguk up against his better judgment and nods goodbye to yoongi. "we're gonna head to that party."

once upon a time, a few blue moons ago, jeongguk had one successful date-date with seokjin. it hadn't been a genuine result of the iconic cinematic meet-cute so many people fantasized over. it was the result of seokjin needing to dodge one of his exes and jeongguk being all too eager to volunteer as fake boyfriend tribute.

the whole time seokjin had been focused on using his acting skills, going out of his way to be grossly mushy. he would giggle at anything jeongguk said, tuck a loose hair behind the younger's ear, let jeongguk kiss his neck, it was all all a facade. but jeongguk ran with it and used it as an excuse to do all the things he'd always wanted to do.

even though it was fake, taehyung is sure that jeongguk has been trying to recreate that for a long time. that, combined with yoongi's presence, was probably why jeongguk was knocking back for liquor than he can actually handle. he tends to get worked up when it comes to seokjin.

"i thought you were supposed to be helping me get laid or something," taehyung pinches jeongguk's cheek. his hand is slapped away and jeongguk's eyes stay cold as he stares at a blank space.

he sets his red cup down, reaching for the liquor bottle to pour more. but then he grimaces, tosses the cup, and guzzles the bottle. "do i really need to hold your hand through everything?"

with that comment, taehyung stands and steps away. "i'm gonna find weed and go home. i hope you pass out everyone draws dicks on your face."

it doesn't take taehyung long at all to find the stoners. all he had to do was follow the trail of cheeto crumbs...and the scent of marijuana but specifics. being taehyung, he kind of managed to fit in with any kind of crowd so upon entering the room, he was given a seat and quickly offered a perfectly rolled joint. it was so pristine, taehyung almost wanted to cry.

"this is the most beautiful thing i have ever seen," he marveled at it, rolled it gently between his thumb and forefinger, and inhaled deeply so that the smell would be embedded in his existence. "shit," he breathed out.

"thank you," the guy who rolled the joint smiled proudly. "i'm kind of an expert at this point. you smoke a lot?"

"not really. i just save it for special occasions."

"oh?" the guy leans over and lights the joint for taehyung. taehyung inhales, sees angels, and exhales. "what's today then?"

"almost done with finals celebration," taehyung laughs. he takes another hit and his chest burns pleasantly. "i only get a three day break though."

the other guy laughs, chokes out smoke, and wipes his watered eyes. "isn't the break like a month long?"
"yeah," taehyung nods regretfully. "i signed up for winter intercession so i'll be here doing coursework. which is exciting, i know."

"tuition?"

"yep. too expensive so i try to take classes during every break," taehyung eyes the guy's light blonde hair and smirks. "you're a fashion major?"

"uh, no. undeclared for now."

taehyung inhales again and, upon remembering that his mother raised him to be cordial, presses the joint between his lips and offers a free hand. "i'm taehyung, by the way."

"mark," the blonde takes taehyung's hand and gives it a firm stoner shake. "it's good to meet someone who appreciates my joint rolling efforts."

"hey, it's amazing to meet someone who can roll one like he has fully developed motor skills."

they tap joints like they're clinking shot glasses and therein begins the kind of platonic meet-cute that has cemented iconic friendships like timon and pumbaa. they laugh about the current political endeavors of ex-frat boys who totally peaked in college, they exchange stories about horror professors, they critique current social life on campus and somehow find themselves wandering into sex territory.

it's a topic that taehyung doesn't usually talk about but one that he does enjoy discussing.

"and then there's that whole debate on swallowing and kissing right after," mark continues his diatribe with a fire akin to rage and lust in his eyes. "i mean, who actually gives a fuck? if a girl gives me head and she actually swallows, the last thing i'd be concerned about is tasting it. in my opinion, it's kind of the hottest thing ever but, you know, guys will go weeks without a shower but suddenly become germaphobes when it comes to that."

"thank you!" taehyung slaps mark's arm in victory, a symbol of brotherhood. "someone said it, someone actually said it! i don't get what's so gross about it, besides if someone is willing to suck your dick and swallow and you're happy about it, what does it say about you that you won't do it? it's gross to you yet you want them to do it? i really wish i could find the logic in that, i really do."

mark nods excitedly. the two were hitting off like gangbusters. "my god! and it feels so amazing, let's be honest. though, you know, it's no fault of the person doing the sucking if they don't want to swallow. you never know what you're swallowing down which is why i personally consider it to be, like, a symbol of great appreciation and solidarity and love when someone does want to swallow."

they both laugh, they both take a hit, they both hold it in for a bit longer than usual. when they exhale at the same time, they laugh again as mark hits taehyung's chest.

"oh, oh," he groans, biting his bottom lip and throwing his head back. "there was this guy though. he used to swallow with everyone, he'd swallow even if he didn't know them. but i mean, that's a special case though, he was kind of...loose. that'd be the nice way to put it."

mark giggles again but taehyung's smile fades and his anxiety, despite the high dosages of thc in his system, starts to rise. his stomach becomes a professional in acrobatics, flipping and twisting until he feels like he could be sick. he inhales again to distract himself.

"what was his name?" mark thinks out loud. "oh...we called him...finger cuffs! that was it! finger
cuffs..."

and maybe it's because of the unnerving curiosity or because taehyung wants to have a decent reason for using the fighting skills he does not possess on this guy...whatever it is, he asks: "finger cuffs? what's the story behind that?"

his feigned cluelessness goes unnoticed and mark starts to dive into this story very excitedly with a wide smile and those same fiery, lustful eyes. "basically he was kind of a huge slut."

"so?" taehyung asked with a little more force than necessary. but mark failed to notice again. "aren't we all to an extent?"

"to give you an idea," mark set down his joint and cleared his throat, looking at the group in the room. "you guys remember finger cuffs?"

as if mark had asked them about the latest sports game win or how great the marvel universe is, everyone in the room cheered. they laughed and nodded and each delved into their own personal tales about encounters with jimin. jimin because taehyung would never call him finger cuffs, no matter how many people only knew him by that name.

"see?" mark continues smugly. "anyway, he was the guy that you could rely on. if you came out to have a good time and you were striking out with everyone you really wanted to be with, if you weren't too late, there was always finger cuffs. honestly, he would let you do anything to him, it didn't matter. i'm not positive but i'm pretty sure -- pretty fucking sure -- that he's been fucked by everyone on campus except the freshmen since he kinda fell off.

"he stopped going to parties," mark clears his throat again before taking another hit. "he changed his number, deleted a lot of his profiles, and stopped. but, if you ask me, it doesn't matter if he's stopped or that he doesn't do it anymore because, at the end of the day, he still did it. did everyone. a slut by any other name is still a slut." for the first time in ever, taehyung understood how jeongguk fumed so easily. how he would clutch his fists, clench his jaw, bite down on his tongue, and be prepared to fight. he would throw a punch but every fight he's ever been in before has started and ended with him not having a clue what he's doing and getting his ass repeatedly handed to him. instead he passes his burnt down joint to someone else. "kind of close minded, don't you think?"

mark shook his head. "you think i'm exaggerating. one of his last big hoo-rah's was this holy gang bang that none of us thought would be something we'd actually witness or take part in, you know? but there he was being handled. . . to give you another idea, before that night, we called him cum dumpster."

mark laughs loudly like it's the funniest thing ever, bursts out until his face is red and he's wheezing. everyone in the room starts to laugh and chant "cum dumpster" and taehyung is certain he's going to throw up now.

"so finger cuffs? how'd that come to be?"

mark smirks. "at that party, he had action going on at both ends. a dick in his mouth, a dick in his ass, locked in like finger cuffs."

before taehyung turns to leave, he slaps that fake smile on his face and asks for mark's number or facebook or something because "we should hang out more."

he's given the number with a promise that he's invited to mark's dorm for a reefer anytime.
when taehyung gets home, he hacks into mark's weibo and facebook account with ease and posts the most heinous status he can think of. the hate comments start rolling in immediately but he doesn't read any of them.

taehyung stares at his reflection in the bathroom mirror. he isn't as attractive as jimin but his reflection will have to do. it's early in the morning and everyone else on the hall is asleep which works to his benefit because he doesn't really need anyone to hear his speech. he'd been up most of the night trying to figure out how he could make himself look relatively hot while wearing his job uniform.

which had been a waste because he'd totally forgotten that he wasn't on the clock until afternoon. so then he just focused all his energy on not looking like he was raised in a barn. he could prove seokjin wrong, win jimin's heart, and make his mother proud all in a single move.

after the party, he'd reflected on jimin and everyone's perception of him for a long time. the thing was, even with the image of jimin kneeling on all fours at some house party on some soiled bed being pounded on both ends, taehyung still thought jimin was immaculate. he tried to look at it from someone else's perspective but even when he imagined the roles being switched or when he put actors in his place (priyanka chopra as him and deepika padukone as jimin), he still didn't care.

knowing a fragment of jimin's past and remembering the advice hoseok had given him, he decided that he had no other choice than to actually try. who cared if he was a stuttering mess around jimin? he couldn't wait for him to fall into his lap. even if he couldn't be a lover, he could at least be a friend. with everyone on campus being assholes, he figured jimin would need one. even if he didn't want one.

"hey," he says to his reflection smoothly and very taehyung-esque. not the taehyung who messes up in his own dialect when speaking to jimin. "my name is taehyung. we see each other like every day at the smoothie shop but i didn't think you knew my name. since i'm always losing my name--" "tag," he stutters again and blushes. the speech had gone so smoothly when he wasn't looking into jimin's eyes. after ensuring that he didn't look like he just rolled out of bed and jumped into the first set of threads he could find, he went to the quad and waited behind a tree. as if that wasn't stalkerish enough in itself, he started walking in step with jimin once he appeared on his way to the dance hall. "i saw you and i just thought i'd say hi."

jimin had stopped after the first few steps of walking with taehyung. he stared at him as he spoke, unsmiling and seemingly uninterested. "i know your name."

"oh," taehyung's voice rises an octave. "really?"

"your boss is always yelling at you," jimin nods. "good to meet you, i guess."

"yeah, you too."

it was always really fantastical in the movies and dramas but taehyung never realized it. there he was, standing in front of the guy who's had the starring role in all his dreams for the past two months, and he couldn't do anything but stare. he knows he planned more of the speech, had stored some witty banter somewhere deep in his mental filing cabinet of icebreakers but he can't get to them. because this is the closest he's ever been to jimin.
at this distance, he can see the smoothness of his skin, see more details in his pleasantly plump lips, see a future of constant hand holding and --

"i'm gonna walk away now."

jimin turns on his heel and taehyung is almost left behind but he catches up quickly. they continue walking to the dance hall and taehyung looks from jimin to the building every few seconds to make sure he has time. why isn't the building father away?

"anyway," he clears his throat. "i saw you walking and thought i'd say hi."

"you mentioned that already."

"right," taehyung scrolls through the mini script he wrote on his notepad. "so you're a dancer? that's really cool, i have no rhythm at all. i like music a lot though, what kind of music do you like?"

answer: glaring side eye.

"do you dance contemporary?" taehyung scans through the script again. "hip hop? ballet? you look like you'd do it all. you seem really well rounded and cool. you're really handsome too--" not on the script, not on the script, he screams internally. "i didn't mean that -- no! i mean, i did. i do! but i didn't mean to say it out loud."

jimin speeds up and taehyung struggles to keep up with the pace. sure, he's a skinny pole but that's because his metabolism is faster than senna's best racing record. not because he actually exercises.

he pants. "um...you like the shop? we're thinking of adding some new options to the menu? do you like carrot juice because--"

see, even though taehyung put hours upon hours into making sure he looked decent. even though he wore his best pants and borrowed one of jeongguk's expensive shirts and even though he spent a lot of time making sure he's hair looked like he was a civilized human being, he forgot about the shoes. according to his cousin, the shoes could make or break the outfit.

if you're wearing the nicest armani suit with silk lining and costly material, it won't matter if you're wearing dirty, torn up sneakers with it. taehyung should have borrowed a pair of jeongguk's best sneakers as well but he was so used to slipping on his sub-par, beaten up sneakers that it didn't occur to him.

years of dragging his feet, running around scheming with jeongguk, and generally treating his shoes like shit boats finally caught up to him. the sole of his shoe pushed out enough for a small part of it to be ripped from the rest of the shoe. and because of that, along with the fact that his shoestrings never stayed tied, he tripped right onto his face.

jimin stops in his tracks and backpedals to kneel down next to him. "you all right?"

"yeah," taehyung groans as he sits up and sees the sole of his shoe bending out, peeled away to put his charlie brown socks on display. "i've died several times from mortification but i always come back."

"no, you're bleeding."

jimin sighs and opens his duffel bag, ransacks it with steel focus. taehyung really does try not to stare. like honestly. like completely. but his willpower is terrible and he stares openly at the way
jimin's eyebrows bunch up. "oh" is all he manages.

"here," jimin tosses him a bandaid.

taehyung is quick to place it near his eye where it feels like the bleeding is coming from so he can keep staring at jimin whose hand reappears from his bag again, this time with a pair of jordans. he sets them near taehyung and zips up his bag, ready to get up and be on his way.

"you can return these whenever," jimin says. he looks at taehyung and the corners of his mouth turn up slightly but he stops the smile from spreading quickly. he leans close, really close, close enough that his breath can fan over taehyung's face. "the cut isn't there."

he takes the bandaid off of that area and places it about taehyung's brow. with his own legs sprawled out on the ground, hands back, palms flat on the concrete and jimin kneeling next to him in the large quad, taehyung feels a sense of intimacy. jimin had stretched his neck to look at the cut on taehyung's forehead and taehyung lowered his to stare at the muscles in jimin's neck.

the moment is over all too soon, jimin offering an extra bandaid and walking down the path again.

"wait!" taehyung calls out, still sitting on his ass, not wanting to move in case his clumsiness betrays him again. "will i see you tomorrow? i mean, outside of your smoothie break."

at that particular moment, taehyung made it a note for him to memorize everything and store the image as a keepsake. with the sun starting rising higher behind him, set in an orange glow, jimin looks like an undeniable descendent of royalty. even with his unsmiling face, he looks gentle. "tell you what: you pretend you don't know i walk here every day and i'll pretend i didn't see you hiding behind that tree."

"where'd you get those?"

taehyung stuffs more fries into his mouth and looks down at the jordans on his feet. he taps the heels together like that's the only way to get home. "they're jimin's."

hoseok raises his eyebrows, elbows taehyung in the stomach, and cheers loudly. they're sitting in the parking lot of wheein's second job, a fast food joint, waiting for her to get off work so they can all go the movies. hoseok's latest genre infatuation is playing on the radio: indie rock-rap fusion. "so, is it official? did you guys spend the night together?"

the smile taehyung had been wearing falters a little but not too much because a step is a step. "actually, i just fell on my face in front of him because my shoes gave up. and he took pity. but before that, i think we were really hitting it off."

hoseok ruffles his hair before turning his attention back to his burger. it's greasy, bacon dense goodness that he only permits himself to indulge in every other week on his cheat days. "i have to say, tae, i'm impressed."

"that i'm still in the game after striking out so many times?" taehyung takes a bite of his own burger. "but i'm relentless."

"most people wouldn't bother trying to get to know jimin beyond..." hoseok trails off, the thought of stating the truth to disdainful. "you know."
"yeah, i've heard. this guy named mark told me all." taehyung shrugs.

"mark? oh god, mark tuan? what an asshole, did you see his status?"

taehyung reddens a bit but hides his face by taking a huge bite. he mumbles: "what can i say? i'm in love."

"and then you go and say things like that about a guy you've barely spoken to and being impressed becomes being appalled."

"okay, if you're such an expert, what does love feel like?"

hoseok opens his mouth but he's saved by the sound of the back door opening. wheein smiles at him and greets the two of them. that light in hoseok's eyes as soon as he set his sights on wheein makes taehyung wonder if that's what he looks like when he looks at jimin.

he can't dwell on it for long though because a fry is thrown right on the side of his cheek.

"move," hoseok growls. then to wheein: "babe, he's going to the back. you sit up here next to papa."

wheein engulfs him in a hug when he slides out of the passenger seat and he slaps a greasy, salty kiss on her cheek. the fry that hoseok had thrown at him fell into his hoodie and he offered it. "fry?"

"you're disgusting," wheein slips into her seat and shuts the door. taehyung drags his feet to the backseat as he scarfs down the limp fry.

"just because she's here doesn't mean you can't answer the question."

"ooh," wheein squeals. "what were we talking about?"

"i asked him what love felt like," taehyung slides into the middle and leans up until he's bearing his elbows on the center console. "would you help me out?"

"just to clarify: he thinks he's in love with someone he's never had a regular conversation with," hoseok explains quickly as he starts the car. "the most consistent dialogue they've had has been about smoothies."

"and?" wheein clicks her tongue. "taehyung, i hope you know that before hoseok even considered asking me out, our only interactions were when he was craving extra boba in his matcha iced tea."

"i'm noticing a pattern," taehyung hums thoughtfully. "maybe we're all cursed to find our soulmates in beverage shops."

"nah," hoseok starts up, passing wheein what's left over of his cheat meal. she takes it gingerly, lifts hoseok's free hand and kisses the back of it. "yoongi and seokjin met at a party off campus for people wanting to come up in the fashion world or something."

wheein freezes mid bite. "you mean jeongguk and seokjin met at a cafe."

oh, another thing about the effect of the seokjin trial: everyone in their circle and even people outside of it liked to keep up with what was going on as if it was a drama. a weekly television show where people could be shocked and surprised. people liked to ship and take sides too.

hoseok was team yoongi and seokjin. wheein was team jeongguk and seokjin. and taehyung was
team not giving a fuck because jimin is amazing.

"c'mon, you know they wouldn't last. jeongguk doesn't know anything about seokjin, he just idealizes his good looks."

"okay, well, jeongguk isn't the one who used seokjin for sex and then broke it off but refused to back off so he can have an actual relationship."

"actually," taehyung interrupts. "if we could get back to me..."

"how do you feel around this guy, tae?" wheein turns in her seat and looks into his eyes. "explain how you feel."

"i don't know," elton john starts singing in his head as he leans back in the backseat and slips into those constant daydreams. "i feel happy. like i could be having a boring day at work and he'll come in and i'll feel like life is a parade of sunshine, rainbows, and blowjobs. not literally. but...it's like i feel nervous with swans in my heart--"

"his version of butterflies in his stomach," hoseok explains quietly.

"--but at the same time i feel like i could do anything," taehyung breathes out lightly, still living on cloud nine as the very thought of jimin is enough to send him to the highest heaven. "i dunno, wheein, i just really like him. love him, i love him."

"no, you don't," hoseok argues.

"yes, i do."

"no, you don't!"

"yes, i do!" "yes, he does!"

"what?" hoseok and taehyung ask wheein in the same breath.

"that sounds like love to me," she says pensively. her smile becomes thoughtful, eyes lifted up as she's transported to the past. "i loved you at first sight."

even though that starts off a gooey love fest that taehyung doesn't need to see, one that makes him regret coming with them to take on the role of the third wheel, he can't be too upset. first it was hoseok, now it was wheein, and taehyung was beginning to feel certain that he could make this happen.

after all, a big part of love is making sacrifices and taehyung has been pretending his feet haven't been in total pain for the past three hours. he couldn't quite bring himself to take the too small shoes off though.

jeongguk, sober and somewhat pleasant, smiles at his sneakers when he walks into the dorm room. he sets down the water bottle he'd been guzzling from and nods approvingly. "so you decided to forget the ring and bought yourself some nice shoes instead? i'm proud."

taehyung doesn't respond. he takes a seat at his desk, back facing jeongguk and opens a random book to pretend he's studying. he isn't sure when or why he made the conscious decision to ignore jeongguk but he thinks it might be the best idea he ever had. if the person he considers being his
best friend (the very person he would never claim as his best friend out loud) won't accept the new love of his life, then what good is he? he doesn't have to take this shit--

"if it makes you feel any better," jeongguk tries again. "i did pass out and i got dicks and tits in permanent marker."

taehyung turns around to catch a glimpse of any almost faded ink marks but there's nothing on jeongguk's face. he scowls. "bullshit."

"honestly. seokjin hyung let me use makeup so i could go to class without wanting to kill myself."

clicking his tongue, taehyung opens the bottom drawer of his desk until he finds the makeup wipes. his stint as a bootleg part time model means his "less than impressive face" (namjoon's words, not his) gets caked in foundation on a regular basis. which also means he has enough makeup wipes to put pat mcgrath to shame.

he throws the opened pack of wipes at jeongguk. "prove it. you're not going anywhere else tonight. besides it's risky to sleep with makeup on."

"fine," jeongguk rips it open and takes out a handful of wipes and all but rubs his face off in the process. the marks are all there: shaft, balls, tits including eerily detailed nipples.

taehyung smiles. "okay. we can talk then."

jeongguk smiles back. "i like your choice. i personally would have gone for some adidas but jordans aren't bad."

"oh," his smile fades because this is the relationship that he and jeongguk really have. the not having to worry, the harmless banter, the comfort. and he's missed being able to talk to him about anything. and he knows he's about to ruin it because the one thing he wants to talk about is the one thing jeongguk refuses to hear. "they aren't mine actually."

"oh?" there's a smile in his voice. "i kinda took you as the type to steal a hoodie after a one night stand, not a pair of shoes. but whatever the important part is who it is."

taehyung worries his bottom lip and stares at his feet, kicks the shoes off, and watches them fall against each other on the carpet. he curls and stretches out his toes. "it's, uh...they're jimin's."

for a few seconds that last a few years, the silence is thick and seemingly impenetrable. it becomes so quiet, taehyung is certain he can hear both their hearts beating. a forced laugh breaks through and then:

"what did he do? gift it to you so you'd let him suck you off?"

"nah," taehyung shakes his head. "that's usually how i lose my income, come to think of it. but no, he took pity on me after my shoes ripped up."

jeongguk hums shortly. taehyung still doesn't look up. he doesn't have to to know that jeongguk is scowling at his hands. "interesting."

"that's it?"

they both look up at that moment. there's hope in taehyung's eyes contrasted against the disillusionment in jeongguk's. the younger shrugs, reaching for his cell and headphones. "you wanna get your heartbroken, fine by me. can't say i didn't warn you, right?"
taehyung has a bad habit of having good memory and an even worse habit of using it to help his friends. maybe both those things sound good but what things are and how they are perceived are totally different. take now for a fantastic example.

it's the last day before winter break officially begins and, realistically, taehyung should be knocked out cold in his bed. he should be snoozing and drooling on his pillow. the only reason he should be up is to steal the comforter off jeongguk's bed to battle the cold. instead, he's delivering the carry-on that jeongguk left behind on his way to his last class.

he was meeting his rich parents in paris, sweden, or bruges for the holidays and had his flight right after his class. he'd said he'd forgotten the carry-on accidentally but taehyung is certain it was intentional, some kind of warped vengeance to make him lose sleep.

"i'm here," taehyung says into the phone as he steps inside. he scans his surroundings. "where you at?"

the speaker crackles with the sound of jeongguk's annoying heavy breathing. "just wait by the entrance, my teacher wants to talk to me."

"i don't get it," taehyung shakes his head whilst observing the encased medals and trophies for various achievements in dance. "how can you have a final on dancing? is the challenge to dance along to the cha-cha slide without the instructive song?"

his answer comes in the form of a dead line. being hung up on is something taehyung has become very accustomed to and, as a result, totally desensitized to it. but because it's jeongguk, it means revenge, no matter how un-passionate, is necessary. while keeping his eyes on the awards, he rummages into the carry-on until he feels the pack of gummy bears he'd been looking for. it's jeongguk's anti flight anxiety snack, always keeps him calm whenever he has to travel.

manners should tell him that he shouldn't take away jeongguk's only form of comfort but, you know, rivalry...

dragging his feet against the ceramic corridor floor, taehyung wanders with a mouth full of gummies. various bass lines to different songs from techno to rnb reverberate throughout the hallway, pounding up from the floor and traveling through his veins. the feel of the music makes his blood rush and his adrenaline spike like he's having an encounter with a stranger in an alleyway. he might have to switch majors...

he moves on to peeking into the practice rooms. a duo here, a group there, a lone ballerina, etc. just as luck would have it, he stuffs a handful of gummy bears into his mouth and has barely started chewing them when he peeks into the window of the next room.

the dancer moves like liquid, fluid and flexible and smooth. there's a quiet rhythm to his movements that aren't as aggressive as some of the other dancers. even the ballerina was rigid and point oriented but this dancer...purely floating. and of course it had to be jimin.

taehyung starts to choke almost violently and spurs into a coughing fit that seems like it can't be stopped by anything. a few passing students stop and stare at him in concern but he's quick to wave them off.

"shit," he breathes out when his throat clears up. he dry heaves, eyes red and watery, and tries to give a convincing smile to those concerned. he quickly turns back to the window and watches. "oh
god, i love you."

maybe it was stupid to say that out loud but he didn't think, with the bumping music, that jimin would be able to hear him, and it's likely that he didn't. rather, he just turned around and looked right at him because he felt someone watching him.

how this must look, he whines as jimin makes his way from the center of the room to the door. he swallows hard. how could he explain this to him? oh yeah, sorry jimin, i was just watching you like the stalker i've already proven myself to be. don't mind me.

with all the time he wasted trying to form a decent response, he could have just ran for it. but it was too late now. the door was opening and before he could really process it, jimin was standing in front of him.

he's silent in front of him, only staring intently and with some kind of sourceless purpose that he can't put his finger on. taehyung gulps down the gummy bears in one swallow which is digestive system will no doubt thank him for later. "i'm sorry."

jimin bites his lip, an adorable crease that taehyung has to resist the urge to touch appears on his forehead. "do you know how to say anything else?"

a pause. "yes," then another. "i'm sorry--"

jimin crosses his arms and looks down. "no, i am. i forgot about the shoes, you can just set them down in here."

he turns on his heel and leaves the door open. taehyung watches him, watches his biceps, his shoulders. even squints to see the small bead of sweat roll down his back. despite his better judgment, he steps inside. "i don't have them."

"oh?" jimin turns back to him, hands on his hips. "why are you watching me then?"

"i didn't mean to," taehyung stutters out and looks down at his hands. he juts his arm out in jimin's direction. "gummy bear?"

"try again."

slowly, taehyung relaxes his arm and lets it rest to his side, the bag being squished in his hand. "i came to drop something off for my roommate. and i...i was just checking out the building and i saw you. but i was, i mean, i watched everyone, not just you."

jimin raises his eyebrows and taehyung face palms.

"not like that. i was just watching them dance," taehyung pauses to catch his breath. jeongguk once told him that when he isn't stuttering and mumbling around the people he infatuates, he talks too much and too fast. "you're a good dancer. what is that, contemporary?"

jimin stares for a moment but then he shakes his head as he walks from the center of the room to his duffel bag in the corner. he takes a big gulp. "i don't know."

"me neither," taehyung answers too quickly, too eagerly, too excited to have something in common. "i know there's ballet and contemporary and jazz and hip hop but i don't really know dance. my roommate studies it but i...i'm ignorant about anything that requires actual talent, you know."

jimin smirks and chuckles softly. "no, i mean, i'm kind of blending a few things together. so i don't
"oh. well, from what i saw, it was great. spectacular. you could call it...instead of contemporary dance, it could be ingenuity dance."

the smirk turns into a small smile and taehyung catches a glimpse of it. last time, he was so distracted by the way jimin's eyes crinkled and disappeared, he almost missed the crooked front tooth. every time he saw jimin, there was something new to discover. it was like returning to a monet.

"tell me something," jimin speaks up after a short while. "why...?"

he trails off and quiets under taehyung's inquisitive, expectant gaze. "what? i'll tell you anything."

jimin bites his lip and looks away. "tell me if the whole thing looks as ingenious as you think?"

"you want me to watch you?"

jimin nods. "show me what needs work."

remember the part when i said i didn't know dance is what taehyung wants to say. but he can hear yoongi's voice in his head telling him not to be a dumbass. "okay."

he makes himself comfortable in the corner nearest to the entrance of the room because he doesn't trust his hormones to not react if he watches from directly behind. jimin starts his routine and taehyung ascends to heaven.

if prompted, he wouldn't be able to identify any of the steps choreographed or describe the precise physicality of each move. but he would be able to write an essay -- scratch that, a fucking novel -- on how angelic and elysian jimin looked under the fluorescents. if being photographed by yoongi taught him anything, it was that no one looks good under fluorescents. unless they're park jimin.

some of the movements do make taehyung's mind wander to other things but he takes to reciting that famous norman bates speech to keep the excitement down. around his third time reciting it, the music is ending and jimin is stepping forward. "so?"

"the problem isn't his work," his middle school teacher had explained to his parents on a parent-teacher night years ago. "the problem is that he doesn't listen. i don't think it's that he doesn't want to either. i think he just gets distracted."

it was true.

"uh," he scrambles to his feet, hunching over slightly. "i thought it was incredible. it really made me feel a lot and..."

as jimin gets closer, the words come out with less ease.

"there was a move you did," taehyung continues. he tries to emulate it but he's the same person who messes up trace drawings. "i can't do it but it was when you sort of tilted your foot to the left--"

jimin's lips are loud and distracting enough to shut him up. when taehyung first realized the dancer in the room was jimin, his chest sort of caved in and expanded at the same time. he stumbled on his breathing and couldn't remember what it felt like to do it with ease.
now, it's more of the same. except not remembering how to breathe is more like all the air he once
had has been taken from him, sucked into jimin's lungs and never to be retrieved again. maybe if
he kisses back hard enough, he can regain some oxygen. so that's just what he does.

jimin's lips are soft, his tongue is warm and tastes like coffee. taehyung almost feels bad for his
revenge consumption of gummy bears because it really clashes with the enjoyment of the kiss. as
he opens his mouth wider and grips the back of jimin's head, he hopes he isn't scarring him for life.

just as taehyung is prepared to make the stuff of some of shower day dreams become a reality, the
lips of dreams are gone, jimin having pulled off and away. he stays close though, only inches
between them and an air of ecstasy so thick, a simple inhale would do them both in. "did i do
something wrong?"

"no," jimin breathes out and it tickles taehyung's face. he restrains himself from inhaling it.

"sorry about the gummy bears."

"shut up," jimin leans forward and then his lips are on taehyung's neck. as he's trying to remind
himself not to be loud, he lets out a moan so loud and sinful, it seems like something straight out of
a grade d porno. he slaps a hand over his mouth at the same time jimin chuckles and removes his
hand from taehyung's groin. "you're already hard."

"i have an active imagination," taehyung blinks and realizes for the first time that the lights are
off.

jimin's hand returns and taehyung's body jerks. "is this okay?"

"it's great," taehyung wheezes, voice fragile and shaky. his body is all too aware of how every
single brush, no matter how light, is setting him aflame. he'd always imagined it would hurt to be
on fire but it feels pretty good.

his body is pinned against the wall as the nibbling on his neck turns into sucking into full on biting
into "tae, have you been giving yourself hickies with the vacuum cleaner again?".

the mouth on his neck moves to his lips again and pretty soon after that he's saying something he
knows he'll come to regret in that stupidly high climax voice of his. he shudders when jimin
strokes once more for good measure and chills run down his neck when the other's hot breath leafs
over his skin.

and taehyung sees a glimpse of comprehension of the climax descriptions in erotica fiction. the
white hot burning light, the coil release, the fucking knot, and the explosion behind his eyes that
make him rise up to the heavens before gently sending him back down. the descent is almost as
great as the ascent. coming down from his high, heart rate catching up to him, his vision clearing
up and eyes adjusting to the dark. seeing the body leaned up against him solidifies reality in a
single moment.

"was that good?"

the whisper tickles his neck and makes him wish time could be frozen. he smiles wide and nods.

"good," jimin lifts his head from his shoulder and looks him in the eye. his eyes are dark and
unreadable but there's a small, spurious smile there as well. "now that you came, you can fuck off
and leave me alone."

jimin turns away after flipping the lights back on and taehyung doesn't get a chance to reply, his
phone ringing before his voice can come out.

"you're an asshole," jeongguk complains when he sees the half eaten bag of gummy bears. he
snatches his carry-on and, upon seeing the dark stain on the front of taehyung's jeans, shakes his
head in disgust. "was it that hard to put on a clean pair? jesus..."

taehyung has felt a lot of things after being rubbed down through his clothes (which has only
happened like twice in his not so extensive sexual history): euphoria, gratefulness, an inclination to
the belief in miracles. but he's never felt so guilty, ashamed, semi-betrayed, etc.

after giving jeongguk his carry-on and wishing him an awful flight, he went back to his dorm to
change out of his cum soaked threads and go to sleep. but once again, jimin was alive and well in
his thoughts. he was there in the shower, there in the laundry room, there in his bed. and none of it
was sexy.

"why are you still close to jimin?" he would ask hoseok on a night when he couldn't think of
anything else.

being mostly alone on campus -- everyone else was sensible enough to go home for the hoildays --
made venting over a drink kind of difficult. and out of all of his friends (well, out of all the ones
who approved of jimin in the first place) hoseok was the only one to answer the phone.

"i'm not close with him," hoseok responded. "he just hates me the least."

"how do i get to that point?"

"maybe by giving him a little breathing room."

"that's what he said."

something on the other end of the line dropped and hoseok groaned. "why the fuck are you asking
me then?"

Chapter End Notes

yeah...this is why it's a terrible idea for me to write what are supposed to be one shots
and split them up into two...because i end up splitting them up into three. if i DON'T
add a bunch of material before i finish the next chapter, the next chapter will conclude
everything
winter intercession consisted of classes organized for the sole purpose of making students pay a pre-selected professor to bore the shit out of them. taehyung’s theory had been that the school council was made up of alma maters who’d all tied for the title of “most likely to put tacks on your seat”. that was the only explanation for why every winter intercession class made him fall asleep faster than he did when he watched heaven’s gate after eating his weight in brownies (the special kind that namjoon had made for one of his reefers).

as luck would have it, this class, though on par with watching paint dry, is on the subject of literature. and tae did like to read. he figures even if he has to suffer through the professor’s very convincing bueller professor impression, he could at least read through the every reading assignment with pleasure. according to the syllabus, he’d be reading the likes of phyllis wheatley, john keats, langston hughes, sadakichi hartmann, and the rest of the world’s brilliant dead poets.

slowly slipping into unconscious territory as the professor recites “howl” with as much passion as bill murray playing garfield, taehyung suddenly feels the inclination to look out of the window.

he tries to ignore it because he’s not five years old anymore and no longer gets easily distracted when class steers into ennui territory. but he isn’t successful because he’s twenty-one years old and does get easily distracted when class steers into ennui territory. when he turns to look, he almost wishes he hadn’t because on the side of the glass is jimin walking across the green, ever immaculate. this time he only stares for a minute before turning back and trying to listen intently.

he’d only just managed to stop hating himself every waking moment for what transpired between them in the practice room. with the help of a few shitty rom-coms and the realization that the world was bigger than being rubbed off by his crush in a dance studio, he pulled himself out of his self-pity stupor and managed to feel human again. (all without the help of his supposed friends who just left him to wallow on his own while they a) skied down hills in switzerland, b) ate their mother’s home cooking, and c) probably fucked their ex-fuck buddies).

hand jobs have never made him feel so guilty before. except for maybe the first time he’d received one and he came before the stroking even started and scarred his first girlfriend for life. whenever he replays what happened with jimin in his head, he feels like an idiot because he should have stopped him. he should have affirmed his position as number one stalker who wants to hold hands not receive hand jobs. he kicks his feet together and, as the sole contact makes a resounding thump, he remembers the jordans.

“angel-headed hipsters,” his professor recites as he sits up straighter. he still had jimin’s jordans. he
still had a chance to explain himself, apologize, and maybe even confess. he stands up and literally
howls to the shock of his classmates and teacher who turn to him with their mouths agape.

“sorry,” he clears his throat when he sits back down. “i really like ginsberg.”

there are only so many opportunities afforded to a person with his experience in making a fool out
of himself. when he was younger, his parents stressed the importance of a first impression and, so
far, he’s had three first impressions with jimin and he’s embarrassed himself every time. he messed
up the first day jimin walked into the smoothie shop, he messed up when he fell on his face, and he
especially messed up in the practice room. so far, jimin probably perceives him as a dick, a klutz,
and a premature ejaculator. which is all true but he’s ready to really introduce himself.

he doesn’t even bother to knock when he happens upon the practice room. he just pushes the door
open and tries not to shrink under jimin’s intense glare. he walks all the way to the center wall
where a couple of chairs are pushed up against, where jimin’s duffel bag sits, and puts the jordans
on the floor. no, he isn’t upset or too shy to even say hello. he just really had to work hard to gain
the nerve to part with the jordans as they were the only connection he had with jimin. and now that
he might fuck up again, that wasn’t something he sacrificed with ease.

“i thought i was pretty clear,” jimin says and taehyung looks up to see jimin watching him through
the mirror, his back still facing him. “should i get a restraining order or are you gonna continue to
bother me?”

taehyung looks at jimin a little longer, trying to memorize his face and what he’s wearing. he might
as well savor the last moments of interaction he’s going to have with him. he just hopes his
infantile nature will permit him to fall in love with someone else so that the heartbreak hangover
will be less painful. jimin wears gray joggers and a black tank that looks like it’s been stretched out
by 1980s arnold schwarzeneggar. taehyung takes a deep breath.

“You don’t have to do that. i just wanted to return the shoes before i fucked off for good,” he
gestures toward them lamely. “they look expensive so…i’m really sorry. and i know every time i’m
around you, i say that for some reason but i always mean it and i really mean it now.”

jimin rolls his eyes and turns around to face him. “and i really mean it when i say fuck off.”

“okay. i will. can i just say a few more things first?”

with a lot of hesitation and clear aggravation in his expression, jimin nods and taehyung takes
another deep breath, preparing himself for the stab of coldness he’s about to jump into. “i like
you.”

for a fraction of a second, jimin’s eyes widen in surprise but taehyung blinks and the facade of cool
is back up.

“i like you a lot. i mean, a lot. since the start of the school year, i’ve been talking my friends’ ears
off about you, trying to figure out what you like, how to impress you. the day i fell, everything i
was wearing belonged to my roommate. he’s rich and he has nice clothes and i thought if you saw
me wearing them, you’d…i dunno. but…every time i talk to my friends about you, they say awful
things and i really want to apologize for that. there’s no excuse for how they treat you or how they
talk about you and i know you know what they say. and as much as i hate to channel all 90s
romantic comedies and overstate my individuality, i’m not like that and i don’t think of you like that.”

taehyung shuffles from one foot to the other and looks down. “i stare at you and watch you when you walk here in the mornings because i think you’re the most beautiful person i have ever seen. i can’t really comprehend how someone that looks like you even exists. when i first saw you, i thought my life had been a lie because for as long as i can remember i was told that perfection didn’t exist but your existence just shuts that argument down. i get nervous around you because i like you so much, not because i’m expecting a blow job in exchange for a free drink. and i should have stopped you the other day when…well, you know. when i see you, my heart fills up with swans—“

“what?”

“i mean, my stomach fills with butterflies and i can’t think straight. that’s why i have to look down at the floor when i talk to you because when i don’t, i just apologize and say ‘what’ a thousand times. but with all that said, i don’t think you’re wrong for telling me to fuck off so i will. because i love…”

(“taehyung,” jeongguk pinched the bridge of his nose. “you can’t tell people you barely know that you love them.”

“why not?”

“why are you acting like you just got on this planet?!”)"

“i…love respecting people’s decisions,” taehyung finishes. “yeah. raised right so…”

he takes one last look at jimin who, for the most part, has been watching him silently with his arms crossed and eyes unreadable. internally, he has a very emotional goodbye with the love of his life and turns on his heel to leave. but before he can even open the door completely…

“are you staying for the intercession?”

taehyung whips around and his eyes land on jimin’s. “yes,” he nods eagerly.

jimin looks him up and down, seemingly sizing him up and smirks at the same time that he rolls his eyes again. he turns back to the mirror, starts up his music, and stretches. “come find me sometime.”

from: unknown [ 1:31 AM]

still thinking about that speech

taehyung blinks up at his phone, narrowing his eyes as a way to salvage his corneas from the bright light. he reads over the message a few dozen times before tossing his phone to the side and turning over, wrapping himself up tighter in his blankets.

he’s on the verge of good sleep when his phone beeps again and he realizes what the text means. he scrambles for his phone at the same time that he sits up and flicks the bedside lamp on. his heart palpates when he sees he’s missed more than one text.
it was a bit overdone, a little theatrical. but it was cute.

it's official. jeongguk is going to come back to his dorm once the spring semester begins and find taehyung's innards all over the room. because there's no way he's not going to spontaneously combust. he shoots his arm out and snatches his water bottle up from the floor. he devours it like he's been stranded in the desert before going back to the texts.

don't forget to come find me.
i live off campus.

as calm as he can, taehyung sets the phone down on the bed, stands up from the bed, opens his window, sticks his head out, and screams. the howl is guttural and comes out of him like it's purging his soul. he raises his arms and shouts out praises. then he shoots his middle finger up to the direction he think paris or switzerland or bruges might be located.

"screw you, jeongguk!"

"that wasn't a hand job," namjoon says the next day.

taecyeon jerks his head away from the computer where he's screening transaction traffic. he manages to glare without narrowing his eyes, even widening them as his way of telling them to shut the fuck up if they'd like to remain employed.

"sorry," taehyung says lamely.

"tell him," namjoon lowers his voice and leans in closer. "a hand job is when someone--"

"i really don't need you to define what a hand job is."

"okay so you can for sure argue that if someone just palms you through your jeans--"

"sweats," taehyung corrects meekly. "i was wearing sweats."

namjoon turns back to taec. "if it's palming over cloth, it's not a hand job."

"it's not," tae turns back to the computer. "and if you guys don't stop talking about methods of sexual gratification, you're both fired."

"okay so it wasn't a hand job," taehyung says. "but i was literally touched by an angel"

"guys," tae warns. "i'm not saying it again."

"change the subject," namjoon sort of kind of demands in a way that isn't demanding at all.

"dude," namjoon eyes him judgmentally after reading the contact name. "seriously?"

taehyung shrugs. he may or may not have put jimin's number under "love of my life" which was
probably not a great idea but he's a man who isn't afraid of his feelings.

"taec hyung, if this guy goes missing and the police come to ask us, we're turning taehyung in. he's acting like a fucking dahmer fanatic."

"just read the texts."

after a beat, namjoon looks up from the phone with a shit-eating grin. "what speech?"

"it says for me to come find him and all you got was the speech? i mean if i responded with 'what's the address?', would he call it off? am i supposed to literally find him? do i need to break into school records because, i have to say, jeongguk once tried to get me to eat at the dining hall without scanning my i.d. and...i'm just not good with crime."

"you act like we don't know you hack in your spare time," taec mutters. his voice is uninterested but his self invitation into the conversation confirms his intrigue.

"sparingly," taehyung corrects. "and only when it's absolutely necessary."

namjoon hands the phone back. "this is jimin, right? if jimin tells you to come find him, there's an unspoken rule that you're coming with lube and a condom."

in spite of all taec's warnings and namjoon's irreverent rebuttals, it was that statement that finally shut taehyung up. his breath comes out slow and shaky.

stepping out of the backroom and onto the serving floor, namjoon takes a swig from his coffee mug before correcting himself. "make it a whole pack."

taehyung's stomach lurches, his heart drops, and his blood rushes south all at the same time. "oh," he murmurs.

shortly after his shift ended and he'd had enough time to calm his intrinsic frenzy, he cultivated the courage to respond to the text messages. it took many false starts before he ended up with:

**to: love of my life [ 8:06 PM]**

**show me the way.**

with unsteady hands, quivering from the mere thought of the possibilities of the night, he locks his screen and shoves the phone back into his pocket. his grip around it is so tight, he's certain he'll have red imprints on his palms later. sitting on the stoop of his dorm building, he lets the freezing cold evening numb him and sedate his anxiety.

even though he tries to stay distracted with the night sky, with the hard brick of the step that's making his tailbone ache, his mind manages to find its way to jimin once again. it rambles and rhymes with ample scenarios. like if sex is a possibility, if jimin's place is filled with posters or ironic albums or whether his cabinets are stocked with tea or coffee.

and, ultimately, if sex is a possibility, the reminder that he needs to be careful of not ruining whatever respect he's gained.
his phone pings.

from: love of my life [ 8:11 PM]

:)

shortly after that, he sends an address.

like all teenagers, taehyung had his phase of doing nothing but hoarding lotion and tissues and jacking it like nine times a day. seeing as he's held onto his dick so many times (when it's standing proud and when it's limped out), he would think that he would know what size condoms to get.

but he's been standing in front of the shelf of arranged trojans, durex, and lifestyles for about ten minutes and the convenience store clerk is looking at him suspiciously. he lifts his hand, looks down at it, and curls his hand into an imaginary grip. he adjusts the size until it seems like his dick would fit.

"looks large to me," he mutters to himself. he's this close to reaching for the large condoms when he hesitates and has an idea that he'll definitely come to regret.

he whips out his phone again.

to: guk [ 8:32 PM]
what size do you think my dick is?

the reply comes right away.

from: guk [ 8:32 PM]
there's something seriously wrong with you.

to: guk [ 8:33 PM]
i'm trying to buy condoms and i think i should get large but i need to be sure

from: guk [ 8:35 PM]
a large trojan condom would fall off even at your hardest

from: guk [ 8:35 PM]
your dick is small

from: guk [ 8:36 PM]
you're how old and you don't know how to buy condoms?

the reply bubbles continue to pop up with the moving ellipses and taehyung locks his phone again. okay, so maybe his dick isn't large but jeongguk doesn't need to be such a bully about it. and in taehyung's defense, he's never had to buy condoms because they just always happened to be there.

in college, condoms were everywhere. even the bookstores had a courtesy basket full of them on the way out. he frowns at the standard package and looks down at the front of his jeans as he reaches for the package. having an average dick never felt like such a disappointment.
not yet, he thinks as he stops himself from knocking on jimin's door. just like at the convenience store, he's been at a stand still. if yoongi was standing next to him, he'd probably tell him he's a fucking idiot for hesitating considering he's been fantasizing about this night for months. but it's not so much that taehyung doesn't want to as much as it is that he absolutely needs to calm himself, warn his little head to not try to do all the thinking.

"don't fuck this up, don't fuck this up, don't fuck this up."

the door opens mid-chant and taehyung's words, like dinosaurs, vaporize upon being struck by the comet that is jimin. "you made it."

"yeah."

in all the times that he's observed jimin, the way jimin interacts with people remains interesting. he tends to speak slowly, permitting himself to actually think about what he wants to say or do. like now. as unnerving as it can be, taehyung loves to be under jimin's scrutiny. "well, come in. i'll take your coat."

taehyung steps in and the scent of cinnamon assaults his senses in the most gratifying way he could never imagine. because jackson is both obsessed with sex and claims to know everything, taehyung is immediately reminded of something he'd told him between transactions so many moons ago.

("you know why so many people are ordering the apple cinnamon smoothie?"

"because there's a massive discount on it and it's limited edition?"

"the smell of cinnamon is an aphrodisiac of sorts. increases blood flow southward more than any other scent."

"please don't tell me that's your way of telling me you've been making drinks with an erection.")

wiggling out of his coat, he eyeballs the apartment. it's small, really nothing more than a closet, pretty much the same size of his dorm. if taehyung didn't know the way people talked about jimin, he would wonder why he even bothered to stay off campus. before he can get the coat off completely, jimin presses himself to his back and slides the rest down.

when he goes to hang the coat, taehyung toes off his shoes quickly. the last thing he'd want is to have jimin volunteer to take those off too as he's certain the image of jimin kneeling at his feet is going to ruin the lecture he just gave to his penis. "this is a nice place."

"we're not dating," jimin says, passing him by and going to the electric kettle on the corner desk. "so you don't have to lie to me."

"it's nicer than my place," jimin beckons him to take a seat on the papasan chair which looks like it shouldn't be able to fit in such a small place but does. "and it smells like cinnamon. my room just smells like ramen and sweat."

"oh yeah. i like to burn incense and scented oils. keeps me calm. coffee or tea?"

"whatever you're having," taehyung sinks into the seat and tries to figure out a way to sit without
lounging.

"coffee. how do you want it?"

"however you like it."

the sound of water pouring into mugs blends with jimin's light snickering. taehyung continues to observe the room. there are no posters, no real decorations with the exception of the necessary knick-knacks like the electric kettle and grassy yard charging station. there are corner wall shelves where there are books and notebooks and an incense holder.

just as mysterious as he'd imagined.

jimin hands him the mug. "sugar, no cream."

"vegan?"

"no," jimin sits at the foot of his bed which means there's only about a foot and a half between them. "dieting."

"you don't need to."

"remember the whole 'we aren't dating' thing?"

"but i'm not lying," taehyung peers over his mug as he sips, giving jimin what he hopes translate as bedroom eyes. "you're really fit."

"is that why you fell for me?"

they laugh together. "no...it's just...the first time i saw you, you were leaving the dance hall. the sun was setting behind you so you were, like, alight in this orange glow. and," taehyung pauses, trying to find the right words. "everything kind of slowed down. and i could hear elton john singing. and, well, i dunno, it just felt real."

"which song?"

"tiny dancer."

"is that a crack on my height?"

"no!" taehyung covers his mouth and stammers. "no, no, oh shit, no. i just..."

"i'm messing with you, elton john, relax."

it quiets down between them, the occasional slurp and sip sounding in the small room. usually when things get awkward for taehyung, he pulls his phone out and pretends to be preoccupied with a wave of incoming texts and emails (which really never happens because he's not that popular). but not tonight. he just watches jimin in disbelief because he's actually here.

jimin leans over and sets his cup down before sliding to the side. "sit down next to me."

okay, taehyung thinks. this is happening. i can do this. i have everything i need.

their thighs touch for a nanosecond when taehyung sits down. he's quick to reposition himself as not to overstep his boundaries before jimin wants him to. with the new proximity, he takes free reign in sending more lecture signals to his dick.
"we need to acknowledge the elephant in the room."

as jimin says this, his hand find its way onto taehyung's knee. the contact sends electricity surges through his nervous system. goodness, what an embarrassing way to die: knee orgasm.

his body reacts before anything else does and without thinking, he pushes himself onto jimin and kisses with more aggression than necessary. like he's trying to bite his tongue out.

"no," jimin says when he pulls away, hands pressed up against taehyung's chest. "that wasn't code for try to kiss my face off."

taehyung falters and slouches. "i'm...my bad, i thought your hand..."

"was a signal?"

taehyung nods.

"i don't do codes or signals. if i wanna fuck, you'll know because i'll tell you. with words."

"okay," taehyung slides away, distancing the two of them as much as the small bed permits. "so how about that elephant?"

"right," jimin's hand appears again but this time taehyung's eyes stay on his eyes which are painfully sympathetic. "i don't think you like me. i think you think you like me but i doubt it's sincere."

"but--"

"come on, you know what people say about me obviously. you probably know about that big orgy. you know about finger cuffs and cum dumpster and all the nicknames i've been graced with. you know i'm a slut."

taehyung winces. "you're not--"

"let me finish, elton," jimin pats his knee gently. "that being said, it's clear to me that you want to like me because i'd be bad for you. we go to a rich school which most likely means you have a set of rich, conservative parents who you'd like to piss off. or, less likely, you're a born again whatever and you want to save me."

"i don't--"

"maybe you think i'm damaged. and maybe you like the idea of a challenge and fixing me sounds like it could get you some street cred. but you should know that my promiscuity isn't the result of some kind of implosive trauma. i just like sex."

"are you done?"

jimin shrugs. "for now."

"good," taehyung gains some kind of alien confidence and puts his hand on jimin's thigh. jimin stares down at it like it's a pest. "i had no idea about your 'reputation' until like a week ago. so, though your theory is sound if i was a character from the oc and if i did have rich parents, when i saw you and music from the beatles popped up in head, it was all sincere."

"so you're saying you like me for me? despite the fact that you barely know me."
taehyung nods. "i know it sounds ridiculous. but i'm for real."

"so also in spite of all you've heard about me, you think i'm...what?"

"beautiful," taehyung answers without hesitation. "really beautiful..."

"that's all, isn't it?"

"well, i don't really know you that well, do i? the point is that i see you and i want to know you."

"you don't think i'm used goods?"

taehyung shakes his head. "you're not goods to me. you're like...i don't know, okay? i don't know how to describe the way i feel, that's why i'm in computer science instead of being an art major. i don't know why and i don't know how, i just know that i like you. and i want to get to know you."

jimin narrows his eyes and raises an eyebrow. he leans closer. "i once let a guy i didn't know jerk me off on a bus ride to visit my parents."

"when i was in high school, i had a tutor two grades above me and when he was trying to go over physics equations, i sucked him off under my dining room table."

"still hearing 'tiny dancer'."

jimin leans in so close that their noses almost brush together. "one time i was invited to a party at this school when i was a freshman. when i got there, it was just a room full of horny homos and a few unwilling to come out 'straight' guys. and every single one of them wanted to circle jerk and grace me with facials. and you know what i did when they told me? i stripped and got on my knees with a bigger hard on than i've ever had."

"and i still think you're most beautiful person i've ever seen," taehyung closes the distance between them to deliver a chaste peck. when he speaks again, their lips a featherlight against each other. "and i guess that means if we were to get together, the sex would be really great too."

jimin sizes him up again, slowly this time. he lets his eyes sink into every surface of taehyung until he pulls him in and their lips are crashing together like the turbulent waves of a sexually frustrated sea. the warmth coming from jimin's unworldly soft and sensuous lips is enough to protect taehyung from the bitter cold outside. jimin's hands, soft and callous at the same time, are pressed up on either side of taehyung's face. taehyung still has one tentative hand on jimin's thigh and the other has the bedsheets in a tight grip.

at the same time that jimin tilts his head for a better angle, he stands up and pulls taehyung up with him. taehyung hears the clink of his belt buckle being undone before he actually feels it. which is strange considering jimin's hand on his knee almost sent him on a tailspin, a hand near his crotch is a whole other story. when his jeans fall to the floor around his ankles, there's a light zephyr that brushes against his bare legs.

jimin pulls away at that moment and taehyung has barely opened his eyes when he's pushed down on the extravagant bowl chair. jimin drops down to his knees, kneeling between taehyung's legs. he looks up with wide, eager eyes. "do you want this?"

taehyung nods, mouth open, eyes glazed over, looking like he's just been put in some trance.
"i need to hear you say it."

"yes."

"no, i need to hear 'jimin, i want this'."

"jimin, i want this."

a smile like taehyung has never seen creeps up onto jimin's face and the whole world gets brighter. this is a side he's never seen. jimin is voracious like a hungry wolf but his meat is a measly cock.

"wait, wait."

jimin looks up. "what? should i stop?"

"no, it's just...do you want this?"

smirking, jimin pulls taehyung out of his briefs and wraps his lips around him briefly before coming back up. "i don't get on my knees for things i don't want."

jimin doesn't waste any time, starting with a keen nip on the head of his cock, flattening his tongue over the skin and sending shockwaves to taehyung's gut. the thing about really fantastical sensations is that they tend to cut out other senses. at this moment taehyung can barely see straight, not when his most sensitive appendage is being enveloped in such wet warmth. jimin moans around him and his thighs tremor.

taehyung throws his head back and gazes up blindly at the ceiling, barely making out the patterns. he can feel jimin's nails pushing into his thigh, another hand stretched out over his abdomen. the nipping turns into engulfment and bobbing, the smooth ring of jimin's mouth sliding down rhythmically.

taehyung's hand slides down until he's holding the hand jimin has against his stomach. then his other hand finds its way into jimin's hair where he grips hard when jimin massages his balls. jimin makes a sound of dissatisfaction and pulls up.

"don't do that."

taehyung opens his eyes and looks down. "i..."

"i know it's a turn on but i really hate it. don't touch my head."

"no, i wasn't trying to...i just wanted to touch you."

jimin captures his bottom lip in between his teeth. "if you want me to take in more, i can. before they called me finger cuffs, they called me deep throat."

when taehyung takes the walk of shame back to his dorm, he thinks about oscar wilde and that infamous quote : "a kiss may ruin a human life." he wonders what oscar wilde would have to say about mind-blowing blow jobs. a jiminesque blowjob is guaranteed to kill you and/or send you up to the heavens.

he sincerely had all intentions to take things slowly, to maybe ask jimin out on a date, or offer to
buy him a chocolate muffin. but everything happened so fast and before taehyung could really --
like really, fucking really -- understand it all, he was coming in jimin's mouth.

well, into his hand because “i don't know what you've heard, elton, but i don't swallow on the first
date” but still.

all those penis lectures did absolutely nothing.

at the very least, when jimin was showing him the way out, taehyung managed a distraught
apology.

"for what?” jimin asked, leaning against his door.

"i just hope i wasn't moving too fast. if i was--" 

"i did most of the moving," jimin laughed. "and i wanted to. i want to. i haven't had sex in months."

"oh. but you didn't even...you know, didn't...should i--?"

"i can take care of myself. besides, you don't seem to know what you're doing, don't worry, it's kind
of cute. charming, even."

"...i don't?"

smiling sympathetically, jimin cups taehyung's cheek and pats it. "you kiss like you're trying to bite
my head off. i wouldn't want your mouth anywhere near my dick."

as taehyung falls onto his bed (not without stealing jeongguk's duvet), he imagines a world where
his fellatio skills aren't challenged and his kissing is something to be desired by many. a night on
an ecstasy high ending in such a trough makes him want to toss them back like jeongguk does
when seokjin looks at him like he might want him.

he heaves a sigh as he relives the embarrassment of jimin telling him he was sub-par and turns on
his stomach. that way, if he happens to suffocate, he won't have to suffer through the afterlife
embarrassment of stupid looking suicide. it can be ruled as an accidental death.

his phone vibrates loudly between the mattress and his chest. he almost doesn't look at the
message.

from: love of my life [ 1:18 AM]

i didn't say i wouldn't teach you.

"i think i'd like a summer wedding."

he can see it now. a wedding in the winter would be so beautiful and idyllic with the snowfall
coating everything in fairytale but a wedding in the summer means they could probably get
married wearing nothing but bowties and boxer briefs. the merits of that are endless.

namjoon sends him a sharp glare but it's quick like a whip before he turns back to the road ahead.
they're currently on their way to have dinner with the relatives they do have in this city which
happen to be made up of aunts and uncles they don't really know that well. "please don't talk about
the person you're stalking at dinner. i don't think they'd take it well, they're conservative."
"why?" with a quick arm flailing, taehyung huffs almost aggressively. "why have dinner with people who would burn me at the stake if they knew what happened last night..."

taehyung looks over earnestly and sighs loudly, waiting for namjoon to pick up the signal. when he doesn't react, taehyung sighs loudly again.

namjoon rolls his eyes and musters up some mock interest, faking an excited tone. "what happened last night, taehyung?"

"well, namjoon, i'm thrilled you asked. i got to second and a half base with my soulmate."

"please don't tell them that, they'll burn you at the stake."

"i don't really get why we just can't have a shitty dinner with us two. get some chips and cookies from 7-eleven and feast out at your place. your place that has the large flat screen and the video games, if your memory needed refreshing. but us having dinner with our racist, homophobic, ancient belief extended family that we don't even like, mind you--"

"don't lump me in with you."

"you like them?" betrayal never tasted so bitter. "hyung, you know i'm gay, right?"

"you're a halfsie, don't lie to me."

"queer," taehyung corrects. "besides the love of my life happens to have a penis so, if anyone just saw us on the street, i'd be considered gay."

"bi is not gay."

"you're deviating from the soul of the conversation. why do we need to have dinner with them?"

"i promised auntie you wouldn't be alone this christmas. she worries about you," almost as an after thought, namjoon shrugs. "also she may or may not have told me that they plan on giving us money. you for being on the honor roll and me for....well, for being me."

"oh. step on it then."

namjoon doesn't, too aware of traffic violations and speed limits. "what does second and a half base mean with jimin anyway?"

when taehyung doesn't immediately answer, namjoon looks to find the younger blushing and nodding toward his lap.

"you're how old and you don't know how to say someone went down on you?"

"i'm still trying to wrap my head around it."

"just...be careful, please. not because he's got the rep he has but because it's you."

"what does that mean?"

again, namjoon looks at him, testing the waters with a wary gaze. "because you like him and he likes sex. see it for what it is."
when jimin first directed him to the papasan chair, taehyung thought it was an ugly little thing. it was slinky and worn and a painfully bright shade of turquoise. as ugly as it was in the beginning, taehyung can't deny that the chair is starting to look gorgeous. granted this is only the second time he's been in it but it seems like every time he sits there, only good things happen.

good things that make it hard for him to breathe, make him see angels, and his bones turn to goo. like jimin straddling him and grinding onto him graciously. they're both hard but on two different levels, taehyung has a feeling that jimin is only just getting started while he can already feel the waves building up in the pit of his stomach. he grips onto jimin's hips and guides him to his liking. the weight of the blood rushing throughout him makes him weak. also the friction to his dick isn't absolved of any implications. jimin's breath is hot and heavy against his neck where he's currently decorating heart shaped bruises. or taehyung can hope that they're heart shaped, it's the romantic in him.

taehyung bites his lip, less out of an attempt to put a cap on the incoming orgasm and more so to scratch the itch of desperately wanting a kiss. he turns his head to try and capture jimin's lips but jimin turns away as quickly as he stops gyrating. "don't kiss me."

"why not?"

"don't remember?" jimin starts up again and taehyung chokes on the sighs in his throat. "you can't kiss for shit."

"i remember you said you'd teach me too."

a whimper escapes the depths of taehyung's throat as jimin bucks his hips and taehyung tightens his grip to get him to stop.

"what now?"

taehyung adjusts himself. "i'm like half a grind away from exploding."

"is that a problem?"

"i don't really wanna have to walk home with my pants soaked again...people look at me funny."

"we aren't even halfway done with the song."

before they started dry humping each other the beautifully hideous chair, jimin asked him to play the song. the song he heard when jimin walked into his life in a cinematographer's ideal slow motion. so even though traditional dry humps are usually set to ginuwine or the weekend, taehyung is getting off to elton john.

which is something he never thought he'd do. taehyung leans away until he can't feel jimin's breath tickling his nose anymore. "i know. i get really excited sometimes."

"seems like all the time," jimin says evenly, not changing his seat but adjusting his posture which yields the slightest bit of friction. "maybe we need to work on your stamina."

"can we...don't get me wrong. i love this stuff. but can we maybe go on a date? or...can i get you a coffee maybe? a nonfat latte?"

"oh...you were serious."
"not this again," taehyung grabs jimin's hand and holds it against his chest. he strokes jimin's knuckles. this is the very hand that stole his heart. "when i say that i like you, it doesn't mean that i just wanna fuck. you know how you don't bother with signals? neither do i. i say what i mean."

jimin is silent, eyes cast down, worrying his bottom lip. he leans forward and gently kisses the hand entangled in his. "coffee, huh?"

"or smoothies," jimin smiles at that. "with the discount. a bakery, the movies, an amusement park, the fair. anywhere you wanna go."

"there's a diner i like going to when i can't sleep. it's 24 hours and they have excellent coca-cola cake."

"coca-cola cake?" taehyung smiles as jimin jumps off his lap. "your diet?"

"it's my cheat day."

the diner is a place two bus rides away, hidden in the hole of miniature shopping mall squares. in the rain, that kind of travel better mean a life threatening emergency but with jimin, it's just a raincoat adventure. it's in the kind of area that only gets business from people trying to get lost because no one would sincerely think to look there. inside, the decor is loud and ostentatious but, with jimin guiding him with an arm around his waist, it's almost magical. colorful neon lights and neon signs cascade around jimin lighting him up in a technicolor shroud.

jimin guides him to the booth hidden near the back of the restaurant and slides in across from him. beads of raindrops roll down his cheeks and fall from strands of his hair. he giggles out something breathless and waves at the waitress.

taehyung smiles. "you're heaven, you know that?"

under the blue neon light of the open sign outside and the pink neon light overhead, jimin smiles at him. it's genuine but even so it doesn't quite reach his eyes. "and you're...you're in over your head."

"you think i can't handle you?"

jimin takes his hand. "i think you're the weirdest guy i've ever met. i think you're a chaos junkie or you're self-destructive or maybe you have a bucket list and on that list, you've written the desire to have your heart broken."

"and i think you're so used to being fucked over, you feel the need to end the relationship before it officially starts. it's like you're putting up 'beware of dog' signs in the yard even though it's just a sweet, harmless terrier."

"who says i'm the one being fucked over and not the one doing the fucking?"

"because you don't like me," taehyung answers with ease. "and you thought the best way to let me down would be to invite me to your place, let me have coffee, and take me down easy. when you could have easily just maced me, i deserved it."

"or maybe i invited you over, knowing i wanted some company," jimin leans closer. "it's been ages since i've been with anyone. that's not because i'm ashamed either, that's the biggest lie about me."
"so, no regrets--" taehyung breaks off when the waitress sets the single slice of cake down between them with two forks. jimin thanks her with a kind smile before she walks away. "is that supposed to turn me off?"

"i need you to understand that. because it's a part of who i am and i refuse to make believe that i'm someone i'm not just because you want to play house."

jimin pauses and taehyung squeezes his hand reassuringly, a prod to continue. "make me understand then."

"people call me a slut and you say that i'm not but i am, that's one thing we need to clarify."

"maybe my definition of slut is different from yours. i think if you're promiscuous, you're just promiscuous. a slut is someone who is inconsiderate in their pursuit for sex, someone who wrecks homes or breaks hearts..."

jimin nodding at him with a knowing smile makes taehyung stop.

"oh."

jimin drags his finger across the the top of the cake and makes a show of sucking the icing off. "i didn't stop because i was ashamed. i know that in the movies, that's what happens when the school slut closes their legs but that's not what happened with me. people call me a slut and i am one, i don't care that they call me that. i'm jimin, i'm a dancer, i minor in psych, i'm a libra, and a slut. it's nothing but facts. the only reason i slowed down was because i hurt someone."

jimin pauses, he removes his finger with a loud pop, a histrionic flare of showmanship. even though it is sexy, the sadness that fades into his eyes as he tells the story. "i'm certain you've been told about the...i don't wanna be crude but i've already palmed you, sucked your dick, and dry humped you so, the gangbang."

taehyung nods. "i've heard about it, yeah."

"that really...hurt this person i knew. like a lot. it wasn't intentional, you know. i get off on fucking, not sadism. after that, it kinda hit me that i didn't know who was hurting. like the guy who i let jerk me off on the bus could have been engaged. what if his fiance loved him more than anything and found out about his little tryst with me and...imagine how heartbroken she'd be," jimin takes a bite of cake before slicing another bit and feeding it to taehyung. "i can't do that. i didn't want to be a bad person."

"why not just get in a relationship? that way you know you're the only one."

"because i'm a slut," jimin repeats with a laugh. "understand that? it means i'm used goods, it means i'm easy, it means i'm disloyal. plus i've never really been in an actual relationship. in high school, when everyone should be dating, i was already a certified whore. never had a chance...that's why you're so fucking weird because...you really do look at me like the sun shines out of my ass and i don't understand it."

"past has passed," this time taehyung takes the fork and slices into the cake, feeding jimin a piece. "it's not important. and i like you for your looks and what my imagination has filled out of your personality. not because of the lack or surplus of dicks you've had in your mouth."

jimin struggles to keep his mouth closed with the wide smile that stretches out his cheeks. he covers his mouth and continues chewing. he takes both of taehyung's hands into his. "i like that part of myself. okay? i've had two people at both ends, i've had my ass eaten, i've eaten other people's
asses, i've been in six person trains, i've done a lot of dirty, filthy things. and i like the dirty, filthy part of me. okay?"

taehyung ducks forward, brings jimin's hands close, and kisses each finger slowly. "okay."

taehyung keens brokenly, eyes watering as jimin settles down onto him. he starts to shudder and his body quivers so violently from the pleasure, he thinks it could be considered a series of convulsions. jimin cups his cheeks and looks him dead in the eye.

"don't come already," jimin breathes out.

"i'm not," taehyung grits out. jimin's tightness and warmth is doing nothing to preserve is sanity. or cool the heat pooling in his abdomen, bubbling up like an abandoned tea kettle on the stovetop. he grips jimin's hips and tosses his head back. "motherfuck..."

"that's good," jimin lifts shortly before coming back down. "if you need to focus on mothers to not come early, do that."

"please don't talk about that unless you want me to go soft."

"i can still work with soft," jimin smirks, continuing to build momentum. "focus on something other than me."

"i thought you'd like the attention, no?"

"not when it means you come earlier than i want you to," jimin gains a steady pace, starting to bounce over him. he moans with a smile. "are these ribbed?"

"huh?"

"the condoms, focus."

"huh yeah, maybe, i think...shit."

soon the only sounds in jimin's tiny closet apartment are skin slapping against skin, taehyung's quick breaths, and, of course, moaning. but the sounds of it all, the sight of seeing jimin with his skin flushed out and his hair tousled riding him like a fucking cowboy, the feeling of, well, sex, is making the waves crash. he digs his nails into jimin's hips.

"think about something," jimin says quickly and slows down a little.

"tae," jimin presses his palms to either side of taehyung's cheeks again. "i said think. you don't have to talk."

"but--"
jimin presses a kiss to his nose. "please don't talk. please."

"but you want me to last, i'm trying to last."

"okay," jimin laughs. "but can it not be about cosmological inflation? can it maybe, if you must talk, be about how sexy i look riding you?"

"no," taehyung moans. "no, it can't."

"just think of cosmological inflation," jimin kisses his mouth this time. "don't talk."

"okay, ah..." taehyung hisses when jimin sinks back down and he shuts his eyes again. "ah...okay...okay...consumerism is probably more dangerous than communism. big name brands like adidas and fucking givenchy manufacture massive amounts of clothing with unsustainable material and--"

jimin, who had been so focused on riding so well that taehyung could barely think straight, falls onto him and bursts out laughing. their chests, hot and sweaty, stick together. taehyung starts shaking with laughter too and the two of them are on a giggling fest. they shake together in humored harmony and jimin leans his forehead against taehyung's.

they kiss. "you need to shut the fuck up," jimin laughs again.

"i feel like we skipped over the dating part."

wrapped up in bedsheets together, a sweaty mess of tangled limbs, they drink diet cokes out of cans with crazy straws (taehyung's idea) and listen to "master's hands" (jimin's idea). apparently jimin has a post-coitus playlist that he's never got to listen to with anyone.

it's full of mostly old songs from sultry jazz singers of yesteryear. fever, baby what you do to me, bessie smith, etc. but there's an occasional appearance from someone who's actually alive today. for a playlist mostly made up of songs about sex, they're all sweet.

jimin kisses his shoulder. "we ate cake."

"true. but that was after you made me come twice."

"sorry, i'm not traditional. would you like me to build a time machine and take it all back? so you can never ask me out first and we can never get past you stalking me and forcing free drinks on me?"

"why don't you like my free drinks? are you some rich heir who hates saving money?"

"ah," jimin takes a sip of his coke and turns over on his stomach, curling his legs up. he's still draped over taehyung's torso, arm stretched up to caress his hair. "i'm a rich kid who loves saving money. but hates it when people think they can buy me."

"i wasn't trying to buy you," taehyung says gently.

"i know that now."

taehyung draws circles in jimin's back. "how many people confessed to you before me? at this
school? with, you know, the rep?"

suddenly shy or embarrassed or what, jimin dips his face into his shoulder, hiding his reddened cheeks and small smile. "you're the first. trust me, if more people were confessing, i wouldn't have been that easily swooned over your speech."

"is that why you really invited me? i swooned you?"

"that and because i wanted to see what the catch was. thought maybe you were doing more than necessary for a quick fuck or that you were trying to save me."

"most people i know love the hero type."

jimin lifts his head. "i don't damsels...i see what you mean though. i'm sorry we haven't been on more dinner nights."

"we've known each other a week," taehyung laughs. "officially, at least, so it's okay. it's not the dates, it's just...i don't want this to just be sex."

"it's not. i wasn't kidding, you kind of won me over with that speech. it was so earnest and cute with a little hint of a pathetic undertone. i may be a slut but i'm a romantic too."

"you're not a slut."

jimin slides up, setting his can down on the bedside table and straddling taehyung's waist. "we may be dating now but it doesn't mean you can lie to me," he smiles with a mischievous glint in his eye.

before taehyung can really complain about memorizing the likes of robert frost and emily dickinson, winter intercession is over. with all the time he's been spending with the love of his life, it's been kind of hard to focus on class. taehyung doesn't even remember getting any work done but judging from the 93% final grade, he definitely worked.

"or poetry is just easy," jimin teased.

upon waking up this morning, he thought about how much time has passed-- only a month (but a month of cake, sodas, and splendid sex) -- and, upon turning to jimin sleeping soundly tucked into his side, he knew he'd been right. he was in love then and he's definitely in love now.

he checks the time on his phone and realizes this is the first time he's slept over the entire night. "oh shit," he whispers.

jimin stirs at his side. "did you have a nightmare about cosmological inflation?"

"no. we spent the night together."

"oh?" blinking one of his eyes open, jimin peers up at taehyung. "i guess this means it's official."

taehyung can't help but to smile. "the official date didn't make it official?"

"yeah, neither did the 69 session," jimin turns on his back and rolls his shoulders. "neither did the riding, the confiding, the reverse cowgirl, or blow jobs. but the sleeping over, yeah, that made it official."

"to me, it did. no need for the sarcasm."
"that's what 90% of our conversations consist of anyway."

"and the other 10%?"

jimin hums. "you talking about government conspiracies, alien existence, and the international crime rate to get yourself to not come ten seconds in."

taehyung slides down over the sheets until he's laying eye level with jimin. "i have to go to my dorm."

"sleeping over really scares you, doesn't it?"

"no, i just have to make it look decent before my roommate comes back. have to return some of the things i stole to his side of the room."

"okay. you can go."

"no," taehyung leans closer and gives jimin a butterfly kiss. "i mean...do you...?"

"come on, you can do it. you know i don't bite and if you thought for a second that i did, you wouldn't let me go down on you as many times as i have."

"do you wanna walk with me?"

jimin sits up. "go to your dorm? this is the college equivalent to meeting your parents."

"right. so?"

"why not?" jimin stands to his feet, stretching out completely. "can i shower here or are you inviting me partly as a ploy to get me to shower with you?"

taehyung freezes. "i hadn't thought of that. but that sounds really...i'd like option two, please...how have we not tried that?"

"because i live in a closet and i'd get kicked out if the superintendent found me getting pounded in the shower."

"oh yeah," taehyung slides until he's sitting at the edge of the bed. "can i hold your hand?"

jimin answers by sticking his arm out and offering his hand, palm up. "go ahead, paulie."

"no, i mean when we walk there? can i hold your hand?"

"in public and at school?" jimin wavers, even stumbling with putting his clothes back on. "you know everyone's gonna be there, right? they're all checking back into dorms and...they'll all be there."

taehyung nods.

"are you sure about that? if people see you with me, i dunno, would that be okay?"

taehyung pretends to search, looking around the room and craning his neck. "jimin...if i can find a fuck to give about what people think, you'll be the first to know."

jimin beams and taehyung squeezes his hand.
"did you know 'faster than the speed of light' is somewhat of a falsity? or, more correctly, it's just not always true. there are plenty of things that travel faster than the speed of light and sometimes light doesn't even travel that fast because of the vacuums it--"

jimin presses a hot, breathy kiss to his lips. he pulls back. "you have to learn how to fuck quietly."

"i'm nervous," taehyung's snaps his hips faster and jimin's legs tighten around his torso. "i haven't been on top of you before, i wanna do it right."

"don't think about it so much."

as if to add a note of sarcasm or irony or whatever to the statement, jimin manages to tighten around him and taehyung chokes. "kinda hard not to."

"try thinking about dead puppies."

taehyung stops, the motion of his hips coming to a complete standstill. "i wanna last, i don't wanna deflate."

jimin tilts his head back against the pillows and sighs. "how about you go down on me instead?"

"you just wanna shut me up."

jimin laughs with him and opens his eyes. "you have odd tendencies, i won't be surprised if you somehow manage to yap with my dick in your mouth."

"it's just because i like you," taehyung says as he pulls the covers over his head and slides down.

if getting sucked off by jimin is otherworldly, sucking jimin off is the closest thing to ambrosia. but taehyung has barely taken all of him in when he hears the bedroom door open and jimin almost knees his eye out.

"you almost took my eye out." taehyung comes up face to face with jimin.

his face has taken on an extrinsically somber expression. he keeps his eyes down, tucking the sheet up to his neck. taehyung turns to the door and smiles apologetically at jeongguk who's looking at him like taehyung drove him out to east jesus nowhere, locked him in the car trunk, and pushed the car out to sea. "hey. sorry about the mess. how was your flight?"

jeongguk exhales heavily out of his nose. "can you take out the trash?"

"sure but technically it's your turn--"

jimin blinks slowly, nudging taehyung subtly. "he means me." he laughs it off but the hurt in his eyes is obvious.

taehyung turns back. "guk, what the hell? you don't have to be such a dick."

"i just got off a non-stop 14 hour flight, i'm sleep deprived, hungry, and not in the mood to beat around the bush. get him out of here or i will."

"no."
"taehyung."

"jeongguk."

"i'll go," jimin interrupts the tension with a forced light smile. he starts to sit up but thinks better of it, leaning to whisper into taehyung's ear. "can you cover me up?"

"you don't have to go."

"please?"

looking into jimin's full eyes, pupils dilated and irises gleaming exuberance and vitality, taehyung finds he can't deny him anything. even if what he wants isn't what taehyung wants. he stands up, lifting the sheet off their bodies and holding it up as a partition between them and jeongguk. behind him, jimin pulls his clothes on as he stares daggers at jeongguk. jeongguk doesn't even blink.

the air becomes stifled and riddled with jeongguk's vexation, jimin's discomfort, and taehyung's disbelief.

"okay," jimin runs a finger down taehyung's bare back. "thank you."

taehyung lowers the sheet then rushes to put his pants on before jimin can leave the room. jimin has to duck under jeongguk's arm because the asshole refuses to move it but taehyung just pushes through him to get to the corridor.

"i can walk you home."

he knows he must look wild with his hair sticking up, shirtless with his pants barely pulled on, and his skin flush. but even so, jimin doesn't look at him like he's a crazy guy in the hallway. he shakes his head. "don't."

swallowing the dry lump in his throat, taehyung slouches in defeat. but, very quickly, his blunder turns into wrath. he returns to the dorm room and slams the door behind him.

"was that really fucking necessary?" he crosses his arms as jeongguk peels off his coat, drops it on the floor, and collapses onto his bed. "i know you don't like him but really?"

"it's my room," jeongguk closes his eyes. "i pay tuition, i can decide who stays and who doesn't."

"and i don't?"

"how long have you guys been fucking?" when jeongguk opens his eyes, they've practically gone red. "i've been gone a month and he's already got you sucking his dick?"

"the fuck's your problem?"

jeongguk stands. "my problem? you're having sex with a nympho who doesn't give a shit about you and i'm the one with a problem?"

"you don't know anything about us. he cares about me just as much as i care about him."

"a month ago, he didn't even know your name and now that you're having sex with him, he cares about you?" jeongguk forces out a laugh to challenge taehyung and reinforce his own disbelief. "a little soon, don't you think? has he told he loves you too?"

"i don't need to listen to this," taehyung exhales after a few moments too long. he moves to his side
of the room to find a shirt but Jeongguk stays on him.

"You just don't wanna hear the truth. Admit it, everything I'm saying is true and you know it. I bet he tries to act like he's some kind of saint, right? Probably claims the rumor came from exaggeration?"

"He told me everything," Taehyung turns and steps close enough to Jeongguk's face that he's breathing in his exhales. "He told me everything, he doesn't keep anything from me."

"So you know about finger cuffs, right? How it came out?"

Stepping back and casting his eyes down, Taehyung pulls his hoodie on and sits down to pull on his shoes. "Of course."

"You know a lot of people fucked him that night?"

"A lot of people fucked him every night."

"You know I was one of them?"

The atmosphere changes, shifts with something in Jeongguk's demeanor. The silence lasts only for a second but it's long enough to make Taehyung look up at his roommate. They stare at each other long enough to read the other's mood before Taehyung finishes with his shoes and stands up. Jeongguk looks somewhat defiant like he knows he's holding the knife to make Taehyung bleed.

"So?"

Jeongguk's jaw clenches tightly. "I hope you wrapped it up. Because with the amount of people he's let stick it to him, there's no way he's clean."

Taehyung clenches his fist for a split second but Jeongguk catches it right away.

"You gonna hit me?"

"No," Taehyung shakes his head. "You're my best friend. Last thing I want to do is hurt you."

His first instinct is to check Jimin's apartment but he makes stops along the way. He checks the dance studios just to be safe and the smoothie shop before visiting "the closet". He knocks on the door twice and waits...

He's about to leave for the diner after the third knock when Jimin's voice comes through as a mumble:

"Go."

Taehyung presses his hands up against the door along with his ear. "Jimin? I'm so sorry about him. Will you let me in so I can--"

"No."

"No to opening the door or no to my apology?"
"both," he hears jimin sniffle. "i'm not opening the door and i'm the one who should be sorry."

"i know about jeongguk." taehyung tries. "he told me about the...orgy or...i know and i don't care."

"what?"

"he was one of the guys, i know. it doesn't matter to me."

the door opens a crack, jimin using the rest of it as a body shield with only his head poking out. "he didn't fuck me at the gangbang."

"no?"

jimin shakes his head, pursing his lips. when he looks down, a few more tears come down with his eyes. "he's the reason."

"for?"

"why i stopped."

"i know this has to end," he says with a shaky breath. "because he's your best friend and i hurt him. and it wouldn't be fair. i know. i...i didn't mean...it wasn't my intention to hurt him. we met one night when were the only two working ourselves up in a frenzy over these different routines. we started talking -- talked all night actually -- and...well, we ended up doing it in one of the bathroom stalls. that was that."

jimin breaks off and wipes his cheeks before continuing. "like a week later, at that party, i saw him again. and it was when someone new was getting their turn from behind. i remember because it took a minute for the guy to get going 'cos he couldn't get the condom on right...i was crying but not...it was just because the other guy was fucking my throat and everything was confusing and hazy and i saw him. there was a small group of people watching it and jeongguk had stumbled in. the way he looked at me..."

"taehyung, i didn't know that it meant anything to him. i thought it was just a fling but the way he looked at me, like i ripped a hole into his universe...i think it was his first time...with me. and i think he thought i might have been someone for him. think of how he felt when he found me in a random room at a random party getting fucked by random guys. i should have followed him out but i didn't. i never apologized to him."

the ability to speak as well as the overall knowledge of basic vocabulary seemed to evade taehyung as his mind was flooded with different images. the main one being his hand free of jimin's.

"thank you," jimin speaks again. "for being amazing. all the time. i'm sorry for hurting you."

jimin starts closing the door but taehyung puts his foot in the way. "it doesn't have to."

jimin raises his eyebrows in question.

"you said it has to end," taehyung clarifies, trying his best to swallow down his desperation. "it doesn't."

"i told you i don't like hurting people. i can't come between you two--"

"you won't. he's my best friend, yeah. he's also the best friend who started pursuing someone i once
loved more than life. he can deal with it."

his beaming through tears is akin to the sunshine appearing through the rain. it makes taehyung feel alive. "you're sure?"

taehyung reaches forward and brushes jimin's cheeks with the pad of his thumb. "can i tell you a secret?"

"i love secrets."

"i...fuck, i kind of really love you."

jimin's face goes blank. his eyes widen a fraction. at the same time, taehyung frowns.

"i didn't mean that," he lies and uses jimin's shock to step inside, closing the distance between them. he cups jimin's face and peppers his eyelids, cheeks, and forehead in kisses. "i was just saying that, i swear."

the tears return and taehyung becomes more urgent.

"i lied, i don't mean it. i don't know why i said that. i just wanted to get you in bed."

at that, jimin surges into a fit of hysterical laughter and falls into taehyung's arms, curling his fingers around the back of taehyung's neck. he kisses his shoulder through his laughter. "we're 'official'. you don't have to lie to me."

when he pulls back, taehyung looks at him hopefully. he doesn't want to pressure but he does want to know. jimin looks down at his lips and caresses his cheek.

"i trust you," he whispers before pulling at taehyung's neck and leaning their foreheads together. "that's bigger to me than 'i love you'."

jeongguk starts dodging taehyung and, when he wasn't dodging, offering the ever-loved cold shoulder. taehyung stopped bringing jimin to the dorm but not so much out of respect for jeongguk's feelings as much as out of protecting jimin's feelings.

when jeongguk was pissed or when he felt like he'd been wronged, he easily went from slightly evasive college student to heartless dickhead. there was no reason to make either of them more uncomfortable than necessary (necessary being when jeongguk deserves a prank like mayo in his shampoo bottle or uncomfortable when jimin is being prepped).

taehyung hasn't left their dorm as it's the center of everywhere he needs to be: work, fashion, and class but he sleeps at jimin's when it's convenient.

he tries to make every night convenient.

"are you two talking yet?"

taehyung doesn't move his position: cheek pressed flat against jimin's stomach, arms stretched up to circle jimin's nipple. he only moves the slightest to press a wet kiss to his belly button and jimin continues caressing his hair. "he told me he'd be home late. in three words...two days ago."
"anything else?"
"i get the occasional grunt of acknowledgement."

taehyung hisses when jimin pulls at his hair and responds with a pinch to his nipple.
"don't worry about it, it's not your fault. and we'll start talking again. he's just stubborn."
"you both are," he hears jimin sigh. "please. just talk to him."

taehyung, with much reluctance, pushes up from jimin's stomach, kissing his belly button one last time before closing in. "i promise i'll talk to him. will you do something for me too?"
"you making up with your best friend is not for me."

"not in return," taehyung smiles hopefully. "just an unattached request...there's this party--"
"no."

"--my friend is throwing it. well, not really my friend, just a coworker but it's a good party--"
"no."

"and a lot of my friends will be there."

"with a lot of people from school."

"and i just want to, maybe, pretty please, introduce you to them?"

"tae--"

"it's like you said: my friends are important to me. and you're important to me. and i want the important people and things in my life to blend. that's why we had sex watching cosmos the other day."

"you came for neil degrasse tyson," jimin huffs, crossing his arms.

"you know i did. when he talks about the universe, i can't hold it in long. but seriously."

"i'm seriously considering hitting you right now."

"you already pulled my hair."

"and you pinched my nipple."

taehyung narrows his eyes. "don't act like you don't like that...i want them to know how amazing you are. i want them to know you're more than your reputation. please?"

"...fine," taehyung yelps excitedly and smooches loudly. "you're just using me as practice for neil."

"you know me so well."

if taehyung could choose songs for certain events in his life, the soundtrack to his life would win
like six grammys. he actually did have a spotify playlist dedicated to things like when he first laid eyes on jimin ("tiny dancer"), when he and jimin had their first makeout session ("sleazy bed track"), when he had his first taste of coca-cola cake ("je t’aime…moi non plus"). and, yes, he has moments without jimin, it just so happens that the ones with jimin are much more interesting.

that being said, even he's pleased with the song he and jimin end up walking in to hand in hand.

"blitzkrieg bop" blares from the speakers and as taehyung navigates their way around the place he's gotten to know almost as well as the back of his hand, the fifty plus guests stare.

"no one has stared at me like this since i showed up as ronald mcdonald."

jimin looks at him. "that's a story i'll need to hear later. you're gonna have to get used to this if you really want me on your arm."

taehyung shrugs. "i don't even notice them anymore."

"holy shit!"

they both look up to see hoseok staring at the two of them with a pac-man wide smile and sparkling eyes. he's obviously drunk but taehyung knows his excitement is genuine. "hey."

"holy fucking shit," he looks at their enjoined hands and almost bucks his knees. "it's official! it's official? holy fuck, come here."

he pulls them both into a tight hug and kisses their cheeks. he sags against them and whispers. whispers because he's drunk and drunk whispering is really just tame yelling.

"i'm so proud of you guys," he pulls back and pats jimin's hair. "he kept me up so many nights bitching about you. i'm so happy, i love you."

taehyung's thankful for the darkness of the house as it makes the pink dusting his cheeks completely unnoticeable. jimin eyes him over hoseok and bites his lip. "allow me to apologize on his behalf."

"you don't need to," hoseok slurs and falls back onto them. "jesus christ, i'm so relieved."

"if your other friends are as nice as him, the stares might be worth it," jimin says when they manage to detangle hoseok's clingy limbs from theirs.

they find a few others in the kitchen and, once they step in, they're met with open-mouths and shock.

"he was serious?"

"holy shit."

"wow."

taehyung raises his arm and displays their hands with pride. "we can hear you."

"you're supposed to," jackson scoffs. "look who you brought."

"shut the fuck up, jackson," namjoon looks at taehyung and raises his cup. "congratulations, i guess."
"thank you for that half-assed best wish, i can tell how heartfelt it is," taehyung says sarcastically.

"i control your job."

"and that wasn't sarcasm, i really think it's the best congrats we've gotten."

with the exception of the echoing heights of johnny rotten's excuse for singing, the kitchen is silent. the quiet isn't broken until seokjin stumbles into the kitchen, spilling his pina colada on the floor in the process. he mourns his alcohol before he notices them standing in the doorway. then he smiles.

"awwww!"

taehyung turns to namjoon. "why has no one cut him off yet?"

"he's running the bar."

"he's drinking the bar," jackson corrects.

seokjin pouts and his eyes actually tear up. he jumps into them and wraps both arms around taehyung. "you're in love! you're such a nerd and you're so socially awkward, i never thought you'd find love. like at all." seokjin turns to jimin. "he's really a nerd. like..."

"everyone seems to be shitting on you, doesn't seem like i had a reason to worry at all."

taehyung sticks his tongue out at him as seokjin rests his head on jimin's shoulder.

"please don't ruin it. neither one of you. because taehyung is stupid and jimin, you're...i don't really know actually. but love sucks so don't...fuck, i was saying something."

he seems to fall asleep for a second but the furrow deepset in his forehead confirms him just overthinking. suddenly he springs up.

"ah," he lifts his head. "jimin, it's not because you sleep around, i'm a bit of a slut myself, i just want everyone to be happy. because sometimes, like, people you think care are ...they turn really mean. and i don't want mean, i want everyone happy. okay? taehyung, okay? everyone in this room, be happy now! done? good--ah, shit."

the pina colada fell to the floor completely and seokjin almost shed tears over it. he looks down at the mess for a while before cheering up again.

"i can make another one," he exclaims as he turns to leave. before he's completely gone, he turns back to smile. "i love everyone, bye."

taehyung turns to namjoon. "the party barely started, why is everyone so drunk?"

namjoon shrugs. "you guys walking in here is the most interesting thing that's happened so far. only good thing about this party is the booze."

everyone doesn't fall in love with jimin like taehyung wants them to. it doesn't happen like it does at the end of a nice romantic movie where everyone hugs and the camera pans out and some corrine bailey ray song plays into the end credits. some people -- okay, just seokjin and hoseok -- were excited and others were indifferent.

taehyung knows namjoon doesn't actually mean his congratulations and that he's really just going to be waiting for jimin to fuck up. because namjoon can't enjoy anything when he isn't right. due to
some kind of chemical imbalance in his oversized brain or something. jackson only held back insults because of namjoon's presence. even though namjoon doesn't approve, he'll defend blood with unemployment. jeongguk already made it known how he felt and yoongi was nowhere to be found.

so, they got comfortable. even with the eyes on them, they danced and tried hard not to grind. in the middle of some lady gaga dance song, they slow dance, arms secure around each other, both of them grounded to nothing but each other. the tips of their noses brush together as they stare into the trance of each other's eyes.

"i love you so fucking much," taehyung mouths.

jimin smiles. "i know," he mouths with a wink.

"careful, taehyung." someone comes up to them, almost parting them with the brute force of their vulgarity. "if you take a piss break, he'll wander and find someone else's dick. maybe mine."

neither of them recognize the person and taehyung only wonders how they knew his name as an after thought. whoever he is, he winks at jimin who scoffs out a laugh as a reply.

"i wouldn't be able to find your dick with nsa surveillance," jimin delivers so quick, almost like he didn't even need to think about it. fuck, taehyung is really sprung.

"that's never mattered to you, has it? doesn't matter the size, whether there's a condom, whether it's in your mouth or..."

the guy trails off as he turns around, having been tapped on the shoulder. before he can even turn completely, jeongguk punches him out cold and blows on his fist when he's collapsed. he looks at jimin and nods once. then at taehyung: "because you can't throw a punch to save your life."

taehyung puts a hand up to his chest but doesn't feign the warmth growing in his chest. "guk...you defended the love of my life."

"shut the fuck up," jeongguk turns and heads into the other direction. he doesn't get very far because a drunk seokjin appears, says something that neither jimin nor taehyung can hear, and smacks the sloppiest looking kiss onto jeongguk's mouth.

there's a collective murmur of "holy shit" among the party attendees and taehyung internally counts how many seconds the kiss lasts. he cranes his neck to see where the kiss rates on the grandma to getting laid scale and sees enough tongue in their to qualify as a cunnilingus central porno. he counts to ten when seokjin pulls away, smiles dazedly, and walks off like he didn't just cause an explosion in jeongguk's universe.

jeongguk stands there frozen and taehyung watches seokjin pass a fuming yoongi who stands in the corner of the room.

"this is gonna be interesting."

Chapter End Notes

i hate myself for going over the word limit but i can't lie: i'm actually pleased with this. if you're interested in knowing what jimin's post-coitus playlist:
http://8tracks.com/nonheather/petit-mort-encore

my favorite scene has to be that quick diner scene with the coke cake because it was so pretty in my head. and with serge gainsbourg playing in the bg, i mean, who wouldn't love it? i'd love to know your favorite parts too! <3

thank you for reading! btw would anyone even want to read a spin off concluding the jin triangle?

random quote prompt because why not: "you're shitting in my mouth and saying you bought me dinner!"

End Notes

my twitter omg i made one just for you guys

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!