Summary

Whether or not Jimin was smuggling drugs really didn’t matter. He was hustling, and these days that was all there was to it.

Hustle and survive, or struggle and die.

Notes

This work contains /a lot/ of visual references so for that sake I created this padlet: X
These are also the playlists I was listening to to get some 80s and general vibes: 1 and 2

Find me on twitter here: X

Lastly, disclaimer: I am not from San Francisco nor am I even from America. Any geographical mistakes in this work are purely the results of my own research and shortcomings so please put this into account. I wasn't born in the 80s either, so once again all of this is the results of pure research, books, films and documentaries I've seen to help create
a semi-fictitious world with realistic elements and history mixed into it. Also, for the prices for things listed in this story, multiply the amount of dollars by around 2.4-2.7% to find the modern price (e.g. $40,000 is actually $95,000 something equiv.) because yes I did use a inflation calculator for realism OTL.
14th August, 1984, 4:32am: Lower Haight, San Francisco, United States of America

Sometimes, when Jimin found himself naked and bent over a table in some dingy fucking apartment room at 4:30am, another man three fingers deep inside of his ass and the strong scent of latex hanging in the air, he found himself wondering what the fuck he was even doing with his life.

Unsurprisingly, he never truly managed to think of a decent answer to this question. Usually, it was because his veins were filled with more coffee than blood at this point, and his heartbeat was far too jacked to be considered healthy. It had crossed his mind on more than one occasion that a line of cocaine would have the exact same effect on him (if he ignored the clammy outbreak of sweat, that was), but he always found himself turning to coffee instead.

If there was one thing that Jimin knew, it was this: never use what you’re selling or, to be more apt, what you’re smuggling.

Now, Jimin was no stranger to this routine, considering the fact that he had been doing this for almost a year now. But sometimes, he did miss the good old running days, when he could carry around several baggies of eight-ball and grams across the city and not even attract a single pair of police officers’ eyes because he looked clean, young, and so very unlike the addicts that lined various streets and blocks of The Castro and Haight-Ashbury every single night.

No, Jimin looked ‘good’, and that was saying something these days, all things considered. He didn’t look like he was smuggling drugs for a gang every couple of weeks, spent most of the daylight hours sleeping in a communal home with a bunch of hippies, gays, and runaway suburban teens, and his nights...well, his nights were spent in bars, bathhouses, or the backseat of someone else’s car occasionally.

Just a clean-looking young man, of course.

But now, Jimin didn’t play around with eight-balls and running for soft addicts up in Pacific Heights: suburban white folk looking for some excitement to their mundane fucking existence. No, these days, Jimin had a key of cocaine shoved up his ass and strapped to his body one day, half a key of heroin the next. Sometimes, there would be a small break between this, just to not raise too much
suspicion, but he was looking at at least two trips between the USA, South Korea, and Hong Kong over the duration of a single month on average. Sometimes, he wondered if he was a mule or an air hostess. Needless to say, the constant travelling was wreaking havoc with his mind and body. Jet lag, constant douching, and swallowing laxatives to purge his system was not exactly an ideal way to live.

That was probably why, at 4:30am in the morning, Jimin had completely consented to this current anal probing without a single complaint.

Well, he would have continued his silent consent if Namjoon would just hurry up and insert the condom parcel. How many fingers did he really need to insert for this? And how many times was he going to accidentally rub against his prostate to make the entire ordeal rather erotic and uncomfortable?

Usually, the cocaine was separated into several portions: two baggies to go under the armpits, two baggies against the thighs, and a select amount kept aside for insertion. This amount was carefully poured into a condom, which was then lubricated and slipped inside another, which was then lubricated again and shoved several inches up his ass. Really, it was just a lot of slick latex and a hell of a mess. The lubricant in question had to be selected carefully, just to make sure that it wouldn’t destroy the sensitive latex.

Jimin had heard far too many horror stories about mules carrying parcels internally, only for the condom to explode and flood their anus or vagina with enough cocaine to drop a fucking elephant before they even boarded their plane.

Of all of the ways to go, Jimin really didn’t want to drop dead from an overdose in some shitty alleyway, in the back of a runner’s car, or even on said plane.

Jimin sighed under his breath; his cheek balanced on the surface of a dining table, and his arms stretched across the length to hold onto the rough edges. It was plywood, likely imported cheap European shit considering how there seemed to be a lot of cheap European shit in this city. The surface was sticky on his skin, and he didn’t even know what was stuck to the surface. He was hoping it was old lubricant of some kind, but knowing the other man, it could be the remains of last night’s beer and dinner - assuming that Namjoon had crashed here in advance to get the supplies. He almost hoped that it was, just so that it wouldn’t be something more disgusting. The wall across the apartment room was covered in mould, and he could see the old, floral wallpaper peeling away from the wall.

Lovely.
Jimin was about to move his head and balance his chin on his folded arms when he felt slight a stretching followed by a sharp burn, and that was when he knew it had finally happened.

Namjoon had just shoved a fourth fucking finger up his ass.

“Shit, Namo,” Jimin almost groaned, trying his very hardest to not squirm. “Are you gonna shove it up there already or just carry on fingering me, huh?”

“Very funny, Jimmy,” Namjoon said, his tone completely devoid of amusement. “Stop clenching and maybe I can get it up there. God, stop acting like a rookie and, or, like you’ve never taken it up the ass before. We both know the truth here.”

“Fuck you,” he retorted, as he set his jaw and tried to not clench too much.

“You’d like that; wouldn’t you?” Namjoon remarked, and this made Jimin snort laughter, even when he didn’t want to. “Look, even when we both know you’re partial to taking dick every now and again, this isn’t a dick. If you want me to just shove it up there and tear a bunch of muscles so you bleed through your trousers, I will. But I think that sounds like a bad idea; don’t you?”

“Probably taken worse,” Jimin joked back, earning himself a laugh from his partner. “Yeah, I know I’ve taken worse.”

“OK, well, I’ll be inserting it in a minute, so, just hold still and stop yapping,” Namjoon stated, as he moved his fingers ever so slightly inside of him.

Jimin placed his chin on his upper arm to get more comfortable, now staring out of the window of the apartment room instead.

The sight that he saw was that of a wide street, currently covered in parked cars, with tram lines crisscrossing from post to post so that the sky was a mass of snaking black lines. Pretty soon, the sight outside of that window might just change, should more renovations sweep across the city and result in mass erections of skyscraper buildings. But he doubted that that would happen this far from more privileged areas. He stared at the opposite block of buildings in boredom for a moment, his body still thrumming from one too many coffees, and then he felt Namjoon finally slipping his fingers mostly free.
Jimin could have sighed in relief at the sensation if he didn’t know that they would be getting replaced by something else, something much wider and longer.

His partner collected the cocaine condom parcel, and a moment later, Jimin felt the end prodding against him - rubbing against his entrance until Namjoon applied some pressure and it started slipping inside. The lube was cooler than the trickling remains on his inner thighs, and he pulled his lower lip in to nibble on it as it started inching deeper and deeper inside of him.

“You know, Jimmy,” Namjoon remarked, as he carried on slipping the parcel forward. “I think you could make a career in smuggling Cuban cigars into this country up your ass. You could fit the whole fucking case up there, one by one.”

Jimin could only roll his eyes at the remark and pretend to ignore him, his fingers tightening on the edge of the table as the condom started getting deeper inside of him. It was now edging beyond the length of his partner’s fingers and reaching the point of discomfort, but soon, that sensation would pass. Soon enough, his muscles would get used to width of the parcel, and so he dropped his head to stare at the table.

“Probably fit a gun up there too, so-”

“Namo, I swear to god…”

“Or at least some clips, just saying,” Namjoon stated in a defensive tone, as he gave the condom parcel another shove so that it was almost fully inside of him. He had to give it a slight push to leave the small knotted end right by his entrance. “Good boy.”

Jimin let his breath out in a heavy sigh, and as he loosened his hold on the table, he felt himself clenching around the end of the parcel. There, it was inside him and now it was time to move onto the next step. He shifted ever so slightly, standing upright and feeling pressure in his lower back and stomach. It was uncomfortable and would be for some time, but it was a discomfort that he was used to. At least it didn’t hurt as he straightened up and he stretched his muscles.

After a few seconds, Jimin turned to sit down on the table, his bare and now rather packed ass sticking to the sticky patch of god knows what still on the wooden surface. His feet brushed against the old and dirty carpet, which felt unpleasant on his skin.

Jimin stuck his tongue out to wet his lips, and then he turned his head to watch Namjoon collecting
the other items from the briefcase. He reached up to rub at his brow, feeling beaded sweat present like usual. It was of no surprise to him. After all, his thigh and stomach muscles had had quite the workout so far today. He probably should have been embarrassed by his nudity, but he wasn’t. It seemed pointless to be conscious of his naked flesh when Namjoon had been fingering him (for lack of a better word) for the best part of ten minutes now. Maybe, the fact that he was slightly hard was something to be embarrassed about?

Well, it wasn’t like his partner hadn’t seen it all before.

The first thing that Namjoon pulled out was tape, a large roll of grey tape, and this was then followed by the baggies of cocaine. The tape was horribly sticky, sticky enough that Jimin was almost certain that it would tear his first layer of skin off every single time that it was ripped free from his body. Had he not been smart enough to already shave his body hair, he would be looking at a wax job to the armpits and groin every week. He saved himself the trouble by shaving his body free of all hair, just to be safe.

Jimin watched him peeling the first thick strip of tape and tearing it so that he could stick it onto the top of the first baggie, and then he reached down to cup his cock and testicles, moving them aside for the older man. The baggie went onto his left thigh first, right up to the groin, and then Namjoon secured it in place with even more strips of tape. Next came his right thigh, and another swollen baggie of cocaine was taped in place there so that it made closing his legs fully incredibly difficult.

“You know, it’s real fun trying to tuck around these things,” Jimin remarked, as he pulled his briefs up and he awkwardly tried to tuck himself to the left with the bulging baggie refusing to cooperate.

The fact that he was still sporting a halfway hard erection didn’t help him either.

“Good thing you got a small dick then,” Namjoon replied with a smirk, grabbing more tape to stick onto the third baggie.

Jimin glared at him as he fixed the waistband of the briefs up on his hips, and then moved to grab his trousers from the table. He hastily slipped into them, the tight black cotton moulding to his legs. He reached down to check that they didn’t showcase any hints of the baggies.

Strangely enough, the crotch and seat area of the trousers always allowed slight room, allowing him to wear the two pouches and not stretch against the fabric. He didn’t fasten the trousers up just yet, however, for he still had two more baggies waiting to be stuck to his body.
Jimin sat back down on the table and he proceeded to hold his arms up at his sides, his hands level with his shoulders.

Namjoon fixed the third baggie under his armpit, securing it in place by wrapping a layer of tape around his joint when he lowered his arm. It kept it trapped in place snugly and allowed him to move most of his shoulder without a hint of resistance. Then he taped the ends down against his ribs, just to make sure that it wouldn’t swing loose. Once that was in place, he moved onto the fourth and final baggie parcel, and Jimin stayed as still as he could and he tried to not wriggle too much on the table. It took Namjoon a moment to get it in place, but then he was done: all prepped and ready to go.

Jimin grabbed his folded-up shirt from the table and he slipped into it, his fingers fastening up the buttons without even looking. He was unable to wear his usual tee-shirt of choice because that was far too risky and fitted for boarding any planes with. The loose-fitting shirt allowed him to disguise any possible hints of the baggies under his armpits, and it gave his svelte frame a little more bulk that his form-fitting trousers didn’t allow. The black silk was just loose enough to look comfortable and casual, the open neck showcasing a hint of his collarbones and chest. It didn’t look like something that a drug mule would wear, not when it showed off so much chest and skin. Hell, it was even embroidered with two white koi fish and so it actually looked decent and not cheap.

In reality, it was pretty fucking cheap.

“That went quicker than usual,” Jimin remarked, as he fixed the shirt ends down inside of his trousers and then pulled his zipper up. As he buttoned himself up, he saw that Namjoon was wiping any hints of lube off his gloves so that he could turn his attention back to the briefcase. His partner made a noise in agreement, and Jimin patted at his back pocket to pull his passport free and check it. “If only everything else went that quick, huh?”

“Wouldn’t that be a breeze?” Namjoon agreed, as he reached inside of the briefcase and he pulled two envelopes out: one small and thin white paper, and the other a padded tan manilla. He lifted up the envelopes and he started checking through them slowly. “Got your stuff here. Your ticket, but also got your instructions. You probably know this shit off by heart, but let’s just check anyway.”

“I get off the plane at Gimpo International Airport, probably around what…7:30pm here? It’ll be, like, 11:30am there anyway; supposing that the flight is on time. After leaving, I head west along the main road outside the place. I’ll pass a school and eventually I’ll reach the Mayfield Hotel after a couple of minutes. It’s probably one of the few luxury things in that fucking city, but I digress. That’s where I’m scheduled to meet Kim and hand over the goods, which will finalise the transaction of the coke.”

“OK, give me more,” Namjoon stated, holding his hand up and twitching his fingers. “Talk business to me, baby.”
“I’m looking for 40,000 dollars wired for the trade, nothing less than that. I’m carrying about 35,000 dollars on me right now, but that’s hush hush,” Jimin lifted his hand to press his finger against his lips. “Our boys in Camp Kitty Hawk don’t need to know that. I wanna hear something around…32 million won coming out of Kim’s mouth - 32 and a half including inflation and our pay. If they say anything below that amount, I walk, and if the runners do anything to me or Kim then they sever all connections to our side of the gang. So, they better cough up the fucking bills.”

“Yeah, you’re in the exact ballpark,” Namjoon said with a nod, not taking his eyes off the sheet of paper once.

“Add the heroin from Hong Kong into the equation, 15,000 dollars give or take like usual for the half a key, and we’re rolling in 5,000 extra on both deals before the shit hits the streets,” Jimin finished, before cocking his head and smirking at him. “Of course, we aren’t rolling in it, but you get me.”

“Yeah, we’re really rolling with our five hundred a piece, Jimmy,” Namjoon remarked, as he dropped the manilla envelope back inside the briefcase without a care.

“Hey, I’m the one walking away with five hundred,” he argued. “By the time that I get back, you’ll have made that much and counting from pushing and dealing, so, don’t act poor around me, Daddy-o.”

This made his partner snort as he turned his head to eye the small canvas bag propped up against the wall.

“Probably blow a nice chunk of that on pot too, knowing you.”

“Yup, I’ll blow my bills on pot and you’ll, well, you’ll probably just be blowing a guy.”

“Hilarious as always, Namo,” Jimin muttered, as he moved his feet across the carpeted floor to try and find his loafers, dragging them close so that he could slip into them. “Go get high at one of the comedy clubs on Haight Street and get on the stage. You might just find yourself with an audience, but I doubt it.”

For a moment, the apartment room turned silent. Jimin decided to break the quiet again - far too riled up from the coffee to stay still and silent.
“When’s check-in start?”

“6:00am, so, we better blow now,” Namjoon stated, as he held the tickets out to him.

Jimin moved to collect them, placing them inside of his passport before shoving the object inside of his back pocket. Then he grabbed his canvas bag up from the floor. His partner stripped off his gloves and he tossed them onto the table without a care, slipping his sunglasses free from the front of his red tee-shirt to shove them up his nose as Jimin got his bag up onto his shoulder.

They left the rundown block as a pair: Namjoon in the lead and him trailing behind. Getting down the narrow staircase proved very fun for him, his loafers thumping off the worn and destroyed thick pile carpet that embellished them, and his muscles tightening around the still awkward condom parcel. The apartment was a front, of course, a front paid for by Moon Tiger Mob just so runners and mules could meet up and exchange goods. Addicts could also rent the lower floors for a decent price to get them off the streets and lessen police activity in the area.

When they stepped out onto the sidewalk, Jimin squinted and he lifted a hand to shield his eyes from the rising morning sun. He turned to look down the street to try and spot their ride, locating it just a few feet away.

The car parked on the curb was a 1983 Datsun *Maxima* sedan: deep blue and currently in pretty good shape, all things considered. Knowing that Namjoon owned it, he was amazed that there wasn’t a single scratch on the hood, doors or around the gas cap, for a broken headlight and a missing plate would be completely expected from his partner.

Jimin dropped his hand from his brow and he moved to go around the front of the car, pulling the door open seconds after Namjoon had unlocked it. Sitting down in the low seat proved just as awkward as getting down the stairs had been, and he grimaced as he slammed the door shut behind himself.

As Jimin wrestled with his seatbelt, Namjoon tugged and snapped his own one in place with ease; quickly shoving the keys into the ignition. When he twisted them hard, the radio came on, blaring music loudly from the speakers: Grateful Dead’s *Friend Of The Devil*. Well, at least it was none of that thrash rock shit that seemed to be getting popular on the streets now. Some old dreamy Deadhead rock was better than that any day, just not as good as the new wave and synth-pop stuff blasting on the airwaves.
Jimin fixed his seatbelt in place, tossed his bag under the seat, and then he turned to his window. He rolled it down whilst his partner started the car and proceeded to pull away from the curb.

Just like always, the weather was currently hot even in the early morning hours, signalling that it would reach a sweltering level by the afternoon. But Jimin knew that the heat here was nothing, that it was rather mild compared to what was in store for him. As if Seoul wouldn’t be hot enough, he would have to handle the crushing humidity of Kowloon City too. The thought was enough to make him sigh under his breath as he stared out of the window at the sights of Lower Haight passing them by.

Namjoon would drive them down several streets to get them onto Highway 101, which would skirt them around the neighbouring districts of SoMa, Mission, Bernal Heights, then down through Southeast to get to San Bruno, and eventually down to San Francisco International Airport. The ride would take them some time, but they would get to the airport with enough time for him to check-in and board the plane, like they did so with every smuggling trip.

Though they weren’t going to go through The Castro, Jimin could still see kiosks set up all over the streets leading to the highway. They had spread across the city now, and he wouldn’t be surprised if he saw them all of the way up in Presidio and all of the way down in Crocker Amazon: little kiosks set up outside of the mansions and monuments. The thought was enough to make him snort under his breath, because at least areas like Presidio Heights and Pacific Heights had managed to avoid the droves of homeless and addicts on the streets like the rest of the city. And the occasional schizo, of course, considering the fact that several care centres had been shut down through welfare cuts.

Yes, those areas had no need to worry about anything like that; why, it was almost as if AIDS was nonexistent in those neighbourhoods.

Jimin had seen all of the fliers and more, always plastered to kiosks all over the city and any available brick walls just to ensure that no one could possibly miss the messages. Some of them were… questionable at best, some were downright condescending and made him roll his eyes wearily. But the fliers remained regardless. They had been present on the streets for going on two years now, and they seemed set to stay present for quite some time if the terrifying figures continued to rise and more bodies lined street gutters around various areas of the city.

There were the fliers aimed at gay men first and foremost, of course, on account of the fact that they seemed to be the main focus of the current disaster. He had seen some pretty ridiculous ones, with slogans like “you’ll never guess what we wear to bed!” and the downright morbid ones of gravestones with simple messages printed underneath to ensure that no one could miss it: “the facts about AIDS: people are dying to know.”

Pleasant.
There were posters for women too, but they were all aimed at heterosexual women and incredibly rare to come across in most parts of the city. Worryingly rare, in his opinion. It wasn’t like Jimin had seen a lesbian hippie in his communal home damn near rotting away from Kaposi’s Sarcoma. It wasn’t like he had started noticing a lot of photographs of women being plastered to memorial walls all across The Castro for the dead. No, it seemed like this was being largely ignored by a great majority of news outlets, who only seemed to care about mentioning gay men instead. He had heard about a planned demonstration against this, against what a great many were labelling a sexist plight against dwindling female health care because most women weren’t able to receive treatment for the virus.

Jimin wished them luck, but he doubted that the protests would change a fucking thing.

Not with Reagan in charge. The fucking prick would probably just cut the already limited funding to the CDC just to spite them all.

There were fliers for users too, of course. Jimin had seen ones trying to scare injectors away from sharing needles, with bold print loudly shouting that sharing needles would spread the virus and result in death. It always made sure to have death underlined for effect. “Don’t pass the spike!” was another popular one. As if such messages would mean a thing to a freak on the street desperate for a hit. As if they would care about a possible infection when the chance to get stoned presented itself. They were about as useful as abstinence posters on a university campus. No, Jimin found himself much more inclined towards the ones that tried to educate users instead. There were bleach ones, with diagrams and explanations on how to clean needles after use with bleach and water to destroy the virus. Yes, Jimin much preferred those because at least they might save a few lives.

Lastly, there were the sight of religious fliers present in the city, though they were rare. They lasted a few days at most before someone pulled them down and trashed them. It was usually catholic fliers declaring complete abstinence as the only way to avoid AIDS, but there was the occasional more virulent strain of Christian ideology that almost seemed to delight in the virus’ existence: exalted messages of joy proclaiming that God’s will was being done on the earth or something. Jimin wasn’t sure, he suddenly found himself unable to read whenever he saw a cross printed on something. Whatever the case, the fliers still occasionally popped up all over the city just to piss him off.

“You see that one, huh?” Namjoon asked suddenly, catching him by surprise.

“Hmm?” Jimin hummed, as he turned away from the window to look at him, his fingers brushing against his cheekbone. “No, what’d it say?”

“Hugging doesn’t spread AIDS,” Namjoon stated in a scholarly tone. Then he turned his head to
look at him, his short black hair shifting from the breeze coming in through the window and his eyes hidden behind those stupid massive round shades of his. “That’s good to know. What next, breathing doesn’t spread AIDS?”

“Don’t joke, you might just see it soon,” Jimin retorted, as he turned back to his window and he sighed under his breath.

A breeze came through the open gap and ruffled at his tousled hair, blowing it back from his brow like playful fingers.

On the ride to the airport, Jimin kept his eyes glued to the window, watching the streets changing depending on the district and the soft rising and falling hills all across the city. At this early hour, they still saw a decent amount of people out on the streets, jumping trams or buses to traverse the city and get to work. Decent folk, he supposed, the kind that likely didn’t have secret addictions or live in shitty communal homes. Working people, in other words, which Jimin supposed that he was in some way or the other. Sure, he might be banking quite a sweet amount of cash every month but it was nothing compared to what pushers and dealers were cashing in. But, regardless of the cash that they were making, they were all still on the lowest echelon of Moon Tiger Mob: expendable younger brothers.

But whether or not he was smuggling drugs really didn’t matter. He was hustling, and these days that was all there was to it.

Hustle and survive, or struggle and die.

Eventually, they ended up on Highway 101, heading down south on the wide road with a random assortment of vehicles and rattling trams. Had he not been so hyped up on coffee, Jimin could have napped over the duration of the drive, but he was far too thrumming with caffeine for that. He had no choice but to watch everything pass by and listen to the mixture of psychedelic rock coming from the speakers until they were eventually drawing close to the airport. In that time, the sky changed vastly, no longer tinged with shades of pink and red, but rather just a thick blue devoid of any clouds, and the heat had increased considerably too.

San Francisco International Airport was a massive building which covered a shocking amount of land. It made Gimpo Airport look a little like something a child would make from toy blocks and yet, despite its impressive and intimidating size, Jimin no longer found it scary. As his partner drove through the parking lot to find somewhere to kill the car, he found himself not wriggling on the seat in anticipation, not even bobbing his leg up and down impatiently. He could see hundreds of vehicles already parked in the sprawling lots around them, all makes and models and colours. There were even coaches in the lot right now, which were probably tour buses.
Namjoon ended up locating a spot not too far from the building in the correct lot, and so he slowly pulled into it and he stalled the engine for a minute.

“Here we go again,” Jimin said, as he popped the door open to climb out the car. He hunkered down to grab his bag and he shrugged it up onto his shoulder, shooting his partner a knowing smile.

“I’d wish you good luck, kid, but considering everything; I don’t think you need the luck,” Namjoon remarked, as he peered at him from over the rims of his sunglasses. Then he let go of the steering-wheel to hold his hand out to him, offering him a solid.

Jimin reached down to bump their closed fists together hard.

“But still, good luck, Jimmy.”

“Thanks, see you in a couple of days, Daddy-o,” Jimin said, before shoving the door shut.

When he entered the airport, Jimin went to the check-in counter first to collect his boarding pass and go through the usual rigmarole. He made sure to give the worker his morning greeting, but to not smile too widely at the woman on the counter, and he also made sure to not fidget too much as he waited for the pass to get printed and be slid over the counter to him. His only item of luggage was carry-on, the canvas bag small enough to count as one of the allowed items, and so he had no need to worry about paying for checked-in luggage.

After collecting the pass and shoving it inside of his passport with the ticket, Jimin fixed his bag up on his shoulder and he proceeded to cross the airport to get to the security gate and join a slight queue of people waiting to be processed.

Considering the fact that the drugs on the streets seemed to be considered a larger threat to the city right now, Jimin wasn’t at all surprised that passing security in this airport was so easy. When the current fiend on the streets came from a needle: brown, potent and foreign, it was understandable that the fact that he was smuggling baggies of cocaine out of the country was something that had went completely off-radar for such a long time now. The fact that he was going to Korea also helped him keep low-key and safe. Truth be told, he couldn’t seem less suspicious, and it was all of these factors combined that meant that he didn’t even feel his heartbeat increasing as he moved along the rather small line.
Some days, Jimin wondered if someone would get caught out in the line in front of him for either a fraudulent passport or even drugs like him. He had yet to witness such a thing happening, and so he had often wondered how much of a risk that he would be put in if it actually did happen. The rather lax security might just get a little tighter in response, but so long as he stayed calm and collected, he would give them no reason to suspect him of anything. He had been going around the world for an entire year now without ever once raising an iota of suspicion, so, why would today be any different?

The female TSA agent checked his pass and passport over carefully, and as soon as he was processed through, Jimin had to go through the final and most worrying step of the entire process: the security check. This was the point that might just result in a slight outbreak of sweat, but not always; that might turn his mouth cotton dry. After all, Jimin hadn’t ended up as a mule for nothing. He had a great poker face when he needed it and this was nothing, not even that high a risk in comparison to the Hong Kong flight checks.

When he got to the security gate, Jimin placed his bag on the slight conveyor belt so that it could pass through the scanner. He stepped out of his loafers and placed them inside of the box, and then he proceeded to remove his earrings and rings - dropping them inside and stepping under the metal detector. It remained silent and allowed him to retrieve his belongings a moment later. His bag was scanned by the machine just like always, nothing more than an assortment of clothes and toiletries inside it. Then an agent unzipped it and proceeded to go through the contents just to be sure.

Jimin waited beside the counter, almost anticipating that he would get patted down by the other agent, but he never was when flying to Seoul. He was on the flights from Hong Kong, of course, which was why he carried half a key and only ever in areas that they wouldn’t feel up too closely.

Like right underneath his fucking testicles and inside of his ass.

Jimin was in the act of slipping his last ring on when he saw that his bag was being repacked by the female TSA agent: his clothing once again shoved inside of it, and his toiletries purse zipped up and dropped inside with them. He collected his passport, ticket and pass from the box and he found himself holding his breath until he heard it, until he heard those two glorious syllables.

“All-clear.”

There, he had officially received the all-clear. He was safe to board the plane as soon as check-in started - no more checks needed save a quick scan of his documents before boarding the actual plane.

“Enjoy your flight, sir,” the woman said in a perfunctory tone, her eyes already focused on the screen
as another bag was scanned.

“Thanks,” Jimin said, as he retrieved his bag and he shrugged it up onto his shoulder. “Keep up the hard work, ma’am.”

Oh, the irony.

Jimin checked his ticket and pass quickly, finding out what terminal he had to go to. After following the signs and taking several escalators, he finally located an area to sit down in. There were a random assortment of benches all over the floor, placed in clusters close to the terminals for ease. He could see many people walking to and fro across the massive floor: food containers and drinks in hand, books bought straight from the store downstairs. Jimin could hardly grab a bite to eat considering the fact that he had a parcel sitting up snugly close to his fucking intestines, and so he had no choice but to sit in the foyer and wait impatiently for the voice to finally sound over the system and call out his boarding group. Right now, the air was filled with the soft and constant drone of conversation, and the occasional musical chime before a sweet-toned female voice would announce various things over the system.

There was an overwhelming and natural sense of relief that he had been let through security but, even now, Jimin still had to be careful. He could still arouse the suspicions of absolutely any security worker inside of the airport if he acted too strangely.

Jimin selected a seat close to the wall of windows so that he could look out at the runways and watch the planes. He could see some parked close to the terminals, with long bridges connecting them to the gates to allow people to board them. He could see other planes slowly moving across the massive stretch of tarmac to get to the runways, and little buggies driving around with luggage and flashing lights on them. The sight of it all, the noise of the airport going on around him, filled Jimin with a strange sense of calmness because he knew that he had done it once again. He had smuggled the key of cocaine past security and he was all set to board with no complications at all.

Jimin turned his head to look across the foyer for a moment, seeing crowds of strangers moving around and the occasional sight of airport security wandering around the stores and assistance desks. He felt a smile lifting up the corners of his lips, and so he gave in to temptation as he turned back to look at the window just as a plane took to the skies from the distant runway.

Soon enough, Jimin would be on one of those planes too.
14th August, 1984, 8:01am: Pacific Heights, San Francisco, United States of America

Just like every morning, Yoongi wasn’t at all surprised to find that the diner interior was empty. It usually was at this current hour, on account of the fact that most workers had already had their breakfasts and were either busy working away or travelling across the city. It was a great bonus, for it meant that he could just walk in and take whatever seat that he wanted - no need to pause in the doorway and eye the choices awkwardly. As he crossed the diner, he reached down to grab a folded-up newspaper up from one of the tables, taking it over to his favourite corner booth so that he could sit down on the leather padded seat and drop it on the surface of the table.

The diner interior was a long and wide rectangle, the counter stretching across the length and a small bathroom placed to the side. The flooring was black and white linoleum, the counter light wood and glass, and the walls of the building were a deep cream. It was a rather bland-looking place, but it was clean and the cooks here could really fry up a great breakfast, so that was all that mattered.

Great food, great prices, and a great sight out of the window too.

Right now, Yoongi could see a large sloping hill devoid of any cars leading down to Lower Pacific Heights and Western Addition though said window, along with the distant sight of San Francisco Bay to his far right; all clear blue waters with the occasional tiny speck of a boat gently moving across it.

Yoongi could see that the same woman as always was at the counter and, rather than move to take his order, she just looked right at him.

They knew each other well enough by now, because he visited this exact same diner most days a week at the exact same time and ordered the exact same thing. He knew the waitress by name: Annika, and through various light conversations, he also knew a little about her background too. Her family currently resided in The Bayview, quite possibly the poorest region of the city: a rather large family of Haitian immigrants from several generations. But despite this fact, he knew that her younger brother was about to enrol in college.

Yoongi stored these facts away like dimes, as he rather liked collecting and hoarding facts about people. Usually, these facts could be used against people, but not always.
Annika asked him, “The usual, darling?”

Yoongi nodded rather than reply, turning his attention back to the newspaper in front of him.

Some mornings, whilst waiting for food, Yoongi liked to peruse the newspapers that he could find inside of the diner. But other mornings, he hated the mere thought because he knew what he would see inside of them.

Yoongi didn’t need to open up a newspaper and see dozens of photographs of protests happening out on the streets right now and outside of various government buildings. He didn’t need to see crowds of young people holding up signs and protest boards plastered with photographs of their dead loved ones, and he most certainly didn’t need to see article after article about cuts to social care and the disparity across the country as the result.

Some mornings, Yoongi liked to pretend that this city wasn’t suffocating to death slowly and that no one seemed to care.

Not the government, not God, not anyone.

Why would the government care? After all, who was out on the streets dying right now? The hippies, the addicts, the gays, the black, Latino and Asian folk; people that didn’t matter in the grand scheme of ‘The American Dream’.

Why would itｆucking care?

Yoongi found himself already clenching his jaw before he had even unfolded the paper, a little throb of anger shooting through his head. He sighed heavily and closed his eyes as he spread the paper across the surface of the table, willing for the sensation to pass. He scanned the front of the page to see the usual: more fear over Section 8 cuts, more violent crime and stores being robbed and looted. So he opened the paper and he proceeded to read through the sections that interested him, folding one leg over the other and getting comfortable on the booth seat.

By the time that he was quickly scanning the results of the latest races, his breakfast was being brought to his table and set by Annika.
“Maybe, one of these days you’ll order a little meat,” she remarked, as she set the main plate down for him. “Put some weight of them bones…”

“Mmm, what’d you recommend?” Yoongi asked, as he pushed the newspaper away and he watched her placing the last couple of items down on the table.

“You can never go wrong with the bacon or chicken steak, they’re the favourites by far.”

The wide plate in front of him was covered in French toast, buttered with fried tomatoes on top, and to the side of it there was an omelette packed with peppers and mushroom. There was also a bowl of fruit salad next to a mug of coffee, and a tall glass of milk beaded with condensation.

Yoongi knew that his mother would find the sight of the food absolutely shocking because she still greatly hated all American food. But luckily for him, she wasn’t present to complain about the fatty and calorie-ridden meal. Considering the fact that breakfast was really the only meal that he ever ate, he thought that he deserved it.

Yoongi grabbed the small jug of milk from the centre of the table, pouring it into the mug of coffee and then stirring at the contents until it was exact. As soon as it was mixed, he dropped the spoon onto the saucer and he grabbed the knife and fork with a weary and tired sigh. The first thing that he did was cut into the omelette, his knife sliding through so that he could portion it out neatly. Then he cut up the toast too, and he was in the act of sampling the first forkful of bread, tomato and egg when his eyes caught sight of something moving down at the bottom of the hill.

Yoongi froze for a moment before shovelling the fork into his mouth, too hungry to really care. In a minute or two, the other man would be entering the diner, and that meant that he should just tuck into his breakfast and wait. He chewed the mouthful and then speared another bite onto the tines of his fork, his palate very pleased by the flavour of it all.

It was hard to not notice the car coming up the road considering how empty that it was right now on the wide street. The fact that the car in question just happened to be a Ferrari Testarossa, still gleaming almost as if it had only just come right off the assembly line: cherry red with the glossy black interior - told him exactly who was inside. Yoongi knew one man only that owned that model, and the sight of it cresting the hill made him snort around his food. He swallowed his second mouthful and then he collected his mug of coffee, taking a cautious sip of the strong and slightly bitter liquid.

As he had predicted, the car rolled up the hill and softly pulled up to the curb, sunlight dancing off its smooth and sleek body. A moment later, the driver-seat door swung outward and Seokjin stepped
outside almost as elegantly as his car: dressed to near perfection. At least today he had left his mac in the car rather than wear it, because he would look rather funny entering a small diner all dressed up like that.

Yoongi felt terribly under-dressed in comparison, with his loose white tee-shirt tucked into his black chinos, and a pair of sandals on his feet instead of designer leather dress shoes. If it wasn’t for the Rolex Presidential 18038 on his wrist then he would look no different from the other young men out on the streets right now: avoiding university to piss off their parents, or just simply jobless.

Yoongi cheeked his mouthful of breakfast and he watched Seokjin slamming the car door shut, eyeing his clothing and trying to work out the cost for this particular outfit. White shirt, black and gold bolo tie, cream trousers just to match his mac and, of course, he could see calfskin loafers too. He estimated that he must have been wearing $500 alone in clothing, not including his watch and rings. It was a Tuesday morning just like every other, and yet Seokjin looked like he was about to step into a fucking high school prom, and the funniest part about it was that he completely expected this from the man.

As Seokjin walked along the sidewalk to enter the diner, he glanced in through the window, making direct eye-contact with him.

Yoongi held his gaze until he passed and then he speared another mixture of toast, egg and tomato on his fork. His ears detected the sound of the bell on the door tinkling, but he didn’t look up at all until he felt a shadow falling over him.

“Good morning, Yoongi,” Seokjin said, holding one hand out to him with his elbow cupped in his other hand respectfully.

Yoongi placed his cutlery down and then he lifted his own hand to take hold and squeeze, shaking thrice until the older man released his hold.

“Mmm, good morning?” he repeated, as he grabbed his fork again and he raised an eyebrow languidly. “If it was good you wouldn’t be here, huh?”

This remark made Seokjin’s lips twitch upwards, not exactly a proper smile but close enough.

“Sit your ass down.”
Seokjin moved to sit at the opposite side of the table, not settling on the leather bench as comfortably as him. The way that he folded his hands on the surface alluded to the fact that he had news to tell him, as his current posture looked rather stiff. It was in the way that he held his wide shoulders and he glanced out of the window for a moment rather than meet his gaze.

Yoongi took said moment to study his face, seeing a head of black hair swept to the side and off his brow to showcase his strong eyebrows and large eyes. Seokjin had a rather nondescript nose but his full mouth and pointed jawline were rather striking, made him quite a pretty face in the crowds on the streets. Clean-cut, handsome, trustworthy - these were all words that came to mind when studying the older man.

Yoongi dropped his gaze down to the surface of the table, eyeing his wrist intently. Seokjin always had a funny pink mark on his wrist, the price of having a briefcase handcuffed to it for most of the days that he was supplying merchandise to dealers. After all, Yoongi couldn’t afford to have some backstabbing dealer or twitchy addict in a den snap and steal the goods. It would take a fucking hacksaw to get that locked case off his body, be it through sawing through the links or his arm. Whatever the case, he had yet to have his merch stolen from him. That made another word spring to mind when studying him: reliable.

Yes, Seokjin was one of the most reliable suppliers out there, and Yoongi greatly liked him.

Yoongi could see a rather notable red mark on his wrist today, a sign that he had been supplying just this morning. He was about to ask him about the mark when he detected movement from the corner of his eye.

“Can I get you anything, handsome?” Annika asked, as she stopped by their table. “Coffee? A bite to eat?”

“Coffee, please,” Seokjin replied, as he turned to look at her and he gave her a warm and perfectly rehearsed smile.

“Sure thing.”

“You been supplying this morning?” Yoongi asked him as soon as the woman was out of earshot, stabbing another forkful of toast and egg as he did so.

Seokjin lifted his hand up so that he could look at his wrist, his sleeve cuff shifting ever so slightly.
“Yes, supplying Kim over in The Haight so that he could get his mule prepared just this morning,” he explained, eyeing his wrist for a moment before dropping his hand back down on the table. “This isn’t about Kim or his mule, they’re good. I’ve no problems with them, they’ve never burnt me once, but…”

“But?” Yoongi repeated, the fork hovering in front of his mouth.

At this, Seokjin moved his gaze over to the window again, avoiding eye-contact with him expertly.

“We appear to have a runaway mule. He was set to board a plane yesterday, around 8:30am,” Seokjin continued, as Yoongi slowly chewed his mouthful of food and eyed him intently. “Therefore, he would’ve been landing in Bangkok this morning around 4am. We should’ve received a call alerting us to the possession of the mule and blow around the 5am mark, but we didn’t. Almost three hours is far too long to wait for a call, so naturally, I went looking around-”

“Naturally,” Yoongi repeated, as he licked a slight blob of butter free from the corner of his mouth. Then he moved to lift his cup of milk, nursing it in one hand as he stabbed his fork around the omelette without a care.

No, right now there was something far more interesting to feast upon, and it was the story that Seokjin was telling him.

“You know me well,” Seokjin stated with a quick twitch of the lips. “So, I went looking around, and guess what I discovered? Rhee, the mule, was spotted around the shopping districts of Presidio Heights. This was around the time-frame of 9-10pm last night. He’s since disappeared, likely jumped a coach to get the fuck out of this city.”

Yoongi had the rim of his glass pressed against his lips, but he didn’t tip it to drink just yet. He stared at his supplier from across the diner table, still and silent, not even blinking as he processed his words over.

The mule had not only ditched the flight, but he had quite possibly ditched the goods too; meaning that $35,000 of street value cocaine had went right down the public toilets of San Francisco International Airport or, even worse, was floating around the city right now being reaped for profits. They had shaved off a $5,000 profit from the original smuggling price, and right now they weren’t even going to make even on the $35,000 because it had fucking vanished.
Yoongi ran his tongue around his mouth slowly, the lingering flavour of fried tomato and egg still present, and then he slowly lowered the glass back down to the table. It clunked rather loudly in the current silence of the diner, nothing more than the air-conditioning unit across the floor softly rumbling away.

“My initial feelings upon not receiving a call of any kind from the dealer was that Rhee had gotten his ass caught out at Gimpo Airport, Yoongi. But the thought was ludicrous, no one gets their ass caught at Gimpo. Had he been caught at the airport here then our ears would’ve informed us of a police bust going on. But again, the lines were all dead. So, I knew it had to be a runaway case, and I went looking around to find out that my suspicions were correct.”

“Who prepped him? A dealer?” Yoongi asked, as he sat back against the leather bench.

Annika reappeared a moment later with coffee, and so Seokjin held his tongue whilst she set it down for him and he shot the woman another well-rehearsed smile.

“That’s the problem. Rhee wasn’t just a mule, he was a pusher too, so, he had connections to more than one man,” Seokjin explained, as he grabbed the milk jug. “I supplied Jang the blow yesterday morning at sunup, and he prepped Rhee with the goods and sent him off. He was the man to contact me when he received no call from our buyers in Bangkok. Jang most certainly isn’t connected to whatever is going on. Rhee doesn’t push for him, he’s a solo dealer. He just offered to prep him as they’re active on the same block. We would have to contact Jang further and ask him if he knows who he’s pushing for, because we obviously can’t contact Rhee. The reason that I came to you first was because I believed that you would want to know this, Yoongi.”

Yoongi watched him tipping most of the contents of the jug into his coffee. The colour changed from a deep brown to a milkier shade, and then he proceeded to grab the sugar dispenser and he added a liberal amount of that too. He had his fork in hand and he could feel that he was gripping hold of it tightly, much too tightly. His breakfast was sitting there, just waiting for him to continue eating, and it took him a great amount of effort to loosen his grip and his jaw to carry on doing so.

“You think the blow’s gone, huh? Piss in the wind?” he asked, before shovelling more omelette into his mouth.

Yoongi already had his own thoughts on the matter, but he wanted to hear Seokjin’s thoughts too. A prince was only as good as his second leftenants, of course.
“No, I don’t think it was tossed,” Seokjin replied, not even the slightest hint of hesitation in his voice. “I think it’s on the streets right now, being circulated. It makes no sense that Rhee would do that. If he was fucking stupid enough to dump it, he would’ve jumped on that plane and ran, got to Bangkok and found relatives or friends and then went underground in Asia to avoid us. He wouldn’t come back here, walk around Presidio Heights, and then disappear; right?”

“Mmm,” Yoongi hummed in agreement, pleased that he too had been thinking exactly what he had discerned from the situation.

Seokjin lifted his coffee to take a slight sip, clearly not fazed by the heat.

“He’s a snake, he fucking muled the blow right back onto the streets, right under our noses.”

“But we’ll sniff it out again,” Seokjin argued. “Rhee, he’ll have left a trail behind and it’ll lead us right to the blow.”

Yoongi finished his breakfast quickly, not savouring it as much as he would have liked to have. Most mornings, he could spend as long as he wanted sitting in the booth, but this morning he had plans, very important plans. So he devoured the remains of the omelette and French toast and then picked at the fruit salad just like always.

Seokjin remained silent during this, sipping at his coffee and looking out of the window respectfully whilst he ate.

As soon as he was finished eating, Seokjin moved to go to the door, pushing it open and holding it as he wiped at his mouth with a napkin and he got to his feet. Yoongi placed down a $5 bill to cover the costs of the breakfast on the table, and then he rummaged through his wallet to find a $20 bill. Rather than leave this on the table, he grabbed it between his index and middle finger, holding the note out straight to Annika just as she was about to start clearing the table. She accepted the note from him and discreetly slipped it down the front of her uniform shirt with a knowing smile. Yoongi walked around her to get to the door, stepping out ahead of Seokjin.

“You got your car phone? I got a couple of calls to make,” Yoongi asked, as they crossed the sidewalk to get to the car.

“It’s under the seat,” Seokjin explained, unlocking the Ferrari with his key fob.
Yoongi pulled his door open and he climbed inside, sinking into the plush leather seat. Whilst he collected the phone, Seokjin climbed into the driver-seat and he slammed the door shut.

The Nokia *Mobira Talkman* was a block of solid black plastic, and it had a considerable weight and took up a great amount of his lap as he placed it down and grabbed the rectangular-shaped receiver. There was even a curled cord to plug it into the car, just in case it needed a little boost to the battery. Yoongi flicked the whip antenna up as he turned it on, hitting several buttons with his thumb to go through the address book.

“You know, Yoongi,” Seokjin remarked, as he watched him. “A DynaTAC 8000x would really come in handy…”

“Why? So, I can call a number, talk for five seconds, and then have to charge the fucking thing all day long?”

This made the other man laugh but he wasn’t actually joking around.

“4,000 dollars and it’s still shit,” Yoongi sighed under his breath, as he finally located the number that he was looking for on the address book. “Jang?”

“He’s the dealer, Goohee Jang,” Seokjin agreed, fastening his seatbelt in place and starting the car. “Where to?”

“Just drive ‘round the block, gimme a couple of minutes to sort this clusterfuck out,” he replied, as he hit the number and he held the receiver against his ear, sticking his tongue out to wet his lips.

The dialling tone sounded for several seconds and he wondered if the dealer was even going to pick up, but then there came a static crackle on the end of the line.

“Y’hello?”

“Jang, it’s Min calling right now,” Yoongi stated, wanting to ensure that he had his most strictest attention. “You got a runaway mule on your hands. What’re we gonna do ‘bout that, mmm?”
“Runaway…mule?” Jang repeated, his voice still revealing a hint of an accent.

“Where’s Rhee? Where’s he gone?”

“Uh, I dunno, Prince Min, I-”

“Who’s he pushing for? Who’s he got connections to? What backstabbing, cock-sucking motherfucker burnt us on this fucking deal, Jang!” he shouted down the line.

Yoongi could hear the other man stammering, trying to give him a reply and yet just bumbling complete nonsense in his shock.

In the seat beside him, Seokjin barely even blinked, as he was completely used to this routine.

“I want names, if you dunno who, then I want the names of anyone that does, and I want ‘em now!”

“I-I- well, I know who he pushes for, Prince Min,” Jang stammered out. “Rhee, he-he pushes for Choi. Choi, a dealer in Nob Hill and Chinatown. Pretty big fucking dealer from what I’ve heard, he ain’t just a street guy, y’know what I’m saying?”

“Choi, huh? Seunghyun Choi, deals in brown?” Yoongi repeated, turning his head to look at Seokjin. The other man thought this over for a moment, his brow furrowing as he no doubt searched his memory to try and recall something. “That check out?”

“Choi does deal in heroin predominantly but…” Seokjin pulled up at a set of traffic lights and he looked over at him. “But there’s been a funny little drug floating around Nob Hill called ‘Sacramento Snow’ that’s been increasingly popular over the last couple of weeks. Speedball, I believe. I’ve been trying to track it around, but there’s too many pushers to single out just one man.”

“You think Choi’s fucking stupid enough to mix stolen blow and market it as this brand?”

“…Yes, I think he’s fucking stupid enough to do it,” Seokjin replied. “Rhee wasn’t supposed to have been spotted, we were supposed to believe that he had been caught in Korea, clearly. Which would’ve left Choi with a key of unmarked blow to slip into his heroin or sell freebase, reaping in the
profits and even keeping some for himself.”

Yoongi felt his fingers tightening around the receiver so much it was a miracle that the plastic didn’t snap under the pressure that he was exerting on it. He slammed the receiver down into the cradle to end the call with Jang, no longer needing his services any more. He reached up to rub at his brow for a moment, groaning under his breath just as Seokjin drove through the lights. When the car reached the end of the block, he took a turn, bringing them onto the adjacent block so that they could just circle around for a few minutes.

Yoongi collected the receiver again and he hit several buttons, opening the address book and scanning the names until he located the exact one that he required. He dialled it and he held the receiver against his ear, folding his free arm up on the window rest. There was just two dialling tones before the other man picked up.

“Go, I need eyes and ears on Seunghyun Choi right now,” Yoongi ordered, as he stared out the front window, not even giving the other man enough time to speak. The breeze coming through the window ruffled his tee-shirt sleeve and blew his hair across his brow, making him squint. “Set up surveillance on his mansion in Presidio Heights, any dens he might visit over in Nob Hill and Chinatown, any-fucking-where he goes usually, and contact the known numbers if anything seems off; yeah?”

“Yes, Prince Min,” Go said in his usual monotonous manner. “Expect faxes and calls throughout the day, I’ll get as many men and women onto him without raising suspicions.”

“I want eyes on him, I want ears ‘round him as much as possible.”

“What kind of information are you hoping to collect on him?”

“I’ve got strong reason to believe that cunt’s burnt us: blow,” Yoongi explained, as the car slowly rolled down the wide sloping road. “Unmarked blow to be exact, which he might be marketing as speedball over in Nob Hill. Low-level dealers and pushers should be lining Sacramento Street, so, get ears there too. I wanna find out where that shit’s coming from, and if Choi has any connections to it.”

“Yes, Prince Min, the second that I find out names or details I’ll get it to you,” Go replied.

“Good, get to it,” he said, before dropping the receiver back in the cradle.
Yoongi reached up to cup his face in both hands, once again groaning deeply. He could sense that Seokjin looking at him but he stayed still and silent, processing the events of the morning over slowly in his mind.

When he had woken up this morning, Yoongi had expected trouble because there was always some form of trouble every single day. Usually, it was a minor issue, something that could be handled by his leftenants, enforcers, and younger brothers without him needing to get involved. But sometimes, the issues were more severe. This could be anything from prostitutes being poached by pimps in other gangs, a great loss in profits that would require sending out enforcers to smash some dick’s teeth in; to dealers getting reckless and trying to reap more profits than they had earned, which also resulted in a similar order. Sometimes, it was news of a petty offence, but no low-level fucker capable of being arrested had any real clue about the gang.

Therefore, most mornings Yoongi could sort out his affairs with little more than a few words - his tongue and fingers barely twitching and yet causing waves to spread across the entire city.

But this morning?

This morning was not a simple matter.

No, at some point overnight, someone had poached more than a prostitute. They had poached a key of cocaine and had burnt them on a deal. $35,000 worth of cocaine was circulating out on the streets right now, and if he didn’t track it down, then it might just be completely wasted. That was not something that he could fix so easily, and Yoongi could feel a horrible discomfort starting to swirl in the pit of his stomach just knowing that some bastard had managed to pull this off and he had not noticed any signs on the streets in advance to warn him of this outcome.

“Where should I take you?” Seokjin asked after a minute of silence, the car shifting slightly as it curved around another corner.

“Take me to…shit,” Yoongi groaned, as he pulled his hands down his face slowly, dragging down on his cheeks until he let go. “Take me to Hoseok, take me to him.”

Hoseok’s mansion happened to be right in Pacific Heights, meaning that Seokjin only had to drive up from the lower side to reach it. The journey took mere minutes, and Yoongi spent the entire time in silence, staring out of the front window with his head balanced against his hand. The *Mobira Talkman* had a great weight on his lap, almost demanding that he lift the receiver and call a certain
someone and yet he decided not to.

No, his father didn’t need to know what was going on right now because he was going to sort this issue out before sunset. It was nothing more than a small blip in today’s schedule. He was going to catch Choi out if the bastard had anything to do with it, and he was going to track down the source of this new brand drug and stamp it out at the source. One man couldn’t avoid hundreds of eyes all over the city for too long, and no branded drug was untraceable.

Seokjin’s Ferrari rolled up the hilly slope of Pacific Heights, passing the newly unveiled apartment blocks at the lower levels and then the spacious and colourful mansions that stretched up the road. Yoongi saw yellow, pink, orange and more all in rows, and so he shifted to place the car phone down under his seat in anticipation.

The mansion was built at the top of the hill, the building built on strong foundations to keep it even. The outer walls were cream and white, completely flawless and reflecting the sunlight back at his eyes dazzlingly.

Yoongi climbed out of the car and he moved around the front, stopping on the curb just beside the driver-seat as he eyed the building. There was a garage built beside the front door, the upper floors hanging over the entrance to create a slight porch. He could see the two massive bay windows above the overhanging porch canopy, and around the back there would be a balcony instead - a wide stretch that would almost reach the swimming pool. To the side of the front door, there was a long stretch of the building, where the sweeping ground-floor would be: which consisted of a massive open-plan sitting-room and kitchen, and a spiralling staircase that would lead to the first and second-floors.

Yoongi had been inside the mansion enough times to know it off by heart, but he had never entered Seokjin’s home before. As he turned back to the other man, he pondered on how strange that this fact was.

“You got any supplies to run to Choi, huh?” he asked, as he folded his arms on the glass and peered in at him.

“Depends on when exactly you decide to trap him. If I were you, I would act by tonight, save us any trouble. I’ll wait on a call, so, if I get anything noteworthy, I’ll come and collect you,” Seokjin stated, as he turned back to the wheel and he reached down to grab the clutch. “Choi is going to regret fucking with us.”

Yoongi didn’t bother going to the front door of the mansion, rather he just went around the side of
the building to get to the garden whilst Seokjin pulled away from the curb. If Hoseok wasn’t out there already, lounged in his pool like he was most mornings, then he would have the glass doors wide open so that he could just step inside of the home unannounced.

As he had expected, Hoseok was floating around the swimming pool on his back, his Ray-Ban **Wayfarers** sunglasses pulled over his likely closed eyes as he gently bobbed in the crystal clear waters. Yoongi could see a silk bathrobe folded on a deck chair across the patio, black, and his friend was currently wearing form-hugging red trunks and nothing else. He moved to stand at the very edge of the pool, eyeing the younger man as he gently bobbed in the waters. He could be asleep, completely zoned-out, or maybe a little stoned on Valium - there was no clear way of telling. He studied him for a moment, seeing his black hair rippling in the water and the little beads of water on his tanned and toned stomach, and then he decided to loudly clear his throat to grab his attention.

Hoseok jerked at the sudden noise, shifting to stand up in the water. It sloshed around his lower ribs and his sunglasses slipped down his nose to show his large eyes. They were rounded with surprise until he recognised him, and then Yoongi saw his lips lifting up into a smile. Hoseok reached up to push his sunglasses up his nose again, moving to get to the edge of the pool. He folded his arms on the side and he placed his chin on them, eyeing him behind the **Wayfarers** so that he couldn’t really read his face well.

“Good morning,” Hoseok almost purred at him, hinting that he was probably stoned. “You look like shit, Gigi.”

“I _feel_ like shit right now, Seokseok,” Yoongi retorted, as he hunkered down in front of him and he folded his elbows on his knees. “But in a few hours, I’ll feel fucking great.”

Hoseok thought this over for a moment, and Yoongi could sense that his fuzzy mind trying to figure out what he meant by this.

“But you look great right now, I gotta say.”

“When you pull in 20,000 dollars from your pimps overnight, you wake up looking fucking great,” Hoseok agreed with a wide smile, showcasing his perfectly straight and white teeth.

Yoongi whistled out of the corner of his mouth at this, and his friend giggled rather giddily.

“But you pulled in a lot more than that overnight, so, what’s with the face, huh?”
“Oh boy, that’s a long story…” Yoongi muttered, as he glanced across the garden and he eyed the stretch of wicker deck chairs that ran the length of the pool.

Beside one of the deck chairs, there was a small table with a parasol in the centre, under which there was a bucket of ice. Yoongi could see a cocktail shaker already inside of it, and he wondered what the contents would be. Most likely a mimosa knowing his friend, because even for Hoseok it was a little too early for anything strong.

Hoseok suddenly shifted to climb out of the pool and Yoongi watched him doing so intently.

When he dragged himself up out of the water, his bare back was on full display, showing the tiger tattoo on his skin. It covered most of his spine from his shoulder blades down to the waistline of his trunks, and it was quite the sight to see. Unlike most men, who settled on a roaring tiger head, Hoseok had opted for an entire tiger: stretched out and perched up on a sharp outcropping of rock with swirling wafts of smoke all around it like dissipating clouds. The predator was snarling over its shoulder so that its striped orange and black back also ran along the valleys of his spine. Its long tail ran down the lower dip in his back and curled up like a snake, and set above the majestic creature there was a crescent moon on the back of his neck.

The sight of his long and toned thighs as he walked over to the deck chair had Yoongi involuntarily gulping hard until Hoseok shrugged the bathrobe on and loosely knotted it closed.

“I can see on your face that you’re here for business,” Hoseok declared, as turned his attention to the bucket. He grabbed the cocktail shaker and proceeded to start shaking it, cocking his head at the chair. “Sit down, let’s talk.”

Yoongi moved to get to the deck chair, his sandals lightly slapping down on the granite around the pool, and then he shifted to sit down on it.

“Somehow, I doubt that you’re here for a ‘massage’…”

“It’s a little early for that,” Yoongi retorted, as he lounged back against the deck chair and he got comfortable. He drew one of his legs up to fold it at the knee, stretching the other one out fully in front of him.

“Hmm, well, you do like calling at 2am to request pretty massage boys from Chinatown,” Hoseok
agreed, as he carried on lightly shaking the cocktail shaker. “But you know that I’m more than capable.”

“Mmm, but there’s a problem,” Yoongi said, watching him unscrewing the lid of the shaker. “You actually wanna fuck me, Seokseok, they don’t. Therefore, they find our…agreement rather agreeable.”

“Pft.” Hoseok scoffed, his sunglasses slipping down his nose as he did so. “I’m literally drowning in pussy and ass, and you think that I’m after yours?”

Yoongi just cocked his head and gave him a lazy smile at this remark.

“Are you still strictly avoiding ass until the crisis ends, huh?”

“I ain’t gonna risk it.”

“You have heard of condoms right, Yoongi?” his friend asked sarcastically.

“Still ain’t risking it,” he reiterated. “Your massage boys are more than capable. Shit, I think I prefer a prostate massage to actual fucking these days, Seokseok. It’s like one long building orgasm until I get ‘em to jerk me off. I can make it last a whole hour some nights.”

“Oh, really?” Hoseok asked, as he reached up to shove his sunglasses up onto the top of his head. His damp hair slicked back off his brow and stayed in place neatly. “You never lasted that long for me, Gigi, you always blew after ten-”

“Actually, I’m here on important business,” Yoongi spoke over him, cutting his friend short expertly.

Hoseok snorted at this and then he moved to start pouring out the drinks in the two tall flutes beside the bucket. He saw that it was indeed mimosa, the bright orange juice heavily scented with champagne.

“I need your darlings to do some snooping ‘round for me,” Yoongi explained, as he lightly bobbed his leg in a fidgeting manner.
At this, Hoseok finished pouring out the cocktail and he lifted his eyes to stare at him, his attention completely grabbed.

“That mightn’t be connected to this shit, but I got a feeling it’s all connected.”

“Yoongi, when you get feelings they’re never wrong,” Hoseok retorted, as he finished topping up the flute and he placed the cocktail shaker down onto the table. “You’re like a human metal detector or some shit…”

This made Yoongi snort laughter under his breath whilst Hoseok picked up the two flutes, moving to offer him one.

“What am I spreading on the streets exactly, Gigi?”

“Tell ‘em to ask ‘round ‘bout ‘Sacramento Snow’, ask ‘em to try and set up deals and connections,” Yoongi explained, accepting the flute from him. “If need be, get ‘em to buy some shit and pretend to use it, or use it - whatever, I don’t give a shit. I need info, and any girl or guy that gets me details on pushers and dealers that can get me to a source…I’ll be very thankful. Maybe, enough to slip some Franklins in their hands, if you get me?”

“Sacramento? As in Sacramento Street? That’s not a prime location for my darlings, but they could find out easily enough,” Hoseok replied, as he moved to sit on the edge of the deck chair. “Something like that, it’s branded. It’s coming from somewhere, and it’s certainly new. What are we talking about? Coke: freebase or crack? Speedball?”

“Speedball. Choi deals in brown, so, if he’s been dabbling in speedball of late he’s been getting that blow from somewhere,” Yoongi explained. “I think it’s connected to a missing key and I think Choi burnt us on the deal.”

“Choi? You mean Seunghyun Choi?” Hoseok asked, raising his eyebrows sharply at him. He had the flute under his nose and yet he made no move to sip it.

Yoongi nodded at the question, and the younger man thought this over for a few seconds before lowering the glass.
“He’s got a heroin den over in Nob Hill, I know that a lot of my darlings hang there when they start itching for brown. I could easily find out shit through them, the place is flooded with pushers; hell, they shoot buyers up free of charge from what I’ve heard.”

“Oh, Seokseok,” Yoongi said, as he held out his flute to him in a toast. “I knew that I could rely on you.”

Hoseok brought their glasses together, the glass tinkling musically, and then he took a deep sip of his mimosa.

“Choi also has a den in Chinatown, so, make sure that’s hit up,” Yoongi added.

“I’ll get the word out there. I’ll tell Chrissy and by 9am, every fucking whore in this city will be looking out for that shit.”

“Chrissy? What, she your new thing now?”

“Chrissy’s a bitch, literally,” Hoseok retorted without missing a beat. “I don’t fuck bitches, Gigi, I fuck heirs and heiresses and maybe best friends, but not bitches. Especially not bitches like Chrissy, who can’t keep her mouth shut for five seconds.”

His friend lifted his flute up to take a deep sip of the mimosa and Yoongi just swirled his around the glass, mulling over the knowledge that he was three steps ahead of Choi and that the other man had no clue. He couldn’t believe that he would be stupid enough to think that he could get away with such treason, but he would realise his mistake soon enough.

Seunghyun Choi was a dead man walking, and he had no fucking clue.

_15th August, 1984, 11:57am: The Mayfield Hotel, Gangseo-gu, Seoul, South Korea_
The Mayfield Hotel was a large block building of brown brick, covered in countless windows with a wide entrance area. It took up a massive chunk of land because it had a parking lot around the back, and to get inside of the grounds, one needed to pass through a wide archway and cross a courtyard. It was a very pleasing sight, certainly much more appealing and luxurious-looking compared to other buildings in the capital that he had seen so far, but Jimin had never been inside of it before. No, he had only ever observed the building from the outside, but one day, he might just get to see what the inside looked like.

The entrance doors were set beside two sweeping staircases that led onto a balcony, flanked by tall and vivid green shrubs and trees. There was a small courtyard that ran around the interior of the building grounds, with squares of neatly placed concrete divided by the occasional patch of manicured grass to make it look bright and clean inside. There were even trees and a small lake with a tinkling fountain present, which he could hear from his location under the small archway.

Jimin proceeded to fix his bag up onto his shoulder, scuffing his loafers on the concrete as he ran his eyes over the stretch of windows on the main section of the building.

Inside one of those rooms, so that the archway was in perfect view, there would be a man - a man that worked for Moon Tiger Mob. Upon seeing him down in the archway, he would call for a car to come and collect them both, and so Jimin needed to wait around for a couple of minutes to make sure that he saw him.

Quite simply, Jimin hated waiting in the archway like this, as he felt like he was on complete display. It was strange that he felt so exposed standing under the stone roof and behind the thick brick walls, but he did, because he was always convinced that there were other eyes watching him through all of those windows. He knew that that was not the case, but he still worried about it regardless; couldn’t help but fidget as he lingered under the archway.

Jimin found it incredibly strange knowing that right now it was Wednesday, 15th August rather than Tuesday, 14th August, which it had been when he had boarded the plane. He had travelled for twelve solid hours and yet had gained roughly fifteen extra on top. It was enough to make him feel temporarily disoriented, and he reached up to fix his bag more securely onto his shoulder as he ran his eyes over the courtyard again. He had been standing on the same spot for what must have been close to ten minutes now and he was getting restless, but he knew that it would be at least twenty until the car arrived to collect him. There was no one present in the courtyard currently, but when he glanced out onto the main street, he could see some tourists moving along the wide road to presumably enter the hotel and check-in. He moved out from under the archway to clear the entrance for them.

Jimin didn’t really smoke that often. He sometimes bummed a cigarette from someone, but never
often enough to get addicted. He occasionally partook in sharing joints with Namjoon, but that occasion was also rare. But right now, he found himself craving something, something just to take the edge off his nerves and give him something to do with his hands. He had no cigarettes, however, and he understood enough Korean culture to know to not bug someone for one out on the streets. So he was left with no choice but to lift his hand to his face and start nibbling on his thumb nail.

God, he hated waiting like this.

As soon as the small group of tourists had passed through the archway, Jimin moved to stand underneath it again. He watched them crossing the courtyard to enter the building with little interest, his thumb nail still trapped between his teeth.

Jimin was about to look back across the street again when he detected movement coming from across the courtyard, and he saw that it was a man exiting the hotel. As he drew closer to him, he could tell that he was affiliated with Moon Tiger Mob from first glance quite simply because of his clothing. There was no sight of knock-off goods visible on his body, for his Ralph Lauren polo was most certainly legit. The sight of legitimate American goods was enough to let him know that he was also a part of the gang, and so he let his pent-up breath in a sigh of relief.

Okay, everything was still on, everything was fine and that meant that he had no need to worry.

“Car,” the man said in a guttural voice, as he stopped right beside him.

Jimin knew what he meant by this, of course - he meant that the car was coming to the hotel and that it would be here soon. Considering the fact that he had been waiting for close to ten minutes now, the vehicle would arrive in less than ten more. He studied him for a moment, noting that he was a couple of inches taller than he was and most certainly wider in frame. Then he moved to get out from under the archway again, wanting to wait on the sidewalk instead.

As he had predicted, it took a further ten minutes for the car to arrive, and in that time Jimin just stood there and breathed in the second-hand fumes from the other man’s cigarette. At least it helped him feel relaxed. Eventually, the sight of the vehicle appeared at the end of the wide street.

The Hyundai *Pony II* sedan was a pretty sweet-looking car in his opinion. Sure, there were much nicer cars back in America, but the car was still kind of sweet, with a squared hood and headlights and a deep chocolate brown paint job.
Jimin watched it slowing down until the car stopped at the curb, and then the unnamed man moved to open the backdoor for him so that he could climb inside.

There was a man in the driver-seat, a man that Jimin knew was called Yoo because he often drove the pick-up car. Taehyung was in the passenger-seat and he twisted in his seat to look back at him, no seatbelt present. It seemed like no one wore the fucking things here.

Jimin dragged his eyes away from Yoo to look at him, quickly studying him.

Taehyung had a very handsome face, with tanned skin and large eyes. Jimin thought that he was pretty attractive, would have most certainly sidled up to him should he have seen him at the Twin Peaks bar back in The Castro. He was currently wearing loose jeans and a chambray shirt, the sleeves rolled up to the elbows to combat the heat and the top buttons undone to showcase a hint of his chest. Around his head, there was currently a strip of red fabric that looked to be a hair scarf of some kind that he had placed onto his brow and had knotted at the back. His mop of unruly hair was dragged back into a little ponytail and a stray lock was hanging over the head scarf. He could see the characters for ‘freedom’ painted onto the material, but he guessed that it could also mean ‘liberty’ too. Yes, it seemed that Taehyung was still going through his student protesting phase right now, which was of no surprise to him.

“It’s Jimin,” Taehyung said in heavily accented, but otherwise passable, English.

Jimin was used to understanding his parents’ broken grasp on the language, and so he found it incredibly easy to understand him.

“Wha…whad up, bro?”

“My dick,” Jimin retorted, knowing that the joke would go right over his head.

Taehyung stared at him for a moment, no doubt trying to figure out what this meant, before making a series of noises at him; little ‘ahs’.

“Good, good…”

“I’m good, brother, I’m good, and you?”
“Awesome,” Taehyung replied, giving him a wide and boxy smile as he shot him a thumbs-up. “So awesome.”

Jimin had pretty great Korean considering the fact that he was a first generation American-Korean - his parents having moved to America shortly before marrying and settling down in The Bayview. As a result of his parents not knowing a single word of English and his childhood education, Jimin had learnt to balance both languages with ease; found that slipping into his ancestors’ tongue was surprisingly smooth. Like slipping on a condom. So rather than play this ongoing game with the younger man, he decided to just switch tongues and make the ride back to the apartment a hell of a lot easier for the both of them.

“Anything changed since I last came here, huh? Still no fucking McDonald’s at all?”

“No, no McDonald’s,” Taehyung explained, also switching back to his thick Daegu dialect so that he slurred and rumbled heavily. “Not even a fuckin’ Burger King; can you believe it?”

Taehyung made a disgruntled noise at this, and it made Jimin snort laughter under his breath as he looked out of the window.

Yoo pulled away from the curb a moment later, rolling into the lane so that they could start moving. The location in question that they were going to was an apartment block way over in Apgujeong-dong, a rather run-down one that had yet to be pulled down and replaced with new shiny blocks like the rest of the area.

Apgujeong-dong might just have been the Presidio Heights of Seoul, a nice area packed with commercial stores and brand new high-rise apartments and expensive houses, but it was just a small speck in comparison to San Francisco. Gangnam-gu was kind of like Western Addition to him, but having travelled through the west and north of Seoul, Jimin had found that the rest of the capital was woefully underdeveloped. He had passed through slum areas that had yet to urbanise like the rest of the region, and the sight of construction sites and workers was almost constant. As a result of this booming urbanisation, the roads were often packed with traffic and the air was heavy with fumes and smoke and dust.

But now, now the sights visible on the streets to get to the other district were rather disturbing.

Jimin could see that there were soldiers out on the streets once more, armed with shields and batons and some even had gas masks present, though they were rare. They weren’t a constant sight, but he
had started noticing them more often with every visit. The sight made him nervous. Jimin didn’t like police and he most certainly didn’t like the military. Was he seeing more today than usual, or did he just tell himself that every single time that he arrived here and first laid eyes on them?

“Anything happened since I last landed here?”

“Just typical protests, student protests mostly,” Taehyung replied. “Nothin’ too extreme, ‘cos the soldiers break crowds up and have curfews to stop anythin’ big happenin’.”

“Shit,” he muttered under his breath, finding the idea of an imposed citywide curfew absolutely shocking.

“Yeah, but there’s still been trouble,” Taehyung explained, as he twisted around to look at him. “Lotsa anti-American sentiment in the air right now, sorry.”

“You wouldn’t be the first country to hate us,” Jimin retorted, making the younger man laugh heartily.

“I like you Yankees, I’ve seen you on TV protestin’ constantly. You do that here, you get fuckin’ shot.”

Jimin thought about the marches that he saw happening every day in The Castro, and he suddenly found the sight out of the window a lot more interesting. Yes, they did like to protest a lot, but that didn’t mean a thing sometimes.

“It’s those sentiments coupled with hatred for the fuckin’ murderer we got runnin’ the country. I mean, the fuckin’ murderer dictator we got runnin’ the country.”

“We’ve got a fucking murderer running our country too,” Jimin replied in a quiet voice. “Now that I think about it…”

“Who doesn’t?” Taehyung pointed out. “Fuck governments, they ain’t democratic. But that don’t matter, ‘cos we’re gonna bring in a democracy, a proper democracy. I know we are.”
There was such a strong sense of pride and hope in Taehyung’s voice that Jimin could tell that he truly believed in this. He turned his head to look at him and the younger man gave him a wide grin before shifting to look out of the front window again.

On the remainder of the ride to the apartment block, the radio was playing at a low volume - a mixture of strange music and lyrics coming from it that Jimin struggled to follow because the singers enunciated their lines very funnily. He guessed that it was traditional, but he didn’t know what it was called. He wondered if they had different genres of music like America, and yet he had never heard anything other than this style of music playing on the radio. Well, considering the fact that they had no McDonald’s or even Burger Kings, he thought that the answer might just be: no.

Eventually, the car was heading down several streets to get closer to the apartment. Jimin could see so many mismatching buildings that had recently been constructed, none of them in any way the same because they had been built by various companies. It made the area look unbalanced somewhat, especially when some of the newer and taller blocks were built on the same street as older and smaller ones. It was in one of those small and rather decrepit blocks that he was finally going to complete the transaction, and when the car pulled up to park at the end of the street, Jimin practically dived out of the back.

Just like the prep procedure with Namjoon, the apartment room they went to was otherwise vacant and contained just several items of furniture and a landline phone. Jimin followed Taehyung through the doorway, Yoo and the nameless man following suit.

“Set the scales up, Ahn,” Taehyung instructed, and so the other man moved to drop a briefcase on one of the two tables.

Jemin could see that Yoo also had a briefcase in hand, no doubt where the cocaine would be going into as soon as it had been checked.

“Before I hand this shit over, what’s the deal as of this morning?” Jimin asked, watching the other man opening the briefcase.

“About…32,500,000 won,” Taehyung replied. “Give or take a couple of hundred, not sure on the exact figure. Uh…Ahn?”

“32,564,000 won,” Ahn stated, as he read something off a sheet of paper inside the briefcase. “That’s the agreed amount between the buyer here and your supplier. It’s a couple of hundred thousand more than the last deal because of inflation and shit.”
Jimin did the maths roughly in his head, using his rather great skills in maths and his memory of the last deal to figure out that it was more-or-less the price that he and Namjoon had discussed in the apartment room back in San Francisco. It was around $40,000 after the conversion with a little leeway for inflation, meaning that he had just clinched a $5,000 profit over the street-value that they had been predicting.

God bless G.I.s and their love of cocaine.

“Man, it’s too hot here,” Taehyung muttered, as he unbuttoned his chambray shirt fully and he left it open in an attempt to cool down in the heat.

Jimin was also suddenly aware of how hot that he was, how stuffy and musty that the air in the apartment room was.

“I haven’t eaten in like…twenty hours,” Jimin stated, the thought just coming to mind suddenly.

“Shit, really?” Taehyung exclaimed, in the act of collecting a pair of latex gloves from the briefcase. He nodded at the question and the younger man made a shocked noise. “As soon as this deal’s sorted, you and me are gonna get some food.”

“I’m used to it,” Jimin replied with a soft shrug, watching Ahn finishing in the act of setting up the scales on the table.

Taehyung shoved his hand into his jeans pocket and he pulled a flick knife free.

“Let’s get that shit outta you, yeah?” he said, as he hit the button on the flick knife - three inches of cold and sharp steel shooting out of the slot in the black plastic.

Jimin could have cried in relief just knowing that he was finally going to be free of the goddamn condom parcel. It had went from uncomfortable to bearable, but now, after twelve hours of sitting down and a slightly bumpy car ride across the region, his muscles were starting to ache again. After the ordeal in Hong Kong, they would be aching for days and it certainly made nights spent hanging around The Castro less fun. Sure, the saunas and Jacuzzi in the bathhouse could most certainly help fix that problem, but…it was hard resisting other temptations whilst inside the building.
Jimin dumped his bag on the floor and he started undressing, slipping out of his loafers as his fingers worked the buttons of his shirt. When he shrugged out of it, he could feel the other man staring at him, at the two revealed baggies and layers of thick tape around his shoulders. He folded his shirt and he placed it down on the table, moving onto his trousers next. As he slipped them down, Taehyung moved to perch on the table beside him, placing the flick knife on the surface momentarily. His sitting position made his open shirt shift, showcasing a flash of his tattoo.

Jimin had seen it many times in the past: a rather tribalistic-looking tiger in the act of leaping in front of a crescent moon. It was located on his lower stomach, to the side of his navel, and it was entirely black ink outlines rather colour.

Jimin had seen quite the variety of Moon Tiger Mob tattoos, but he didn’t have one yet. Namjoon had a rather unsettling coloured tiger head on the ball of his shoulder, caught in the act of roaring with bulging and rather demonic eyes - the style heavily Asiatic. Considering the fact that he was a runner and a mule, he currently had no tattoos, but he knew that he might just end up with one if he ever progressed higher up into the gang.

“What’d you say to…meat?” Taehyung asked him, watching him stepping out of his trousers. “I know a place south of here, fuckin’ meat there is to die for. Galbi, bulgogi, you name it they serve it and—”

“So long as it’s dead, I’ll eat it right now,” Jimin declared, as he tossed his trousers onto the table.

This made Taehyung smirk and he dropped his briefs down to his ankles, revealing the two other baggies to the men.

Jimin stepped out of his underwear and he turned to bend over the table without even needing to be asked. Rather than fold his arms on the wood, he had to just place his head down on it, needing both hands for another purpose entirely. So he grabbed hold of his buttocks and he parted them, revealing his entrance to Taehyung.

“OK, just take deep breaths and stay still, bro,” Taehyung said, as he hunkered down behind him.

Jimin felt him gently prodding around his entrance, preparing him for the probing that was to come.

“Ahn, lube.”
The other man moved over to them, his clothing rustling and his shoes padding on the floor, and the younger man’s fingers disappeared for a few seconds only to be replaced again; now cold and wet.

“I’ll get it out as fast as I can.”

When Taehyung slipped his fingers inside of him, he did so in a strictly business manner. There was no need to slowly stretch him open because he was already stretched, meaning that he could snag the end of the condom and lightly tug. Because of his warm insides, the lube from earlier was still mostly present, and so the parcel moved slightly from the tug. Taehyung pulled enough to get the knotted ends out first, and then he used his lube-slick fingers to try and hold his entrance open, pulling with his other hand to free the parcel. It took a minute of easing and strong discomfort as his rectum was stretched around the parcel, but Taehyung pulled it free with a series of liquid squelches.

Jimin wished that he knew why Taehyung always took it upon himself to give him a series of pats on the ass afterwards, not exactly spanks for they were much too soft for that. It was like a strange version of a pat on the back in thanks, but Jimin was hardly complaining. After all, Taehyung had such warm hands; warm and large enough to cup his whole buttock with ease.

Oh, if only he fingered him as good as Namjoon did.

“See, that ain’t so bad? Is it?” Taehyung said, as he dumped the wet and glistening condom parcel on the table.

Jimin eyed it for a few seconds before straightening up and allowing him to start pulling the other baggies off his body, waiting for the sting and burn of the tape as it was wrenched free.

As soon as the tape and baggies were free, Taehyung proceeded to empty all of them into the scales. He pierced the plastic with his flick knife, the white powder pouring free to land in the metal bowl. The amount started to pile up to a considerable mound inside of the scales and, as soon as it was done, Taehyung dropped the empty condom and he checked the weight.

Jimin got dressed whilst he did so, feeling strangely empty now that he no longer had a parcel shoved up his ass.

“It’s…” he made a series of noises under his breath and then finished, “it’s a kilo. Call ‘em Yoo, let ‘em know we got the mule and possession of the cocaine. It’s ready for transportation.”
Jimin was in the act of buttoning up his shirt and tucking the ends inside of his trousers when Yoo made the first call on the landline. The man spoke in Korean; sending a message across the capital to alert the current buyer in Seoul that the cocaine was ready to be smuggled to Camp Kitty Hawk. As soon as he was finished making that call, he would also make an international call to alert Jimin’s supplier all of the way back in San Francisco that the deal was still underway and running smoothly.

Whilst he did this, Ahn started scooping cocaine from the scales into new baggies to ready it for transportation across the city.

“C’mon, let’s blow this joint,” Taehyung said, as he finished getting into his loafers. His partner tossed his latex gloves onto the table without a care, his flick knife back inside of his jeans pocket. “We got three days until we go to Hong Kong and that means plenty of meat, soju and sleepin’.”

The place that Taehyung had told him about happened to be just a few streets down from the apartment, built in a rather packed shopping district filled with people and cars. Crossing the roads to get there was hell considering the traffic, but after a couple of minutes they were walking along a sidewalk to get to a building; a rather traditional-looking building with slide doors and a single flared roof.

The interior of the restaurant was dimly lit, with dark walls and the thick scent of cooking meat and charcoal briquettes hanging in the air, and there was quite a decent amount of people inside. The tables were low and built around open grills, meaning that Jimin struggled to sit down properly with his aching thigh muscles. But once he was seated on the padded cushions, he was very comfortable. He could sense some customers looking his way, perhaps noticing his travel bag or clothing, perhaps finding his hair and appearance somewhat foreign.

Was it that obvious that he was American at a glance? Judging from several pairs of down-turned lips: yes, yes it was.

They ended up ordering dak galbi as the main dish to go with fried rice, but that wasn’t all that they received. Along with lettuce to wrap it in, there were side dishes of kimchi, mandu and even a small serving of samgyeopsal. Their table was covered with the massive simmering pan of dak galbi and the near dozen small side dish bowls, not to mention the bottle of soju and three shot glasses for them each.

Jimin always found it funny how the table layouts in this country reminded him of his old family home, with the dozens of bowls and plates. Nowadays, he was either eating from a single plate or bowl on the rare occasions that he could do so, or out of food containers when he couldn’t.
It was strange that a table halfway across the world could remind him more of home than the table in his current communal home.

Unsurprisingly, Jimin found his stomach rumbling at the sight of it all; his mouth flooding with so much saliva that it was a miracle that he didn’t drool all down his chin. The soju meant nothing to him right now, not when the dak galbi looked and smelled like heaven to his eyes. So he started shovelling the spicy mixture of chicken, cabbage, sweet potatoes and tteok into a lettuce roll before almost swallowing it whole.

Taehyung seemed to find this highly amusing, for he smirked as he watched him eating and filled up their shot glasses.

Finally, food that he could actually enjoy that wouldn’t be getting chased by laxatives!

Jemin went between the dak galbi and the side dishes, sampling a bit of everything as fast as he could. No amount of takeaway food could compare to the fried rice in this joint and he had to suppress the urge to moan after the first mouthful. But as quickly as he started devouring the food, he also started knocking back shots of soju; both he and Taehyung swallowing three each before they had gotten properly started on the meal. Then they were refilled again, just waiting to be knocked back.

“You know,” Jimin said, as he lifted his shot glass up in front of him.

It was his eighth…no, wait, his ninth shot? Whatever, he supposed it didn’t matter.

“Seoul’s kinda small but I kinda like that,” he said, noticing a slight slur in his words. “It’s nice coming here after being in San Francisco, with all of the…stuff.”

Jemin knocked back the shot and he swallowed hard, barely even feeling the slight burn of it going down at this point.

“I don’t care, I love you Yankees,” Taehyung declared, as he grabbed another lettuce leaf and he shovelled dak galbi into his palm. “You got good shit there, bro, the kinda shit we don’t have here. I think we should try and be more like you, yeah? But, y’know, change shit–”

“Free health care,” Jimin said, as he lowered his shot glass and dropped it on the table. “Make sure to
add that to your democracy, don’t fuck that up.”

“Nah nah, we gon…gon do that,” Taehyung said with a nod, before shoving the food into his mouth. “Gon do that,” he repeated around the mouthful.

“Fix the education system too,” Jimin stated, as he grabbed a chunk of samgyeopsal. “And don’t… don’t legalise guns for fuck’s sake, bro. No, no don’t. Don’t, that’s bad shit.”

It was hard to tell what Taehyung said around his mouthful of food, but it sounded like an agreement to his ears.

Jimin wasn’t exactly sure how they left the restaurant because the soju worked through his system quickly. As a result of the lack of food that he had consumed over the last day, it was no surprise that he started feeling tipsy early into the meal, and as he downed more and more shots, he went from drunk to full-blown wasted. He was aware of the fact that Taehyung was only tipsy, for his partner had to almost carry him to keep him from falling down drunk. He was also aware of the fact that they ended up in a taxi, travelling across the district to get to his current partner’s home. Said home was a bungalow, a rather small but decent home that was far nicer than his. It certainly looked nicer than the apartment blocks that covered the rest of Gangnam-gu.

When Taehyung managed to unlock the front door, they were greeted by a dog, a female white jindo dog that Jimin knew was called Cheonsa. She was a rather enthusiastic dog, and she leapt up onto her hind legs to almost bounce and dance around their legs as Taehyung helped him get inside the home.

Apparently, she was a trained guard dog, but Jimin struggled to believe that when he saw her lolling pink tongue and rather dopey grin. Over the four months that Taehyung had owned her, she had went from a puppy to a young adult, and he had yet to see her act in any way aggressive. She looked about as vicious as a poodle to him.

“Settle down, girl,” Taehyung said with a rather tipsy guffaw.

Jimin removed his arm from around his shoulders to try and stand on his own two feet. He ended up staggering backwards to lean back against the front door, dropping his travel bag to the floor and struggling to get out of his loafers. His partner went straight to his dog, grabbing her face in his hands and proceeding to nuzzle and roughly stroke her jowls.
“Gonna shower,” Jimin said, as he crossed the wide floor to get to the bathroom and he dragged his bare feet across the wooden flooring.

His head felt all weird and he just wanted the sensation to go away because it felt like the room was spinning slowly and tilting to the side. Oh shit, maybe he should have slowed down with those shots?

Jimin left the bathroom several minutes later in nothing more than the towel, his head still woozy but feeling strangely better now that he was clean. His skin was flushed from both the heat and the liquor and his hair was dripping wet: rivulets of water still slowly running down his spine to soak into the towel. He could see everything across the wide layout of the ground-floor, could see the various items of furniture, the small doorways that led into the bedroom and kitchen, and Taehyung on the sofa with his dog. But his legs didn’t seem to want to work. No, all that he could do was awkwardly lower himself to the floor instead because that seemed like a brilliant idea to him.

It wasn’t even 1pm and yet he was in a state of near nakedness and completely drunk, lying on the flooring of Taehyung’s living-area in a slump.

“Mmm, just leave me here,” he mumbled. “Gonna sleep.”

“I got…got a bed,” Taehyung argued, hiccuping loudly as he got off the sofa. “I got a bed, c’mon, lie in the bed. It’s a nice bed.” He managed to tug him to his feet with little effort and he steered him across the bungalow towards the bedroom. “You did good today, you totally deserve the bed.”

“I do?” Jimin asked in surprise, turning to try and look back at him.

“Yeah, you deserve the bed,” Taehyung reiterated, as he dragged him over to said bed. It was a mattress on the floor with pillows and covers and his partner had to help him sit down on it. “So, just lie down and go to sleep.”

Unsurprisingly, Jimin sank into the heavy blackness of sleep the very second that his head hit the pillow.
15th August, 1984, 4:03am: Nob Hill, San Francisco, United States of America

The weight of the Mobira Talkman was on his lap once more, a weight that Yoongi was more than used to by now. But he didn’t have the receiver in hand currently. It was still placed in the cradle and it would only be picked up when the device started ringing, because right now he was waiting on a very important call.

Yoongi had his right arm folded on the window rest of the car door, his left hand slowly tracing concentric circles into the leather seating. It was smooth and firm against his gloved fingertips, strangely calming in a way. Had the car phone not been on his lap then he would have had one leg folded over the other, his foot bobbing impatiently as he waited for that flashing red light and the rather shrill dialling tone sound to fill the car like a siren.

An entire day of planning, waiting, and stalking, and now it was drawing close to an end. Yoongi had been setting up his dominoes for so long now, carefully stacking them in place so that they wouldn’t topple on him and ruin everything, but now…now he was going to flick one and watch everything start coming down on Choi’s fucking head. It was going to feel so satisfying to see it all collapse right in front of his eyes, knowing that it was his hands that had caused all of the chaos. A petty fucking rebellion and an act of grand treason against his family - all destroyed because of him.

Yoongi could feel his lips twitching upwards at the corners just thinking about it all.

Through Go’s eyes and ears on the streets, they had managed to track various sources back to this den - a strictly heroin-only den that had been frequented by several of Hoseok’s darlings over the day, who had reported the sale of cocaine and the notorious ‘Sacramento Snow’ inside of the joint.

So that was why, at 4:00am in the morning, Yoongi was sitting in the backseat of a enforcer’s car, with fake plates on the front and an entirely black wardrobe: his black baseball cap pulled down low, a black and white bandanna over his face, along with a black shirt, trousers and boots, and even gloves. He was almost invisible in the backseat, a ghoul that was only visible when he turned his head to show a flash of his ear and eyes from under the brim of the cap.

That was why there were eight enforcers standing down the sidewalk with guns in hand, the entire den surrounded.

The den might just be built in Nob Hill, a decently affluent area through and through, but the district had desolate lots just waiting to be snapped up by realty agents to turn into more upscale apartments.
That was why there was a heroin den just several streets away from the somewhat wealthy folk that lived in the area; a den built in a rundown warehouse with a dirt lot just beside it. There was no sight of traffic nearby, nothing more than the softest rumbling of it on the air, and there was most certainly no houses close to the den to witness the activities that went on. It was surprisingly a safe location, all things considered, but not right now.

No, right now, the den was a very dangerous place to be inside of.

Yoongi was watching it all from the backseat of the car, keeping a clear eye on the den and his men. At his gesture, they would kick the back door down and storm inside, would completely turn the place upside down in search of the missing cocaine. All that he had to do was hold his arm out of the window and click his fingers at Ryu, and then it would all go down. But he wasn’t ready just yet. No, he was waiting on a call on the Mobira Talkman, a call from any of four different enforcers across three districts to alert him to the fact that they had eyes on Choi. Only then would he strike, because he had the knowledge that they had gotten him before anyone could possibly alert him of the raid on the den.

Yoongi shifted his eyes from the street to look at the dashboard of the car, eyeing the clock to see that it was 4:03am now.

Any second now…any second now and the phone would start ringing.

Choi couldn’t hide forever, especially when he had no fucking clue about what was going down right now. Choi was a high-ranking heroin dealer, with a dozen more dealers and pushers working underneath him. He didn’t have eyes and ears on the streets, he didn’t own chunks of this city. But Yoongi did. That was why the other man was going to regret trying to steal shit from him. Well, he wouldn’t get to regret it for long, but that wasn’t the point. The point was that today would be a historic moment for Moon Tiger Mob.

Today was going to be the first ever high-profile execution within the gang. That kind of event, it would be enough to scare any other men off attempting to stab him in the back for quite some time.

Yoongi was about to turn his head back to look out of the window when the car phone sounded, the shrill noise catching him by surprise and making his heart skip a beat in his chest. He grabbed the receiver and he shoved it against his ear, hearing a series of static crackles down the line until one of the enforcers spoke.

“He’s on Columbus Avenue, in a bar called ‘The Stone Garden’. I’m at a payphone across the street and able to see straight through the windows where he’s seated, Prince Min,” the man
explained, giving him cold hard facts just like how he liked it.

“He’s in the bar?” Yoongi asked, as he shifted on the backseat, wanting to make sure that he had heard things right. His voice was slightly muffled from the bandanna but he spoke clearly enough. At the enforcer’s confirmation, he turned to look out of the window. “Drug him, get him outta there and back to his apartment block over in Presidio Heights, a block on Presidio Avenue turning onto Pine Street. Slip three blues into his drink, I want him conscious, but fucking blitzed.”

“Yeah, Prince Min, we’ll get him back there for you.”

Yoongi dropped the receiver back in the cradle, and he stared at the phone as he forced himself to count to six hundred. He needed to give his men over on Columbus Street enough time to get into the bar and slip the sedatives into Choi’s drink, to get him out of the bar. It might only be a ten minute time-frame but it was better than rushing in too quickly. No, Yoongi wanted to be certain that the other man was either in the back of a car already or halfway there by the time that his enforcers stormed the den, and that was why he needed to wait. He prided himself on being a patient person, but right now he was getting somewhat impatient, and it took him a great amount of strength to manage to count to six hundred; taking regulated breaths and trying to not clench his fingers as he did so.

When he hit six hundred, he shoved his arm through the open window and he clicked his fingers hard - signalling to Ryu to start the raid.

Yoongi saw the men disappearing around the sides of the building, heading straight for the back door entrance. Through the window gap, he heard the rattling thud and then the bang of the door swinging out to hit the wall - the sign that his men were inside. Yoongi almost anticipated the sound of gunshots, knowing that the pushers and dealers inside were carrying, but he didn’t hear a single shot ring out. It seemed that the men were clearly not stupid and they valued their lives more than loyalty. He did detect some slight commotion, however, as he heard deep masculine shouting and high-pitched feminine screams of shock and horror at the sudden raid on the den. There were people inside, of course, addicts and prostitutes just like always, and hopefully they too would be smart enough to drop to the floor and stay there.

After a couple of minutes of waiting, Yoongi caught sight of movement coming around the building and he saw that it was Ryu. The enforcer was heading straight for his car, his gun now hidden inside of his armpit holster, and it seemed that he had a message for him.

“All clear, Prince Min,” Ryu said, as he hunkered down beside the window. “But, you might wanna see this.”
“Wanna see what?” he asked, wanting the enforcer to cut to the chase.

“We found the missing blow,” the older man explained, as he grabbed the outer door handle and he pulled the door open for him.

Yoongi pulled down on his baseball cap hard, making sure that it covered his eyes. The bandanna already covered the rest of his face, ensuring that none of the limited CCTV cameras in the area could possibly pick him up. He had even removed his Rolex, just so it wasn’t identifiable in any way. Then he shifted to climb out of the backseat, his boots crunching on the pavement as he straightened up.

Ryu slammed the door shut behind him, and then he proceeded to escort him along the sidewalk to the den.

The interior of the den mostly consisted of a large main-area, filled with low tables and ratty sofas, bean bag chairs and mattresses. Yoongi could see that it was filthy, which was to be expected of a heroin den. On the floor, he could see cast-off needles and tourniquets, junk food wrappers and beer bottles, cigarettes stubs and more. He was thankful for his bandanna, for it blocked any scents from hitting him as he just knew that the place would stink.

The buyers were all lying on the floor in neat lines, their hands on their heads to show they were unarmed. They were waifs: sallow-skinned zombies with cracked nails, greasy hair and track marks all over their exposed arms or thighs. Yoongi did little more than run his eyes over them, paying no heed to nobodies and junkie ghosts. The men that had had guns, the dealers and pushers, they were kneeling with their hands on their heads. Their firearms were now in the possession of his men instead, shoved down trouser waistbands. He followed Ryu past the main-area to get to another room, and the enforcer moved to stand beside the doorway, allowing him to step inside.

Yoongi saw that there was a table in this room, one with a large scale bowl filled with their missing cocaine. This was clearly an area where it had been getting transferred into baggies for the streets, or cut and mixed with heroin to make speedball, for he could see various equipment placed all over the room. Some of the men had likely been inside here working away before his enforcers had busted the door down. He moved over to study the bowl, seeing a chopping board covered in a small pile and gram piles already prepared to go into baggies. Oh, Choi had really set up a little thing here. He had the heroin, the cocaine - the speedball, he was really branching out with this business venture.

“Missing ‘bout…” Yoongi cocked his head and he studied the mound of cocaine in the bowl, tugging down the bandanna as he did. He had seen so many keys that he knew that the bowl was nearly full, a small but noticeable portion missing. “I’d say a hundred grams, so, ‘bout 3,500 or so dollars worth.”
That brought the current losses from this failed coup up to $8,500 so far.

“But we got it back, Ryu.”

“We did, Prince Min.”

Yoongi collected the chopping board and he swept the small pile and lines of cocaine back into the bowl with his index finger. The powder clung to his leather gloves, and as soon as he was done, he put the board down and proceeded to shove his finger under his upper lip. He rubbed the residue powder into his gum line, massaging with his forefinger until he felt a nice little rush of heat starting to bloom in his head. As expected, it was good grade, barely cut and very potent.

“Get the key outta here,” Yoongi ordered, as he sniffed hard and he ran his tongue along his gum line. “I want it delivered back to Kim, Seokjin Kim, for circulation ‘round the city. Search the men down, take all of their cash as payment. I want ‘em to know not to sell above their fucking stations again. Ryu, you oversee ‘em.”

Yoongi fixed his bandanna back up over his mouth and he left the room to step into the main-area. He lifted his arm and gestured at an enforcer that he knew was called Woo, signalling for him to follow him back to the car.

Woo did so, climbing into the driver-seat without even needing to be told what to do. The man asked him where to, and so Yoongi gave him the address of Choi’s apartment as he slammed his own door shut and he settled down into his seat. The heat from the cocaine had shifted down to his chest now, had started making his heartbeat start to pick up and make him feel a rush of energy surging through his veins. He could barely sit still from a combination of the slight drug rush and the knowledge that he was going to finally get his hands on Choi after waiting all day long. Oh, his hands were almost itching at this point because he could barely suppress the mental images of just throttling the other man.

Woo drove him across the district to get to Presidio Heights through Western Addition, passing streets that were mostly empty of people save for the usual amount of homeless people placed here and there in the slight awnings and steps on the front of buildings. He was surprised that patrolling police hadn’t forced them to move, but considering the fact that they would just crash a few streets down, it seemed rather pointless. Along with the homeless, he saw the occasional prostitute still hanging around streetlights on the ends of streets, women and men that might just belong to anyone. If he caught sight of red, however, he knew that they were Hoseok’s darlings: red heels, red shirts, whatever, so long as red was present. Eventually, they were starting to draw close to Pine Street, the time on the dashboard clock telling him that it was 4:32am.
Yoongi could see the car down the street, the one that his enforcers had used to get Choi back to the apartment block in this district. One of the men was waiting under the entrance awning, clearly anticipating his arrival. So he shifted to sit forward and he gestured at the driver to kill the engine at the end of the block. The man did so, pulling up to the curb and allowing him to pop the door open and step out onto the curb.

Yoongi stepped out and he slammed the door shut behind him, hastily crossing the sidewalk to get to the apartment. Choi owned the entire block but he didn’t rent out any of the multiple rooms inside the six storey building, for he much preferred using the block to host parties, orgies, whatever the fuck he got kicks out of.

“He’s inside, Prince Min: top suite,” the enforcer said, as he held the door for him and allowed him to enter the building.

Yoongi went straight over to the elevator, entering the carriage a minute later and jabbing the button with his thumb as he glanced up at the convex mirror mounted in the corner. He greatly doubted that Choi had CCTV in this block because it was pricey, but he still kept his cap and bandanna in place just to be safe. It took a moment for the carriage to reach the floor, and when it did he stepped outside to see that the suite door was already open at the end of the narrow hallway, which gave him a quick glance at the interior.

When he stepped inside, Yoongi quickly ran his eyes across the wide room, seeing maple wooden flooring and peach walls. The furniture inside was all white: white leather, white padding, white fucking throw rugs. The sight of it all made him sneer, finding the attempt at decadence rather tacky. He dragged his eyes away from a sound system almost as tall and wide as he was to look over at the owner of the apartment instead; the reason that he was here in the first place.

His men had drugged and prepared Choi to perfection, the dealer currently tied to a rather expensive-looking kitchen chair close to the centre of the suite. Yoongi could see nylon rope knotted around his ankles, and his wrists were also knotted behind his back. There was another loop of blue rope around his chest, pulled taut to dig into his shirt and ensure that he couldn’t even buck. No, he was trapped in place and Yoongi stopped crossing the room to study him for a moment.

The two other enforcers were standing across the suite, one close to the bed and the other by the kitchen. They were both still and silent, perfect sentries that would observe everything like hawks. Not too far from where Choi was, he could see a table, a low glass table that he had no doubt been snorting off before leaving to go to the bar because the evidence was still present.

“Oh? So, you put a little aside for yourself?” Yoongi said, as he eyed the spread of lines on the glass
There were a few baggies stacked to the side of this, perhaps a dozen gram portions or so. He eyed these with a great interest and added another couple of hundred dollars back onto the amount that they could recover from this operation. After all, those baggies could go straight onto the streets when he was done here.

“Didn’t know you liked blow, Choi. But then again, I didn’t know a few things, huh? Like how you’re a backstabbing motherfucker.”

Unsurprisingly, Choi couldn’t really talk to him, could only moan deeply as he rolled his head back against the chair. Those blues had really gone through him. The older man might just specialise in peddling opioids but it seemed that he most certainly didn’t dabble in downers, not with his slack mouth and glazed-over eyes, that was.

Yoongi went over to the kitchen-area, running his eyes over everything until he located a champagne rack; slightly sloped and discreetly placed under a counter. He hunkered down to eye the visible corks before selecting one, pulling it free and feeling the considerable weight and cool glass permeating through his leather gloves. He turned it around in his grip to eye the label as he got upright and crossed the suite again. Dom Pérignon Oenothèque 1976. He grabbed a bottle opener from the wooden counter and stuck the corkscrew in the cork hard, twisting to pop it free seconds later. A waft of cool and carbonated air plumed from the open neck, and Yoongi dropped the bottle opener onto the glass table without a care, reaching up to tug his bandanna down to his neck.

“Does it taste good?” Yoongi asked, as he sniffed at the bottle. His nose detected a strangely sweet scent wafting from the dark bottle, a nice warmth and plum scent underneath it.

Choi made a noise at this, a rather pathetic noise to his ears that wasn’t even close to a reply.

Yoongi looked down at him and then he lifted the bottle to his lips, holding it above his open mouth so that he could pour a slight amount into his mouth. The champagne was light on his tongue, a slightly bubbly feeling lingering as he let it settle and tasted it.

Then he dropped his head to spit it right in Choi’s face.

“It’s fucking bitter!” Yoongi complained, wiping at his mouth roughly.
Choi blinked rapidly to try and clear the champagne out of his droopy eyes, drops beaded and glistening in his hair.

“You stab me in the fucking back, steal 40,000 dollars of fucking blow and this’ the kinda shit you spend it on?! Fucking bitter!” Yoongi ran his tongue around his mouth, gathering saliva so that he could spit in his face again. The globule of spit landed right on his cheek, but the dealer was too drugged to even show a hint of disgust. “Does it taste good to you, huh?”

“Wuh…fuh?”

“Yeah, what the fuck to you too,” Yoongi muttered, as he lowered the bottle and he stared at the other man. “I found your den, you dumb fuck, the one you were keeping the key of blow in. Your mule, Choi, your mule fucked up and led us all the way back to you. How fucking stupid d’you think I am, huh? You supply your own goddamn mule with a key and it vanishes into thin air, and you think I ain’t gonna track it back to your ass? You wanna steal a key? Poach a mule, you fucking retard!”

Yoongi could feel his fingers tightening around the bottle, a throb shooting through his head that was one-hundred percent black anger. Just thinking about how the other man had tried to get away with such a terrible plan was enough to make him want to laugh, but right now he couldn’t possibly laugh. Not when he was looking at Choi, not when he was breathing the same air as a treasonous snake.

Yoongi spared a quick glance up at the enforcer in the bedroom area, silently instructing that he move to stand behind the chair with a slight cock of the head. The man did so on cue, his hands held behind his back and his gaze burning into the back of Choi’s head. Yoongi reached out to touch the dealer’s tie, lifting it up and running his thumb over the silver charmeuse silk so that his leather glove made a faint rustling sound.

“You’ve been working the scene since I was still in fucking school, Choi,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice, lifting the bottle of champagne up to eye the label again. “You worked yourself up from a pusher to this, and now…now you fucked it all up ‘cos you got greedy. Ain’t that a real shame? But, y’know, life’s a bitch.”

Yoongi lifted the ends and he shoved Choi’s tie into his mouth, the enforcer clamping his jaw shut for him a second later.

It sealed off one airway, no problem.
The enforcer’s elbows were planted on either side of his head and he had pulled him back in the seat, holding Choi firmly still so that he couldn’t possibly move. But he still tried. He tried to cry out through the gag too, making disgusting choking sounds and huffing out nonsense to his ears, and he also attempted to wiggle but it was rather useless. He was still so weak from the drugging at the bar that he could do no more than weakly shrug his shoulders and rock against the restraints around his chest.

Yoongi moved back a step to look at him, watching his rather pathetic attempts at fighting for his life and finding that he felt nothing at this point. No anger, no hatred, no pity. He was just cold and numb.

“Does it taste good, huh?” he repeated, as he lifted the bottle and he held it above his face. A beaded drop fell down to land on his face, running down his brow to land in his hairline. “Tell me, Choi, does it fucking taste good?”

Yoongi moved the bottle so that he could tip it against his nostrils and start pouring the champagne into his nose. The mouth of the bottle was just large enough to catch both of his nostrils inside and only let a slight amount trickle free down his cheeks, making sure that he couldn’t possibly get a hint of air…but it wouldn’t have mattered if he could.

Yoongi didn’t want to tip it too fast and waste the champagne, for he needed it to last long enough for Choi to need to take an intake of breath. He just tipped the bottle lightly and let a steady stream of liquid start pouring down his nose and into his throat because the man was holding his breath. He could see Choi’s throat shifting as he involuntarily swallowed the champagne and he squeezed his eyes shut with effort, managing to not choke on the first trickle of the bitter liquid.

Of course, to breathe once more, Choi would need to stop holding his breath. But if he did that then the champagne would stop trickling down his throat and would instead be dragged into his airway. The dealer had been taken by surprise to begin with and, combined with his current drugged state, he wasn’t going to be able to hold his breath for too much longer.

“Does it taste good?” Yoongi repeated, as he watched the other man’s twitching brow. He could see tendons starting to stick out against his neck because he was straining that hard, and he was more than certain that his face was starting to get a little flushed. “Does it taste fucking good, Choi? It must, you can’t stop drinking it, you greedy fucking pig.”

The bottle must have been halfway through when Choi’s lungs finally betrayed him and he had to take a breath.
Yoongi had the bottle pressed down hard against his nose, trapping his nostrils inside of it, and when Choi inhaled and proceeded to force the liquid back out of his lungs in shock, bubbles erupted inside the bottle like a whirlpool. But Choi couldn’t expel the liquid and take a choking gasp of air because his mouth was still clamped shut, meaning that he ended up breathing in even more champagne a second later. The man almost jerked from the sensation, his body tensing up and bucking up against the restraints. The ropes just dug into his chest, however, and gave him no leeway, meaning that he couldn’t knock the bottle free from his nose. The enforcer was holding his head too tight, stopping him from moving a mere inch.

“You make me fucking sick, just like this champagne,” Yoongi spat, as he eyed the liquid inside and he saw it rapidly decreasing. That was because it was being sucked right into Choi’s lungs, was being inhaled and forced back out only to once again fill them up and slowly drown him. “Maybe, you’ve got something better, yeah? I’ll check later, I’ll crack it open for your fucking funeral. I hope you like this shit, Choi, I really hope you do.”

Choi carried on struggling for a moment longer, his body taut and his face contorted in sheer terror and likely agony - Yoongi didn’t really know. He could see the way that he opened his eyes and almost bulged them out, the force enough to make the veins in his temples also stand out like cables under his skin. But then he started to struggle less, and Yoongi detected a noticeable difference in bubbles frothing inside the bottle, decreasing rather rapidly until they stopped completely and the liquid flowed smoothly again.

The bottle was almost empty when Choi finally turned limp and unblinking. But he still kept the bottle clamped in place until it was empty, even when he was more than certain that Choi was already dead. Even after it was drained, Yoongi kept it place for a minute longer, and only then did he pull it away. He leaned forward and hovered his own face over his, and yet there was nothing: no weak puff of breath.

When he pressed his fingers hard against his throat and held them there for a moment, he felt no pulse, signalling that Choi was indeed dead.

Yoongi moved to put the empty bottle down, and then he moved to collect a champagne glass from a dresser across the bedroom-area. He placed it on the table beside the empty bottle, just for the sake of it. It was really just a strange little joke perhaps, or even for some artistic integrity. Then he moved to collect a kitchen knife and he cut the ropes that were tied around him, seeing how Choi’s slack and limp body sank against the chair, his arms dropping to hang loose at his sides. He pulled the tie free from his mouth as he lifted his foot, cocking his knee up high so that he could kick the chair hard and topple it over.

Choi hit the floor with a meaty thump, the wooden chair thudding loudly on the still air. He held the
knife out to the man that had helped him drown Choi as he looked down at the dealer, eyeing his splayed out limbs and still body.

“Leave him as is, don’t take anything from his body,” Yoongi said, as fixed his bandanna back up over his face. “Get the blow outta here and to Ryu, but trash the place. You find any drugs or paraphernalia, snatch it and get it to Ryu too. You find any cash, pass it ‘round. I don’t wanna touch it. See anything you like? Take it.”

“Yes, Prince Min,” they both said in near perfect unison.

Yoongi went over to the kitchen-area and, just like he had remarked to Choi, he did indeed search the champagne rack to try and locate something of interest whilst the enforcers started tearing the suite up. It took him a moment to find something, a bottle of Moët & Chandon Cuvée Dom Pérignon 1962 that he hoped had been kept well enough to keep it sweet.

Yoongi hefted the bottle and he eyed the green and gold ribbon around the body just as a painting on the wall was dropped to the floor, the glass shattering with a crisp crunch. The enforcer proceeded to use the kitchen knife to slice into the back of the frame, just to make sure that Choi wasn’t hiding money or drugs inside it.

Satisfied with his choice, Yoongi turned on his heel to leave the suite, taking the elevator back down to the ground-floor once more and exiting the block. When he climbed back into the car, he placed the bottle down behind the driver-seat and he proceeded to turn back to the Mobira Talkman.

“Woo, take me back home,” Yoongi instructed, as he lifted up the receiver and he started hitting buttons to get to a certain number.

“Yes, Prince Min,” Woo replied, starting the car engine again pulling away from the curb just as he hit Seokjin’s number in the address book and he shoved the receiver in the crook of his neck.

Yoongi sat back against the leather seat with a weary groan, still feeling the buzz from the hint of cocaine earlier. It would be gone very soon, however, leaving him bone-tired and mentally dead. He could hardly wait to get back home and shower and maybe catch three hours of sleep before he was right back to it again. He couldn’t afford to sleep after all, because sleep was for the fucking weak and those with souls. He listened to the dialling tone for a moment, wondering if the older man would even pick up at this current hour, but then he heard a crackling sound and a burst of static before his voice sounded down the line.
“Yes, Yoongi?” Seokjin said without a hint of hesitation, showing that even when he was half-asleep he was still quick on the draw.

“We got the blow, Ryu’s gonna get it back to you,” Yoongi explained. “Choi’s got shit taste in champagne.”

“Hmm, somehow I doubt that you shared drinks with him,” the other man replied, his tone hinting that his lips had quirked up at the corners slightly. “I’ll assume that we will be drinking in his memory in the next day or so, yes?”

“Yeah, drink up, Seokjin.”

“If you got the blow back then, by that, I’ll also assume you mean that you got enough back to be worth selling?”

Yoongi made a noise in agreement, and then he quickly explained that they had maybe 900 grams with which to sell - almost the whole key.

“Anything on the Sacramento Snow situation?”

“Well, we located a den that was selling it, but I’m still working on tracking the direct source,” he replied. “There’s a high chance that it was Choi dealing it ‘round the streets, but I ain’t sure if he’s the supplier and creator just yet. The son of a bitch might just be working for someone else.”

Seokjin made a noise at this down the line, a soft humming sound.

“Who’s that dealer you mentioned earlier, the one with the mule?” he asked, as he looked out of the window and he eyed the passing blur of streetlights and building signs.

“Kim? Namjoon Kim?” Seokjin said, the name ringing a bell instantly.

“Yeah, him. Get this blow to him, I want it circulating ‘round Nob Hill and The Castro area, at least half the key. We can make this shit back, charge…43 a gram; it’s good grade. Get it ‘round the bars and clubs in The Castro, guys’ll be lining up to get this. Ain’t nothing like three lines to help you
take a cock. If 50 grams gets pushed free and guys keep coming back for the real deal at 43? We’re looking at…38,700 dollars from maybe 31,500 dollars.”

“It could take a few days, but…we might recover this,” Seokjin agreed after some thought. “Kim has his guys, they’ll push and deal in The Castro, no problem. Blow’s still as popular as ever on the circuit, nobody itching for brown will be there. But, here’s an interesting fact. His mule, he used to run up in Pacific Heights and Presidio Heights. I think when he returns from Hong Kong, he could run that blow up their way too. Except he could get away with 50 dollars a gram, 165 for an eight-ball.”

“Yeah, brown ain’t circulating there,” Yoongi remarked. “Those rich bitches wanna snort shit as white as their asses, I say: let ‘em.”

Seokjin made an amused noise down the line at this, a rather tittering laugh.

“The runner any good?”

“Well, he’s been a mule for a year now. Never burnt us once, never brokered a bad deal and never been caught. I think those things speak for his ability as a runner; what do you think, Yoongi?” There was a hint of sarcasm in Seokjin’s tone that he could detect even under the bad static. “I say we trust the mule to run those areas, 50 dollars a gram, 165 an eight-ball, and give him a slight cut of the profits to keep him keen.”

“Good boys should be rewarded,” Yoongi agreed. “Specially in the wake of Choi, we can’t afford to have another mule poached like fucking Rhee. See to it that Kim’s supplied, the full 900 grams, 850 for dealing and running. When his mule returns with the heroin, see to it that he runs that blow fast and hard too. If they can clear it in a few days, I’ll personally buy ‘em a fucking dinner.”

“Oh, speaking of which!” Seokjin said suddenly. “Brunch? Hoseok requested our company tomorrow, something in regards to information you asked from him?”

“He did, huh?” Yoongi asked, as he dragged his eyes away from the window and he eyed the dashboard clock. 4:50am. If that was the case then he could get more than three hours of sleep tonight, because he could push breakfast back until 10:30. He might just get five. “Yeah, sure, I’ll be there.”

Yoongi ended the call and he placed the receiver back in the holder, finally finished for the day.
On the ride across the city to get back to Pacific Heights, Yoongi found that the last of the cocaine buzz had completely disappeared, leaving his joints aching again and his eyelids tight and heavy. He just wanted to drop his head and close his eyes but he knew that he couldn’t, not just yet. So Yoongi turned to stare out the window, watching the neon signs and streetlights blurring into streams of glow and waiting until the car finally came to a stop in front of his mansion. He shifted on the seat to pull his wallet free and open it.

“Woo, go to the diner in Pacific Heights, y’know the one, it’s called ‘Mickey’s Joint’,” Yoongi said, as he slipped a bundle of notes free and held them out to him. “Treat yourself to breakfast, but make sure to tip the waitress twenty for me - a black chick called Annika.”

“The full twenty, Prince Min?”

“Yeah, the full twenty,” he reiterated with an eye roll, as Woo accepted the notes from him. “I can’t do it myself, so, do it for me.”

Yoongi shoved his wallet away again, popping the door open to step out onto the curb. He collected the bottle of champagne and he slammed the door shut, and he didn’t even bother watching the car drive away as he walked up the manicured drive to step onto the porch.

Yoongi slipped his keys free from his front pocket, struggling to get them into the hole and fumbling for a moment until he heard them slipping in and clicking when he twisted. He pushed the door open and stepped inside, making sure to lock it fully behind himself, and then he crossed the open-plan sitting-area to get to the kitchen. He placed the champagne bottle down on the counter, and then he pulled his watch out of his trouser pocket, checking the face to see that it was now 5:00am.

Yoongi sighed as he pulled the cap off and he dropped it onto the counter beside the bottle.

“Home sweet fucking home…”
Chapter 2

15th August, 1984, 9:30am, Pacific Heights, San Francisco, United States of America

When the coffee finally finished brewing, Yoongi moved to press down on the top of the cafetière, trapping the grinds at the bottom of the mixture so that he could lift it up and pour the coffee into his mug. The liquid came out in a thick and steaming stream, the aromatic and enticing scent wafting up to his nose. When he was finished pouring it out, he added a slight dribble of milk. Not too much, of course, but just enough to lessen the slight bitterness on his tongue. Then he collected the mug and he proceeded to leave the kitchen, crossing the ground-floor to get to the open and winding staircase.

Said ground-floor consisted of a large sitting-area: filled with two leather settees, a small office with a typewriter and fax machine; and a kitchen: which had a stretch of counter with stools rather than a dining table seeing as he had little use for one. The flooring under his bare feet was botticino honed marble, which matched well with the soft white walls on which nothing was currently hanging. Yoongi liked to avoid clutter if possible, which likely explained why his home was bare of many things. There were no paintings, no framed photographs, just the bare essentials and some potted plants on the ground-floor.

Yoongi quickly went up the curved staircase to get onto the first-floor, his feet now brushing against wooden flooring instead. This floor contained a wide study that took up most of the space, in which he had bookshelves lining the walls and a table placed beside the large bay window. On either side of this area, there were guest rooms and a bathroom, but Yoongi very rarely had guests enter his home, never mind stay overnight. This floor was also rather bare, for it was only on the second-floor that he added a little character to his home. That was where his bedroom and en-suite bathroom were, and the walls and flooring of his bedroom were most certainly not bare of decoration.

Yoongi nursed the mug of coffee in his hands as he ran his eyes over the display of books in front of him, trying to find something of interest. He had placed all of the books that he was still slowly making his way through on a separate shelf to the rest, and there was a great variety to choose from: from fiction to nonfiction and many different genres. His eyes moved along plain brown leather spines and cheap white and black paperback ones, some wrinkled from use but most of them pristine. To be wrinkled then it would require opening the book more than once every few weeks - a highly unlikely situation.

Yoongi sighed heavily and he pulled his lower lip in to nibble at it for a moment. Then he reached out to grab a particular black spine with bold red writing on, slipping the copy of King’s ‘Different Seasons’ free from the shelf. He had tried his earlier work in the past, the horror stuff, but he had
found that it didn’t appeal to him that greatly. But he had heard that this particular collection was more dramatic, and so he thought that he should at least give it a shot. It had been on his bookshelf for close to two years now, after all. If he didn’t start reading his books soon then he would be buried under them all.

The phone was stretched across the area, the cable carefully tucked around furniture to avoid him tripping over it. It was plugged into the wall close to the stairs, but with some stretching and inventive placement, he had managed to get it to reach the table in front of the bay window on the opposite side of the room. There were exactly three phones in this single home: one on the ground-floor placed beside his favoured settee of choice, one on the first-floor, and one in his bedroom on the second-floor. He also had a fax machine too, which was in the sitting-area for convenience.

Yoongi lifted his leg and he took a high step over the kinked cord, crossing the floor to get to the table with his bare feet padding on the smooth wooden flooring. He placed the mug of coffee and book down on it, and then he pulled his chair out to sit down at the table. There was a high chance that the phone wouldn’t even ring, but he wanted to make sure that he could answer if it did. That was why he had dragged it across the study like this, just so he could reach over and grab it with ease.

Yoongi had been hoping for maybe five hours of sleep, but just like usual, he had found himself waking up after just three and unable to rest again. At least he had used the time to his advantage, as he had already made calls earlier in the morning, had checked up on various men and transactions, and had found that everything was running smoothly today. Or as smoothly as possible, that was. That now meant that he could spend the next hour or so reading, unless he was interrupted for business matters, that was.

It wasn’t often that Yoongi was able to read like this, considering how busy that his days could turn out. Therefore, he was going to enjoy the momentary peace that he had been granted after the hectic events of yesterday and the early hours of the morning. He thought that he had earned it after everything that had happened. After all, managing to rescue a near key of missing cocaine and hopefully still make up profits on it was something to be celebrated.

Maybe, that should have been done with bottles of champagne, lines of cocaine, and a full house of people? Yet, here he was, a book in hand with a mug of coffee. Hoseok would find it hilarious that this moment of peace was his idea of a reward, but it was.

Yoongi had woken up this morning slightly foggy and completely empty of thoughts. But now that he had taken his seat in the warm sunlight and was about to relax, it was all starting to come back to him slowly but surely. Yesterday had been one of the most unexpected days in months, a shocking unravelling of events that had culminated in a harsh final solution. Just recalling it all was enough to make him stop in the act of taking a sip of coffee, the rim of the mug pressed against his lower lip.
Today, Choi was dead, had been executed by his own two hands. Today, his body might just be discovered in his apartment block, lying on the floor surrounded by the remains of drugs and bitter champagne. He had been dead for hours now and so he might just have started hardening from rigor mortis. Whatever the case, he was dead and that was all that mattered. He no longer needed to worry about disappearing keys of cocaine and poached mules from him at least.

Yoongi took a deep sip of coffee and he placed the mug down again, sparing a quick glance over the street. He saw a slow roll of traffic down at the bottom of the hill and the long and distant stretch of the bay, the double rows of houses running down the street like tall picket fences. After a moment, he turned back to the book and he located the business card that he had been using as a bookmark; a business card for a cordwainers. He couldn’t even recall if he had used the company, but that didn’t matter right now. He just dropped it onto the table and proceeded to turn his full attention to the book.

Between reading and drinking his coffee, Yoongi made sure to look out of the window every now and again, just to stay vigilant. He had almost entirely finished the first short story when he felt a pressing urge to check the street, and when he did so he caught sight of Seokjin’s car through the bay window: the unmistakable flash of the gleaming red Ferrari Testarossa pulling up to the curb outside.

Yoongi placed the book down on the table and he got out of his chair, crossing the floor to go down the stairs. His sandals were left beside the door just like always, and so he stepped into them and then he unlocked his front door to move out onto the porch. The heat was even thicker now that he was outside, a heavy weight bearing down on him that made him squint as he stepped down onto the front drive and walked to the curb. A glance at his watch told him that it was 10:13am, so his supplier was here right on time.

Seokjin was waiting for him, seated on the hood of his car with one foot crossed over the other. His usual suit of choice was chocolate brown today instead of cream, pinstriped too. But rather than wear a shirt, he had at least settled on a cream turtleneck.

Yoongi wondered if the other man would ever dress casually in his presence, but the answer was likely: no. Seokjin was very professional, after all. He tried to imagine Hoseok wearing a suit for anything other than a funeral and yet the mental image wouldn’t come to him. He once again felt under-dressed in his black silk shirt and fitted trousers, the sleeves rolled up to combat the current heat.

“You get the blow?” Yoongi asked, the best greeting that he could currently muster right now.

“Yes, Yoongi,” Seokjin replied, as he moved to open the door for him. “Ryu brought it to me at
roughly 6:00am, and so I supplied it to Kim at 8:30.”

Yoongi climbed inside the passenger-seat, and Seokjin slammed the door shut before moving around the front of the car. He climbed in behind the wheel and he dragged his seatbelt across his ribs to secure himself into his seat.

“I instructed him just like you told me to: 850 grams for sale, 50 grams for pushing. I also told him about the mule idea, and he assured me that he would contact him in advance and put some of the blow aside for him to run for us.”

“When’s the mule set to land?” Yoongi asked, fastening his own seatbelt in place.

“He’s set to return here on the evening of the 18th,” Seokjin explained, as he pushed the parking brake up and he proceeded to pull away from the curb. “He’ll be on his way to Hong Kong tomorrow evening, which will already be the 18th for him, of course.”

“Good, the sooner he gets back, the sooner we can make a profit on the stupid blow,” Yoongi muttered, as he cocked his arm on the window rest. “A delayed profit, but better than nothing.”

“Exactly, and if the mule can run most of the blow then we’re set to make an even bigger profit than Rhee would’ve brought in through that deal,” Seokjin stated with a quick glance over at him. “It almost makes the delay worth it.”

“What ‘bout the burnt deal, huh? Did we sort that shit out?”

“Not exactly, but I’m working on it,” Seokjin explained. “Our buyer in Thailand believes that they should get a cut on the new key as a result of the broken deal. I told them that they can shove the cut price up their ass. We aren’t smuggling fucking keys for cut prices.”

“Attaboy,” Yoongi remarked, as he reached over to squeeze his shoulder.

“I expect at least 35,000 dollars minimum to make even on the next shipment, nothing less,” Seokjin continued. “If they won’t accept that then the next key that goes to Thailand goes to another buyer. And there will be more buyers, there always is.”
On the remainder of the ride across the neighbourhood, Yoongi stopped asking questions and he let the car fall silent instead. It didn’t take that long at all to get from his home to Hoseok’s mansion, nothing more than a couple of streets between the two buildings. The radio was playing lowly from the speakers, no music currently on the wave but rather a DJ discussing various news items with call-in guests. Yoongi found the particular topic of building renovations completely brain-numbing, and so he found himself not even listening to the various voices coming from the speakers. It wasn’t like there were more important topics to be discussing, of course, no…not at all.

Eventually, the car was pulling up into the driveway outside of Hoseok’s mansion, and so he removed his seatbelt and he popped the door open. The pair of them crossed the front path to get to the door rather than enter through the back this morning.

A maid ended up opening the door as opposed to Hoseok, a woman that Yoongi knew was called Woori because she had been working for the Jung clan since he and his friend had been children. But, despite this fact, she spoke next to no English, and so when she opened the door, she just dropped her head respectfully and welcomed them inside in Korean instead.

When Yoongi stepped inside of the mansion, his ears detected the sound of the other man talking. As he stepped out of his sandals, he saw that Hoseok was seated at the kitchen counter. His phone was also stretched across the room, pulled taut so that he could use it. His friend was currently wearing a white polo shirt (presumably paired with white trousers, though he couldn’t see his legs currently), and there was a soft pink pullover shrugged over his shoulders, knotted around his chest so that the arms dangled down like cashmere snakes. Despite being indoors, he had his sunglasses on the top of his head, just like usual.

Woori closed the door shut behind them both and then she moved back across the sweeping ground-floor, getting to the kitchen to resume cooking brunch without a single word.

Yoongi decided to move and sit down at the table without speaking too, leaving the younger man to finish off whatever he was currently sorting out.

“…OK, OK, Denise,” Hoseok said, as he carried on scratching at his inner arm without rest, a sign that he was nervous and irritated. “OK but- listen, stop fucking talking! Shut the fuck up, Denise, and get rid of it! I don’t care what you think you can do, you can’t have it. Get rid of it or I’ll make sure that Lim does…with a baseball bat.”

Hoseok slammed the phone receiver down into the cradle hard, the cream plastic banging together loudly.
Yoongi studied him for a moment before turning his attention back to the maid, who was in the act of setting the large dining table with plates and glasses from a serving tray. He watched her placing down a jug of orange juice and then she moved back to the stove, which was still hissing and sizzling away.

Hoseok groaned loudly and then he cupped his head in his hands, his fingers sinking into his black hair.

Yoongi could sense that Seokjin was eyeing him out of the edge of his periphery, and he wondered if this was the first time that he had seen the other man actually working.

“Anything I should know ‘bout?” Yoongi asked, as he folded his hands on the table and he cocked his head.

“Oh, just the usual,” Hoseok replied with a forced and hollow smile. It twitched at the corners slightly, his habitual nervous tic when he was sobered up. “Just the usual coke-addicted bitches telling me that they’re gonna become mothers and that they want out. You know, the kind of shit that I have men to sort out but it seems that none of my fucking men can do anything - so!” He threw his hands up dramatically and then he moved to get off his seat. “Here I am.”

“If they don’t start working, introduce a higher tax,” Yoongi remarked. “Pretty soon the bastards’ll start earning their pittance the right way.”

Hoseok moved to fill up a flute with mimosa, not replying to this suggestion.

Woori was working away at the stove, hastily moving fried eggs, tomatoes, mushrooms and meat onto plates and then buttering toast with an efficiency that showed she had been working as a maid for a long time. As soon as she was done with this, she collected the plates and she placed them onto the tray, once again moving to put them down on the table in front of them. Both he and Seokjin had the same breakfast, save for the serving sizes being different, but despite the impressive spread Yoongi still thought that the food in Mickey’s Joint looked (and likely tasted) better.

“You’re going to get fat,” Hoseok remarked, eyeing their plates.

His own brunch serving consisted of a single quail egg, poached not boiled, and a sweet jam-covered croissant along with his obvious morning drink of choice: a mimosa.
“I don’t see the problem with that,” Seokjin retorted, as he collected his cutlery. This made Hoseok snort under his breath as the other man started cutting his food up into portions. “I would rather get fat and enjoy life than stay thin and frugal.”

“Woori, leave,” Hoseok ordered in Korean, speaking bluntly and without a care for the older woman.

“I should clean the kitchen first, yes, Master Jung? I think that-”

“Just leave, woman!” he snapped, reaching up to rub at his temples in a sign of vexation.

Hoseok had pulled his lips down at the corners severely, a sure-kill sign that he was incredibly frustrated today.

“Hold on,” Yoongi spoke up, jumping into the conversation without invitation. “Woori, clean the kitchen. Ignore him, he’s acting like a baby again.”

“A baby?” Hoseok exclaimed in English. “Oh, Gigi, when I’m pissed off you really shouldn’t try and make it worse.”

“She don’t speak English, so, it don’t matter what she hears,” he explained, as he collected his own cutlery and he stared at his friend.

Hoseok still seemed to be irritated and his interruption had likely made him even more annoyed, but Yoongi didn’t really care. Let the younger man glower at his flute of champagne cocktail. It wasn’t like he was going to clean the kitchen up after all, because that was far too common for him.

“Woori, the kitchen.”

“Yes, Prince Min,” Woori said, before crossing the floor to get to the kitchen. She proceeded to start filling up the massive sink to clean the various pans and spatulas, her back to them and once again silent.

“Where’s Cleo? Where’s my black queen?” Hoseok asked suddenly, as he lowered his flute, his eyes
growing in size as he glanced across the floor. It seemed that he had yet to take his morning dosage of Valium right now, judging from his rather unsettled presence and temperament. “Cleopatra, I swear to god I- ah, there you are.”

Hoseok put the flute down on the kitchen counter and he moved to hunker down for a second, disappearing from view. When he straightened up again, Yoongi could see that he had his cat hugged against his chest, one hand holding her snug so that he could collect his glass again and move to sit with them at the table.

Cleopatra was a black Turkish Van, a cat with a pointed head with high-set sharp ears and a svelte frame. Her tail was a long and thick plume, which Yoongi knew personally to feel like silk against the skin, and she had round and large yellow eyes. Truth be told, Cleopatra was a supermodel of a cat, gave quite a lot of Hoseok’s darlings a run for their money.

“Oh, Cleo, daddy’s head is going to explode,” Hoseok declared, as he stroked her chin and made her purr loudly. Had Yoongi not known him well enough by now, he would have thought that he did so dramatically, but he knew that Hoseok was being serious; completely serious. “Daddy needs his happy pills or his head is going to go boom because he’s sick and tired of whining bitches and fucking useless pimps.”

“Happy pills?” Yoongi repeated with a languid eyebrow lift.

“That’s what I’m currently calling them,” Hoseok stated, as he looked up from his cat to hold his gaze. “They’re like a ray of sunshine.”

“And where are these ‘happy pills’?”

“Everywhere, I have bottles everywhere, but the closest bottle is in the kitchen,” he explained. “In a drawer, right beside the champagne rack.”

At this, Seokjin got out of his seat, clearly not needing to be told to collect them because he already knew.

Yoongi watched him doing so, cutting into his eggs without much care for the food right now.

After locating the bottle, Seokjin opened it and tipped it, spilling some free into his palm before
putting the bottle away again. He placed the two pills down beside the champagne flute for Hoseok, the white circle pills with the heart-shaped missing centre.

Hoseok collected them and he tossed them into his mouth, dry swallowing and then taking a quick sip of mimosa to chase the pills. With the slight splash of champagne, the Valium would start kicking in much quicker, would be much stronger on his system. There, at least he would relax now.

“You know, I didn’t ask you the last time that you were here,” Hoseok said suddenly, as Seokjin moved to sit down again. “But how’s pops, hmm?”

‘Pops’ seemed to be Hoseok’s title of choice for his father, a title Yoongi was still trying to figure out the intent behind.

Was it ironic that he called the current figurehead of Moon Tiger Mob, a king that was currently running a crime syndicate racking up figures in the millions, by such a friendly and rather Americanised term of endearment? Was it actually supposed to be a term of endearment with no jokes attached? Yoongi knew that his father was rather fond of Hoseok after all, and why wouldn’t he be? The Jung clan were very important to the gang, were practically family to a degree of familiarity because Hoseok’s father was their first leftenant.

But Yoongi wouldn’t dare call his father something as friendly as ‘Pops’ to his face.

“Constantly pissed off, constantly drinking and constantly playing golf,” he replied without a hint of hesitation, and this made Hoseok laugh as he reached down to stroke Cleopatra’s head again. “Nothing’s changed much since you last saw him, ‘cept maybe his weight.”

Hoseok’s demeanour changed so much over the following minutes that it was rather fascinating to observe. Gone was the nervous tic at the side of his mouth, replaced instead by a mellow lift at the corners of his lips as the drugs kicked in and started calming him down. His friend slowly sipped at his mimosa and ate his brunch, Cleopatra’s nose twitching away at the scent of the egg. Eventually, she jumped down from his lap to instead come over to Yoongi, pouncing up elegantly to sit on his thighs and staring up at him with those rounded eyes of hers.

Yoongi knew that he shouldn’t feed her, but he ended up sneaking her a chunk of sausage anyway, watching her gnawing at it for a moment before she swallowed the chunk whole and licked at her furry lips eagerly.
Uh-oh, it seemed like he had made a grand mistake.

“Seokjin told me that you had info,” Yoongi said, as he offered another chunk to Cleopatra, his own brunch completely forgotten about right now. “Potential info on the Sacramento Snow situation?”

“Yes, I do,” Hoseok replied, in the act of filling his glass up with straight orange juice this time. “It turns out that the den over in Nob Hill isn’t the only den that was supplying the branded speedball, it was just the most well-known one among my darlings because of the name. A certain darling, however, told me that she and a couple of others had been getting hits from three dens all over the city: Chinatown, Mission and Bernal Heights. That’s a lot of ground to cover, and I know for a fact that Choi didn’t own any brown dens in Mission or Bernal Heights. That’s too far south for him. He was just Nob Hill and Chinatown. So, who does, hmm?”

At this question, both he and Yoongi turned their heads to look at Seokjin. The older man was in the act of chewing a mouthful of food and when he was finished, he put his cutlery down and he wiped at his mouth with a napkin hastily, preparing to speak.

On his lap, Yoongi could feel Cleopatra kneading away, demanding more sausage from him or possibly strokes, and so he reached down to place his hand on her back and lightly stroked at her whilst he waited for Seokjin to speak.

“Bernal Heights is easier for me to narrow down because there aren’t many brown dealers there at all, more blow for sure considering the popularity. But Mission’s got quite the amount of dealers, you would have to be more specific,” Seokjin explained, as he collected his own mimosa and he hovered it in front of his face. “Do you have the specifics?”

Hoseok was quick to reply, “I can give you specifics for both. Bernal Heights is Nevada Street, not hard to find because it’s only a short drive with half a dozen buildings on it. In Mission, it’s on the corner of 19th Street, going onto Harrison Street. That one’s in a small apartment block, if that helps.”

Seokjin thought these facts over for a moment, not moving to sip at his drink because he was so busy concentrating.

Yoongi glanced down at Cleopatra to see that she was looking up at him with half-lidded eyes, happily rumbling away. Some days, upon finding the cat curled up on his lap, he found himself incredibly tempted to smuggle her out of the mansion, but he never gave into the temptation. He could always buy his own cat, but that didn’t seem to hold the same appeal. Another cat wouldn’t be Cleopatra, which defeated the entire purpose.
“Bernal Heights is Dukwon Lee,” Seokjin explained after a quick swallow of mimosa. “He resides in Glen Park, but right on the border between the districts. As for Mission, I believe that that must be Seungho Kwon. He resides in SoMa, but he could have dealings in Mission. I don’t know any other heroin dealers that could own dens in that area save for him, the others are all street, club and bar dealers. Only he has the credentials to run a den from what I know of him. Both districts are out of my jurisdiction, however, so I don’t have much control there.”

“We’ve had trouble with Lee before…” Yoongi remarked, as he moved his hand to Cleopatra’s ear and started scratching it.

“Yes, we have,” Seokjin confirmed with a nod, grabbing his cutlery up from the plate again. “There was an arrest made at one of his nightclubs just three months ago as a result of a drunken fight spiralling out onto the streets and causing mayhem. It was shut down shortly afterwards, and as a result profits were lost. There was also an incident with delayed payments, but upon being threatened, Lee amazingly produced the requested amount with no trouble.”

“Seungho Kwon…don’t he supply drugs to a brothel in SoMa?” Yoongi asked, as he looked up from the cat and glanced between the two other men.

“He does,” Hoseok explained with a nod. “He gets quite an amount for it, supplies blow and MDMA for the women to get them excited and wet, and benzos for the men to knock them out and turn them into sex dolls.”

“He done any shit, huh? Anything to get on our bad side already?”

“Not that I can recall right now,” Seokjin replied with a soft head shake. “Did your darling give any more information in regards to that den, Hoseok? Could it be related to a brothel?”

“Seokjin, most heroin dens double up as fucking brothels when someone’s itching for a hit, but she didn’t specify. That said, the block was multistorey and could easily contain both a den and a brothel on the different floors. But that’s risky, it brings in too many people to not attract attention.” Hoseok shifted to lounge back in his seat with a soft sigh. “This is too much thinking for me right now, I could be in my pool instead…”

“Yoongi?”
Yoongi turned his head to look at Seokjin, noting that he had stopped eating his breakfast. That was a clear sign that he was distracted with something else, something far more important. So he made a noise to tell him to speak, his curiosity piqued.

“If there’s branded speedball coming from four dens owned by three men, then you know what that means. Right?”

“It means that Choi wasn’t the creator of Sacramento Snow, just a supplier,” Yoongi replied without a hint of hesitation. “Which also means that someone else’s running the show. It looks like we’ve got a snake supplier in the grass feeding speedball to dealers.”

“I don’t know suppliers well enough out of my jurisdiction to be of too much assistance,” Seokjin stated, before he turned back to his food. “I only know who I supply personally, and whoever pisses us off. But your father would know.”

“Yeah,” Yoongi agreed, as he looked back down at Cleopatra and he cupped her head in his hands, feeling her soft and warm fur against his palms. “He would know…”

18th August, 1984, 3:00pm: Kowloon City, Kowloon, Hong Kong

From his current view on the roof of the apartment block, Jimin could see quite a decent amount of the neighbourhood.

The main focus of his view was the other buildings all around him, from brick and concrete to metal and glass. The buildings in this city at least looked to have more consistency than Seoul, which was an eclectic mixture of architecture that seemed to have no planning at all. Quite a lot of these buildings were covered in signs, in both Chinese characters and English. Some of these signs were brightly painted metal and some were tubes of neon-lighting, but in the current daytime hours they weren’t glowing. At night, they would likely be amazing to look at, a myriad of fluorescent glowing characters, but sadly Jimin had never seen this area at night before.

No, Jimin usually ended up in Hong Kong during the day instead of the night, which was somewhat
disappointing. He so greatly wanted to see the nighttime views that Kowloon City had to offer him, maybe even sample a hint of it in bars and market stalls with Taehyung. The temptation to request that they arrive in the country a day earlier rather than stay in Seoul was so great that Jimin knew that he would give into it one day. He just knew that it would be so much better than Seoul’s current offerings, on account of the fact the city was still on edge in the wake of political unrest. That kind of tension really ruined the fun, and it could be plenty of fun; especially with Taehyung included.

Jimin didn’t know that much about Taehyung, just that his family came from Daegu and he worked in the same gang as him all the way across the Pacific Ocean. He knew that the younger man was heavily involved in student protests and that he seemed to have a great love of ‘Yankee’ things. After getting him loose in some dive bar, he might just learn a couple of other things about him too, like how much booze that he could really handle and if he was into casual sex with other men. The answer was likely: no, but that wasn’t going to stop Jimin from hoping. It wasn’t everyday that he found a guy as attractive as him back in San Francisco, which was terribly depressing. Not unless he had a thing for moustaches and lumberjack shirts, which Jimin most certainly didn’t.

Because the apartment block was only ten storeys, he wasn’t able to look down at streets thinner than his fingers on which toy cars and tiny ant people traversed. No, if he were to get off his deck chair and look over the roof wall, Jimin would see a drop that was rather small. The people wouldn’t look like ants, more like dolls instead. He even got up to do so, a beer bottle held loosely between his fingers as he folded his arms on the brick wall and he looked down.

Jimin saw the packed street down below him, just like he had assumed, along with the usual tramlines like back in San Francisco. Cars of varying models that he didn’t recognise and a bus or two rumbled on down the narrow road, and he saw that some of the apartment windows were open. From somewhere inside of the building, he could hear music playing: loud music bleeding through one of those open windows to float up and hit them both. It was most certainly more livelier than the music that he had heard on the radios in Seoul, but it bordered on rather manic in pitch.

Jimin didn’t really know what the block was used for. He had been here so many times in the past and yet he was clueless. He knew that there was a small room that he and Taehyung used to store their travel bags and to also prep him with heroin in, but beyond that he was uncertain. The other possible inhabitants could be normal people, poor people currently renting in Moon Tiger Mob owned property - one of many small real estate ventures that the gang owned in the country. They could be working for the gang in some way.

All that Jimin knew was that whenever he was inside of the block, he would hear noises coming from behind doors and along hallways: televisions and radios, voices. That let him know that the block wasn’t empty at least, and he moved to sit back down on the deck chair with a weary sigh.

What Jimin wanted right now was to sleep. It didn’t matter that he had actually gotten quite a lot of sleep this morning because they had left for Gimpo airport just after 10am, because no amount of
sleep was going to help him adjust to the sudden change. It would take him at least a week to adjust to the new timezone and yet he didn’t have a week. He had had just a couple of days, and he was already set to leave again this evening.

The flight from Seoul to Kowloon City had taken three hours, a breeze in comparison to what he had underwent to get to Seoul in the first place. Including the waiting time to board and get screened, both he and Taehyung had spent just over four hours in airports and in the actual air, but now they were currently grounded. Or at least they were until 6pm, that was. That was when he was due to board the plane back to San Francisco. Said flight was going to stretch for just over twelve hours without a stop, give or take another hour or so of waiting and screening time. Yes, the flight was even longer and more horrible than the one to get to Seoul and, quite frankly, Jimin was not looking forward to it.

At least he could sleep on it.

Jemin sighed as he lifted his bottle of beer to his lips, taking a slight sip. Truthfully, he didn’t like the flavour at all, and so he had been nursing the Tsingtao beer for quite some time now. But it was hard to enjoy anything currently, considering the fact that he had a raging headache that wouldn’t leave him alone. It had started when he had woken up on the 16th, hungover and sick to his stomach, and it had yet to leave him now on the 18th. Coupled with the fact he had had to purge himself with laxatives yesterday evening, it was no wonder that his body was currently hurting so much. It was trying to tell him something and that something was this: stop drinking and purging, you stupid asshole.

Yet, here he was, drinking anyway, completely ignoring his aching body in his boredom. Jimin probably shouldn’t be drinking at all right now, but Taehyung had offered him the beer and he had given into the temptation. Empty system or not, a single beer wasn’t going to get him close to drunk. Therefore, he felt that he had deserved this bottle, even if he didn’t like the taste that much.

Jemin swallowed the grainy mixture as he turned his head to look at his partner.

Taehyung was currently stretched out on the other deck chair, his checkered shirt open and his bare feet lightly bobbing away as he lounged out in the current sun. There were five empty bottles lining the side of his chair, showcasing that he had almost single-handedly blitzed through a six-pack. He was currently humming to some piece of music that was drifting up through the floor of the apartment block, and as Jimin studied him, he proceeded to try and sing along by making all kinds of strange noises that he was certain wasn’t actual Cantonese. He had just started getting into the song when he noticed him staring and he froze almost comically.

“Huh?”
“That’s terrible,” Jimin remarked with a wry smile. “You sounded terrible, Taehyung.”

“Well, I ain’t a singer,” his partner retorted, as he lifted his beer bottle and he took another deep swig. “You think you can do better?”

Jimin just shrugged at the question, and Taehyung lowered his bottle again with a deep groan.

“Fuck, it’s too hot. I’m hot and I’m hungry.”

“Join the club,” Jimin muttered, trying to not think about the hollow space currently under his ribs and his aching stomach. Thinking about it made it hurt more, and so he had learnt to ignore the hollowness on most days.

“Jiminie, how many burgers d’you think a man can eat without dyin’?” Taehyung suddenly asked, hovering the bottle in front of his mouth but not taking a sip.

“I think you’re halfway there already,” he stated, causing his partner to snort loudly. “Don’t laugh, you’ve had two already and we’ve been here for like an hour. God help you if Seoul ever gets a fucking Burger King.”

“You think we’ll see a plane today, huh?” Taehyung asked, cracking one eyelid open to look at him.

“Doubt it,” Jimin replied, as he turned back to look across the roof and he squinted from the sunlight reflecting off one of the tall buildings.

It wasn’t at all surprising to see planes soaring above them whilst in Kowloon City, always close enough so that it was almost as if they were going to crash; but luckily they never did. In this current district, to lessen such chances, there was a strict height allowance for buildings to adhere to. Jimin found it very peculiar that a runway would be built so close to such hazards, but having seen quite a decent amount of the city, it wasn’t that surprising. There was an overwhelming sense of franticness to how packed that the streets could get at times, and therefore it just seemed to fit. The sky needed to be as chaotic as the ground to balance it out.

Jimin had seen other sections of the city that were away from Kai Tak Airport that contained taller
buildings, but the hub of the city had a block on anything taller than fourteen storeys. Even the infamous Kowloon Walled City wasn’t allowed to grow any taller. Though skyscrapers were rather new to most of San Francisco as a result of renovations, Jimin had seen so many towering buildings that he was used to the constant sight. It was somewhat strange not seeing them all around him right now, and it made Kowloon City seem quite small, when in reality it was packed with people and business. Quite possibly one of the most packed cities that he had ever been in, in fact.

Jimin was in the act of lifting his bottle to take another deep sip when a plane actually soared across the skies above them. The roaring sound of the engine made him wince, his shoulders shooting up as his fingers tightened around the glass neck. His reaction made Taehyung burst out laughing, slapping his hand on his thigh hard as he guffawed heartily. Jimin squinted and he followed the plane across the sky for a moment, the shadow of it falling across them and casting them into temporary night until it passed and the heavy sunlight returned. His ears rang tinnily for a moment from the noise that it had made, and he wondered how the people living here could stand it.

“You got your wish,” Jimin remarked, as he took a quick sip and he put the bottle down on the floor.

Taehyung hummed in agreement and then he shifted to try and sit upright, struggling for a moment because of the awkward angle. As soon as he was upright, he got off the chair and he wandered over to the wall, folding his arms on it and staring off across the block.

“What’re you looking at?”

“Can barely fuckin’ see Kowloon Walled City from here,” Taehyung replied, as he twisted to look back at him. For once, he wasn’t wearing that stupid headscarf knotted around his head, had instead left his hair hanging free so that most of it covered his face in a way that he disliked.

Jimin climbed off his deck chair to move over to where he was standing, his bare feet also padding on the sun-baked concrete roof slabs. He had to get up on tiptoe to see as well as Taehyung could, his arms folded on the gritty brick wall.

“See? Can just see the perimeter.”

Jimin could see the very far end of Kowloon Walled City from their current location on the roof, a rather decrepit-looking block of steel and concrete. The rest of the vast stretch was hidden behind other buildings on the horizon, but he had seen it quite a few times whilst here in the country. There were really no words that could describe the sight of it at all, for none that Jimin knew could come close.
'Majestic' was one word that came to mind.

Closely followed by ‘nightmarish’.

Kowloon Walled City was a massive block of buildings all built on top of one another and crushed together on a single plot of land. He had never been inside of the enclave before, but he had heard that there were walkways connecting things together and that the houses inside were nothing more than hotel rooms in size. Apparently, there were schools inside of that block of metal, though he found that hard to believe. He knew for a fact that there were dentists and doctors inside of it because there were quite a few on the very borders, visible from the outside even though they were borderline illegal practices. The thing that struck Jimin the hardest about the settlement, however, was that he had been told that it was rare to even be able to see the sky overhead because of all of the walkways and hanging lines of clothing and cables. He couldn’t imagine living in a cage of cold steel and concrete like that, it would drive him mad.

Looking at it eerily reminded Jimin of that sci-fi film that he had went to see with Namjoon a couple of years back: *Blade Runner*. Granted, they had both been stoned out of their brains at the time, and so his memories of that film were somewhat foggy; a blurred mess of colourful lights, weird floating car things and tall buildings that seemed to pierce the very sky. He couldn’t remember the rest of the film, just all of those glowing neon lights and metallic monstrous skyscrapers. That was what looking at Kowloon Walled City reminded him of, a broken down and decrepit version of that imaginary city.

“Why’d you wanna see it so bad, huh?” Jimin asked, as he turned his head to look at him. “It’s just a chunk of metal, Taehyung.”

“We better enjoy the sight whilst we can, Jiminnie,” Taehyung remarked. “I heard that it’s goin’.”

“Going?” he repeated in confusion. “What’d you mean by going?”

“Kowloon Walled City’s gonna get demolished, or that’s what I heard guys here sayin’,” Taehyung explained. “Apparently, Britain and China want it gone, can you believe that? There’s like…what, 30,000 people inside that fuckin’ kingdom and they want ‘em to just go.”

“Why?”
“Uh, quite a few reasons, I guess?” his partner suggested with a shrug. “Mostly, it’s ‘cos the Triad own most of it and operate there, but there’s all kinds of shit goin’ on. Don’t trust any government, Jiminie.”

This made Jimin snort under his breath in amusement, once again finding Taehyung’s dislike of authority both cute and appealing.

“I think those people deserve that land, they built it up from nothin’, so, they earned that right.”

“What Triad owns it?” Jimin asked curiously, turning back to stare at the chunk of metal with interest.

Okay, so maybe he could see the appeal in looking at it right now, now that his partner had told him about all of this. Suddenly, the nightmarish enclave was somewhat more fascinating than he had originally thought.

“14K and Sun Yee On,” Taehyung replied without hesitation. “Y’know who we get our heroin from, right?”

 “…14K,” Jimin said after a moment of thought.

“Yeah, so, try to not piss any Sun Yee On boys off or they’ll kill you,” his partner retorted.

Hopefully, he was telling a joke, but Jimin had no true way of knowing. When he glanced back at him, he saw that Taehyung was squinting at the enclave in the harsh sunlight.

“Imagine what it’d be like if there was somethin’ like that back in Seoul, huh? How weird would that be?”

“Pretty weird,” Jimin agreed with a soft nod. “I can’t imagine such a thing existing in America.”

“You like your freedom a bit too much…”
“No, Taehyung, we really don’t,” Jimin retorted with a laugh. “That’s the problem, really. Do you think that Kowloon Walled City’s kinda like a prison or…or do you think that we just see it like that because we’re made to see it like that? That it might actually not be that different at all inside?”

“…Dunno,” Taehyung replied with a shrug. “Sometimes, I think it must be like a prison in there, but then sometimes I think it’s more free than anythin’ outside its walls. All the walls are are city borders really, they ain’t nothin’ that we don’t have. You get me?”

“Yeah, I get you,” he agreed, as he reached over to pat his back. “I get you, brother.”

“Hey…hey, Jiminie?” Taehyung said in a quiet voice.

Jemin lifted his eyebrows curiously at this, and after a few seconds, his partner dragged his eyes away from the city to look at him.

“You wanna go there, huh? You wanna go and, uh, I dunno, take some photos?”

The question caught him by complete surprise, and Jimin could only stare at him rather dumbly for a minute as his words sank in.

Taehyung wanted to go and visit Kowloon Walled City? Right now, when they were due a visit from a dealer in preparation for the heroin deal in a couple of hours? He was so taken aback that he didn’t really know how to react to this suggestion, but he started to find himself liking it. Yes, he liked the idea lot in fact. It didn’t matter that he was starving and his head hurt, that Taehyung was pretty drunk right now and the heat was overwhelming. It didn’t matter that Jimin felt like shit and he just wanted to go home. What mattered was that his partner had just suggested something fantastic and he actually wanted to do it. If he was telling the truth about the rumours that he had heard, then they might not have much longer to try and visit the city, after all.

“Fucking-a, I do,” Jimin declared in English, as he held his fist out to him.

Taehyung returned the solid, having learnt that particular action shortly after they had first been introduced; banging their fists together hard.

“Fuckin’-a!” Taehyung repeated, something that he was no doubt also going to store away for future reference. There was a wide grin on his face as he did so, signalling that he was very pleased.
by the fact that he had agreed to go with him.

After collecting their shoes and buttoning up their shirts to look more presentable, they both went down into the apartment room to collect Taehyung’s camera. Then they left the block and they jumped a tram to draw across the city to get closer to the enclave.

Taehyung’s Polaroid SLR 680 camera was probably a little outdated considering what was available back in America, but it served its purpose. Sure, it was a little clunky, the large square of black plastic with the slot in the front and the overhanging top to cut down any glare on the lens. Clunky was better than nothing, however. There was a rainbow stripe down the front, the trademark logo of the company.

Jimin turned the camera over in his hands curiously, aware of the fact that a few people on the tram were staring at them because they were speaking Korean to one another.

“Hang on, hang on,” Taehyung muttered, as he grabbed the device out of his hands and he proceeded to turn it around to point it at them both.

Jimin could see a tiny mirror on the front around the lens, could see their reflections in it. But before he realised what he was doing, his partner depressed the button and he took a photograph of them both. The shutter clicked loudly and caught him by surprise, made him jump on the under-stuffed seat.

“Taehyung!”

Taehyung rumbled laughter as he shook the piece of film, letting it develop.

Jimin thought that they would both likely look stupid on it, but when Taehyung showed him it, he found it didn’t look that bad actually. Sure, he wasn’t smiling in the snapshot, but he thought that that might actually be a good look for him because at least then his eyes didn’t disappear into crinkles at the corners. Taehyung’s cheeks looked a little flushed from the beer, but he was winking on the photograph and so he thought that it was fitting.

Jimin snatched the photograph out of his fingers and he shoved it into the breast pocket of his shirt; this one black with white pinstripe details around the short sleeve cuffs and pockets, with a matching white open collar.
“You lil thief,” Taehyung muttered, as he punched his arm hard, hard enough to almost hurt. “I’ll get another one, trust me.”

“I’d like to see you try,” Jimin retorted, as he pulled the camera out of his fingers and he placed it back down on his lap with a smug smile.

Upon drawing closer to Kowloon Walled City, they jumped off the tram and they had to walk down several streets to get to the perimeter. Jimin knew that there were slums built around some of the city’s outer walls, but they ended up in a rather nice area with proper paved streets and businesses on it instead of the dirty and unpleasant slums. He found his eyes running over the wall of metal and glass, and he wondered how they could even get inside because he couldn’t figure out how. In the end, he had to settle on asking the other man because he was so confused.

“The fuck do you even get inside, Taehyung?” Jimin asked, as ran his eyes along the outer perimeter of the stretch of buildings, seeing many signs that he couldn’t possibly read. “Can you get inside?”

“Course you can, Jiminie, don’t be so stupid,” Taehyung retorted, reaching over to grab hold of his lower arm and tugging him along the length of the street. “You gotta get in through the south gate, through the market-area. C’mon, we ain’t got long, so, hurry up.”

“Today, we can just wander the lower levels and next time…next time, we’ll come here a day earlier; yeah?” Jimin suggested, as he guided him down the street and presumably in the direction of the entrance. “That way, we can really spend some time here, can really look around.”

“I like that idea,” Taehyung replied, sparing a quick glance over his shoulder at him before turning back to the dirt road in front of them. “Shit, imagine the kinda things you could find in here.”

It took them several minutes of walking to locate an entrance to get inside of Kowloon Walled City, a narrow alleyway rather than the actual gate entrance. It was so narrow that Jimin felt rather uncomfortable at the thought of going down it, but he had little choice seeing as Taehyung pulled him through. There were a lot of wires running to and from the buildings, and he found his eyes drawn up to them as he was guided along the alleyway to get inside the city.

They had gotten perhaps halfway down the length of it when Jimin felt water dripping down to hit them, freezing cold water that he prayed was coming from a water pipe and not a sanitation system. Judging from the fact that the ground was wet under their shoes, it was the former, because he could both feel water under their soles and hear it dripping down all around them. It got so dark so fast that Jimin was stunned by this fact, and he ended up reaching forward to grab hold of the back of Taehyung’s shirt tightly.
“Whoa, hey, you just gave me a fuckin’ heart attack,” Taehyung called back down the alleyway, and though Jimin tried to laugh in reply, he found it rather hard to do so in his discomfort.

Jimin just wanted to be out of this alleyway now, because he didn’t like it at all. It was too dark, dank and narrow and he hated it. But sadly, he was to find that the lower levels of Kowloon Walled City were more-or-less entirely narrow alleyways much like the one that they had entered through. It was enough to make him almost grimace as Taehyung carried on guiding him around the enclave.

The scent on the air was very unpleasant to his nose and he almost wanted to hold his breath, but it would be useless. It wouldn’t help him get used to the fetid stench. Why did it smell so bad inside here? He assumed that it was because of a lack of a regular rubbish removal service, combined with no street cleaning services, or at least that was what he was hoping it was.

“Y’know what I heard?” Taehyung said suddenly, as they passed a street filled with soggy rubbish. “I heard most trash goes up on the roofs, along with the dead bodies.”

“Taehyung,” Jimin almost whined. “Fuck off, they don’t do that; don’t even joke about that.”

“Then where’d they put the dead bodies, huh?”

Jimin had no answer in reply to this and he found his eyes drawn to the slight gaps between the alleyways now, paranoid that he might just catch sight of a hand hidden away under bags of rubbish, or the quick gleam of empty eyes reflecting neon lights in the darkness. His ears did detect rats squeaking away, and that made him just as uncomfortable as the thought of corpses being left on the roofs.

“I know you said to check the lower levels, but how about we go up one or two, yeah?” Taehyung suggested, as he glanced back over his shoulder at him.

The thought of getting away from both the rats and water-covered ground was enough to make him nod in agreement. Jimin allowed Taehyung to drag him up a rickety metal staircase to get onto one of the dozens of metal walkways that ran along the towers around them.

There was a rather interesting-looking building with many glowing neon signs not too far from the top of the staircase, casting red glow all over the surrounding area and finally illuminating the darkness of the city. There were windows on the building, but they were frosted and tacked over
with posters, not allowing them to look inside. But the red glow, coupled with the windows and faded posters of beautiful women stuck over them, made him pretty certain that it was a brothel. Taehyung just had to decide that he wanted to take a photograph with the signs.

“What’d you Yankees say, huh?” Taehyung asked, as he proceeded to pose by lifting his hand up to his face with his index and middle finger scissored.

“Cheese?”

“Cheese!” the younger man declared, giving him a drunken and beaming smile.

Jimin held the camera steady and he depressed the button, the shutter making a loud and crisp sound as the piece of film shot out of the slot. He pulled it free and he proceeded to shake it hard a few times.

“We say ‘kimchi!’ instead.”

“Kimchi? Why’d you say kimchi, huh?”

“Kim-chi,” Taehyung repeated with emphasis, his lips lifting up to flash his teeth in a perfect smile. “Why’d you say cheese?”

Considering the way that Taehyung pronounced the word, Jimin wasn’t surprised that he found it confusing.

Taehyung moved to get closer to him, glancing at the snapshot curiously, and so he held it up to show him it and let him check it out.

“Like it?”

“Uhuh, you keep it,” Taehyung said instead of taking it out of his fingers. He grabbed the camera and he snapped another shot of the naked building, clearly just liking the glowing signs a lot. So Jimin slipped the piece of film into his shirt pocket for safekeeping, freeing up his hands. “Ain’t got a lot of film, so, we gotta find some good shit and fast.”
Good shit in Kowloon Walled City, it turned out, was rather hard to find. Most of the buildings that they passed on the walkways seemed to be homes, tiny homes that he couldn’t imagine living inside of. Down below them, they occasionally caught sight of dealers hanging around the narrow alleyways, presumably to peddle heroin. According to Taehyung, the poorer people inside here used that, whereas the richer ones used opium. That meant that there were also opium dens inside of the enclave along with heroin dens and brothels.

There seemed to be a lot of vice on offer in the city, but Jimin quickly realised that the exact same could be said for San Francisco; just that the vice back home was spread out nice and neatly rather than packed together like this. As they walked along the walkway, he found his eyes running along everything and anything, adjusting to the darkness inside after some time so that he could see much more clearly. Eventually, they stumbled upon a well-lit building that seemed to be a store of some kind.

The store in question sold various drinks and some snack foods mostly, in tins and boxes stacked on the shelves behind the till in a wonderfully organised and colourful fashion. But that wasn’t all that he could see, for his eyes fell upon a glass display case of cigarettes. Underneath the counter, he could also see boxes of needles. He didn’t need to ask that they were for, for the answer was rather obvious: heroin. They had already seen enough of it floating around the lower levels. He assumed that this store must make a nice amount of money from just drug addicts alone.

Jimin was so busy studying the needles that it took him a moment to realise that there was a woman standing behind the counter, looking at them both curiously because they were peering through the doorway.

Taehyung started talking to the store owner in somewhat fractured-sounding Cantonese, but it seemed to be good enough for the woman to understand him. She started talking back, being sure to gesture as she did, and after a moment, Taehyung stepped inside. She saw the camera and started laughing, reaching up to fluff at her bobbed hair and saying something that even Jimin could follow regardless of his lack of language skills. She was joking about how she needed to get ready before he could take a photograph of her, because she had to neaten up her hair and clothing.

Rather than step inside of the store fully, Jimin decided to wait in the doorway instead, because he was unable to do much more than look currently. He watched Taehyung taking a photograph of the woman and her store shelves, the film shooting out of the slot on the front, and a moment later, a little boy appeared from the open backroom door. He tottered over and proceeded to climb up and sit on the counter, staring at them both and his presumed mother with wide eyes and a slack mouth. The boy must have been all of four, with downy hair and a tee-shirt with a faded and cracked Transformers alien on the front.
Unsurprisingly, the boy caught Taehyung’s attention, for he turned around and he lifted the camera to take a photograph of him too. The shutter sound made him blink hard and he stared at the machine in confusion.

When it developed, Taehyung held the photograph out to the boy, gesturing between it and the child as he spoke. Jimin understood what he was trying to do - he was trying to tell the boy that that was him on the photograph. But the child seemed to have difficulty understanding him until his mother started explaining, talking much faster and smoother than Taehyung had been able to do so.

At this, the boy made a rather high-pitched squeaking sound, which Jimin laugh under his breath. The boy took the photograph from Taehyung and he got down off the counter to race into the backroom. He was screeching things at the top of his lungs, presumably to someone else in the store-cum-home.

They left the store a minute later, after Taehyung had amused another child with the camera by shooting a photograph of her so that she could race around the store excitedly too. Limited film or not, he didn’t seem to mind in the slightest, and when they left, Jimin saw that there was a smile on Taehyung’s face.

Using his partner’s watch, they figured out that they still had some time to wander and so they did so; on the lookout for other interesting things to get photographs of. Mostly, it seemed that only buildings with glowing signs could catch their attention, because anywhere too far from the signs was too dark to get photographs of. Taehyung ended up taking shots of the tall stretch of buildings, taking in the sight of the metal balconies and hanging clothing and potted plants; or interesting-looking graffiti that Jimin couldn’t read. There were buildings that looked like bars with posters for films plastered to shutters and countless signs everywhere, along with the obvious brothels and drug dens. His partner decided to not photograph these, maybe because he was worried that they might get caught by a Triad member, or maybe because he just didn’t find them as appealing as the first brothel.

They ended up having to go back down to the lower level to leave, once again taking a rickety metal staircase to get down to the ground. Taehyung found a nearby gathering of smoking women waiting around a dark alleyway interesting enough to document, women that Jimin assumed were prostitutes considering the fact they were lingering around the lower level much like the drug dealers. In the dim alleyway, there was little more than a hint of the overhead fluorescent lights casting off their faces and clothing, the tiny glowing ends of their cigarettes floating in the darkness.

On the walk to get back out of the city, Jimin found that this trip hadn’t sated his interest in the slightest. All that it had done was make him even more curious about the enclave, and he just knew that they both had to come back again in the future to see more of it. He needed to find more small stores with kids and smiling owners, needed to see what the homes were like and how people lived inside of this dark and rather enchanting little kingdom.
Just like earlier, Taehyung had to guide him down the narrow and dripping alleyway to get back out into Kowloon City. It was only as they started walking along it that Jimin realised that his nose was no longer filled with the foul stench of the rubbish-filled streets, but rather much cleaner air.

When they broke through and exited the alley, the sudden sunlight had Jimin crying out and squinting. He was so confused by the fact that it was still bright and daytime and not nighttime like he had started thinking that it was. He had to reach up and shield his eyes with his hand to try and block the rays, and he caught sight of Taehyung closing his eyes with a deep groan. It took them both a moment to adjust to the blinding sunlight, and then he was being pulled across the streets again to locate another tram for them to jump on and ride back to the apartment block.

Sitting on the seat beside Taehyung, Jimin felt different than he had just two hours earlier. His head was still pounding and his stomach was that same aching hollow under his ribs as before, but he felt like something had changed regardless of these facts. Entering Kowloon Walled City had changed his perspective on quite a few things, but he had yet to really figure out or understand what had changed. He just felt different in some way that he couldn’t put his finger on. He settled back on the seat with a weary sigh, brushing his slightly sweat-clumped hair back off his brow. Beside him, his partner reached inside of his shirt pocket to pull one of the photographs out: the one of the store owner smiling with her wares.

“It ain’t a prison at all,” Taehyung said in a quiet voice, as he studied the photograph.

Jimin could see a rather wistful expression on his face that he found himself strangely resonating with.

“That felt like a proper home to me…”

When they returned back to the apartment block, there was only a slight wait until the 14K heroin dealer showed up, knocking on the thin door in his familiar three-one-three pattern. Taehyung moved to unlock the door for him and allow him to step inside.

Just like always, it was a man called Chow, who they had been dealing with since Jimin had started working as a mule for Moon Tiger Mob. The older man entered and he proceeded to cross the room to place the briefcase down on the table, sweeping his hand over the smooth and flawless black leather as he did so. Jimin had to take control of this particular deal because Taehyung was unable to converse with the English-speaking Triad member that brought them their heroin, but his partner would make the phone calls to the gang back home on his behalf.
Unlike Namjoon and Taehyung, who were his partners and, in Jimin’s opinion, also his friends, he didn’t see Chow in such light. The other man was nothing more than a heroin and opium dealer, one that worked for another gang and supplied them with the merchandise that they needed for a much higher standardised charge than what it would cost them to produce it. He didn’t dislike the man, but he didn’t like him either, and therefore Jimin was always on edge in his presence. If there was one thing that he knew about 14K, it was that they liked violence, and he most certainly didn’t want to be on the receiving end of such violence.

Getting hacked up with meat cleavers was pretty low on his ways to go.

“Open it up, let me see the goods,” Jimin said, as he moved to get closer to the table.

“Ah, so eager,” Chow remarked, his accent closer to British than American when he spoke.

The man reached down to flick the clasps up and then he opened the briefcase, revealing the various goods inside. There was the half a key of heroin, of course, currently stored in a thick baggie wrapped up in clingfilm to display the contents clearly. There were smaller baggies and sealed condoms for it to be divided into, along with a set of scales, a roll of tape, gloves and lube. Their plane tickets were also inside, stored in an envelope that he moved to collect first.

“Check the weight, you will find it exact.”

Taehyung did so, setting up the scales beside the briefcase and then cutting the baggie open with his flick knife. The heroin poured out of the slash, the faintly brown tinged powder forming a small mountain in the metal bowl. After checking that it was exactly half a key, Taehyung started transferring it into the baggies for him so that they could get him prepared as quickly as possible.

Jimin checked the tickets just to be sure that the times were correct, and then he placed the envelope down on the table without another glance.

“Talk prices with me.”

“150,000 dollars, Hong Kong dollars,” Chow said, as he watched Taehyung portioning out the heroin.

At this, Jimin found something stirring at the back of his mind, and after a few seconds he realised
what it was. It was like a slap across the face as he dragged his eyes away from his partner to look at the other man.

“No, that’s not right,” Jimin said with a staunch head shake. “That’s 125,000 dollars - the exact same as last time.”

Chow had just slapped $25,000 on top of the usual transaction, meaning that he was aiming at them paying nearly $19,000 US dollars for the heroin instead of $15,000. The heroin that they were already paying $5,000 more for to export it over to America. Sure, they were going to sell it for a much higher fee back over there but that wasn’t the point. The point was that Jimin had witnessed the prices for heroin going up and up over the last few months, whilst they always kept their prices at a locked figure for the sake of business. How could 14K seriously get away with these constant increases?

“Inflation,” Chow replied with a wide smile that revealed too white and too straight teeth - a loan shark smile.

“No, bullshit,” Jimin retorted, as he folded his arms over his chest and he refused to back down. “Inflation is this same half a key costing 119,000 dollars five months ago, not going up 25,000 dollars since our deal last month.”

“If you don’t like it you can walk away,” Chow replied with a lackadaisical shrug, attempting to act like he didn’t care.

What it did was reveal the gun holster under his armpit, of course.

Jimin knew that most 14K members carried a weapon of some kind, but the dealers needed something much more threatening to keep both the police and addicts away from them. He had never witnessed a Moon Tiger Mob man carrying heat with his own eyes before, but he assumed that a lot of enforcers did. Dealers might own guns back in San Francisco for their own added safety, but he had never seen Namjoon with one, nor any of the street dealers that he had ran across. But 14K did have a lot of the country under its grip right now, along with Sun Yee On, and that meant that carrying guns was a lot more easier for them.

“So many other Americans will snap this up,” Chow continued. “We’d rather trade with you than them, but…if the price isn’t right…”
“The price is right!” Jimin argued. “Before I jumped a fucking plane here the price was 125,000, and I’m not being told that the transaction’s been altered since then because we’ve received no word from our guys back home!”

At his sudden shouting, Taehyung looked up sharply from the baggies, clearly wondering what was going on. His eyes were round with confusion and maybe worry, because he didn’t know what they were yelling about.

But Jimin wasn’t scared of the other man. Oh no, he was just pissed off at this point. He had a two day long headache, his body hurt, and he wasn’t going to stand here and let the dealer rip him off like this. $25,000 extra on top was downright extortion, and he just wasn’t going to accept it.

“125,000 dollars, or you really can walk out of here. But before you do, let me shove that suitcase up your goddamn ass, you thieving bastar-”

Before Jimin could finish this curse, Chow moved to pull his gun free from the holster, aiming to get him to shut up and stop yelling. He pointed the muzzle right at his forehead, the end looking very impressive and tunnel-like to his eyes.

“No one calls me a thief.”

“Hey, man, be cool,” Taehyung said, as he threw his hands up, speaking English in his usual thick but understandable accent. “No shoot, yeah, no shoot. Be cool.”

Jimin could sense that the sight of the weapon put his partner on edge, but it didn’t work on him. Not when he knew that the safety was still on and the man wouldn’t shoot him. He was just attempting to intimidate him, but it would take more than an uncocked handgun to scare him.

“What, you think I’m scared of guns?” Jimin said, before snorting laughter. “I live in America, man, guns are the least of my fucking worries; now, get that thing outta my face and listen to what I’m saying. Your supplier, he’s overcharging me and I’m not accepting this fucking deal. This isn’t your fault, I know how this shit works, but I’m not accepting this deal because it’s a ripoff. So, either you listen to me and we talk it out, or you get the fuck out of here and pedal that shit to the addicts lying in the gutters and then explain to your supplier why you burnt us on a good deal.”

“You American homos really know how to fuck a man, huh?” Chow remarked, before sighing heavily. “Tight as hell too.”
“It’s better when it’s tight,” Jimin retorted acerbically. “You Hong Kongese really suck at heckling for a price. Gotta pull a gun on me just for twenty-five thousand fucking dollars, honestly…”

The apartment room fell silent at this for a moment, and Jimin knew that he was going to have to break it. He was going to have to say something to the other man because Chow wasn’t going to speak first. He was obviously supposed to drop his head meekly and agree to the deal with a gun being shoved in his face like this, but Jimin wasn’t going to do that. He wasn’t going to let the other man bully him into agreeing to an extortionate deal because if he did then it would just keep happening over and over again until they were being bled dry of cash by 14K dealers. He was far too stubborn for that, and he also knew that any lost earnings would mean that he would suffer a cut payment. He had worked too hard to let that to happen.

“You guys get burnt on another deal or something?” Jimin asked, as he cocked his head and he studied him. “I understand, it happens, yeah. But you can’t charge 150,000 fucking dollars on this deal, man. That’s not fair on me. I’ll…I can try for 135,000 dollars, but that’s the best that I think I can offer. Don’t forget, I’m just a mule. I don’t get any of this money, but I get my ass beat if I piss my supplier off.”

“…Make a call, talk to your man and see what he says,” Chow said, as he slipped the gun back into the holster and then gestured at the telephone.

Jimin heard Taehyung sighing in relief at this, followed by the sound of him grabbing the landline phone to start making the call. He let his own breath out slowly, not wanting to blow his current tough-guy façade. How he had managed to argue his way out of that one was beyond him currently and his heart was racing in his chest. His partner proceeded to go through the several steps needed to make the international call and, as soon as it was done, he held the receiver out to him.

Jimin moved to accept it to allow him to carry on transferring the heroin, and after six long and slow dialling tones, Namjoon finally picked up.

“Is this Jimmy?”

“Yeah, Namo, it’s me,” Jimin explained, as he watched Taehyung working away. “I’m in Hong Kong right now, currently in the act of negotiating for the brown. I say negotiating because we’re in a spot of trouble right now.”

“Hit me; what’s going on right now?”
“The agreed and standard price for heroin, 15,000 dollars, has apparently been altered to 19,000 or so dollars by my dealer. He’s saying inflation, I called his bluff. He’s demanded 150,000 dollars, Hong Kong dollars, for what’s essentially 125,000. I might’ve lowered that, but not easily.”

“How so?”

“There was a gun involved, I was threatened,” he added, not at all bothered by the fact that Chow could understand him. He even turned to looked at him with a deadpan expression whilst he waited for a response from his friend.

“Shit, Jimmy, what’s the offer? What’d you get him down to? We’ll settle for that, but don’t get a cap in your goddamn ass.”

“135,000 dollars,” Jimin explained. “The half a key’s worth less than that, but he isn’t budging any lower yet. Might be the best deal that we can broker at this point.”

“I’ll make the call and get the transaction rolling, but, Jimmy, call this line back in, like, five minutes,” Namjoon said, as he heard a series of rustling sounds down the line. “I’ve got something I need to tell you, something important.”

“135?” Jimin asked, turning his head to look over at Chow.

The Triad man nodded in agreement to let him know that that would do.

“Yeah, it’s settled on 135,000, Namo, process the transaction for me. I’ll do that too.”

“OK, speak to you in five, Jimmy.”

Jimin put the phone back in the receiver and then he held his hand out to Chow. He didn’t particularly want to shake his hand, but it was better doing so and making sure that the deal stayed strictly business rather than personal.
Chow accepted and shook thrice firmly, thanking him for his business.

As soon as their supplier had left the apartment room, Taehyung broke the tense silence.

“Holy. Fuck,” he breathed out in a wheeze.

Jimin stared at the closed door for a few seconds before turning to look at him. He saw the way his partner shook his head in disbelief, his hands working eagerly to finish filling the first baggie with the portion of heroin.

“I said you better worry about Sun Yee On killin’ us, more like our own fuckin’ supplier.”

“Namjoon wanted me to call him back, said to call him back in five minutes and that it was important…” Jimin said in a quiet voice.

“Lemme finish this and then I’ll call the number for you.”

Taehyung filled the two baggies up with the heroin before he started on readying the condom, the one that would require careful stretching, filling, and double wrapping for protection.

Jimin watched him doing so, creating a small cigar-shaped parcel that was a little thicker and longer than most cocks that he had seen and sadly taken.

As soon as Taehyung was finished, he grabbed the phone and he dialled the numbers for him to connect another international call to Namjoon.

“What’s important, huh? What’s going on?” he asked the very second that Namjoon answered the call.

“OK, I can explain the finer details later when you get back here, but for now, I’ve got an offer for you. My supplier needs me to run some coke on the streets, inflated prices; the result of a burnt deal. But he knows about how you used to run for me up in Pacific Heights and Presidio Heights, yeah, and he figured you could do it too. Inflated prices, but it means inflated pay. You could make triple the amount you make on a mule deal just by running the coke for me.”
“A burnt deal? Shit, seems like everyone’s getting burnt these days,” Jimin muttered.

This made Namjoon laugh down the line in amused agreement.

“This sounds…I dunno, it sounds big, Namo. It sounds bigger than us. Why’d your supplier choose you? Did he say?”

“He did, special request.”

“From who?”

“From Prince Min,” Namjoon replied without a hint of hesitation.

Prince Min?

Just hearing those two words was enough to make his fingers tighten around the receiver and, for a moment, Jimin was convinced that he had heard wrong. He was almost tempted to ask him to repeat what he had just said to check, but he knew that he had heard correctly. The orders might not have come from Father Min himself, the current king of the empire, but his son was about as close to the top as they were both going to get.

How did Prince Min even know who they were? They were little brothers, the lowest of the low in terms of the gang, save for the eyes and ears and the prostitutes.

“OK, OK, explain the rest when I get back, but for now: I’m in.”

“Good boy,” Namjoon said, a smile audible in his voice. “So, hurry up and get your ass back here.”

Jimin ended the call and then he started getting undressed, slipping out of his loafers first.
When Taehyung asked him if everything was alright, he confirmed that it was, explaining to him that he had some running to do when he got back home. This made his partner raise his eyebrows with interest, but he didn’t ask any more questions and he just allowed him to continue getting undressed. Jimin slipped his shirt off first and he folded it on the table beside the envelope, then he hastily slipped out of his trousers and he dropped his underwear to his ankles.

After stepping out of them, Jimin proceeded to do the usual routine. He bent over the table, took hold of the far ends with his fingers, and he opened his legs wide. It was easier for him to lift his hips up slightly too, curving his back to help Taehyung with the entire process. This meant that he had to place his crotch up on the table and get on tiptoe, his genitals settling on the cool wood.

“OK, I’m ready, so, let’s hurry up and get this done,” Jimin said, as he closed his eyes and he listened to his partner moving around the apartment room, his clothing rustling. “That way, you can get another burger and I can-”

There came a crisp clicking sound from behind him and Jimin opened his eyes wide in shock, recognising that sound. It was enough to make him twist to look back over his shoulder at him, the Polaroid SLR 680 camera in Taehyung’s hands and the unmistakable sight of a piece of film shooting out of the front slot.

Jimin stared at him dumbly for a moment, his mouth hanging open and gawping as he tried to think of something to say to him.

“Taehyung! Gimme that!

“No this’ my…uh, what’d you call ‘em? When kids have those dirty photos tacked on their walls?”

The term that Taehyung was referring to was ‘cheesecake photos’ for women. ‘Beefcake’ was the lesser used male equivalent, but Jimin had no clue what that could even be in Korean, and so he didn’t have a clue what to say to him.

“This’ my version,” he finished.

“Taehyung, those photos don’t have actual asses on them!” Jimin argued, as he stared over his shoulder at him. “Gimme it!”
“Pft, it’s just your ass,” Taehyung retorted. “D’you want an airport official goin’ through your bag and findin’ a photo of your ass?”

Taehyung had a good point, but Jimin still didn’t like the knowledge that he had a photograph of his naked body that he could show other men for a cheap laugh.

“You should sell dirty photos, Jiminie, you’re naked a lot of the time anyway, and besides - I told you I’d get you back.”

Jimin watched him putting the camera back down on the table, not missing the fact that he shoved the photograph into his breast pocket with the other shots. It was enough to make him narrow his eyes into a glare as he stared at him, and then Taehyung grabbed the gloves and he slipped them on, the latex making a snapping sound as he stretched his fingers through them and let go again. His partner grabbed the bottle of lube and he applied a liberal amount onto his palm, slightly warming it up first before moving to hunker down behind him.

Just like Namjoon did, Taehyung made sure to prepare him first before even attempting to slip any fingers inside by lightly pressing and rubbing around his perineum so that he wouldn’t clench too much.

Jimin pulled his lower lip in to nibble on it, trying to ignore the fact that it actually felt incredibly pleasing. He wondered if Taehyung even had a clue about what it felt like when he did that; of how it would cause a stirring in the pit of his stomach that would start building in intensity just to annoy him. Why did his partner’s fingers have to be so goddamn warm and why did he always have to do it in a teasingly slow anticlockwise manner?

Taehyung carried on lightly pressing his fingers against his perineum as he slipped his first two fingers right in to the knuckles.

Jimin clenched around him because he couldn’t help himself, a breathy noise escaping his lips before he pressed them together again and he tightened his hold on the edge of the table.

“Loosen up, I’ll never get it inside you if you keep doin’ this,” Taehyung muttered, as he slowly moved his fingers and dug the others against his perineum harder.

This made a spiking throb shoot right up his cock, and if he hadn’t been stiffening already, then that would have made Jimin instantly hard.
“Fuck, Taehyung, I'm trying,” Jimin argued back, feeling the most pressing urge to tighten his jaw too.

Taehyung held his thumb in place, and he carried on lightly digging and rubbing as he moved his fingers down to the first knuckles and slipped another inside.

Oh, here came the stretching, that burning deep down inside him that made Jimin drop his head onto the table. His forehead bounced off it hard but he barely felt it, for he could only feel his thigh muscles trembling as they almost demanded he bring them together and squeeze.

“Stop-stop digging your thumb in!”

“You’re still tensin’, I gotta,” Taehyung argued, a warm puff of air hitting him on his buttock as his partner once again sunk his fingers in to the base. “You should be used to this by now.”

“Namo says the exact same,” Jimin stated, as he took a deep breath in through his mouth and out through his nose. “Shit, Taehyung, shit, just use your fingers.”

Taehyung moved his other hand away, no longer pressing down on his perineum to encourage him to open up wider. Instead, he moved to grab hold of one his buttocks, lightly pulling it aside in some attempt at stretching his entrance a little wider.

Jimin could feel his fingers resting against his prostate but he had yet to move them again, had yet to wriggle them or scissor them. At least he was no longer massaging him and he counted that as a temporary blessing. But then he started moving his fingers around, rubbing and prodding, curling and scissoring in a way that made his head almost start spinning.

“Good, good boy,” Taehyung praised, as he lightly patted his buttock.

Jimin had to turn his face and press his mouth against his upper arm to stop himself from whimpering, unsurprisingly feeling his cock twitching between his stomach and the hard table.

“I'll get the parcel inside in a minute, just gimme a lil more stretch so I can fit it in.”
Jimin gave him a little stretch and some.

When Taehyung finally slipped his fourth finger inside, his fingertips jabbing against his prostate, Jimin lifted his hips off the table and he curved his back involuntarily. For some reason this made Taehyung laugh, but he didn’t feel like laughing right now. No, Jimin felt a little bit like screaming at the sheer torture that he was being put through. Would it be insulting to leak on the table right now? Would it be a strange form of compliment instead, a sign of a good prep job? He didn’t really know but he didn’t have to worry about finding out, because as quickly as Taehyung’s fingers stretched and teased him they also disappeared; replaced by the cool lube-covered condom parcel of heroin.

Taehyung slipped the parcel inside of him without any fuss, moving slow but steady just like Namjoon did to ensure that both the condom didn’t rub too much and create damaging friction, and that his muscles stayed loose around it and caused him less pain.

Jimin just carried on breathing deeply until he felt the shape stretching him more, slipping deeper than his partner’s fingers had done so. Then it was fully seated inside of him, prepped and ready to be smuggled.

“There, done,” Taehyung said, as he once again gave him one of those soft spanks and then got upright.

Jimin kept his head down for a moment and stayed still, letting his body adjust to the somewhat foreign intrusion that was now stuck inside of him. Then he slowly got upright and he moved to sit on the table, reaching up to wipe at his chin because there seemed to be a slight hint of drool on it.

Okay, maybe Taehyung could finger him as good as Namjoon could on occasion.

Jimin once again had to part his thighs and hold his cock and testicles aside so that Taehyung could secure the baggies onto his upper thighs. His partner looked completely unfazed by the sight of his erection and he seemed far too busy taping the baggies in place for him. First the left, nice and tight but not too much to stop the baggie from popping from the pressure, then the right. His skin was covered in tape, and as soon as Taehyung was finished, he started getting dressed again, quickly getting into his underwear and jeans and then buttoning up his shirt. At least he didn’t have the tape all over his shoulders and chest again, much less restrictive.

Jimin got into his loafers and then he grabbed the envelope, folding it up to go inside of his breast pocket with the Polaroids.
Taehyung tossed the used gloves inside of the briefcase without a single care, leaving it all on the table for one of the Triad men to clean up as soon as they were gone.

Jimin moved to grab their belongings, tossing his partner’s bag at him so that they could leave the apartment block together. They had to get a ride to Kai Tak Airport from one of the gang members, a man that Jimin didn’t know the name of, but he recognised because he had escorted them a couple of times in the past.

On the ride to get to the airport, he tried to ignore the fact that his lower stomach was now hurting too, just adding onto the list of sore muscles to piss him off. There was hardly any breeze coming in through the open windows, just the noise from the street and the stink of exhaust fumes hitting him in the face as he stared out at the sidewalks. At least the trip was much shorter than the one to get to San Francisco International Airport, for it took them just several minutes instead of over an hour. The sights were very different too, more people and much less freeways and empty roads to look at through the windows. But there was also quite a lot of traffic to have to deal with, which was a lot more annoying.

The one thing that Jimin noticed when they were travelling around the city was that there were no kiosks placed here and there, no posters stuck to brick walls. He didn’t see a single warning for AIDS or drugs, nothing about sharing needles or wearing condoms. It was almost like there was no need for them, like there was no such thing as AIDS here, but he thought otherwise. There must be, surely? It was a crisis that was affecting the entire world…wasn’t it? Jimin really wasn’t certain, but just like in Seoul, it seemed that Kowloon City didn’t care for or know about the dangers right now.

Just thinking about it was enough to make him feel both confused and strangely anxious, even though he didn’t understand why.

When the car finally pulled into a space in the airport lot to drop him off, Jimin popped the door open and he climbed outside, reaching into his back pocket to slip out the envelope. He pulled his ticket free and left Taehyung’s inside for him.

“Your ticket,” Jimin said, as he shoved the envelope at him. “Don’t lose it, or eat it; yeah?”

“Sure thing,” Taehyung said, accepting it from him and shoving it down deep into his jeans pocket. Then he held his hand out to him, offering him a solid.

Jimin returned it hard, punching their fists together.
“Jiminie, stay safe, bro.”

“You too, man,” Jimin replied in English, as he slammed the door shut and he started crossing the lot; his bag swinging from his fist.

Like every trip to the airport, Jimin put on his best polite and neutral face; smiling when it was needed, but otherwise keeping cool. He checked-in with his ticket and he collected his boarding pass, being sweet to the female worker on the desk for she seemed to get a little flustered at the sight of him. Cute, but very much not his type by far. Then he had to go through the security gate and get processed, his passport and tickets checked by the first of several security agents. The woman studied his photograph and then him, clearly not struggling to make the comparison because his hair was still practically the same and, with the exception of a little weight loss, his face was identical.

Jimin was processed like usual with no worries, allowed to join the queue of people going through the next security checkpoint: the pat-downs and bag checks. They had two agents on standby for the checks, a man and a woman, and another man checking the bags did so in a quick but methodical manner.

Jimin just kept his gaze straight ahead, going between watching them and eyeing the clock on the far wall and the display boards for flights.

5:35pm.

Jimin was due to board his plane at 6pm, which would mean that he had less than thirty minutes of check-in time to wait until he was allowed to board. Hopefully, the plane wouldn’t be in any way delayed, because he just wanted to sleep and wake up back home in America.

After a couple of minutes of waiting, Jimin was in front of the metal detector and two counters, and so he placed his bag down for the man to check and he turned back to the cardboard box in front of him.

Just like he had for the two previous flights, Jimin removed his rings and earrings and he placed them into the box with his loafers. He also added the Polaroids, just to be safe, and then he moved through the detector. The male agent checked his shoes to find them empty and then he turned to him, which meant that the pat-down would happen.
Whilst the other worker checked his bag and turned over his clothes and toiletries, Jimin held his arms up level with his shoulders to let the man know that he could check him. The agent did so, first by patting at his chest and armpits, and then down his sides. When the man hunkered down to check his hips and thighs, he did so quickly, his hands patting and touching but never wandering too close to his crotch. He went down his legs and checked around his ankles just to make sure he wasn’t hoping to hide anything there. Then the man straightened up and turned his head to look at the other agent whilst he got his earrings and rings back on. The man had just finished putting his goods back inside of his carry-on bag, and he looked up and gave him a slow nod.

“All-clear,” he said in a clipped British accent. “Enjoy your flight, sir.”

“All right,” Jimin said, as he slipped his Polaroids back into his pocket and then he lifted his bag up off the counter.

This was too fucking easy.

18th August, 1984, 7:15pm: San Francisco International Airport, San Francisco, United States of America

When Jimin finally stepped out of the airport and he ran his eyes over the vast stretch of the parking lot, he had never been so happy to see the deep blue Datsun Maxima sitting in one of the spaces close to the entrance before.

In the current evening, the sunlight was still bright enough to not need the floodlights on around the building, so it did take him a moment to identify it. He even checked the license plate just to be sure that it was his partner waiting for him in the lot. Satisfied that it was him, Jimin quickly made his way over, stepping into the lot and weaving past a couple of cars to get to the vehicle. He would have ran had that been possible, but considering the fact he still had a condom filled with heroin up close to his intestines, he thought that it was best to avoid moving around too much.

Just in case.
When he opened the door, the usual sound of stoner rock hit him right in the face: a true sign that he was finally back home in San Francisco.

“Please, please for the love of god tell me that you have food?” Jimin whined, as he climbed into the passenger-seat and he slammed the door shut behind him.

This made Namjoon start laughing as he dropped into the seat with a groan.

“Seriously, Namo, I feel like death right now.”

“There’s food in this car, but you can’t have it just yet. You gotta wait until we get back to the apartment,” his partner explained, pulling out of the lot even when he hadn’t fastened up his seatbelt yet.

Jimin quickly moved to do so, only just noticing the fact that there was a cardboard tray of drinks on the dashboard - McDonald’s logo covered drinks at that. Which meant that there was a paper bag of food nearby too, so close and yet so far.

“Then you can stuff your face until you puke if you want to,” his friend added, almost like an afterthought.

“Namo, I can smell the beef, this is torture!” Jimin said in that same whine, throwing his head back against the car headrest. “Gimme it!”

“Nope,” Namjoon replied, as he steered across the lot to get back onto the main road.

Jimin rolled his head to glare at him from the corners of his eyes, giving him the most dirtiest expression that he could muster with his currently flagging levels of energy. It was nothing more than a narrow-eyed stare sadly, but it was enough to get his feelings across.

“Look, you know that if you eat now it’s a bad idea, Jimmy. Just wait until we get back and then you’re home-free.”

“Mmm,” he hummed in grumpy agreement. “I’ve went, like, a whole day without food now,
everything fucking hurts. Like literally everything, especially my head.”

At this, Namjoon moved to turn the radio off, plunging the car into silence. He had no need to do so, but Jimin was thankful for it.

“It’s usually not this bad, but the heat…the heat is too much, I think.”

“The heat’s probably why,” his partner agreed, as the car carried on down the straight stretch of the road to get onto the highway that would take them back to north.

Jimin turned to look out of the window, folding one arm on the window rest so that he could stretch and place his chin on his forearm and feel the cool breeze against his face.

Technically, it was 9:30am, 19th August in his head, but he knew that it was actually 7:15pm, 18th August back home in San Francisco. That was why the sky was a murky shade of orange and covered in pink and purple bruised clouds rather than bright blue and clear of even the most wispiest of clouds. That was why there was a cool breeze right now that made his skin break out into goosebumps for a few seconds, rather than a sweltering and heavy heat causing him to break out into a sweat.

Jimin closed his eyes and he let it brush his parted and loosely tousled hair back off his brow, like gently teasing fingers.

Right now, Taehyung was back in Seoul, had been for quite some time. He would have arrived back in Korea in the late night hours and it would be 10:30am right now, which meant that he was probably still asleep after all of the travelling. Well, the younger man deserved the rest because they had once again done another perfect smuggling deal. Thinking about Taehyung reminded him of the deal that had happened, and on the tail of that, the phone call between him and his current partner.

So Jimin moved to look over at him, his hair falling into his eyes again.

“I can’t believe that we got ripped off back in Kowloon City,” Jimin muttered under his breath, as he settled back in his seat and he fixed his hair in place. “Sure, it was only maybe 4,000 dollars, but still, that’s too much.”

“Especially when you’ve got a gun pointed at your face,” Namjoon added, sparing a quick glance
away from the road to study him. “Honestly, Jimmy, how’d that even happen?”

“Most 14K guys carry guns,” he explained. “If not guns, then they carry cleavers and all other kinda weapons, in case they run into Sun Yee On guys. Our dealer happened to have a gun, probably because he’s a heroin and opium dealer and feels the need to carry and protect himself from all of those ‘terrifying’ brown fiends. I called him a thieving bastard, so, he pulled it on me. But the safety was on.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah, hundred-percent sure,” he reaffirmed with a nod. “He kept it drawn on me for a minute or two, but I talked him down. I knew that he wasn’t gonna use it, he was just trying to scare me really.”

Namjoon made a soft noise at this, his eyes moving back to the road and his hands firm on the steering-wheel. After a few seconds, the car took a turn to get them onto the highway, and his partner changed gears and picked up speed on the new road.

“He scared the shit outta poor Taehyung though, and I thought he’d be used to the sight of guns after everything that’s been going on in Seoul.”

“Things still bad there, huh?”

“Anti-American sentiments, soldiers on the streets to break up crowds, curfews and student protests all day every day,” he explained, as he studied a set of glowing tail lights in front of them. “Lots of political drama and hatred. It’s bad there. I didn’t see anything too bad though, but the soldiers were pretty unnerving. Oh, you know something else weird?”

“What?”

“Still no sign of kiosks about AIDS in Seoul or Kowloon City, nothing at all,” Jimin replied with a soft head shake. “I think that’s more terrifying than seeing soldiers on the streets.”

“There probably hasn’t been a registered case just yet,” Namjoon replied, as he shifted in his seat and he turned the steering-wheel ever so slightly to follow the softest curve of the highway. “But that doesn’t mean that it’s not there, it just means people are blind to it.”
Jimin didn’t reply to this, rather he just carried on staring out of the window instead, seeing nothing interesting at all but just cars and trucks travelling along the stretch in front of them. After a minute of contemplation, he decided to break his silence, glancing over at his partner as he did so.

“Tell me about that phone call, about the proposition you told me about,” he requested.

“The coke deal?” Namjoon asked, as he shot him a quick glance and they made eye-contact for a second or two.

Jimin hummed in agreement, and so his partner spent a moment getting his thoughts in order before giving him a proper explanation.

“Well, it was about 6am in the morning when I received a call from my supplier in regards to an important matter. Though he didn’t explicitly tell me what happened, I deduced from the news the next day, and some talk from my men, that there was a burnt deal in regards to a shipment of coke. Another key like what we deal with. It turns out that a certain dealer in Presidio Heights, a pretty highly ranked dealer at that…he ended up dead shortly after.”

“No shit? Who?” Jimin asked, sitting upright in his seat to stare at the other man as he spoke. “Who got a cap in their ass?”

“No cap, not sure what happened to him, but it was Choi - Seunghyun Choi,” Namjoon replied, and at this Jimin made a shocked noise. “Yeah, my reaction exactly.”

“Did that fucker burn us?” he asked, unable to keep his interest at a lower level because he was gripped by this sudden unravelling of events. “What’d he do to get his ass put in the ground?”

“It seems like he did burn us,” his partner agreed with a nod. “It all connects to me, I mean, I’m being asked to sell off 900 grams of coke out of the blue at an inflated price, there’s rumours about a burnt deal, and a guy ends up dead. Doesn’t take a genius IQ to put those things together, right?”

“No, but it helps,” Jimin joked, as he reached over to ruffle at his short hair.

This made Namjoon’s lips quirk up at the corners happily.
“Damn, we’ve been roped in to sort this shit out…” Jimin muttered, as he dropped his hand back into his lap and shifted to get more comfortable on the seat. “What’s the inflated price huh, Daddy-o?”

“For me? 43 a gram; for you 50 a gram, 165 an eight-ball.”

“165 a…are you fucking kidding me?” Jimin exclaimed, unable to help himself. “Namo, it’s 35 dollars a gram on the streets, 113 an eight-ball. The fuck am I running this too, huh?”

“Who do you think? Rich suburban mums and businessmen that can’t get it off the streets,” Namjoon replied. “The kind that don’t know the street prices and really just want to get high. Trust me, you’ve got it easier. I’m the one that’s gotta push and deal it on the streets of The Castro. Sure, it doesn’t sound too hard, but trust me - it will be.”

“OK,” Jimin said with a soft nod, as he folded his arms over his chest comfortably. “What else happened?”

“Uh, my supplier asked me about pushing and dealing the coke, I said I would. He mentioned there being an increased percentage of profits, and then he started asking about you. He seemed to know a little already, because he knew that you used to run up in Pacific Heights and Presidio Heights and that you’ve been muling for a year.”

Almost as if he had read his mind, Namjoon quickly added, “He didn’t ask anything personal, just asked if I thought that you would be able to run the coke for them. I said I’d asked you and get back to him, but I was pretty sure that you would do it. Lucky guess, huh?”

“Real lucky,” Jimin agreed with a grin.

“I didn’t ask too many questions, but I did ask where the coke was coming from out of principle,” Namjoon explained, as he gave the steering-wheel another slight twist. “I didn’t expect a proper answer, but he at least told me that it was supplied directly through Prince Min, and that he had asked for us specifically.”

“How the fuck does he know who we are?” Jimin muttered in a quiet voice, reaching up to start stroking at his lower lip. “Surely he can’t know everyone in the gang?”
“My supplier, he’s close to him,” his partner replied. “It’s probably through him that Prince Min found out our names, and presumably he was told that we’ve never fucked up a deal before. Hence why we were given the coke.”

“Yeah, but not fucking a mule deal up isn’t the same as not fucking up running.”

“You’re right,” Namjoon agreed. “Mule deals are so much harder.”

Jimin glanced at him quickly, but he saw that his partner was being completely serious. Considering the fact that he had had a gun pointed at his head today, he supposed that he was kind of telling the truth in a way.

“I don’t know about you, but I know that I’d very much like to get on Prince Min’s good side. Yeah? Especially after what happened to Choi, and if running this coke and making a little extra covers my ass for a while, then I think it’s a smart move,” Namjoon remarked.

Jimin could only silently agree with this statement.

Eventually, they were back in the Southeast of San Francisco, going along the 101 to get deeper into the heart of the city. In that time, he had managed to not complain about his hunger or his sore body because he was far too tired to do so. He almost found his eyes drifting shut on him even after he had spent most of the twelve hours on the plane asleep, but he couldn’t help himself. At least Namjoon stayed quiet over the duration of the ride, and he didn’t disturb him once until the car pulled up outside the apartment block.

Jimin climbed out of the vehicle and he followed his partner along the sidewalk to enter the building, both of them racing up the stairs to get to the right room.

Namjoon unlocked the door, balancing the drink tray and food bag awkwardly against his chest, and then they entered the room; Jimin already moving to get undressed just so he could get the stupid parcel out of his body. He didn’t remove his shirt, but instead just stepped out of his loafers and started unzipping his trousers. After all, he only needed to have the heroin baggies removed from his thighs and not his armpits now.

Jimin got out of his trousers and underpants, dropping them to his ankles and then roughly pulling at the tape to try and get it off.
Namjoon ended up placing the McDonald’s stuff down on the table, freeing up his hands so that he could help him. The tape burnt as they tugged it off and removed the first two baggies. Then his partner located a pair of latex gloves in the room and he hunkered down behind him.

Jimin just dropped his head, parted his buttocks and waited, feeling the usual tug and stirring deep inside of him as Namjoon slipped his fingers inside to pull out the parcel out by the tied ends. It took him a minute to do so, but then he was dumping the slick condom parcel down onto the table with the two other baggies; finally freeing him of the hideous sensation.

Jimin didn’t even bother getting back into his trousers, he just pulled up his underwear and he moved to sit on the chair beside the table. He crossed his legs up on the seat and he dragged the McDonald’s bag closer to him, opening the paper bag to look at the contents whilst his partner collected the baggies together.

“How many fucking burgers did you buy?”

“Five,” Namjoon replied. “You know, I was thinking two for me, three for you, but I think maybe you’re thinking one for me, four for you-” this made Jimin snort laughter as he started emptying the containers out of the bag onto the table, “and that’s not including the fries.”

“Hey, Namo, you got a joint on you, huh?” Jimin asked him, as he dropped the boxes of fries onto the table too. He brushed salt off his hands and then he grabbed the last of the napkins and dumped them beside the drinks. “I’m kinda feeling like I need one.”

“Oh, so the burgers aren’t enough?” Namjoon remarked, as he reached into his jeans pocket and he proceeded to pull a small baggie free.

Inside of it were three joints, and he dropped this onto the table and added his lighter beside it a moment later.

“You the man, Daddy-o,” Jimin declared, as he dived to grab them off the table and felt his stomach and thigh muscles twinging as he did so.

Jimin stuck one of the joints between his lips, flicking the lighter on and hovering the flame in front of the fat end of the stick. He took a quick inhale to get the joint to smoulder, breathing the rather pungent lungful of smoke out again through his nose.
“Unbelievable…”

“You try smuggling up your ass for a couple of days and see how you feel,” Jimin retorted, as he pulled the joint out of his mouth and wet his lips. “My insides feel like they’ve shrivelled up and died, and my ass feels like I went ten rounds with a power drill.”

Namjoon snorted at this, before he turned back to the heroin and he started to transfer the rough powder into the large and thick baggie for his supplier.

Jimin took a deep and slow toke on the joint, holding the smoke in his lungs for a moment. It almost made his lungs and throat itch, and when he breathed it out again he was pleased to find that his head felt so much lighter already. Oh shit, it felt so good knowing that he was free from that goddamn parcel and that he could sit back and relax without worrying that it would explode and kill him. So he did so, smoking the joint down before eating and watching his partner working away.

As soon as Namjoon was finished with the heroin transfer, he moved to the landline phone and he hastily hit the buttons before lifting the receiver to place it in the crook between his neck and head.

“The brown’s here,” he said to whoever was on the line - presumably his supplier. “The half a key, ready for transfer. Uhuh, he's here and yeah, he’s gonna run the coke too.”

Jimin breathed a lungful of smoke out of his nose as he listened to him talking, his head feeling so light and fuzzy that he was certain he could see flashing colourful dots around the corners of his vision.

Namjoon made a few sounds under his breath, and a moment later he was hanging up and pulling his gloves off. Then he moved to sit in the only other seat at the table, collecting his own joint and proceeding to light it. His partner pulled the stick free and he breathed the smoke out of his mouth in a loose ring, the white smoke floating over to hit him in the face.

Jimin breathed it in and out again, grinning at him as he pulled one of the drinks free from the cardboard tray. When he checked the contents, he found that it was a chocolate milkshake and so he made an excited sound.

“Oooh,” Jimin hummed, as he fixed the top back onto the cup container and took a sip of the drink.
This made Namjoon snort laughter, taking another toke on the stick that he quickly breathed out of his nose.

“Huh?”

“I don’t know,” his partner said with a shrug. “It was kind of cute.”

Jimin just took a deep sip of the milkshake rather than reply, finding that it was thick and very sweet and exactly what he wanted right now. Then he put the drink down and he grabbed the first container to open it, seeing that it was a double cheeseburger.

It was great to be back in fucking America.

Between finishing the last inch of the joint, Jimin started devouring as much as he could, blitzing through his cheeseburger and a portion of fries without seemingly stopping to breathe. The marijuana made him completely forget about his aching body and instead distracted him by offering up the occasional trippy blur of colour or focus, so that Namjoon’s mouth seemed to be moving too slow as he spoke; and the fries were golden yellow then bright pink, then yellow again. He stubbed out the roach that was left and then he grabbed the chocolate milkshake, suddenly finding that his mouth felt very dry and weird.

“What’s that, in your pocket?” Namjoon asked him, as he gestured at his shirt.

“Oh, um, Polaroids. Took these in Kowloon,” he explained, pulling them free to quickly glance at them. “With Taehyung, we were bored so we went wandering.”

Jimin dropped them onto the table and his partner stubbed out the slight remains of his own joint to reach over and pick one of the pieces of film up.

“So, that’s what Taehyung looks like?” Namjoon remarked, as he held up the Polaroid to look at him more clearly. “Huh, cute. Bet he’s your type, right?”

Jimin laughed noisily around a mouthful of cheeseburger, his partner dropping the snapshot down onto the table and picked up another one.
“Yeah, he’s a pretty boy alright. You like them pretty; don’t you?”

“I dunno what I like until he comes over to me and starts talking,” Jimin retorted, as he sucked a blob of sauce off his thumb.

Jimin could feel the most pressing urge to start laughing swelling in the pit of his stomach, like there was a frothy mixture bubbling away under his ribs, and he couldn’t help but let a few giggles escape even though he didn’t know why.

“Surely you’ve got an idea?” Namjoon said, as he stared at the photograph of Taehyung.

“…Small.”

“What, like a small dick?”

“No, not that!” Jimin exclaimed, before more giggles escaped. God, he always got the giggles when he smoked a joint. “I mean like, a small guy, you know? Because most of the guys in the bathhouses and shit, they’re really tall and wide and they treat me like some fucking kid. I hate it, I hate having to look up at guys and making them feel big and special when they’re fucking average.”

“So, you want a shrimp ass?” Namjoon retorted in a deadpan voice.

Jimin nearly choked on his mouthful of burger at this, unable to not burst out laughing. At least his coughing and spluttering made Namjoon laugh, clearly proud of himself. It took him a moment to regain control and not choke, swallowing the mouthful and unfolding one leg to kick at him from under the table.

“I want a guy that I can look eye-to-eye with, yeah? A guy that doesn’t need to pick me up to kiss me and whose body just fits right when I pull him close or whatever, you know, like-”

“You’re sounding mushy, sounding romantic,” Namjoon spoke over him, and at this Jimin grimaced. “It’s disgusting.”

“Not like that, just…you know,” he finished in a mumble, before turning back to his cheeseburger.
“Just a guy like that, really.”

“What’s this?” his partner asked, as he turned the Polaroid around to flash it at him.

Jimin shoved the last bite of cheeseburger into his mouth as he glanced up at the shot. He saw a flash of glowing signs and he didn’t need a closer examination to know what it was.

“Mmm, that’s from Kowloon Walled City,” Jimin explained, as he lifted the drink container and took a deep sip of chocolate milkshake. “We took a few shots, but we didn’t have a lot of film.”

“Kowloon Walled City? Damn…”

“Honestly, Namo, one day: me and you, we’re gonna go there,” he said, shoving more fries in his mouth and checking them. “You won’t believe it, it’s like…nothing can prepare you for what it’s like inside. It’s like that film, yeah, that sci-fi film-”

“Blade Runner?”

“Yeah, just like that, but seedier and a lot less sci-fi,” Jimin finished, before chewing the mouthful of salted fries. “I think that you’d love it.”

“Sure, kid, one day when you’re not muling your ass around and I’m not busy dealing, we’ll have to go,” Namjoon agreed, as he finished looking at the Polaroids.

“I’d like that,” Jimin said with a smile, moving to collect his second burger container and popping it open.

It was a hamburger, slathered in sauce and salad and just begging that he devour it too. It was after he had finished his second burger that Namjoon actually started eating, grabbing one of the burger boxes and tucking in. He might have been joking earlier about him eating four, but Jimin knew that he just might do so, unable to resist the temptation. His stomach should have felt full after two burgers and countless fries, but it still felt hollow and rumbled loudly instead. So Jimin drained his milkshake, grabbed one of the large cokes, and he proceeded to move onto the next cheeseburger. He had just taken a massive bite when something unexpected happened.
There was a series of knocks on the door.

Jimin froze in the act of chewing, glancing up sharply from the cheeseburger to look at his partner.

Who the _fuck_ could that possibly be? No one knocked on this door whilst they were here, or at least never when Jimin was. Yet, despite his shock, he could see that Namjoon was completely unfazed as he moved to open the door, drawing the lock back and swinging it open.

“I didn’t expect you to arrive so quickly,” he said to whoever was on the other side.

“Yes, well,” a man replied, as Namjoon moved aside to let him enter. “I was in the area, so, I thought that it’d be best to collect the goods.”

Jimin studied the stranger as he stepped inside of the room, seeing a man just a little shorter than Namjoon with a wider frame. He was wearing a cream mac that was currently open, showcasing a light blue shirt and bolo tie, and he just knew that those items were designer items. The man had a face that could really only be described as handsome: long with a defined jawline, a straight nose, large eyes and full and pouted lips. His hair was swept back off his brow to show his thick eyebrows, revealing a masculine visage that made Jimin stare at him in wonder.

Holy shit, this was Namjoon’s supplier; _their_ supplier. This…this well-dressed and rather strikingly handsome young man?

Jimin had always pictured an older man, maybe grizzled, maybe kind of slimy-looking. The kind of guy that would have slicked back hair and ill-fitting suits, a clunky gold watch on his wrist to show off his cash and open-necked shirts to reveal a gold chain. He didn’t expect a young-looking guy in a designer mac with flawless skin and a rather pleasant presence, that was for sure. It was enough to leave him feeling rather dumb in his company.

And here he was: stoned, in his underpants with a McDonald’s cheeseburger in hand.

What a great introduction.

“‘The brown?’” the other man asked, as he stopped close to the centre of the room and he glanced back over his shoulder at Namjoon. It seemed that he had either ignored him or he hadn’t noticed him just yet, for he didn’t glance in his direction once. “I’ll assume that it’s in the briefcase?”
“Yeah, it’s all packed away and prepared,” Namjoon explained, moving to get closer to the table on which the phone and briefcase were placed.

As his partner collected it, Jimin noticed the other man glancing at him, only briefly but rather keenly.

Namjoon popped it open to show him the contents - the large and swollen baggie taking up quite a lot of the interior beside the scales.

“I weighed it, it’s exact.”

“Good good, at least this is one deal to not worry about,” the other man said with a quick smile. It was all business, fast and perfectly timed. “Speaking of deals…”

Namjoon closed the briefcase and he proceeded to fasten the metal clasps, holding it out for him to collect.

“Ah, Kim, this is Jimin, Jimin Park: my mule and runner. Jimin, this is Kim, Seokjin Kim: my supplier.”

Jimin noted that Namjoon used his given name first as a sign of friendship and familiarity: casual. But he referred to his supplier by his clan name as a sign of respect and deference: rigidly formal. Seokjin Kim, huh? Jimin had never heard that name before, but considering the fact that he was a supplier with links to Prince Min that might just be why. After all, the man was likely related to the Min clan or linked through family connections; an uncle as a legal adviser, his father as a leftenant. That was likely why he had never heard his name through his running and muling.

Jimin found himself suddenly wanting to kick Namjoon again for not telling him about his supplier being so important until an hour ago, but his friend was too far away for him to do that. All that he could do was swallow his mouthful of cheeseburger and hope that there wasn’t food all over his face, that his eyes weren’t too blown from the marijuana.

“Um, it’s nice to meet you, Kim,” Jimin managed to say, also hoping that he didn’t sound as awkward as he felt.
“Manners, how pleasing,” Seokjin remarked, before looking over at Namjoon with a wry lift of the lips. Was that sarcasm? He couldn’t tell right now. “It’s nice to meet you too, Park. Can I call you Jimin?”

“You can call me whatever you want so long as it’s not ‘Shorty’,” Jimin retorted whip-crack quick.

Surprisingly, this made the supplier laugh, a strangely dopey-sounding guffaw that was at odds with his prim appearance.

“I don’t often meet mules,” Seokjin stated, as he turned to him - one hand holding the briefcase and the other in his mac pocket. “Usually, they’re halfway across the world and much too busy for that. But you, Jimin, you’re what I like to think of as one of our finest.”

Jimin held his eyes for a moment before rolling his gaze over to stare at Namjoon, wondering where this was going exactly.

“You might think that a supplier only supplies drugs and creates deals, but a supplier is only as good as his men,” Seokjin continued, making Jimin quickly roll his eyes back to stare at him. “I’ve to keep track of everything - every dealer, every mule, every single profit and loss. Over the space of our partnership through Kim, I’ve never found you to cause us a loss in profit. You’ve never been persuaded by drugs or by foreign business partners, you’ve never brokered a bad deal for your own profit; it’s incredibly impressive. Especially when your past as a runner is put into account.”

“Um, thank you,” Jimin said, before letting out a rather flustered laugh.

“So, you understand why you and Kim are ideal for the current blow issue, yes?” Seokjin finished. “Because of your running connections and your flawless record.”

“Yeah, um, like you said,” Jimin said, as he finally put the cheeseburger down and then grabbed some napkins. “I did most of my running through Pacific Heights, I could easily rekindle some old connections, but I’ll have to really sway them with the inflated prices that Namo told me about. It’s pricey but…I’m a good talker and flirter, should it come down to that.”

“50 a gram is rather inflated, but sadly not all mules and dealers are as reputable as you two,” the other man said.
Jimin shot Namjoon a glance at this, wondering if he was possibly talking about Choi.

“And speaking of dealers, I heard that you were…threatened,” Seokjin said in a quiet voice, slightly cocking his head as he studied him.

Jimin held his gaze for a moment before looking at his partner again, wondering if Namjoon had told him this particular fact and what that meant for him right now.

“Um, yeah, I was,” he said in a quiet voice. “But the safety was on, it’s cool. It’s totally cool, you don’t need to-”

“Nonsense, if 14K are going to pull weapons on our men then this issue won’t remain ‘cool’,” Seokjin spoke over him, his voice containing both authority and strong confidence. “It’s a serious matter and I assure you that it won’t happen again in the future.”

“…Oh, OK,” Jimin mumbled, twisting the napkins between his fingers tightly.

“Kim, you have the blow in your possession.”

“I do.”

“When are you planning on circulating it?”

“Tonight, I got pushers and street dealers hitting up The Castro mostly, a couple in Twin Peaks too. My usuals are here in The Haight with marijuana for the night, that’s where I’ll be,” Namjoon explained, reaching up to roughly ruffle at his short black hair. “Gonna keep it up for a couple of days and see where the best interest comes from, but mostly it’s gonna be in Pacific Heights.”

Seokjin turned his head to look at him, and Jimin wet his lips with the tip of his tongue.

“I can start running tomorrow?” he suggested, as he carried on twisting at the napkins and he tried to keep still on the chair.
“Good, that’d be a very good idea,” Seokjin said with a nod. “If you can move this blow across the city fast and clean, Prince Min has already voiced an interest in meeting you both. Dinner, his treat.”

Their supplier left the rundown apartment a mere moment later, the briefcase of heroin in hand.

Jimin watched him go and then he dropped the rather destroyed napkin onto the table with a heavy sigh.

Namjoon moved to sit with him again, grabbing his own milkshake that was likely strawberry and taking a rather noisy sip of it.

“Shit, Namo, why’d I say that?” Jimin hissed, grabbing his cheeseburger again. “Tomorrow? Tomorrow, I’ll barely be able to walk and I’ll be falling asleep all day long. I’m gonna be so out of it; how can I run like that, huh?”

“You better pray that your lucky streak keeps on rolling,” Namjoon retorted.

As soon as they were finished with the food, his partner gathered all of the waste together in the paper bag: nothing more than empty cartons and cups because they had devoured everything. Jimin had put away three and a half burgers and quite a lot of the fries alone, his stomach finally ceasing to feel hollow for the first time in days. He proceeded to slip into his trousers and loafers, and then he grabbed his travel bag so that they could leave the building. The rubbish went into a bin on the end of the street, and Jimin tossed his bag into the back as he sank down into the passenger-seat with a groan.

Namjoon started the car and he pulled away from the curb, rolling down the streets of the district without a single word.

“Hey, you mind if I crash with you tonight? I’m not looking forward to going back to the communal place,” Jimin muttered, as he started biting at his thumb nail. “Every time I go back, it’s a fun game of Guess Who? Who overdosed this time? Who’s got AIDS? Who broke the fucking toilet and won’t admit to it?”

This made Namjoon snort under his breath as the car stopped in traffic, and Jimin just carried on staring out of the window.
“It’s just too much fucking hassle for me right now.”

“Sure thing, kid, you know you can crash at my place whenever,” Namjoon replied. “I’ll be gone all night anyway, I gotta deal, so, it’s no problem at all.”

“Thanks, Namo, you’re a fucking lifesaver.”

Rather than drive across the district to get to The Castro, Namjoon only had to go through The Haight to get to his own home, which wasn’t a communal home at all despite the high hippie population in the area. No, Namjoon currently resided in an old Painted Lady in Haight-Ashbury. It had likely been owned by hippies at some point, but no longer, and it was a very interesting building.

The exterior of his home was painted a deep blue mostly, with white details around the windows and roofing of the home. But there was also teal details and piping, along with a rather ornate fixture placed right above the front door. Jimin had tried to figure out what the fixture in the arch-shaped relief was and he was pretty certain that it was a vase. He had no clue what was inside of it however. Flowers? Maize? There was a small garage beside the front steps and the home had three floors including an attic, which made it seem somewhat narrow and small, but Jimin liked it anyway.

Namjoon killed the car on the curb rather than park in the garage, because he would be jumping right back into it soon enough.

Jimin got out and he went up the steps, following his friend inside.

As per usual, the living-area was packed with everything: from towers of books that didn’t fit on his bookshelves to boxes of takeaway food and random items of clothing. He didn’t even want to imagine what the kitchen looked like, so Jimin didn’t stick his head through the doorway to look. No, he just tossed his bag onto the floor beside the sofa and he proceeded to dive onto the rather battered item of furniture. He almost heard the air and stuffing being forced out of the cushion under his weight as he dropped his head down and he closed his eyes with a satisfied noise.

“Yes, I got an hour to blow,” Namjoon muttered, as he glanced at his watch. “That’s prime time, no point in hanging around the circuit now, I won’t get any bites. I think this calls for…Space Invaders.”

The Atari 5200 SuperSystem was kind of neat, Jimin had to admit. Even when the games were kind of repetitive and really just ported arcade classics, it was still fun to get to play them at home without
the need to waste dimes. The only ones that he had gotten the hang of currently were *Mario Bros.* and *Space Invaders*, both games infuriating when it came to trying to set new high scores against his friend. It was hooked up to his colour television, a decent-sized one with cable and everything.

Jimin didn’t own a television, never mind a virtual games console, and there wasn’t even one in the communal home. So he twisted on the sofa to watch his friend turning it all on - slipping the clunky cartridge into the black console and grabbing the short and wired joystick controller. Jimin folded his arm under his head to form a makeshift cushion and Namjoon shifted to settle against the front of the sofa, his long legs cocked up in front of him childishly.

“You’re not gonna beat my score,” he remarked, as watched the start screen flashing up on the television.

“Just watch me,” Namjoon said in a cocky tone, hitting a button and loading the game.

It turned out that Namjoon wasn’t bragging for nothing, for his score started to increase at a quick speed that left Jimin in awe. Clearly, he had been practising in his absence, had gained a rather unfair advantage over him. The house was filled with the rather irritating sounds coming from the television speakers, pings and terrible explosion sounds that were so reminiscent of his childhood years spent hitting up arcades for fun until Jimin had found a great interest in the old men hanging around outside in cars with cigarettes, alcohol, and plenty of fatherly affections. He found that he didn’t even care about the fact that Namjoon might just beat his score because he hadn’t seen him get such a good score in such a long time.

“Your left, your left, man!” Jimin demanded, as he moved to place his chin on his shoulder. “Your left!”

“Shut up!” Namjoon argued back, clearly finding his advice off-putting.

Jimin couldn’t help but snort laughter at this, and sadly Namjoon managed to shoot the stupid alien on his left before it hit him and racked up even more score points.

“I’ve got eyes, you know, Jimmy?”

“Yeah, bad ones at that,” he retorted with a smirk.
Namjoon gave it a noble effort, but in the end it was his defences that let him down. He managed to reach a rather impressive score of 5,189 points, which was the highest that Jimin could recall in some time. 8,743 was his current high score, just shy of the 9,900 max cap on score points. One day, he might just reach the maximum score, but right now he wasn’t feeling the game. So when Namjoon offered him the joystick, he accepted it and he shifted to sit upright.

“Put that Mario one on, I’m gonna beat your score, I swear I’m gonna do it.”

“Uhuh, sure you will,” Namjoon agreed sarcastically, as he moved to switch the game cartridges.

Jimin got comfortable and rolled his shoulders jokingly as he waited for the game to load. Namjoon joined him on the sofa, also folding his legs up so that there was barely any room left on the cushions, and then he hit buttons to get the game to load.

Right from the very start, Jimin had to give it his full attention, taking advantage of the POW blocks to rack up his score and get into bonus mode. Within just a couple of minutes, his score was increasing at a steady speed.

“This is how a pro plays,” he declared, as he carried on darting around the screen and hitting buttons hard. “Watch and learn, Namo. Watch and learn.”

Which was exactly when he ended up being hit by a rogue fireball, of course.

“Nice!” Namjoon declared, as he elbowed him in the ribs and then burst out laughing. “You got your ass toasted, Jimmy!”

“I’m warming up!” Jimin argued, dropping the joystick so that he could quickly stretch his fingers. “Give me a little slack, I haven’t played this in weeks. I forgot that it got faster.”

Over the next twenty or so minutes, Jimin had burnt through several game overs and he had only managed to increase his score slightly over them. How the ever-loving fuck had Namjoon managed to score 214,569 points on this game? Clearly not whilst stoned, that much was apparent.

Jimin had just loaded another attempt up when his friend got off the sofa, now ready to leave the home and hit the streets. He hit pause whilst Namjoon climbed behind the television set to collect his bag, the one that he would stash in his car and return to periodically over the duration of the night to
fill his pockets with baggies of marijuana that he would sell.

“Don’t stay awake all night trying to beat my high score yeah, Jimmy?”

“Sounds like you’re scared I can, Daddy-o” Jimin retorted, as he looked up at him with a mischievous grin.

Namjoon just ruffled his hair hard and he grabbed his denim jacket off the back of the battered sofa. Then he shrugged the bag up onto his shoulder and he left the house, the door slamming shut and echoing through the thin walls.

Jimin didn’t even get close to his high score. Now that his friend was gone, there was very little appeal in trying to defeat his score after three retries and not even getting close to the needed amount. So he just left the game on pause and he went upstairs to go into the bathroom, finally getting to clean up after the airplane ride.

Jimin jumped into the shower and he turned the temperature up as high as he could stand it, ensuring to clean around his thighs and buttocks to try and rid himself of some of the sticky residue of the lube. He would need to douche several times to get rid of it all, which he would be sure to do after he was finished. The shower felt so good that he almost didn’t want to leave it, but sadly he had to. After lathering his skin with gel and washing his hair, he proceeded to get out of the shower and he started brushing his teeth vigorously, stealing a little of Namjoon’s mouthwash just for the sake of it. Then he had to locate the douching kit from the medical cabinet, the one that Namjoon kept as a spare.

Sitting over the side of the bathtub with a douche bottle up his ass wasn’t exactly Jimin’s idea of a fun time, but it was something that he was sadly used to. It was both the curse of having to purge his body with laxatives, a messy and disgusting method that required cleaning his inside out in preparation of the parcel, and the need to try and clean the sticky lube out of his system afterwards to feel fully clean. He had once used it as a way to clean semen from himself, but…well, condoms were a much better alternative these days. He just forced himself to squirt the mixture up, hating the sensation of the cool water shooting its way inside of him, and then he pulled the bottle free to let the liquid out again. At least he felt clean again after he was done.

Jimin went back downstairs and he turned the Atari 5200 off to flick through the television channels instead, finding nothing that managed to keep his interest because it was all terrible. Sitting cross-legged on the sofa, a towel around his shoulders and dressed in a clean pair of underwear, Jimin realised now why he didn’t need television in his life. Yet, he found himself turning on some weird soap opera anyway, something set in a hospital. Jimin hadn’t been in a hospital in a long time, but he was pretty certain that the doctors and nurses weren’t all incredibly attractive, with perfect hair and makeup.
Okay, so no television for him.

Though he knew that he shouldn’t, Jimin ended up tidying up some of Namjoon’s house because the mess was starting to get on his nerves. If he cleaned it up then his partner would just carry on making a mess, but he couldn’t sit in a room filled with pizza boxes from weeks ago and roaches of long-smoked joints all over the floor. So he had no choice but to attempt to clean up some of the mess, even if it was a bad idea. He promised himself that he would crack open a beer as a reward for doing so, a beer that he would enjoy unlike the Tsingtao one back in Hong Kong.

Jimin abandoned his attempts at exactly 10pm, finding that the living-area at least looked better and that the kitchen was now free from dishes and no longer seemed like a toxic waste dump. When he checked the refrigerator, he found just a couple of bottles inside of it and so he pulled one free.

Coors Light? Well, he guessed that that would do. Namjoon had probably bought it because he liked the way that the mountains changed colour when the bottle was cold.

Jimin ended up looking over his Polaroids whilst he drank the beer, placing them onto the sofa arm so that he could look at them all together.

Taehyung had sorted out the photographs that they had taken, splitting them up equally so that they had both gotten a decent amount of Polaroids. Jimin had the one of him outside of the brothel and the one on the tram, and Taehyung had another of them together taken from earlier in the day and a couple of him inside of Kowloon Walled City. But there were also the shots of the countless balconies and tall blocks, the shots of the glowing neon signs and aged film posters, and some of the exterior. And, of course, Taehyung had the snapshot of his naked behind for whatever god unknown reason that he had wanted it for. Sadly, he had none of his behind.

“Maybe, next time?” Jimin joked to himself, as he sloshed the remains of the beer around the bottle and he picked up the snapshot of the younger man standing outside the brothel with a wide grin on his face.

His type, huh? Well, Namjoon wasn’t far off, he supposed.

Jimin retired to bed at 11:30, hoping that he would sleep even though he knew that he wouldn’t. He had to tidy up Namjoon’s bed too, finding the covers wrinkled and mostly on the floor. The floor was also covered in old joints and rather cheap pornographic magazines that he didn’t want to even look at for the sake of his eyes. He fluffed up the pillows, climbed into the bed and…nothing.
Jimin was wide awake, his muscles were starting to hurt again, and that weird hollowness and dull ache was back in his stomach even when he had stuffed his face with food.

Tomorrow, he was going to be running around Pacific Heights, literally and figuratively. Yet, here he was, wide awake and knowing that he wasn’t going to sleep a wink because his body clock was so badly fucked up from all of his travelling. It was enough to make him roll onto his stomach with a groan, burying his face against his partner’s pillow so that when he breathed in he detected faded scents of cologne, shampoo and marijuana. Great, he had just had to open his goddamn mouth in front of that supplier, in front of Seokjin.

Jimin moved his face so that he could stare at the bedroom window, seeing darkness outside and the glow of streetlights and distant buildings. Well, it wasn’t like he had had much choice in the end. He had to run the cocaine for the sake of keeping up his apparently flawless reputation, and so he was going to have to suck it up and run fast and hard even if he felt like death.

All to impress this faceless and virtually unknown Prince Min.

Jimin rolled onto his back again and he stared up at the ceiling, just knowing that he wasn’t going to sleep tonight.
The light on the traffic lights across the road was red, had been red for what seemed like an eternity to him.

Jimin reached up to brush his hair back off his brow with a heavy sigh, squinting in the current sunlight and wishing that he had brought Namjoon’s sunglasses with him because that would have at least cut down on the glare a little; would have helped him keep that horrible headache at bay so that it wouldn’t come back to haunt him. Several aspirin and a lot of cold water had certainly chased it away, and so he should hopefully be free from it at last. Now, if only his aching thigh and back muscles and jet lag were as easy to fix as that.

“Come on,” he muttered under his breath, as he lifted his hand up to shield his eyes and he stared at the annoying red light. He knew that no amount of staring would change this fact, but he still did it anyway.

Just in case.

In the current heat, he was wearing what he usually wore when he wasn’t muling: completely casual clothing. That meant a white tee-shirt tucked into a pair of tight-fitting jeans, the ends rolled up and a pair of matching white Keds on his feet. There was no sight of open-necked shirts, trousers and leather loafers for him today. He was running drugs, not a casino. A completely casual look was the key to blending in and seeming like an average pedestrian with nothing to hide and no plans for illegal activity.

Jimin needed to give off an air of normalcy, and not at all let anyone become aware of the fact that the denim jacket knotted around his thin hips was filled with baggies of cocaine through a nice hidden seam in the jacket lining.

Just that clean-looking young man like always, of course.

Jimin had still been awake when Namjoon had returned in the early morning hours, smelling faintly
of cigarette smoke and beer because he had been lounging around bars hoping to snap up some deals. His friend had just dropped in the bed beside him, having been far too drained to even clean up and falling asleep within mere moments just to piss him off. Namjoon had been selling marijuana, of course, which meant that he had been unable to ask him about the cocaine deals. But by the time that he returned in the evening, he would find out how much had been ran around The Castro and Twin Peaks last night.

Until then, Jimin had a job to do, and that was to run as much cocaine as he possibly could around Pacific Heights as fast as he could.

It sounded kind of easy.

Jimin was praying that it would be as easy as it sounded.

When the lights finally changed, Jimin dropped his skateboard and he hopped onto it, kicking off hard to shoot across the wide road and then jump up onto the next sidewalk. The rubberised wheels clattered over the slightly uneven paving stones for a second before righting again, and he shifted to lean back ever so slightly and he kicked with his back foot hard.

Jimin had invested in the Stüssy skateboard quite a while back, considering the fact that he was unable to drive a car. At first it had been a hobby, a hopeful attempt at cutting down the time that he had spent running across the different districts for Namjoon. But then he had found that he actually had a talent for it that went beyond just simply being able to skate up and down the sidewalks. Sure, it was pretty hard getting up the constant hills and slopes of Pacific Heights, but on the trips back down, it was a total breeze.

Shooting down the sidewalks, with the cool breeze pulling his hair back off his face and blowing his tee-shirt against his body so that the fabric almost billowed out behind him like a sail, he could easily beat the speeds of the cars rolling up and down the road beside him. He could also weave around pedestrians with ease and easily jump the curb, and there was one or two tricks that he had learnt to go along with it.

Some days, Jimin thought that it would be pretty great to have a car, a sports car or basically any model that was cooler than a goddamn Datsun Maxima. But then some days...some days, Jimin actually kind of preferred the thought of having the skateboard. After all, it was so much easier to get collared by the cops driving a car, whereas he never got any negative attention skating around the area. No, most times that he noticed officers looking at him they did so only sparingly, likely still thinking that he was a high school student at a quick glance. Maybe a college kid. For once, his short height and frame worked in his favour, though he would never brag about this to Namjoon, of course. But that said...he only needed his skateboard for running, and with the exception of today, he didn’t actually run drugs anymore.
Maybe a sports car really would be better?

Jimin sailed along the streets of Pacific Heights, passing newly converted apartment blocks that were still yet to be opened for rent and a small diner that he spared a quick glance inside of. He caught sight of not much more than a single person inside at a window seat booth, a quick shock of black hair and clothing, and yet he didn’t get the slightest hint of a face because he skated past much too quickly for that.

So Jimin just turned his attention back to the street and he curved the corner at the end, heading in the direction of the gradual sloping hill that would get him to his old playground.

At this current early morning hour, there was still a lot of traffic as people moved around the city for work and to get their children to school. The trams were out in full force at the bottom of the hills, but thankfully not up on his way to Pacific Heights, because they could make so much noise that Jimin hated being surrounded by them.

A car horn honked at him suddenly, catching him by surprise so that he twisted to look back over his shoulder, seeing a Chevrolet *Celebrity* 1982. It had a wicked faded blue paint job that made Jimin whistle under his breath, and as the car passed he saw that most of the people inside were guys, young guys. They could have been surfers or skaters, could have just been honking to piss him off, but as the car passed him by, one of the guys leaned out of the open passenger-seat window and he stuck his arm out at him in the solemn high-five of surfers. So Jimin dropped his hand fast to catch it, slapping their palms together with a satisfying *crack* that made the guys in the car start laughing uproariously.

“Keep on street surfing, my man!” the guy who had high-fived him called out, his voice a mellowed out timbre that was most certainly the result of marijuana.

“Keep on catching waves, brother!” Jimin called back, before laughing softly under his breath.

After a couple more minutes of skating, Jimin was finally in the vicinity of the neighbourhood. Pacific Heights was full of mansions but not all of them were impressive or detached. No, quite a few of them were built together in little lots, not exactly uniform but incredibly boring to the eyes. Jimin much preferred Namjoon’s Painted Lady for sure. The ones that were detached…he very rarely got to enter those mansions. They were far too exclusive for him and set up further on the hill to get the best sights on offer in the area. Jimin was pretty certain that some of those mansions had perfect views of the bay or the Golden Gate Bridge. He was envious of the view of the bay even when he was used to it from his childhood, because it was a different kind of view.
It was the luxury of living up in the suburbs, far away from the packed urban streets and poverty and drugs that filled them…but still getting that perfect view of the deep blue waters.

Who wouldn’t be jealous of that?

Mostly, Jimin would enter these little lots or the fancy apartment blocks that lined the sloping hills of the neighbourhood instead, for that was where he found most of his buyers. Young couples, college buddies, techno-wizards, aspiring actors and actresses and models and artists: every-fucking-thing, really. Some of them wanted a nice rush from the cocaine to make them feel big and important - a chemical pat on the back. The others, they just wanted it because it made them feel alive and no longer numb to everything around them - a chemical slap in the face.

Jimin had already ensured that he could run the cocaine here this morning, not wanting to waste an entire day chasing around dead deals and soft addicts looking at a sample before buying the real shit. He needed proper transactions, and for that he had needed to contact several past buyers via phone calls, checking up on them and their pesky little habit. As a result, he had managed to secure a couple of deals in advance. Sure, a couple wasn’t the best, but it was better than nothing, and he might just have to start off small and establish his connections once more. That could take time, time that he might not necessarily have, but he was going to have to test the waters first and see.

Jimin’s first port of call was actually a mansion, a semi-detached one built on the end of a street. He hadn’t been to this mansion in quite some time, but he knew the woman he had ran for well enough because he knew most of his clients on a decent level. To be a runner, it really helped to be friendly and gentle with clients to discreetly nudge them from soft to hard addictions. If he seemed unfriendly, dangerous even, then that would really ruin a potential partnership between his client and Namjoon. So naturally, Jimin knew little facts about these people that he slipped drugs to, and this particular woman was called Tiffany.

Tiffany, the trophy wife of some software developer that worked on military networks or something. Jimin forgot that part, because her husband really wasn’t important at all. He was out of the picture always, and he was either oblivious to his wife’s nose for cocaine or he just didn’t care. No, what Jimin knew was this: Tiffany was a trophy wife but a working woman, one with connections to San Francisco Museum Modern Art through her art. Yes, she was an artist (of course) and she had a son called Bobby. He also knew was that she was fucking loaded and clearly itching for a line because she had damn near wet her panties when he had called her up this morning.

Jimin sailed down the sidewalk until he was outside her mansion and then he jumped off the board, going up the front steps to get to the door. Lemon exterior, white and pink details across the windows and roofing - a pretty nice house. He rang the bell, hearing a melodic theme coming through the door that simply screamed: suburbia.
After a moment of waiting, the pink door swung inwards and there she was: Tiffany, his first saviour of the day. She of the colourful floral blouse, miniskirt and hose, and thick permed red hair. Not exactly the first mental image to come to mind when he thought of the word ‘saviour’, but that hardly mattered right now.

“Oh, am I glad to see you,” she exclaimed, as she opened the door and she gestured for him to enter the mansion. “Come on in, dear, it’s been too long.”

Jimin might just American through and through, but wearing shoes indoors still made him feel weird, like he was doing something that he shouldn’t because of his upbringing. Yet, he didn’t want to drop and get out of his Keds for a deal that might only last a couple of minutes at most. His back was too sore for that kind of stretching.

Tiffany’s heels clip-clopped all of the way across the sitting-area to the kitchen like the swings of a clock finger, and he followed along behind her much like a puppy would.

“You look well, a little thinner now but well,” Tiffany remarked, as she moved to collect glasses from an overhead rack over the marble counter.

Jimin saw a cocktail container in ice on said counter and it seemed that she was planning on cracking open mimosas at 8:00am. A true suburban woman through and through.

“You’ll have to tell me your secret, honey.”

Tiffany must have weighed 93lbs and here she was: asking for diet advice. Somehow, Jimin doubted that she wanted to hear the words ‘food binge’ followed by ‘laxatives’.

“I’ve been travelling a lot,” he decided to reply, thinking that that would suffice. “Barely had a break, so, that’s probably why.”

Tiffany poured the sparkling orange cocktail into the two glasses and then she recapped the shaker.

“And how have things been for you, darling?”
“Well, there’s been a few things. I had an exhibition at the MuMo two months back that went very well. Also, Bobby was accepted onto the football team,” she said with a proud smile, as she quickly moved to place the glasses on the dining table. “We might just have a future 49er in the making.”

“Oh, um…that’s awesome,” Jimin said, before giving her his usual sunny smile.

Football? Jimin had never really had an interest in the sport, had found the players oftentimes more interesting than the game for sure. Just hearing the word ‘football’ would always throw him back to the first time that he had ever sucked another boy off in a high school toilet stall, a boy called Dallas that he hadn’t seen in years. He might just playing for the 49ers too, but Jimin doubted it.

Terrible stamina.

“That’s really swell, Tiff.”

“Come, sit down,” she said, as she pulled her own chair out, sat at the table and cocked one long leg over the other.

Jimin did so too, unknotting his denim jacket so that he could fold it onto his lap.

“Needless to say, I think a lot of people have missed you coming through here,” Tiffany explained, as she took a sip of her mimosa. “Since you moved on, the quality has been just ghastly. I wouldn’t give Roxxy the stuff that’s been circulating around here.”

Roxxy was the family dog. There were addicts lying in gutters all over several districts that would kill for a hit more baby tale than actual cocaine and yet…yet, the rich habitual users turned their noses up at it. Jimin almost wanted to laugh, but it really wasn’t funny at all. It was bleak and depressing.

“Bad, huh?” he asked with feigned sympathy in his voice.

Tiffany nodded so much that her perm bounced around her head.
“Quality’s been declining in a lot of areas,” Jimin bullshitted. “But that’s set to change soon, think of it like a big cleanup.”

“Oh, good, because frankly I hate swallowing pills and the Adderall just didn’t feel right,” the woman said with a soft head shake. “It was so much weaker.”

Jimin reached inside of the lining of his jacket, feeling for the seam so that he could slip his fingers inside of it and pull out a baggie. He could sense that Tiffany was watching him keenly, pretending to be sipping at her mimosa.

“How much were you looking for, darling?”

“Give me a gram first, I want to test it before buying any more,” Tiffany said, as she reached up to brush her hair behind her shoulder. “You understand, right? The stuff that’s been getting brought through here has just been terrible. You almost don’t want to touch it, only if you get desperate. It’s such a low quality that the price makes sense. Cheap coke should feel cheap, right?”

“This is good grade,” Jimin reassured her, as he proceeded to slip one of the baggies free from his jacket lining and he held it up to show her.

It dangled from his fingertips, like a bone to a dog.

“See, the stuff that I was talking about?” she remarked, as she gestured at the baggie. “It was so white, too white, I think. I think that they added stuff to it. Cut it with stuff.”

Jimin wondered if she would ever say the word ‘shit’ in his presence, but that seemed highly unlikely. That wasn’t very suburban at all.

“I know I mentioned it on the phone, but, because this is such a good grade, the price’s a little higher. Yeah? 50 dollars a gram.”

“The usual charge was 35 dollars, but 15 dollars more? That’s a tip at Robert’s favourite restaurant,” Tiffany said with a wave of her wrist, showing that she didn’t care in the slightest that it was inflated.
No, she just wanted the cocaine right now.

Jimin watched her moving to collect her handbag from the kitchen counter, pulling her purse free and setting it down beside her elbow. When she opened it up, there was so much money and cards inside: credit cards, bank cards, store cards, fucking organ donor cards, most likely.

Tiffany pulled out a fifty and she slipped it across the table top with surprisingly steady fingers.

So Jimin exchanged the goods and the woman proceeded to pop the baggie open and empty the contents right onto the expensive table.

After creating three short and fat little lines, Tiffany greedily snorted one of them up using another rolled-up bill. Jimin watched her sniff once or twice and then throw her head back slightly, no doubt feeling the familiar drip at the back of her throat. When she dropped her head again, he saw that the cocaine was mostly certainly a success. Oh, she looked like it was fucking Christmas Day.

“I can call up a few girlfriends, if you want me to?” Tiffany suggested, as she moved on the seat ever so slightly, sticking her tongue out to wet her medium pink lipstick-covered lips. “I think that you could sell a lot more of that today, I guarantee you that I want to buy some more of this stock.”

Tiffany had potential clients that he could sell to?

“Of course, Tiff,” Jimin said with his first genuine smile of the entire ordeal. “You call whoever you want, there’s plenty enough to go around for you all.”

Tiffany moved to go to the kitchen phone, moving with a little bounce in her step now that her system was surging with a good hit of cocaine. She collected the receiver and proceeded to start dialling at the speed of light, clearly used to phoning these numbers.

“Lauren! It’s Tiffany, yes. Good good. Actually, you won't believe what I’m calling you for…” she said, as glanced back over her shoulder at him. “I have a lovely young man in my kitchen right now that we haven’t seen in awhile. Remember, Jimin? He sold me those little treats that- yes, yes, I’m going to call them all. Very good, the best I’ve had in months, Lauren. This is designer, I swear it’s designer. And…uhuh, uhuh - well, you know what they say: when the boys are away, the girls come out to play,” Tiffany said, before shooting Jimin a buzzing smile that was completely the result of cocaine. And so he returned it right back, just knowing that she was making his job so much easier for him. “OK, OK, see you soon, honey.”
Tiffany put the receiver down, and then she picked it up again to start calling another number just as fast.

“Dani! Listen, sweetie, I’ve got some news that I know you’ve been itching to hear…”

Of all of the ways that Jimin had imagined that he would spend today, selling eight-balls and grams to a gaggle of women that looked like they could just as well belong to a book club was not one of the options. The kitchen got rather crowded: a menagerie of different coloured and patterned blouses, skirt lengths and strong perfumes coming from the women all encircling him like giggling and cooing birds of prey.

Tiffany’s idea of ‘a few girlfriends’ turned out to be seven, and all seven of them wanted something. One or two of them had required a little nudging to get them to buy a gram, but at least they bought said grams and didn’t request free samples. Jimin was strictly unable to give free lines in order to make up the loss in profits. He thought that it was incredibly lucky that he had picked her mansion as his first trip, because he was going to need to refill his jacket with more goods the very second that he left the building.

“Are you gonna be a regular?” Isabella asked. “Cos if you’re coming through here, selling this good, you can add my name on that mailing list of yours. Isabelle Gutierrez,” she declared, as she lifted her glass and then clapped a hand to her chest with a cackle of laughter.

“Um, sadly it’s limited,” Jimin explained, as he folded her bill up with the rest and he slid the eight-ball baggie over to her.

Across the table, Tiffany and another woman called Marta were eagerly snorting up a line each, for there was quite a few lines across the table now.

“Limited?” Samantha asked, as she quickly looked between him and Tiffany, her tight Afro curls bouncing from the movement. “Well then, honey, I’m gonna need to stock up on a couple more grams.”

This made the women burst out laughing, rather shriek and manic laughter from the lines of cocaine and mimosas.

Jimin tried to not wince at the sound as he mentally tried to recall just how many baggies that he still
had inside his jacket. God help them when they had to turn back to the badly cut and low grade shit that had been peddled through the neighbourhood over the last couple of months. They might just have nervous breakdowns at the thought of having to settle for the cheap shit just like everyone else.

“I second that!” Marta added, as she held up her glass, which seemed to cause an impromptu cheers session that resulted in quite a lot of cocktail being spilled on the table.

A couple of the other women agreed, and so Jimin decided to just empty his goddamn jacket stash right onto his lap to make things easier for himself. He saw a lot of gram baggies and a small amount of eight-balls left, letting his breath out in a sigh of relief. He should be able to meet this demand, no problem.

Jimin had been in the kitchen for nearly an hour by the time that he exited the mansion, with his jacket now nearly empty of cocaine and his socks stuffed with crisply folded notes. Before leaving, he made sure to tell the women that he would be running again tomorrow, and maybe the next day if they wanted to stock up on more good grade cocaine. Judging from their hearty agreements, blown eyes and flushed cheeks, the answer was: yes. Shit, he could probably peddle the entire fucking 850 grams that they had to the women in three days the way that they were snapping up the baggies and snorting the lines.

So Jimin jumped onto his board, kicked off hard, and he headed off in the direction of the hilly slopes that would take him down through Pacific Heights.

“Uh…three eight-balls to Samantha,” he muttered, as he started his mental calculator to figure out how many grams that he had just shifted in a single meeting. “Eight-ball and three grams to Tiffany…two eight-balls and two grams to Isabella…”

Jimin was in desperate need of restocking his jacket and storing all of the cash that he had just made somewhere safe. Though it wasn’t exactly ideal, he was going to have to go back to Namjoon’s house and exchange the goods there. Cash goes onto the coffee table, cocaine comes out of the swag bag and into his pockets: he had already created a system for it in his head. Sure, he would lose a little time doing these trips, but if he was going to find the cocaine moving just like that then those minutes were nothing, were just speed bumps on the road to profit. Just that one deal had left him feeling pretty fucking good about himself and he found that his body felt much lighter on the skateboard as he weaved and jumped his way down the neighbourhood to get to the hills.

When Jimin reached that steep decline and felt the skateboard wheels racing underneath him, he felt a little like a bullet shooting out of a chamber. The slope was so steep that he had to lean back and place some weight down on the tail to keep the nose of the board from dipping under his weight and spilling him to the hard concrete.
Jimin shot down the sidewalk with a wide smile on his face, travelling much faster than the traffic until he levelled out and made sure to curve the board and stop himself from skating right into a main road. He shot around the corner, still travelling at that bullet-speed until he slowed down by adding some friction from his back foot.

As he passed through the outskirts of Pacific Heights once more, Jimin glanced through the same diner window as earlier, seeing that whoever had been inside before was still present, except now he was with another man. The man had a table covered in plates and cups and he seemed to be in the act of making a call. He was using a portable phone, one that looked like the new mobile phones that Jimin had seen on television but had never actually used before. As he sailed past the diner, Jimin eyed him for a moment before looking away again, not even glancing at whoever he was sitting with right now because they didn’t interest him in the slightest. The kind of guy to own a portable phone was the kind of guy with cash, that much was certain.

He did make note of a red Ferrari Testarossa parked on the curb outside of the diner, however, and the sight was enough to leave him in awe. Shit, that was a hot car. What he wouldn’t do to own one of those beauts. Especially in red, for that might just be the sexiest colour possible for the model. He doubted that black would beat it, the red was just too good. As he skated past it, he turned his head to run his eyes along the smooth hood and boot, the deep grills in the doors and the plush black interior. If that belonged to one of the guys in the diner then they were more than just guys with cash, they were fucking loaded.

When Jimin got back to the home, he re-entered it with his spare key, quickly cutting along the hallway to get to the living-room. Just like yesterday, he located the swag bag filled with the presorted baggies of cocaine behind the television unit, and so he hunkered down and he proceeded to start sorting through it to pull out a decent amount of gram and eight-ball baggies. As soon as he had a small mound ready, he started feeding them through the hidden seam inside of his jacket and then he straightened up and tied the denim sleeves around his waist tightly.

Rather than leave the cash lying around in the open, Jimin located a small cardboard shoe box. It would do for the job, and so he popped the lid off and he placed it on the coffee table before sitting down on the sofa for a moment.

Jimin transferred the stashed bills from his socks inside of it and then he resealed the box, searching for a pen with which to scrawl on the outside should his friend wake up before he got back in the evening. He managed to find a Sharpie liner pen and he uncapped it, quickly scrawling the simple message: Jimmy’s coke earnings, 19/08/84, just so Namjoon couldn’t possibly get confused. Satisfied that the box wouldn’t get tossed and that his jacket was filled fit to burst, he recapped the pen and dropped it down on the table.
Time to go and hope that the rest of his clients were as fucking starved for good quality cocaine as those women had been.

Jimin had to once again pass through Pacific Heights to wrap up some quick deals, but he also had venture into Presidio Heights too, where he discovered that not all of his clients were as needy or greedy as the first ones. He found himself only dealing single eight-balls now because his buyers were just buying it because it was a ‘quick deal’ and they didn’t want to pay the inflated price for more than a couple of lines. Clearly, these users were used to better quality than Tiffany and her girls. Jimin doubted that they were getting the quality that he was supplying, but fuck them. If they wanted cheap then they could buy cheap. At the end of the day, Moon Tiger Mob was still making money from their addiction and so it really didn’t matter. He just wished that the rich fuckers didn’t look down their noses at him like he was their goddamn pool boy.

But the most irritating client of all was a man called Leo, a man that Jimin knew well enough from his past running days.

Leo wouldn’t let him sit down on any of his furniture, wouldn’t let him touch anything in his home and most certainly wouldn’t let him go near the kitchen. Jimin was still trying to figure out if it was because of his skin colour or the fact that the man knew that he was gay because he had asked upon first meeting him. But whatever the case, the result was the exact same. He had to stand in the doorway and talk to him like a manservant, his voice echoing across the mansion to him.

A woman answered the door for him this time around, a ridiculously tall and thin blonde that just screamed European model - European imported model, that was. She didn’t greet him, but instead just waved him in with a hand, her expression saying all that he needed to know. Ah, Leo must be having another cocaine-related meltdown right now. He found him sitting at the kitchen table with his head in his hands and he stopped to stand in the doorway as the woman moved to sit on the leather settee across the sweeping sitting-area.

“Took your goddamn time,” the man muttered, as he nursed his temples and refused to even look at him. “I’ll take a gram.”

“It’s 50 dollars for a gram,” Jimin stated, reaching inside of the slit so that he could pull a baggie out of his jacket and hold it up.

The noise of the plastic wrinkling made the older man roll his eyes to stare at him, and he could see that he was vexed from that glance alone.

“So, I have to pay for the first hit?”
“I’m not a pusher,” Jimin explained. “I don’t give free samples. I explained this on the phone to you, Leo.”

“I know you did,” the man replied, his face giving a slight twitch that was one-hundred percent coke bugs symptoms. “But I still don’t think it’s fair that I should pay inflated prices without knowing what I’m getting.”

“You dunno what you’re getting at lower prices either,” Jimin retorted, as he shifted from foot to foot impatiently. “But I can assure you that this is good grade, supplied directly from Prince Min himself, and-”

“Prince? Did I hear that right? Did you just say ‘prince’?” Leo asked suddenly, squinting at him with a rather bemused expression on his face. “Prince of what exactly? Some fucking shanty town slum across the world where people don’t even have shoes?”

“Are you gonna buy this or not, Leo? I’m busy today and if you ask me, I think you need a line or three right now,” Jimin remarked honestly.

“Ja, he does,” the heavily accented blonde agreed from across the kitchen.

This earned her a glare and yet the woman didn’t seem to care. Jimin could see that her makeup didn’t really hide the bruise on her cheekbone. But at least Leo moved to slip money out of his breast pocket, a fifty which signalled that he would buy a single gram.

Such a tight asshole.

“Catharina, dollar,” Leo said, as he held the bill out to her.

The woman eyed this for a moment before getting to her feet to move and collect it, having to give the bill to Jimin because the other man clearly didn’t want to touch him. He exchanged the baggie for the bill and he turned on his heel to leave the mansion without another word.

“Stupid prick,” he muttered under his breath, quickly jumping onto his skateboard.
Jimin didn’t exactly wish for overdoses considering everything, but if that man were to drop dead from the lines that he had just sold him, well…no need to shed a tear. Not when he had travelled all of the way here for nothing more than a single gram.

Jimin was tired, hungry, and coated in sweat, but he couldn’t take a break now. Not when he still had so much work to do. A break was a loss in profits right now, and the only thing that mattered was profits. His stomach could wait, but sadly his tongue was unable to do so. He was damn near panting from the mixture of sweltering heat and skating around the two districts, and so he ended up needing to buy a drink from a food stand just to stop himself from collapsing of dehydration. The taste of cheap RC Cola had never been so pleasing on his tongue before. Of course, after guzzling a large serving of cola, he then needed to take another break in the form of running into a public restroom to relieve himself. Jimin was actually using the public restrooms for their intended use. Namjoon would be so proud of him.

But beyond these two quick breaks, Jimin forced himself to just carry on running so that he could return to his partner in the evening with a decent profit.

The trouble for him was that Jimin was unable to deal on the streets because he wasn’t technically a dealer. No, all that he did was run the drugs to buyers from Namjoon and accept the payments on his behalf. That meant that he couldn’t try and sell any of the cocaine that he was carrying to the occasional addict that he saw on the street. Not that he would get away with it anyway, considering the inflated price. It was just so irritating seeing the amount of potential clients out on the streets and knowing that he was unable to try and strike lucky earlier in the day. But when it started approaching close to the evening hours, Jimin had no need to worry about scoring single gram deals on the streets. Not when he had his largest deal of the day coming up. So he quickly made his way back to Namjoon’s home in preparation of the last deal of the day.

Jimin had saved his largest trade for last because he knew that he was going to need all of his jacket to pass along the goods. It was a rather massive haul, looked to be the same amount that he had hauled over the rest of the deals combined. It was exactly 50 grams today alone, a massive amount that he could hardly believe he was running in one trip. Jimin didn’t really know why whoever ran the brothel in Chinatown would accept the inflated cocaine over what was on the streets, but considering the fact that Choi was gone, he supposed that that might have something to do with it. After all, this den was official property of 14K to his knowledge, one of their only current investments in the region seeming to be brothels and human trafficking back to Hong Kong. They had to get the cocaine from somewhere, and a casual partner was better than a stranger, even at a little extra.

If there was one thing that Jimin hated and was truly scared by, it was brothels. He had no choice but to deal with their current client, but that didn’t mean that he didn’t feel his stomach twisting at the mere thought. He knew where the cocaine would be going and it was right up the noses of the women inside the building. Not the men, of course, he knew that they got doped instead of high to
make them unable to fight back or cause trouble for the clients. The knowledge that he was helping drug sex slaves and trafficking victims was something that might not keep him awake at night, but it did occasionally make him feel a strong wave of nausea running through his system that he couldn’t shake.

Jimin would take a thousand suburban bitches and spoilt college brat clients over a single brothel deal if he could.

The meeting place wasn’t the brothel, because only select men would know where that was and would be allowed inside; though any tall building that looked to have barred or boarded-up windows in the area was a high possibility. No, Jimin had to meet one of the men in a tea house instead, one that was clearly a front to allow 14K to do dealings and businesses under the guise of a legitimate business.

When he entered the building, he saw that there was only one man currently inside, a man that he assumed was Ang. So he moved over to him and he dropped onto his knees on the floor cushion, unknotting the jacket as he did so.

“50 grams for 50 dollars each, yeah?” he asked him, seeing the way that the man nodded and then offered him a manilla envelope.

Jimin accepted it and then he dumped his jacket on the table. He hastily emptied the cocaine baggies from his jacket into the envelope for the man, wanting to get the deal done as fast as he could so that he could leave and go back to his partner. There was exactly fifty orders of 50 gram baggies, which meant that Jimin’s denim jacket was near bulging in both of the secret compartments.

But for this one deal alone? He was pulling in $2,500.

As soon as he was done, Jimin held out his hand, wanting the man to hand over the cash before they exchanged the goods. Ang did so, handing him a wad of bills that he proceeded to count before sliding the envelope over to him. Then he got upright and he bent down so he could store the cash inside of his sock like usual.

“You probably bring in high demand,” Ang remarked, as he watched him intently.

Jimin detected that his accent was still pretty strong, and his English wasn’t perfect, but it was good enough.
“Nice face, good ass, good quality for demand.”

Jimin had to physically stop himself from shuddering in repulsion as he shoved the cash down into his sock as fast as he could. Great, he had a pimp eyeing him up like he was for sale and he had to hold his tongue because his attitude could affect future deals.

“Tell your dealer we could secure partnership through these deals,” Ang added. “More of this, very useful; yes?”

“Ohuh, I’ll tell him,” Jimin said with a forced smile, as he pulled his jeans cuff down over his sock. “I’m sure that our supplier would be happy to secure a partnership with you.”

“Nice,” Ang said with a wide smile, an unsettling fucking smile that made Jimin feel kind of cold. “Smart boy.”

Before he could fully straighten up, Ang just had to reach up and give his ass a squeeze. It was enough to make Jimin jerk upright and grab his skateboard off the table, dashing out of the tea house as fast as he could without even looking back over his shoulder. He was never going to run to this fucking place ever again. No way, no fucking way. He didn’t want to end up getting dragged into the back of a van one day. Fuck this shit. He could feel his heart almost galloping in his chest as he knotted his now empty jacket around his hips and he sailed along the sidewalk, legitimate fear making it skip hard.

When Jimin finally reached his partner’s house back in The Haight, it was drawing close to 8:30pm. Namjoon would be sending his men out onto the streets again soon enough, would probably be dealing himself at some point in the evening. Upon entering the home, he found that he was at least awake, judging from the sound of the television coming from the living-room. So Jimin closed and locked the door, slipping out of his Keds to cross the thin hallway and step into the doorway.

“Finally!” he exclaimed with a hard shrug of his shoulders, catching his friend by surprise.

Namjoon turned away from the television screen, clearly no longer interested in the news now that he had arrived.

“You’re back?” he asked, as he reached up to rub at his eyes, signalling that he had been awake for not too long. At least he had showered, and he was currently wearing a loose black vest and
undershorts. “How much you pull in, huh?”

“Shit, Namo, food first and then we can talk cash; yeah?” Jimin muttered, as he wiped at his brow and then brushed his sweat-clumped hair back off his face. “I’m about to drop right now, I’m running on empty.”

“Did you seriously run for the entire day without a break?” Namjoon asked him, quickly rubbing at his eyes again before looking at him.

“From 8am until 8pm,” he agreed with a nod, seeing his friend’s sleepy eyes suddenly widening comically. “I took one drink and a piss break, alright, that’s how dedicated I am.”

“You really are gonna drop, you dumbass,” Namjoon said with a head shake. “Sit your ass down, I’ll try and rustle something up. Uh…not sure what, but I’ll figure that out.”

“My hero, you’re honestly my hero, Daddy-o,” he remarked, as his friend got up off the sofa and proceeded to cross the room.

Namjoon passed him to step out into the hallway, smelling fresh and masculine whereas he likely stank of hour-old sweat.

Jimin moved to get to the sofa, retrieving the shoe box from underneath the coffee table and dumping it on the surface so that he could pop the lid off. Then he collected the last impressive wad of bills from his sock and he eyed it for a few seconds until his partner’s voice sounded out and caught him by surprise.

“Kimchi spaghetti?” Namjoon asked him, his voice showcasing just how uncertain he was about the prospect.

Jimin finished shoving the notes into the shoe box and then he straightened up, moving to stand in the doorway of the living-room.

“Kimchi spaghetti? Christ, Namo, I don’t think I’ve had that since I was a kid…” Jimin muttered, as he watched the older man sorting through the kitchen through the gap in the doorway.
“Yeah, well, I can’t cook anything else, so, I hope that you like it,” his partner called back.

The way that Jimin felt right now, he would eat the spaghetti uncooked.

Whilst his friend hastily cooked up his apparently only speciality dish, Jimin went up to the first-floor to jump in the shower. He so desperately wanted to wash away all of the sweat and grime from the day of running, and even when the water was incredibly hot, the heat didn’t faze him. Jimin ranked showers in his top five pleasurable sensations list, ranked number three after orgasms and stuffing his face with food, but some days he was almost tempted to jump it up to first place.

As soon as he was finished, Jimin hastily dried his damp hair off and he slipped into a pair of clean briefs, electing to steal one of Namjoon’s cast-off (but clean) tee-shirts from the bedroom floor to throw on with it. It was red and black striped and almost swimming on his frame as he went down the stairs again.

Namjoon was in the act of finishing up with the cooking, and so Jimin left him to do so, grabbing two beers from the fridge and cracking them open. His partner had no dining table so they would have to eat in the living-room instead. He placed the bottles down on the coffee table and he waited on the sofa until Namjoon was entering the room with two massive and deep bowls of kimchi spaghetti. Not only had he added grated cheese and diced pieces of bacon, he had even added a sprig of garnish to the top of the spaghetti, which had Jimin cracking up at the sight.

“Don’t laugh, cooking’s hard,” Namjoon retorted, placing the bowl down on the coffee table for him.

“Mmm, I mean I smuggle drugs up my ass through several countries’ worth of airport security but you’re right; cooking’s hard,” Jimin agreed with a wicked grin, as his partner sat down beside him.

Namjoon just shot him a look that told him that he wasn’t funny, and Jimin grabbed his fork and he proceeded to eager tucked into the meal.

“So, what exactly happened today?” Namjoon asked him, as Jimin rather loudly slurped a long end of noodle up into his mouth and cheeked the mouthful. Damn, his friend might have said that he could only cook one meal, but this was still pretty fucking good. “Deals go alright? No trouble?”

“I had to put up with Leo,” Jimin retorted around the food, seeing the other man grimacing at his words. “The fucking prick, honestly. He tried to get a free hit from me, and he didn’t like it when I
said no. Also, he’s got some European chick on his arm too.” He chewed the mouthful over and swallowed, gathering more spaghetti onto his fork, and he was about to lift it to his mouth when he was hit by a sudden thought. “That brothel, Namo, listen I got good news but there’s something I gotta say too. The good news - they might wanna secure a partnership to our supplier, or you, now that Choi’s ass is grass. What I gotta say is: get another guy to run to them, please.”

“What’s wrong, did something happen?” Namjoon asked, pausing in the act of twisting his own spaghetti around his fork to look up at him.

“The guy that they sent, Ang? Fucking pervert, I’m talking Class-A creepazoid. He said that I’d bring in a high demand and he touched me, and I’m not putting up with that. Like, he groped my ass, man,” Jimin explained, as he dropped his fork and held his hand up, squeezing his fingers together for emphasis. “I don’t wanna go there one day and end up in the back of a van, you get me?”

“I get you, and don’t worry, I’ll send other guys,” his partner replied. “I’ll send Wooyoung, he’s got a face like a fucking pug and he’s built like a wrestler, so, somehow I doubt he’s gonna bring in high demand.”

“Nasty, fucking nasty,” Jimin muttered, shifting on the sofa to grab his beer. “I hate brothel dealers anyway and that didn’t help. But the creepazoid was taking an order for fifty grams, so…just gotta suck it up, yeah?”

“Yeah, just gotta suck it up, Jimmy,” Namjoon agreed in a quiet voice, as he stabbed at his mass of kimchi spaghetti.

It took them several minutes to finish the meal and beers, Jimin making sure to eat every single bite to appease his rumbling stomach. As soon as they were finished, the bowls went on the coffee table and he shifted to retrieve his marked shoe box.

“Namo, inside here, it’s what I’ve made today, yeah?” he explained, as he placed the box down on his knee and he patted at the lid almost affectionately.

His partner eyed the box curiously, and then he snorted when he caught sight of the scrawled black letters on the cardboard lid.

“A single day running, 8am to 8pm, no fucking breaks.”
“Just hurry up and show me, man,” Namjoon declared dramatically, as he waved his wrist at him.

So Jimin pulled the lid off and he tipped the box upside down, spilling a mess of wrinkled bills all over the sofa cushion between them. This made his partner make a surprised noise as he stared at the near mountain of bills, clearly shocked by the sight.

“How much did you run? You got an idea?”

“I ran, uh, wait let me do the maths…” Jimin muttered, as he held a hand up and he started tapping his fingers on his lips. “Uh…from going into Presidio Heights and Chinatown too, today I ran… gotta be over a hundred grams alone. Maybe one-twenty? Everyone wanted a eight-ball, fucking eight-ball after eight-ball, some chicks were so desperate for a line that they bought three a pop to make sure they had enough to last them a couple of days. I had to start rooting through your stash to take some, so, you’re gonna need to start sharing the coke out again to make up for that.”

“Shit, Jimmy, how much cash is that right there?”

“Let’s find out…” he replied with a wide grin.

Thanks to rich clients, it was surprisingly easy to count the cash in front of him, for it was mostly $100, $50, $10 and the occasional $5 bills. Jimin collected the $5 and $10 notes together first, counting them and stacking them aside before moving onto the real cash. The figure started to add up incredibly fast, hundreds doubling and then doubling again within seconds until he was moving onto thousands and stacking up the bills up.

$4,630 was the figure that he ended up with.

$1,980 of that amount alone was from eight-ball deals, and the rest, $2,650, consisted of the single grams portions that he had ran. He had managed to make $4,630 on around 100 grams of inflated cocaine. Cocaine that was worth $3,211 street value in the exact same deals that he had made.

That was $1,419 of pure profit so far on just the grams that he had touched.

When he was finished counting, Jimin dropped the last handful of bills onto the pile and he looked up at his partner, that same wide grin present on his face.
“4,630 dollars,” he declared in a smug tone.

“Shit, I could just kiss you, kid, I could just- fuck it!”

Namjoon grabbed Jimin’s head between his hands and he proceeded to deliver a loud and sloppy kiss right on his forehead that had him cracking up.

Oh, Jimin was giggling as if he had smoked a joint right now, that giddy burst of laughter bubbling up from his stomach and filling him with elation.

“What about you, huh, how much did your guys make?”

“I didn’t count last night, I just put it in the safe because I was too tired to do so, so…”

Namjoon’s pushers had pushed around 17 grams of the allotted 50 to new potential buyers, and they had managed to shift 150 grams last night alone in deals around The Castro, Twin Peaks, Upper Market and Hayes Valley at a slightly lower inflated price than him. They had made $1,935 on gram deals and $4,050 on eight-ball deals, totalling $5,985 on what should have been $4,966.

That was $1,019 of profit from the 150 grams.

They had shifted 250 or so grams on mixed deals so far over a single day, totalling $10,615 over the street value of just $8,177. They were currently sitting at $2,438 of profit and that was only set to rise over the next few days. Namjoon’s men had yet to bring in the cash from today’s dealings on the streets too, and so the profit could be double that by the early morning hours when the cash poured on in.

When Namjoon dropped the bills from his hand onto the cushion with the rest, the wad unrolled, spilling everywhere so that the mound turned into a near mountain of green paper. Jimin could only stare at it dumbly for a moment, taken aback by the sight of so much green in front of him. It was almost too much for his brain to process right now, for he seemed to be having difficulty doing so. Just this morning, that had been an assortment of baggies of cocaine, and now it was a mound of cash.
“Namo, I’ve never seen this much money at once!” Jimin hollered, as he clapped his hands against his cheeks. “Holy fuck! 10,000 dollars, holy shit!”

“Makes the cash you were making back in your running days seem like nothing, right?” Namjoon remarked with a grin.

“Literally! Oh my god! I can’t believe that’s 10,000 dollars. 10,000…in front of me. Fuck!” Jimin dropped his hands from his cheeks, unable to keep the excited smile off of his face. “Namo, I gotta do it. I gotta do it, man.”

“Do what?”

Jimin reached down to gather as much of the cash together as he could, almost scooping it into a mound so that he could throw his arms up and knock it right into the air. The sudden fountain of bills caught Namjoon by surprise, made him jerk his head back and let out a funny noise as the papers flew up into the air and then came down again on the sofa, their heads and laps, the floor.

“Honestly, Jimmy…” his partner said in a soft voice, the corners of his lips pulled up in a smile.

“One day, one day I’m gonna fuck a guy on a bed of cash,” Jimin declared, as the last of the bills landed down on them. “Or get fucked, whatever, I don’t care, I just know there’s gonna be cash and fucking.”

“You’ll ruin the cash,” Namjoon remarked, reaching over to collect a crumpled fifty from his hair for him.

“There’ll be so much cash that it won’t matter,” Jimin argued, as he fluffed up his hair and brushed it back off his brow. “That’ll be like, spare change.”

“You’ve got lofty ambitions, Jimmy.”

“Hey, if you’re gonna dream, dream big, Daddy-o,” Jimin retorted with a beaming grin.
The golf ball was sitting right there on the tee, just waiting to be hit.

Yoongi had been staring at it for what felt like forever, but in reality he knew that it had likely only been a minute. The blinding white surface was almost burnt into his retinas so that whenever he blinked, he still saw it through his thin eyelids. He wanted to move to fix his cap but it was hard to do so when he had a golf bag on one shoulder and a series of clubs held in his hand - clubs that his father had made him get out so that he could swing them once and then pass them back for another. Therefore, he had to just leave his baseball cap for now and wait until he could put the goddamn clubs away again. He dragged his eyes away from the ball to glance across the greens for a moment, seeing a kart driving across it and the distant sight of other players having fun.

Presidio Golf Course was an impressive stretch of green that covered a great chunk of land. It was filled with smooth hillocks and paved paths of sand, had copses of lush trees and even a small lake inside of it.

Yoongi assumed that he was supposed to be impressed by it all, but he really wasn’t. He found the entire sport absolutely depressing and he hated driving his father around in one of the karts because the man refused to use a caddy whenever he was present.

No, Yoongi was expected to be his caddy instead just so he could be reminded of how much lower than him he really was. That was why he was currently standing in the disgusting heat with a golf bag shrugged up onto his shoulder that was dragging him down on one side, watching the man fidgeting with his club but not taking the shot.

Sometimes, Yoongi was convinced that he spent so long between shots just so he had to stand there and wait. He wouldn’t be surprised, for it seemed sadistic enough to him.

After all, this was his way of getting him to wallow on his actions, his way of making him sweat over it; literally, in this particular case. Yes, his father would make him follow him around all day like a slave: driving his kart, holding his clubs, carrying his bag, and when he felt like it, he would unload some scathing remarks onto him. Yoongi was used to the routine by now, which was the exact reason why he avoided having to contact the man whenever possible. He likely should have avoided contacting him today too, but sadly he had had choice on the matter. If he wanted to retrieve
information then this was the only option that he currently had to get it.

Right now, Yoongi only had jurisdiction in several regions of the city, mostly the northeast and central regions. The entirety of the south, both east and west, and a chunk of the northwest was completely foreign to him. He had no lieutenants there, had no true connections to any dealers or pimps on the streets and the circuits. All of that belonged to his father still, and right now, Yoongi was being blocked. It was almost as if his father had erected a kiddie pen around him, had allowed him to play with all of this toys so long as he stayed behind the gate and behaved. In normal situations, Yoongi would have continued to play and would have ignored the invisible barrier that was all around him, but there was a problem.

Bernal Heights wasn’t in his jurisdiction.

A bead of sweat suddenly rolled down his face from his hairline right into his eye, making him blink rapidly in surprise.

Yoongi decided to just dump the golf bag on the grass, hearing it thump loudly as he did so. He dropped the other clubs inside of the open compartment and then he reached up to remove his cap. He roughly ran his fingers through his sweat-clumped black hair, dabbed his skin dry, and then he fixed the baseball cap back down on his brow, the brim thankfully blocking out the powerful rays. His father was too distracted with faking his entire shot routine to even look back at him, but Yoongi knew that he was more than aware of him. He was probably thinking about how weak that he was because he couldn’t handle a single caddy bag. He could have decided to lift the bag up again but he didn’t want to, so he just left it there and instead folded his arms over his chest. The cotton of his white polo shirt rubbed against his skin, almost stuck to his chest because the heat was so strong.

Yoongi stuck his tongue out to wet his lips, tasting the faintest hint of sweat as he did so. He wanted to break the silence in the air that had been clinging to them both for minutes now, and yet he knew that he shouldn’t do so. He should wait for him to speak first, should let his father address him because that was the most respectful thing to do, even if it was driving him mad waiting. If his father didn’t open his mouth soon then he was going to do it though, because there was an important matter at hand that they both needed to address. That matter was his lack of jurisdiction and the current speedball crisis that was running through their empire.

Yoongi was almost certain that the man had probably been completely unaware of the drugs crisis until he had mentioned it to him on the phone. After all, it was his regions that had been hit hardest.

“So, speedball was floating around the districts and you weren’t even aware of it?” his father said suddenly, as he opened his legs and seemed to be getting ready to take his shot. “How…queer.”
Yoongi was aware of his select choice of word and he elected to ignore the taunt in favour of fixing his glove, snapping and unsnapping the pop button clasp.

“No, father, I wasn’t aware of the speedball being circulated,” he replied, as he played with the fastening on his glove restlessly. “Had I’ve known d’you think I’d have let it flourish so much, huh? No, I’d have stamped it out at the fucking source like what I’m doing right now.”

His father did the usual and ignored him expertly as he took his swing, the ball taking to the air and flying across the green in a clean arc.

Yoongi squinted at it and then he dropped his gaze to watch him lowering his arms again. He had tracked the ball far enough to know where to drive the kart at least, so he guessed that they would end up finding it somewhere in the vast greens over the hillock. His father turned around to look at him for a brief second, practically just running his eyes over him rather than really looking at him, and then he held the club out to him.

So Yoongi took the hint and he accepted it from him, slipping it back inside of the bag. Then he grabbed the caddy bag and he lugged it over to the kart so that he could place it in the back. He watched his father moving to climb into the passenger-seat, his lemon yellow polo matching well with the cream leather seating.

When he joined him in the front and he started the kart, Yoongi waited for the other man to speak, but he didn’t. No, he remained silent as he started driving along the sandy path in direction of the rogue golf ball.

Yoongi spared quick glances over at his father as he guided the kart, not needing to do much more than occasionally twist the wheel to follow the soft curves of the path. Unlike his rather unruly hair, which was trapped under his baseball cap for now, his father’s hair was currently slicked back off his brow and held neatly in place - neither too short or too long. He had perfectly manicured facial hair too, which gave him a feeling of professionalism and yet also made him seem rather slimy at the same time. There were similarities between them, of course, for Yoongi could see hints of his own nose and rather soft jawline on his father’s face. But beyond this casual similarity, he failed to see anything else that made they seem alike. They clashed far too much ideologically for sure.

As he gave him another quick look, he caught sight of his father checking his watch, staring at his own Rolex with marked disinterest.

“Father, y’know I’m here to discuss an important matter with you,” Yoongi stated, as he let go of the wheel with one hand. “For once, can we both act like civil men and discuss the fucking issue?”
“What issue would this be again? You seem to have many issues, son,” his father remarked in a low murmur, lowering his wrist and turning his head to stare across off the greens.

“The speedball situation, Sacramento Snow,” he explained, ignoring the next slight that was tossed his way. “I told you on the phone, some of it’s outta my jurisdiction right now and I’m having trouble tracking the source down. Choi was only a dealer in it, he didn’t supply it, but I’ve discovered that there’s at least two more dealers in Mission and Bernal Heights selling the stupid fucking drug.”

His father remained silent at this, didn’t speak a word or even look at him as he stared across the greens.

Yoongi turned back to the wheel and he gave the kart a slight stir, following the bend of the path in a strange s-shaped line to get closer to the ball.

“I ain’t got access to every jurisdiction, you blocked me from a great deal, and yet you expect me to know every-fucking-thing that’s going on in this city,” he continued. “How can I, when I’ve got two leftenants working for me and they’re both locked in the northeast and central regions? Huh?”

“You have blocked jurisdiction and you know why; it’s because you’re not the king and you won’t be the king until you bury me six feet under. So, son, stop whining like a goddamn bitch and leave this matter to real men instead. The point of the matter is: you killed my man and consolidated power to your own,” his father stated without a hint of hesitation.

Yoongi tightened his hold on the kart steering-wheel and he felt his jaw setting at his words, his teeth nearly grinding together.

“Surely, you can see why I don’t want you having jurisdiction in other regions, if this is what you do in the ones that I allow you?”

“No, I killed a man that was burning deals, stealing blow and marketing a brand drug,” he argued, as he twisted the kart wheel harder. In the back, the caddy bag jostled and fell over with a loud thumping sound. “I killed a man that was fucking us over and I replaced him with another man of yours. Kim is your man too, they all are. I didn’t replace him with my own, I just replaced him with another man of yours. That’s all I fucking did.”
“Keep telling yourself that, maybe you will start believing it,” he retorted in that same monotonous tone.

Yoongi stared out across the greens rather than look at his father, deciding that it was for the best to just hold his tongue and drive him to the next shot. He steered the kart forward until he had reached the point in which he needed to kill the vehicle and get out, collecting the caddy bag from the back again. His father stayed seated in the kart, however, left him to do the spotting all by himself and to locate the golf ball first. It wasn’t hard to do so in the trimmed grass, and so when he had found it, he lifted his arm and he waved him over.

As this, his father moved to get to him at a rather annoyingly languid pace, and so Yoongi dropped the caddy bag and he starting sorting through it to select the best clubs of choice. He selected the 8 and 9 irons, adding a 7 just in case his father wanted a mid-iron rather than a short one.

“Do I have your permission to get involved in this issue and sort it out, father?” Yoongi asked him, as he held out the three clubs to him, balanced across both of his palms and lightly clasped in his grip.

His father eyed them for a moment before selecting one and testing the weight in his hands. Then he gave it back and he checked the second one, actually giving this one a slight swing.

“Do I have your permission to track Sacramento Snow in Bernal Heights?”

“…No,” his father said, as he moved over to the golf ball and he got himself into his swinging position. “You don’t.”

Yoongi watched him getting ready to take his shot and then he moved to dump the two irons back into the bag. Sadly, the metallic clanging and thumping didn’t put him off in the slightest, for the man swung cleanly and hit the ball; making it sail over the trees in a high and wide arc. It was a valiant attempt, but it failed.

For the rest of the course, his father didn’t speak a single word to him. Yoongi was used to the heavy silences from him and so he decided to ignore him and just finish the course for the sake of it: driving the kart, selecting irons, and spotting for him until they were finally driving back to the main entrance of the course. There was a social club on the grounds, one for all of the elite assholes with memberships to use so that they could snaffle champagne and circle jerk about how rich they were all morning long.
“What should I do with the clubs?” Yoongi asked, as he hefted the bag out of the back of the kart, just knowing that the man would go into the social club and likely spend the rest of the afternoon drinking and talking shit like the rest of the patrons.

“Put the clubs away,” his father said with a wave of his wrist, his gloves flopping limply in his hand. “The car’s unlocked, then do whatever. I don’t care, just leave the grounds first and don’t cause trouble.”

Yoongi exited the golf course a moment later, after handing the kart keys back in at reception. The caddy bag was just as heavy and irritating as it had been all morning long, and he couldn’t wait to be rid of it. He located his father’s car in the lot, parked not too far from his own.

Yoongi’s current favoured model happened to be a red BMW M1, a sleek car with a sharp grilled hood and boot rather than smooth metal. It stood out in the lot because most of the cars happened to be black, deep blues or whites rather than bright red. His father’s car was a Mercedes-Benz 200, a slick black one that fitted in perfectly with the rest in the lot, and it was pretty boring to his eyes.

Like he had told him, it was indeed unlocked because it was on the private lot and he had no need to worry about it being stolen on him. He popped open the boot and he hefted the caddy bag, shoving it inside of the compartment. As he did so, a single club came free and fell out of the bag, and so he had to quickly grab it before it hit the ground.

Yoongi looked at the golf club in his hand for a moment, turning it over in his gloved palms so that the leather rustled softly against the metal. Sunlight reflected off it, blindingly bright.

Before he could stop himself, Yoongi hefted it back and he swung it, tossing it right at the entrance door of the golf course.

As the flying chunk of metal and rubber shattered the glass into hundreds of shards, he slipped his wallet out of his trousers and he proceeded to grab a handful of notes, tossing them onto the ground. There, that would cover the costs of the goddamn window replacement.

Yoongi slammed the boot of his father’s car shut and he went over to his own car and climbed inside, starting the engine and backing out of the lot exactly when a worker came running out of the entrance in shock. He twisted out of the lot so hard that the wheels almost screeched and then he shot down the drive to get back onto the road.
How was that for causing trouble?

On the short and straight drive to get off the grounds, Yoongi stripped his gloves off and he tossed them onto the dashboard without a single care. He could feel an annoying spike of anger in his head and he decided to slam his hand down on the steering-wheel hard several times over until the impact made his skin tingle and start to hurt somewhat. It didn’t help alleviate his anger in the slightest, however, as it just made him want to punch someone instead. He slowed down to get through the barricade at the end of the drive, sailing under the yellow and black swinging post and back out onto the road again.

“How was that for causing trouble…”

Yoongi tightened his hold on the steering-wheel and he reached up to rub at his brow with his free hand, kneading at the ache with the heel of his hand. He sighed heavily and then he took hold of the wheel in both hands again. The silence in the car was overwhelming, but he didn’t want to move and turn the radio on, just knowing that it would either be loud and annoying music or people talking about shit that he didn’t want to listen to.

On the drive back to his mansion, Yoongi found himself starting to relax again, but only because he forced all thoughts about his father to the back of his mind. What had happened today was a rather niggling matter, but he would sort it out somehow. As soon as the other man became aware of what had happened over the last couple of days, he was certain that he would understand why he had done what he had done.

Sure, killing Choi might seem rash on the surface, but after some rooting deep down it would become obvious why he had done so. Right now, the issue with the missing key of cocaine still hadn’t been sorted, but Yoongi would find a way to solve that too, he just needed a little time to think it over and plan accordingly. A conversation or three with Hoseok’s father would also greatly help him, and so he made a mental note to find a way to contact him.

Upon returning home, the first thing that Yoongi did was get out of his shoes and cross the floor to get to the phone. He made several calls to check up on everything, finding out that there was nothing to be concerned about currently. Satisfied that everything was running smoothly, he went upstairs to get a shower.

After cleaning up, Yoongi changed into new clothes, not wanting to wear the stupid polo and blinding white trousers any longer. He shoved them into his laundry basket and instead grabbed his usual - throwing on loose black trousers and a white tee-shirt, and tugging his cap back on over his slightly damp hair. He felt so much better now, clean both physically and mentally. Right now, he wasn’t going to think about his father or the fact that he had denied him once more. No, he was going to go and collect Hoseok and discuss the issue with him for a little while, and then he was
Yoongi was going to get incredibly drunk, he decided, as he grabbed his wallet and keys and he left his bedroom.

Just like most Tuesdays, Yoongi knew that he would find Hoseok in Presidio Heights because that was where he went to go shopping. It was a weekly routine for him to usually collect him and escort him back home because though Hoseok owned a car, these days he was usually a little too doped up to drive one properly. Which was why he was escorted around by other men, just to save him from running someone over or driving straight into the side of a tram because his reflexes were blown from his pills. He was running a little later than usual because of the fact that he had been to the golf course, and so he was expecting some complaints from the younger man.

It wouldn’t be a day with Hoseok without one or two complaints after all, and it was nothing that he hadn’t experienced before.

Yoongi caught sight of Hoseok hanging around the outside seating of a coffee shop, sitting at a table looking miserable because he was surrounded by droves of ill-dressed and loud people. He had a pink short-sleeved shirt on with a pair of white shorts and matching Oxfords with brogue details.

So Yoongi pulled up to the curb and he stalled the engine, leaning on the window rest to stick his head out and study his friend. Just like usual, he had several bags placed beside his chair and the sight was completely expected of him, coupled with the coffee container in his hand.

Upon noticing him, Hoseok made sure to lift his wrist and eye his Rolex sarcastically, and then he got to his feet and he collected the bags together.

“Oh, you decided to show up today,” he remarked, as he opened the backseat and he shoved the bags inside. “It wasn’t like I was imagining all kinds of ways that you might have died through traffic accidents whilst I was waiting or anything.”

“I see you’re in a morbid mood today,” Yoongi replied, watching his friend going around the front of the car to get to the passenger-seat. “What’s wrong, finally back on planet earth with the rest of us?”

“Yes, and I hate it,” he agreed, as he climbed inside and he slammed the door shut. “I don’t call them my happy pills for nothing. Without them, I’m…let’s just agree on morbid and leave it at that. If only you could buy Valium like you could buy coffee, how much more fun the world would be, hmm?”
“Looks like you bought one of everything else…”

“Well, Gigi, I don’t like golf,” Hoseok retorted, placing the coffee container in the drink holder and then lounging back in the seat lazily. He hadn’t bothered with his seatbelt because that would get in the way and stop him from lounging around. “Therefore, shopping seems like a great way to pass the time instead.”

“Yeah, somehow I find it hard to picture you playing golf,” Yoongi agreed with a nod, as he pulled the car back into the road. His friend made a noise in agreement and he fixed his sunglasses back up his nose. “But then again, I don’t play golf either. I fucking hate it, I’m just a caddy in the end anyway.”

Hoseok turned his head slightly to look at him, his eyes not entirely hidden behind his Wayfarers for he could still see a hint of them through the thin lenses.

“Another morning wasted,” Yoongi continued, slowing the car down to a stop at a set of lights. “I knew this’d happen, I knew it. Why I waste my time chasing ‘round after him like a whipped bitch, I dunno, but I’m sick and tired of it. I ain’t a child, so, he should stop treating me like one.”

Yoongi felt no need to tell Hoseok that he had thrown a golf iron through the entrance doors of Presidio Golf Club like a child throwing a temper tantrum, of course. That was something that his friend didn’t need to know.

“Oh, Gigi,” Hoseok sighed dramatically, as he pulled down on his sunglasses to look at him over the frames. “You’re ruining the fun with your daddy issues. You’re talking, but all I hear is ‘blah blah blah, I want pity, blah blah blah’ -”

“Seokseok, shut the fuck up,” Yoongi retorted, seeing how his friend smirked at him. “I’m being serious.”

“You’re only ever serious,” Hoseok pointed out, fixing his sunglasses back in place and lounging back in his seat. “All business, no fun. You’re gonna drop from a coronary before you hit thirty, I’m convinced.”

Yoongi stared at him for a moment before turning back to the wheel, setting his jaw in a mixture of annoyance and petulance. He hated it when Hoseok not only spoke back to him, but also hit the nail
on the head. There had been no need at all for him to start complaining like that and it had sounded like he really had just wanted pity and attention by doing so. What had happened between him and his father was between the both of them, and nagging away like that was pretty immature of him.

The lights changed to amber and so he prepared himself, rolling forward as soon as they hit green and continuing on down the street. The interior of the car fell silent for a minute and Yoongi could sense his friend thinking his words over, no doubt trying to find a way to break the quiet.

“What, Gigi? What’s going on? Tell me, you know that I was just messing around,” Hoseok said, as he turned away from the window to look at him. “What happened, hmm?”

As he asked this, Hoseok reached over to place a hand on his knee, giving it a comforting and familiar light squeeze.

“He’s still blocking me,” Yoongi explained in a quiet voice without looking away from the road. “I can’t track the speedball as easy as I want with him blocking me like this. He said I should leave the matter to ‘real men’ but didn’t fucking say what he meant by that. Is he gonna track it down? I doubt it, that requires doing something other than playing golf, getting drunk, and groping waitresses at cocktail parties.”

“He won’t give you jurisdiction in Bernal Heights?” Hoseok asked, keeping his hand in place on his knee.

Yoongi shook his head at this, and he heard Hoseok making a noise under his breath.

“You still have it in Mission, but that’s only going to solve one of the issues in regards to the speedball. You need to solve both to stop it from being circulated.”

“Exactly,” Yoongi agreed, as he reached the end of the street and he took the corner to get them away from the shopping district. “So long as the drug’s not circulating in my jurisdiction, I guess I’ll just have to deal with it. But I wanted to wipe it out at the source and fix the problem once and for all. Let him deal with the fucking problem then.”

“Bernal Heights isn’t your responsibility,” Hoseok stated, quickly patting at his knee and then pulling his hand away. “So, stop stressing out over shit that you don’t need to worry about; yes?”
Yoongi hummed in agreement as he turned his full attention back to the road, driving them both across Presidio Heights to get into Western Addition.

From that neighbourhood, he could drive up into Lower Pacific and then Upper Pacific Heights, a gradual sloping ride up the hilly streets of the district. Now that he and Hoseok had lightly spoken about the issue, he felt somewhat better, could feel that some of his anger had dissipated. His friend was right in a way, Bernal Heights had nothing to do with him and so he should leave it be, but when there was a chance of the branded drug spilling over into his jurisdiction, he still didn’t like the thought of leaving it be. He supposed that he would just have to let it fester a little and hope that the issue was resolved for him, even if he hated the idea of leaving it alone.

Yoongi had solved the problem in Chinatown and Nob Hill with Choi, who was now dead. The areas that he had controlled had been absorbed by Seokjin so now he owned all of his men instead, bringing in even more profit to them both. Soon enough, he would have Mission sorted too, another wayward dealer off his hands and more profit coming through in the region. So he supposed that he should call this a job well done so far, even if his father would sneer at the thought.

As he stopped the car at a set of lights, Yoongi caught sight of a building that seemed to be getting renovated - a man outside on a ladder in the act of painting a sign that was over the front window and door. He was washing the wooden post over with white paint, so that he could likely paint black or red characters over it. From a glance, he could see that the man was Asian and middle-aged, though he wasn’t certain of his exact ethnicity. Chinese? Japanese? Korean? Maybe even Filipino?

Whatever the case, he felt his interest being piqued as he watched the man sweeping the thick brush over the post for a moment; searching his brain for any news in regards to anything happening in Western Addition.

“Y’know what’s going on there?” Yoongi asked, as he nodded in the direction of the store.

“That? Oh, it’s a new front,” Hoseok explained, shifting in his seat to look over at the building. “It’s a gambling den, disguised as…not sure what, but it’s a front.”

Yoongi eyed the building to see that there was someone coming out of the front of it, a young-looking boy. Maybe a last year high school kid or a college freshman, it was hard to tell from their distance. But despite his height and frame, he could see a youthful face under his mop of black hair: large features that demanded attention.

The boy stopped beside the ladder and he proceeded to call something up to the man, who Yoongi was now assuming to be his father. Though he had cupped one hand around his mouth, he could still
watch his lips moving and he saw that he wasn’t speaking English. No, it looked like he might have called something up to him jokingly, like “having fun?” from what he could discern.

“They new to the country or something?”

“Yes, they’re immigrants. Most fronts are ran by immigrants, a good way to secure them green cards in return for their work. I think their clan name is Jeon…maybe? It’s something with a ‘J’ anyway,” Hoseok said with a wave of his wrist, before he settled back in his seat. “I just heard things through my men, the usual talk from the streets, so, I don’t know anything more. You would have to find out yourself by going to pay them a visit.”

“…I think I might just,” Yoongi remarked, as he eyed the boy and he watched him moving to grab the ladder to make sure that it was steady.

The traffic lights changed colour again and so Yoongi drove through them, noting that the kid turned his head to watch the car pass with a rather appreciative eye until it was out of sight.

By the time that they reached Hoseok’s mansion, it was nearing 1pm, the heat now at its most highest for the day. That meant that his friend wouldn’t lounge out in the pool for a while, but would instead wait for it to cool down a little, the glass doors open wide to let air circulate around the ground-floor and keep them both cool. Woori wasn’t in sight but he could hear her moving around the upper floors and cleaning away like usual.

Yoongi decided to sit on one of the plush armchairs in the sitting-area, patting at his lap to make Cleopatra race over and jump up on his thighs with a rather squeaky mewing sound. The sound was enough to bring a soft smile to his face as he cupped her face in his hands and he started tickling under her chin affectionately.

“You see that? She ran to you first,” Hoseok said with a head shake, as he dumped the bags down on the chaise longue and he proceeded to cross the room to get to the kitchen. “Cats are snooty little bitches, aren’t they?”

“She knows who she gets sausages from,” Yoongi explained, as he continued stroking down her thin and long back.

This made his friend laugh as he ducked behind the counter and disappeared from sight momentarily. When he stood back up again, he did so to place a bottle of wine on the counter and then he
collected two deep glasses.

“It’s 1pm,” Yoongi remarked, eyeing the bottle of Pinot Grigio in his hand.

Hoseok snorted as he poured two glasses of the white wine out and then moved to carry them across the floor.

“But then again, this’ later than usual right, Seokseok?”

“Hmm, much later,” he agreed, holding out one of the glasses to him.

Yoongi saw that he hadn’t just grabbed the wine, because he had also slipped the usual bottle of pills into the breast pocket of his shirt.

“You could do with a happy pill,” Hoseok remarked, as he pulled the bottle of Valium out of his pocket and he shook it at him.

The noise made Cleopatra lift her head and track the bottle, her ears twitching and high on her skull.

Yoongi contemplated this before holding a hand out, and so his friend shook a single white pill out onto his palm for him.

“A happy pill a day keeps reality away,” Hoseok said in a singsongy voice, as Yoongi knocked it back and dry swallowed it.

His friend lounged on the other item of furniture and he dropped his head onto one of the massive pillows. Cleopatra sadly jumped off his lap and darted over to join her owner on the chair longue, stretching out of the golden brocade and settling down for tummy rubs and chin scratches.

Yoongi lifted the glass to sniff the contents and then he took a sip, finding that it was light and crisp and slightly citrus flavoured on his tongue. As he swallowed the mouthful, he caught sight of Hoseok also knocking back two of the pills, which would likely mean that he had swallowed four today alone: 8mg of Valium ingested so far. The wine would just help heighten the sensation too.
“I’m thinking,” Yoongi explained, as he placed his elbow on the arm rest and he moved to cup his head in his palm to get more comfortable on the chair. “If I can’t wipe out Sacramento Snow, then I absorb it.”

“Absorb it?” Hoseok repeated, lowering his glass of wine from his lips. “Meaning?”

“Meaning I find a way of negotiating with the source supplier and absorbing the brand under Moon Tiger Mob. Think of it as monopolising on the drug, yeah? If it’s gonna cause us so much trouble, I should just buy it out of business. Someone’s supplying it, someone’s in charge of the source. I find ‘em, I negotiate a deal with ‘em, say…seventy-five profit for ‘em and their men, twenty-five for us. Then, after a couple of months, I’ll supersede ‘em and swallow the fucking brand completely.”

“And Pops?”

“Fuck him,” Yoongi muttered, as he swallowed another mouthful of the wine. He saw Hoseok’s eyes widening at this, but he held his tongue rather than reply. “If my old man don’t wanna fix this shit then he don’t have to, but I ain’t gonna sit here and let it run rampant. Problem solved.”

“So…you’re going to use one of the dealers?” Hoseok asked, as he lazily swirled the contents of his glass. “Find out through them who the supplier is?”

“Nah, I ain’t gonna use Lee or Kwon, they’re snakes,” Yoongi retorted without a hint of hesitation. “They’re dead men, I don’t deal with snakes. When they’re gone it’ll make tracking the source much easier, so, that’s how I’m gonna find it. But I need a little assistance through your father. I just need to get some info on Lee and then I can find a way to sort him out. I don’t have eyes and ears on those streets, but he does as our first leftenant, and whatever info he has on him will come in handy.”

“Hmm? Oh, I’ll get daddy on it,” Hoseok said with a nod. “Won’t even need to say ‘please’.”

This made Yoongi smirk to himself, and he was just about to lift his glass to take a sip when the phone rang shrilly from across the floor. The noise caught him by surprise and he glanced at Hoseok before moving to get out of the armchair and answer it.

“Yeah?” Yoongi said, as he balanced the phone in the crook between his cheek and shoulder, giving the glass a swirl just for the sake of it.
“Oh, Yoongi, I wasn’t sure if I’d find you on this number, but you weren’t picking up your own phone,” Seokjin explained down the line.

“Mmm, I was out with my…father over the morning, and now I’m with Hoseok,” he stated, moving to collect the phone in his free hand to hold it in place instead. “Why’re you calling me?”

“I thought that you’d appreciate the news that I have to deliver,” Seokjin replied. “As of today, the last of the burnt blow is being circulated on the streets, and by tomorrow morning, it’s all set to be gone.”

Yoongi had been in the act of lifting his wine glass to take a sip of the contents, but at this he froze, processing his words over slowly.

The cocaine was pretty much gone? In three days, they had managed to palm off 900 grams of inflated cocaine around several districts? The mere thought was enough to leave him in awe and he was aware of the fact that Hoseok was staring at him with interest, no doubt wondering why he looked so surprised.

“At the inflated prices?” he asked to break his dumb silence. “The fuck did they manage to move that much so quickly, Seokjin?”

“The mule, he managed to set up connections with a 14K brothel in Chinatown, and he moved quite a lot of the blow onto them at the inflated price. Without Choi currently controlling the streets there, I daresay that his death has caused a temporary panic in the neighbourhood. But the mule managed to slip his way in through the cracks and not only move the blow, but also secure our partnership with the brothel before any other gang could attempt to move in on them.”

“Shit, is he a mule and a runner or a fucking second leftenant?” Yoongi exclaimed, unable to help himself.

This made Seokjin laugh down the line and he couldn’t help but let a chuckle free.

“You got a profit margin yet?”
“No, not until the last gram has been moved. But we’re most certainly in profit,” the older man explained. “I’m expecting an update on the profits from Kim tonight and I’ll be collecting the money from him too. Any suggestions for what I do with it?”

“Mmm, set up more heroin deals,” Yoongi replied, before taking a quick sip of the wine. “Get that brown out on the streets, another half a key would be good ‘cos it’s in demand right now and we can just about keep up. Bring the rest to me, I’ll see that you and the dealer and mule get a nice cut.”

“As you wish.”

“Also, tell that dealer of yours, Kim, tell him that I’ll be making a reservation for dinner with him and his mule,” Yoongi said, as he looked down at his wine glass and he swirled the contents slowly. “I’m looking forward to meeting them both.”

22nd August, 1984, 2:19am: Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco, United States of America

When the loud series of bangs on the door sounded, Jimin had been neither awake nor asleep but rather drifting between the two states. Battered or not, Namjoon’s sofa was incredibly comfortable to just dive onto after another twelve hours of skating around the city with no breaks to rest his still aching body. It was even better when he curled up on his side, one cushion shoved under his head and another placed between his thighs just to help relieve any pressure on his sore muscles. There was no need for a blanket in the current heat, his denim running jacket was good enough for him.

Jimin had reached that blissful level of drifting in which his body seemed to no longer have weight and his head was filled with blackness, that inner nirvana where everything was just silent and still and perfect and-

\[bang, bang, bang.\]

Goodbye, sweet nirvana.
“Hmm?” Jimin mumbled, as he lifted his head up off the cushion to squint at his friend.

But Namjoon was already moving to answer the door, signalling that he knew exactly who it was. It was obviously a dealer, another one of his men dropping off a parcel of cash for the night.

As he had predicted, his partner returned a moment later with said parcel - a plastic money bag with notes shoved inside that he proceeded to drop on the coffee table with the other bags, envelopes and mountain of elastic bands. Beside the table, placed down on the floor, was his shoe box and the swag bag that had held the cocaine, now filled with their earnings over the last few days instead of the drug.

Namjoon proceeded to sit cross-legged on the floor just in front of the sofa and then he spared a quick glance at him.

“Still waiting on a couple more drops,” he explained. “You could probably nap a little longer.”

“Mmm, wasn’t napping,” Jimin muttered, as he dropped his head back onto the cushion and he reached over to lazily throw an arm around his partner’s neck. It was an incredibly weak attempt at a headlock, but he was currently too tired to attempt a proper one. “Was awake.”

“Sure you were,” Namjoon agreed sarcastically.

Jimin wriggled on the sofa slightly to get comfortable, stretching his legs a little and trying to loosen the knot in his lower back as he did so. It seemed like he had just gotten comfortable again when there came another series of knocks on the front door, and he let out a deep groan as he moved his arm off his shoulders.

Whilst Namjoon went to answer the door, he forced himself to sit upright and he rubbed at his eyes, keeping them open through sheer willpower alone. He just wanted to sleep, but he couldn’t, not when they had a job to do.

So Jimin got off the sofa and he crossed the room to go into the kitchen, collecting another beer from the fridge. Pressing the cold glass, beaded with condensation, against his hot cheeks certainly helped him feel more awake. He dropped his ass back down on the sofa with a weary sigh and he watched Namjoon dumping another stash of cash onto the table.
When Jimin took a sip of the beer, he found that he was starting to get used to the taste of Coors Light, something he wasn’t sure was a good thing or not.

It took a further fifteen minutes until they finally had the last parcel of cash for the evening from his dealers, which meant that they had all of the cocaine earnings together at last. Jimin knew what that meant and the answer was: counting. Yes, they were both going to have to sit there and count every single bill carefully to ensure that they got an exact figure. He swirled the foamy dregs of beer around his bottle as he listened to Namjoon speaking to the last dealer out in the hallway. He didn’t catch what he said, but a moment later there came the sound of the door shutting, followed by the scrape of the locks being pulled and twisted. His partner returned with an envelope in hand, which he proceeded to toss on the floor beside the shoe box.

“Cash counting time,” Namjoon declared, as he started clearing the coffee table of plates and bottles so that they had a decent surface. “OK, some rules. You count to a thousand and then you tie the wad up, yeah?” he explained, as dumped the plates on the floor.

Jimin made a noise to show that he was following him.

“Thousands go on the table, try and use the same bills if you can, it makes it a lot easier.”

“You want me to count to a thousand in fives and ones?” Jimin asked, as he looked away from the little pile of elastic bands to stare at him. “We’ll be here all night, Namo.”

“Combine the fives and ones but don’t mix them with the tens,” Namjoon explained with a weary look.

Jimin just shrugged with a pout, not at all fazed by his expression.

“It’s pretty simple, Jimmy, I know you can count.”

“Yeah yeah, whatever, just get the cash out,” he said, as he wriggled on the floor impatiently. “I wanna see how much we made, Daddy-o.”

Of the 600 grams left, Jimin had managed to move 350 of that over the last few days. 300 grams he hadn’t actually ran himself, but as a result of his deal with the 14K Chinatown brothel, Namjoon had made Wooyoung deliver the goods for him instead. That should tide them over for a month or two at
least, depending on how much that they used daily. The leftover 250 grams had been floating around several districts for three whole days through his partner’s men, snapped up eagerly around the club and bar circuits.

They had to count 800 grams worth of inflated earnings. He didn’t know whether to be excited at the thought of seeing so much cash, or terrified at the thought that he would be awake all night counting.

Jimin watched him tipping his shoe box onto the floor first, seeing the amount of cash that he had earned them spilling free with a series of rustles. It was quite the sight on its own, must have been over the $10,000 that he had thrown into the air just three days ago. When Namjoon proceeded to add the amount from the now cocaine-free swag bag, he couldn’t help but make a pleased noise under his breath at the sight of it all. The mountain of money was absolutely fantastic, and Jimin eyed it for a moment before shooting his friend a sidelong knowing expression, the corners of his lips twitching upward as he did.

“No cash showers tonight,” Namjoon stated with a stern head shake. “Just counting, yeah?”

“You’re no fun, Daddy-o,” he sighed, as he moved to drag a portion of the cash closer to him for ease.

Jimin grabbed a couple of elastic bands to slip them around his wrist and then he grabbed one of the bills, seeing that it was $50. Now he just needed to locate nineteen more to reach his first thousand, and so he started grabbing notes and stashing them in his hand. When he got twenty, he made sure to double-check them and then he rolled the notes up and he secured them together with an elastic band. Jimin dumped this on the table, noting that Namjoon had already completed one wad and was in the act of securing a second bundle.

“What if we can’t make a thousand from ten and fives because we run out?” Jimin asked, as Namjoon finished knotting the bills up, not wanting to distract him when he was counting.

“Then use tens first, then twenties and then fifties, but only if there’s none left,” he replied, tossing the wad onto the table.

Counting $50 bills was the easiest part, of course, for Jimin found himself snapping up notes fast and hard and securing them together in tight little rolls to go onto the table. But as fast as he counted them, they also disappeared, leaving him searching for $20 bills just to add to the couple that he had left on his lap. He noted that Namjoon was counting slower than him, but it seemed that his partner had decided to count the lower bills to save him the trouble, quite a few piles of $10 and $5 notes in front of him that he was making into groupings of a hundred that he could then combine together and...
secure. Namjoon made it look easy, but Jimin knew in his current sleepy state that he would get confused, and so he was best counting the higher bills instead.

$50s gave way to $20s, which then gave way to $10s, but Jimin found that they had an abundance of those. Hell, there seemed to be more of those bills than any other, signalling that it must be a very common note out on the streets. But to count $10 bills he needed a hundred, a high number to remember. So much like Namjoon, he ended up making little hundred piles on the floor, creating ten of them that he could then stack together and secure.

Jimin found himself so into the counting that he didn’t even realise that the time was dwindling by, for when he spared a quick glance up at the clock on the wall he saw that it was nearly 3am. They weren’t even halfway through the counting right now and the table was covered in little bundles of bills with pieces of red, blue and yellow elastic around them. Yet, despite drifting off on the sofa, Jimin no longer felt tired, not when there was all of this cash to count.

Only when Jimin knew how much that they had made would he finally be able to sleep properly.

“You know,” Jimin said, as they both knotted up bundles of $10 bills. “When this is done, we still have to count the bundles…”

“That’s the fun part,” Namjoon remarked, tossing another rolled-up wad onto the table.

Though when they had started counting, Jimin had believed that it would take them all night, it was drawing close to 5am by the time that they were scrounging together the last of the notes. Namjoon had scribbled things all over his inner arm in marker pen, keeping track of the stray bills that hadn’t reached a thousand, and so Jimin started moving the wads of cash back onto the floor so that they could start counting them.

Including the money that they had made on the previous 250 grams, when they finished tallying the amount altogether, they ended up with the figure: $53,595.

The street value for the cocaine at a push on the same deals? Jimin thought it would total just over $40,000, if they had been lucky to move a lot of eight-balls over gram deals.

$53,595.
They had made around $13,000 of cold hard profit on cocaine that they should have been struggling to make even on.

Jimin stared at the stack of bills for a moment, processing just how much money that really was. Fifty-three tightly knotted rolls of cash and a bundle of leftover bills. $53,595…

As he ran his eyes over the amount, Namjoon left the living-room to collect something, returning a minute later with a briefcase in hand.

“Jimmy, pack it all away, would you? I got to make a call to Kim, tell him about the cash.”

“Sure,” Jimin said with a nod, as he accepted the suitcase from him and he placed it down on the table.

Just like usual, Namjoon reached down to give his hair a hard ruffle, and then he left the room again to go upstairs and make the call to their supplier.

Jimin opened the case and he started grabbing handfuls of the rolls, placing them inside as neatly as he could. It wasn’t ideal, would be much more neater had they had money clips instead, but it would do for now. So he quickly transferred the cash into the briefcase, humming under his breath as he worked. There, they had managed to shift the cocaine, make a profit and stay on Prince Min’s good side, and so it was a job well done. He expected that Namjoon would reappear after a minute or so, but he didn’t. Maybe, he was busy talking to Kim on the phone? Jimin didn’t know, and so he just carried on dropping rolls into the briefcase without giving it much thought.

It was as he was moving the last of the cash into the briefcase that he heard his friend messing around upstairs, the occasional thumping sound bleeding through the floors. So he closed the briefcase, fastened the clasps tight, and then he hastily made his way up the stairs to enter the bedroom.

The sight that he was greeted by was that of Namjoon throwing clothing everywhere, from both his wardrobe and the dresser. Said dresser had had the drawers removed and tipped messily onto the floor for some reason that he was trying to figure out. Was he trying to find something? A stash of cash or marijuana maybe? He leaned against the open doorway and studied him for a few seconds before opening his mouth.

“Namo, what’re you doing?”
“Looking for something like a suit, or something that might pass for a suit,” he replied. “You got a suit?”

“What? What’d you mean?” Jimin asked him dumbly, as he watched his friend attempting to sort through the wardrobe. “The fuck would I have a suit for, Daddy-o? I don’t do that shit and-”

“Remember what Kim said? Kim, supplier Kim?” Namjoon spoke over him, turning back to look over his shoulder at him.

At the question, Jimin made a noise in agreement, moving to sit on the edge of his bed.

“About that whole ‘dinner with Prince Min’ thing? Well, I thought that it was a joke, but he was being completely serious, because he just told me that reservations are being made for a dinner with him.”

“…You’re shitting me?” Jimin asked in shock, unable to stop his mouth from dropping open.

This made his partner laugh and then vigorously shake his head.

“Dinner? Dinner wait, Namo, I seriously don’t own a suit. Do you have to wear a suit to go to one of those joints, huh? Like, is it the law or something?”

“No, it’s not the law. But in most establishments you won’t get in without some kind of formal wear,” Namjoon explained. “Which means we’re both kind of fucked…”

“Fuck establishments,” he retorted with a carefree shrug. “They can’t make us wear shit, so, I’m not wearing a suit.”

His partner gave him a weary expression at this and then he turned back to the clothing all over the floor, hunkering down to try and sort through it.

“Surely a shirt and slacks is good enough, yeah?”
“Let’s hope so,” Namjoon muttered in agreement, as he tossed bunched up tee-shirts aside.

Jimin watched him for a moment before leaning forward over the end of the bed to grab something and pull it free. It was a rather pale blue chambray shirt, the sleeves still folded and buttoned-up. He eyed the creases and then looked up at his friend, lifting an eyebrow as if to ask him if this was good enough.

“Put that aside, it’s a maybe… What about you, huh?”

“Uh, I’ll just wear what I smuggle in, maybe,” Jimin replied, as he folded the shirt up and he placed it on his lap. “That should be good enough, yeah? I mean, I have silk shirts. It’s not like he’s gonna know it’s what I smuggle in, right?”

Namjoon could only snort laughter at this statement as he carried on rifling through the clothing on the floor.

Jimin really hadn’t been joking about the fact that he owned no suits. No, except for his smuggling clothes - which consisted of an assortment of cotton and silk short-sleeved shirts matched with black trousers, the rest of his wardrobe was far from formal. He had many pairs of tight jeans and shorts, countless tee-shirts and vests and even a leather jacket, but nothing like a suit. Why would he own a suit when he had no need for one? So he really had no choice but to check his wardrobe back in his communal home tomorrow to try and find something from the choices to wear that might look a little ‘fancy’.

The thought was enough to make him smirk as he threw himself back on his partner’s bed and he wriggled his way to the top to get comfortable.

“Our supplier, he had a suit,” Jimin remarked, as he stretched out on the empty bed, Namjoon’s pilfered tee-shirt lifting to flash a hint of his stomach. “Bet he only ever wears suits. Bet he sleeps in them.”

“Honestly, Jimmy,” his friend replied. “That wouldn’t surprise me at all.”

Jimin stared up at the ceiling and he was about to close his eyes when he heard a loud thud followed by a series of curses.
Namjoon had just dropped one of the dresser drawers on his foot, of course.

“Nice one, Daddy-o,” he called with a grin.

Namjoon tossed a rolled-up bundle of socks at him in retaliation.

Jimin didn’t really pay attention to his friend, but at some point he must have found something worth wearing because he stopped messing around with the clothes and he started attempting to tidy the bedroom up. Unsurprisingly, he ended up giving up this attempt not long after and decided that climbing in bed was a smarter option, hitting the light switch to plunge the room into semi-darkness, for the streetlights outside cast quite a lot of illumination into the house, as did the blue lava lamp on the bedside table.

Sadly, Jimin lost his stretching room, as he was forced to tuck his arms and legs in so that his friend could fit. The bedroom was silent for a moment, no sound coming from downstairs for the television was switched off, and nothing more than the faintest sounds of traffic coming in through the open window. Jimin knew that he should sleep, that it was late and that sleeping was a smart idea, and yet he found himself somewhat restless.

“Hey, Namo, you ever met Prince Min before?” Jimin asked, as he stared at the back of his friend’s head.

After a moment of silence, Namjoon rolled onto his back first to stare at the ceiling, and then onto his side to meet his gaze. He could sense that he was asking rather silly questions that could wait until tomorrow, but he couldn’t help himself.

“Like, maybe even seen him around the city?”

“Why’d you want to know, huh?” he asked back with a sleepy shrug.

“Because I’ve never met him or even seen him before,” Jimin explained. “It’s like he’s a ghost or something, you know? So, I gotta meet him to see if he’s really real.”

Namjoon gave him a look at this, one that showed he found that analogy kind of stupid.
“That’s why I wanna know if you’ve ever met him before.”

“I’ve never met him before, like, been introduced to him, but I’ve seen him in person and out and around the city,” Namjoon explained after a moment of thought. “It happened one time when I was getting supplied by Kim. He was at the block, the one in Lower Haight, and a car pulled up. Back then…I forget the model, but it’s changed since then because this happened about two years ago.”

Jimin had known Namjoon for going on three years now and yet he had not known this particular fact. It had never crossed his mind to ask him about Prince Min, of course, because there had been no need to talk about him or Father Min before. But now that they were both on the heir’s radars and scheduled to meet him, he found himself desperate to find out more about them both.

“He was waiting for Kim outside on the curb and I got a quick look at him out of the window,” Namjoon continued.

Jimin was about to open his mouth and ask him what kind of guy he was when his friend beat him to it.

“Small guy, I mean in terms of height and frame. He was pretty small and I don’t think he’s changed much at all since then, but I’ve only ever caught quick glances at him over that time, so, I could be wrong.”

“Small?” Jimin repeated, as he squinted at him in the semi-darkness.

“Yeah, like your height, maybe? Maybe a little bigger but shorter than me,” his friend explained. “You seem surprised? What, did you think he was going to be tall, dark and handsome like a prince from a fairy tale, huh?”

“No,” he denied in a rather uncertain tone. His rather shifty eyes gave him away, however.

“He isn’t that kind of prince, Jimmy,” Namjoon said with a grin.

Jimin just kicked his shin under the covers at this, making sure that it was a hard one.
“Sorry to ruin your dreams there, buddy.”

“Fine, you said that you see him around a lot. What kinda car does he drive these days, so, I can look out for him too, huh?”

“These days, he drives a BMW M1 around, cherry red, can’t miss it.”

“A cherry red…” Jimin furrowed his brow and then he made a noise under his breath. “Whoa, hey, I saw a cherry red Testarossa a few days ago, on my first day of running. She was a beaut.”

“A Testarossa?” Namjoon repeated. “Then you saw Kim’s car: he drives a red Testarossa. The only one I’ve ever seen in this city.”

“Wait, seriously, Namo?”

Jimin shifted on the bed, moving to prop his weight up on one elbow. When his partner nodded at the question, he stared at him in dumb shock for a few seconds before he managed to splutter something out.

“What the- I mean, I saw two guys inside this diner, but I only looked at one and are you seriously telling me that the other guy was Kim? Our supplier?”

“That’s his car,” Namjoon said, his tone and expression entirely genuine.

“So, I might’ve-”

“You might have seen Prince Min in that diner,” his partner finished for him.

“Shit! I can’t even remember what he looked like!” Jimin exclaimed, as he threw himself back down on the bed, his head bouncing off the pillow. He kicked his legs around in annoyance and this made his friend sigh heavily. “I saw a portable phone! I thought they were rich businessmen! How was I supposed to know, huh?!”
“Jimmy, please go to sleep…”

22nd August, 1984, 8:55pm: Hayes Valley, San Francisco, United States of America

The private dining-room was set far away from the entrance and the kitchen of the restaurant, set onto an elevated section above the other diners so that they had to go up a small flight of steps to enter the room. Through one window, Yoongi could see out into a garden at the back of the restaurant rather than the street, but in the current evening hours he could see very little. Through the other discreet one-way window on the wall, he could see the main dining-area of the restaurant, could look down on the other diners. It gave him a clear view of the front door too, so that he could see everyone that was coming and going and know exactly when his guests arrived.

Yoongi looked away from the window to run his eyes over the interior of the dining-room instead. It had been quite some time since he had last been here, to the Jung clan owned restaurant. If he recalled correctly, then it would have been Hoseok’s birthday when he was last here. The exact year he was uncertain of, but he was thinking that it was his twenty-first off the top of his head.

It wasn’t a very large room, a square of maple wood flooring and walls with dim and orange-tinged lights placed here and there. On one of the walls, there was a long silk print of a tiger, white and black on red and gold, a fascinating piece to study. On the other, there was a long stretch of table on which buckets of champagne and wine and a tray of glasses were currently placed. The dining table was set in the centre of the room and it usually had eight chairs set around the wide circle, but Yoongi had had the extras removed to clear away clutter. They were comfortable chairs, shapely and padded for comfort, the wood dark and the upholstery cream.

It was a nice room, he decided. It was just the right level of class to stay pleasing and not turn into cloying opulence. A lot of men might think that there was no such thing as too much, but he knew the truth. There was nothing more distasteful than too much, for that was just as bad as too little in his opinion. But this balance was just right - the perfect balance.

Yoongi spared a quick glance at the window for a moment, and then he turned his attention back to the napkin on the table. He had folded and unfolded it several times already, creating various origami shapes before he shook the material out and started again. The white cloth was therefore rather creased as a result and so he smoothed his palm over the cotton to try and straighten it out. Playing with the napkin was a much better idea than tugging on the cuffs of his white shirt or playing with
his bolo tie; pulling on the black silken lengths or fiddling with the golden attachment that was resting against his throat.

Seokjin had already told him all about the cocaine situation, as he had received a phone call at 5am informing him of everything. Shortly after the call, his supplier had arrived at his mansion with the briefcase in tow. With the aid of his cash-counting machine and a bit of mathematics, they had indeed discovered that Kim had given them the exact figure, not even short by a single dollar.

The cocaine was completely gone, the cash was rolling in, and they were well above the hopeful figure that he had predicted the night that he had killed Choi.

Yoongi had been hoping for a little close to $40,000 to make even on the burnt deal, assuming that a lot of the shifted cocaine would be through gram deals. He had not expected that a lot of eight-balls would be snapped up, along with a deal with a brothel over in Chinatown. That was why the profit margin had swelled considerably, had sailed above the hoped amount to reach $53,595.

$53,595 was an absolutely astounding amount. Yoongi couldn’t recall pulling that much in on a key of cocaine ever, not with the low price and availability on the streets. Yet it seemed that old bonds and elitism was still rife across the city, which had saved their asses for once. Never had he been so thankful for rich bitches and fake business bastards before in his life.

Was his father aware of the amount that they had raked in? Probably not, but right now he didn’t care about that.

Tonight, Yoongi was going to get to meet the two men that had just earned them over $13,000 of profit running cocaine on the streets for several days, and he was feeling pretty fucking fantastic right now.

Yoongi had never met the dealer, Kim, before and he most certainly didn’t know his mule. He knew virtually nothing about them both, but tonight they were going to be treated like old acquaintances because they deserved that honour. Yoongi doubted that any of his father’s men could have brought that kind of cash in in such a short time-frame because they were old and quite frankly useless. Those kind of men, they didn’t know how to run half as good as they thought they did because they didn’t know the streets. They didn’t walk them like he did, didn’t sit in cafés observing people out there to learn and adapt. No, they stayed in their mansions and got other men to do it for them whilst they played golf all day long.

If they didn’t know the streets, they wouldn’t be able to run the streets.
That was why Yoongi was sitting at the table earlier than usual, waiting on them rather than having them wait for him. That was why he had purchased the best wine and champagne that they had on offer at this restaurant and was going to have the table set with various courses for them both. Because Yoongi needed more men that knew the streets too; and what better place to start then with these two? These two little brothers that had never burnt them, caused any trouble or lost them profit?

Yoongi caught sight of movement across the restaurant and so he turned his head to look, seeing two men on the door that seemed to be his guests judging from their clothing and the clueless expressions on their faces. It was like they had never been in a restaurant before, and Yoongi guessed that the chances were pretty high that they hadn’t. So he took a moment to study them as they spoke to the waiter on the door, eyeing their clothing. He saw that one of them was wearing a chambray shirt, the sleeves down and buttoned to look a little more formal, tucked into a pair of black trousers. It wasn’t exactly formal but it was close enough. The other guy, however, had neglected to even attempt to look formal, and he was wearing a leather jacket, v-neck white tee-shirt and a pair of jeans.

Yes, they were most certainly his guests dressed like that.

The two men were attracting the eyes of quite a few of the other diners, who were staring at them in a mixture of confusion and disdain. Jeans in a high-class restaurant? It was a miracle that they didn’t spit their champagne all over the floor in shock. For some reason, Yoongi found this bringing an amused smirk to his face as he watched them both being escorted across the dining floor in the direction of the private room by the waiter.

Although Yoongi had only just laid eyes on them, he found himself knowing who was who from a glance alone.

Kim, the dealer, he was the tall guy in the chambray shirt. The one that walked and held himself with just the right amount of confidence. Pleasant face, seemed like a trustworthy kind of guy and easy enough to read; the telling signs were all in his eyes and his body language, Yoongi knew that it was so.

The mule, he was the shorter guy for sure, walking into a high-class restaurant with his head held up and a swagger in his gait. The one wearing a leather jacket and jeans that were moulded to his legs and ass like fucking Lycra. Too much confidence, hard to read. He couldn’t tell how much of it was real and how much was faux just from a single glance. Pretty face though, a bit spoilt-looking but pretty.

Yoongi knew who he was going to find his eyes settling on the most out of the two tonight.
The waiter escorted them both across the dining-area and up the steps to enter the private room, gesturing for them to step inside. The two men did so, quickly glancing over the interior with a great interest until they caught sight of him sitting at the table.

“Your food will be served momentarily, Prince Min,” the waiter said, as he dropped his head respectfully and then stepped out of the doorway.

Yoongi watched him go and then he turned his attention back to the other men.

The taller one, the presumed dealer, he was quick to bend forward at the waist in a deep and respectful bow. The shorter one, however, did so only after he had; almost like he was just copying his actions for the sake of it.

“Y’know, I prefer handshakes,” Yoongi said, as the pair of them straightened up again.

This made the dealer laugh, a rather awkward laugh, but the mule remained silent.

Yoongi held his hand out to him and the other man quickly moved to take hold.

“Name?”

“Kim, Namjoon Kim,” he replied in a rather pleasing smooth and deep timbre, as he shook his hand thrice; holding his elbow with his other hand respectfully.

Ah yes, so he was correct - he was the dealer.

Yoongi released his hand and then he turned his attention to the other man, his hand outstretched to him.

“Park, Jimin Park,” the mule said, as he took hold of his hand. He had a soft and slightly husky voice, a little nasally. Unlike Namjoon, he didn’t hold his elbow respectfully as he shook his hand and then let go.
Yoongi felt no need to introduce himself, and so he gestured at the two chairs instead, silently telling them to take a seat at the table.

As they did so, he was given a moment to study their faces more clearly and he found his eyes instinctively moving over to Jimin’s face. He saw a slightly rounded face, round cheeks but a rather pleasing sharp jawline, tanned skin framed by tousled black hair messily parted close to the middle. Jimin had eyes with a slight droop to the corners, his upper eyelid somewhat flat but his lower softly curved to give his eyes shape, and his nose was small and rather sharply tipped unlike his own rather flat and rounded one. But the feature that caught Yoongi’s eyes the most was his mouth, for Jimin had the kind of pouted and plush lips that women would kill for.

Maybe, it was just because he was staring at them, but Yoongi was certain that they were somewhat pinker than they should be, and glossier too. Well, considering the fact that his eyelash line looked a little smokey it he wouldn’t be surprised if they were. Makeup was all the range for men right now, but Yoongi had never worn any. That would just be another thing for his father to sneer at and call ‘queer’ - no select choice of words needed.

Yoongi was aware of the fact that he was staring at him, and yet he didn’t take his eyes off the other man.

Jimin noticed his gaze as he pulled his chair in, but rather than humbly drop his head and study the table, he actually stared right back at him unblinkingly.

Namjoon, on the other hand, seemed rather keen to avoid eye-contact with him completely.

“My man informed me of everything,” Yoongi explained, as he pushed his own chair out and he moved over to the serving table to collect one of the bottles of wine: white to start with. “The blow, the profits, I don’t say this often but…” He filled up three glasses and then he put the bottle back inside the ice bucket, collecting them together to carry over to the table. “Thank you.”

Yoongi placed the glasses down for them both and then he got back into his seat.

Namjoon looked at him for a second before looking down at the glass and Jimin collected his own to sniff at it. He doubted that he did so to ascertain its quality, but rather just for the sake of it.

“Thank you for making a profit on a deal I was pretty fucking sure I was gonna lose on,” he said, as
he held up his glass in a slight toast before taking a deep sip. “I got men working for me, been working for mob for decades, that would’ve failed to bring in a profit on that blow deal.”

“We were just doing our job, Prince Min,” Namjoon said in a quiet voice.

Beside him, Jimin knocked back the entire serving of wine in a deep swallow, placing the empty glass down on the table again.

Two waitresses entered the private dining-room a minute later, moving to place down plates and bowls from massive trays to set the table for them.

The main focus of the dish was yukhoe, served with side dishes of rice, kimchi, and julienned vegetables to compliment the raw beef and egg dish. But that wasn’t all that was on offer, for there was also a serving bowl of seolleongtang as a starter, the creamy broth filled with beef brisket, and a platter of abalone too - prepared and lightly steamed. The scent of it all wafted on the air and Yoongi could see that Jimin was staring at the abalone platter like he was very much going to eat the entire thing. Namjoon, however, was looking at the meal with a somewhat perplexed expression.

“You seem confused,” Yoongi said, as soon as the women were gone, raising his eyebrows curiously. “Ain’t used to such dishes?”

“Well, no, I was born here, Prince Min,” Namjoon explained, placing his cutlery down on the rest respectfully as he addressed him.

Beside him, Jimin was spooning rice and raw beef and egg into his mouth without a single care for etiquette.

“I’ve never actually been to Korea before, but I learnt the language through my parents. My mother mostly. I’m used to the cuisine, of course, just not this level of delicacy,” Namjoon added.

“Mmm, lemme guess, kimbap for dinner and dakjuk for breakfast?” Yoongi said, as he lifted his glass to take a sip of the white wine. This made the younger man laugh in agreement, and then he picked up his spoon and chopsticks again. “And you?”

At the question, Jimin cheeked a mouthful of food and Yoongi could see a blob of rice stuck to his lower lip. Namjoon moved to wipe at it for him with his thumb, and the mule just sat there and let
him do so, like this was a common occurrence.

“Born and raised here,” he replied around the mouthful, and then he turned back to the food because that seemed to be his reply to the question.

Yoongi swallowed the sip of wine and he studied him for a moment, trying to read him from his body language alone and finding it irritatingly difficult to do so. He saw that Namjoon glanced at the other man, just a quick sidelong look before he turned back to his bowl of seolleongtang.

“Typical immigrant family story to tell, it’s nothing new or exciting I’m afraid, Prince Min,” Jimin added, almost like a second thought.

“I ain’t gonna know if it’s exciting or not if you don’t tell me,” Yoongi remarked, as he lifted his bowl and held it under his mouth.

“Trust me,” Jimin reiterated, lifting his gaze from his serving of food to stare at him. “You don’t wanna know.”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment before sipping at the broth. As he did so, he watched the mule eating, already starting to get a little idea about him from the way that he spoke and acted. Poor, or at least he had been poor at some point in his life. Bad parenting judging from the lack of table manners and attitude, not at all like Namjoon - who had openly discussed his upbringing and seemed to be well-educated.

How very fascinating Jimin was to observe and try and pick up minute hints from.

“Namjoon? I’m gonna call you that instead of Kim,” Yoongi said, as he placed his bowl on the table. “How’d you get into dealing?”

“My parents were immigrants, set up a front for Moon Tiger Mob and ran it well,” Namjoon explained, no food in his mouth because he had good manners. “I had no clue about that growing up, you know, I just went to school and lived my life completely clueless to the fact my parents were working for a mob. Naturally, when I was in middle school, I started running for some cash, kind of like pocket money. From that point, I started going into pushing and dealing right around high school and here I am, Prince Min.”
“Your parents are good people,” Yoongi said, as he wiped at his mouth with his napkin. “They raised you well, kept you away from all of the shit going on out on the streets.”

“Uh, thank you, Prince Min,” Namjoon said, lowering his head respectfully to look down at the table.

Perhaps sensing his gaze on him, Jimin paused in the act of spooning out an abalone and he glanced up from the snail to look between them both before staring right at him. His somewhat droopy eyes widened at this and then he stuck his tongue against his cheek, distending it for a second before he started talking.

“Oh, uh, I started running in the winter of ‘81, that’s when me and Namo became partners,” Jimin explained. “At first, it was around Pacific Heights, I found myself a decent amount of dedicated buyers there that I could deal with. Namo supplied me with the coke, I ran it and brought back the cash. Then I started expanding out to other neighbourhoods, until the choice to start muling presented itself and I decided to take the risk. I found I’d a talent for it after a year of doing it.”

“You’re making muling sound so simple,” Yoongi remarked, as Jimin turned back to the abalone and he carried on removing it from its shell. “Speaking of muling, that dealer in Hong Kong, I want his name,” he added, lifting up his wine glass to take a deep sniff of the contents.

At the order, Jimin looked up sharply from his meal, his eyes growing wider as he cheeked a chunk of snail and clearly tried to figure out why he wanted his name.

“Prince Min?” he asked in confusion around the mouthful.

“His name, I want it,” he reiterated. “How else can I get him killed if I dunno his name?”

Yoongi looked up from his wine to see that the mule’s face had…paled somewhat at this - his eyes wide and his jaw slack. He looked shocked to hear this, and after a few seconds, he turned to look at his partner. Yoongi could see that Namjoon too was surprised by this, but he managed to keep his expression much more neutral; nothing more than his pursed lips giving it away as he stared at his almost finished serving of yukhoe.

Jimin stared at his profile, before turning back to the table and collecting his own glass to hold it up.
“...I don’t want a guy ending up dead because of me, Prince Min,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, as he studied his glass and he slowly turned it between his fingers. “I don’t think that he deserves to die for threatening me with an uncocked gun.”

“Bullshit, he didn’t just threaten you,” Yoongi argued, holding his own wine glass under his nose. “He proved how lil he views our partnership too, an important partnership between 14K and Moon Tiger Mob. Sure, he threatened a mule and mules are easy enough to come by, but that ain’t the fucking point. The fucking point’s that he threatened my mule, and I ain’t the kind to let threats go unanswered.”

“Your mule?” Jimin repeated with a languid eyebrow raise. “And here I was thinking that I was Namo’s mule.”

At this, Namjoon paused in the act of lifting his chopsticks, clearly taken aback that his name had been dropped so suddenly into the conversation.

“Kim’s my dealer, therefore you’re my mule,” Yoongi stated, as he lightly twirled his wrist and he made the wine slosh against the sides of his glass.

Jimin thought this over for a moment and then made a soft noise, a little ‘hmm’.

Oh, he was an infuriating little thing. Haughty, opinionated and clearly not fazed by authority. Yoongi didn’t know whether to be angered by this or to find it somewhat enticing. He was like a more immature Hoseok, less prone to witty remarks and champagne philosophy and rather just full of snappy bite. Jimin lifted his glass to take a sip of wine, not breaking eye-contact with him once as he swallowed a deep mouthful.

Enticing, he was enticing, Yoongi decided in that moment.

“When your dealer shoved that gun in your face, uncocked or not, he was shoving it in my face too,” he continued, watching Jimin setting the glass back down on the table. “That’s a threat, that’s dishonest, and it ain’t the way we do business. Besides, I’m getting him crippled in retaliation no matter what, so, you can decide what’s a better fate for him,” Yoongi declared, putting his glass down and studying the young mule. “Kinda hard to deal with crippled legs, right? Might just be better to put him outta his misery.”

“...Chow, his name’s Chow Lai-Chuen,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, as he collected his spoon and
he grabbed another abalone from the platter. “Do what you want to him, I’m not gonna pick.”

“I asked you to pick,” Yoongi stated, folding his hands on the table and staring at him intently.

Jimin just carried on fiddling with the abalone rather than look up at him, purposely going slow rather than just scooping it out to eat so that he could avoid eye-contact with him.

“Pick.”

“What if I don’t wanna pick?” Jimin snapped back, glancing up sharply at him as he cleanly scooped the snail free from its shell.

Oh, he had some bite to him.

Namjoon moved to try and discreetly elbow him in the side, silently telling him to mind himself, but Yoongi caught sight of the movement.

“Pick: crippled or death?” he reiterated in a firm tone, and Jimin dropped his gaze to stare at the lump of meat on his spoon.

“…Just kill him,” the mule muttered in a petulant tone, before lifting the spoon and shoving it in his mouth. “That’s an easy way to solve a problem, huh?”

“Yeah, it is. How’d you ever solve a real problem without murder?” Yoongi retorted before snorting hard. “Lil brothers, you really ain’t got a clue how an empire works; d’you? D’you think empires exist through…I dunno, polite discourse and handshakes? No, an empire exists through two ways: direct conquest of another territory with excessive force or control, or indirectly through coercion, hegemony and power; now, which one are we?”

“…Hegemony,” Namjoon replied after a few seconds, lifting his glass of wine for the first time of the evening. “It’s how all gangs operate: through drugs, prostitution, firearms - all ways to supersede power in neighbourhoods, cities, entire countries.”

“Smart, you’re smart,” Yoongi said, as he studied the young dealer and he watched him take a sip of
wine. “You’ve both been helping supersede power, to help strengthen an empire through your pushing, dealing and running. I’ve been doing the exact same too. How can we keep hold of power if I let other gangs shit all over us, huh?”

“You can’t.” Namjoon said, stabbing at his food with his spoon.

“Exactly, hence why murder’s so fucking helpful,” Yoongi finished, as he looked between them both. “Try to not think about it as being more than a contract extermination, it makes it a lot easier that way.”

“I’m sure it does,” Jimin muttered, as he turned the abalone shell over in his fingers and he ran his thumb over the bumps and whorls.

Yoongi found himself almost biting his tongue at this, so overcome with the urge to say something scathing to the mule. The level of disrespect that he was showcasing had went above and beyond a slight accident, for not only was he barely referring to him by his title, he was also answering him back, making extended eye-contact and refusing to speak to him properly when addressed. But he decided to hold his tongue for now instead, to not ruin the dinner. No, after it was finished he could pull Jimin aside and speak to him bluntly, but until then he was going to finish this meal and act civil. So Yoongi just moved to collect more glasses, changing to red wine this time to be more fitting with the beef.

Let Jimin work his way under his skin that little more if he wanted to. By the end of the meal, he might find himself regretting his behaviour. Or not. Yoongi still wasn’t certain whether he was pissed off with the way that he was acting, or if he rather liked it, found it…exciting in a strange way.

“This is very nice,” Namjoon said to break the silence in the air.

Yoongi found his effort at trying to dispel any awkwardness somewhat endearing.

“I’m so used to eating kimchi spaghetti that I kind of forgot what real food tastes like,” he finished.

“Kimchi…spaghetti?” Yoongi repeated in a slow voice, as he collected his own spoon and he squinted at the young dealer in confusion. “Are you shitting me? Is that even real?”

“Haven’t you ever had kimchi spaghetti before, Prince Min?” Namjoon asked in a solemn tone, and
his tone and expression had Yoongi snorting laughter as he grabbed one of the abalones off the platter.

Even Jimin’s sullen pout twitched at the corners at this, even if only for a second or two.

“You should make it for him one time, Daddy-o,” the mule said in a quiet voice. “Kimchi spaghetti and Coors Light, that’s real food.”

Yoongi made a disgusted noise at this that had them both laughing, the awkwardness in the air having dispelled slightly but not completely.

As Yoongi spooned the abalone into his mouth, he couldn’t help but notice how Jimin dropped his eyes back to the remains of his seolleongtang, that sullen expression returning once more as he prodded at the chunks of brisket floating in the broth. It remained for most of the meal as he sipped and chewed, sloshed his wine and hummed responses rather than reply, but at least Namjoon attempted to talk to him. Sure, there was a forced sense of conversation in the air as the dealer tried to keep things light, but it was better than brooding silence.

When the meal was finally finished, most of the white wine and quite an amount of the champagne and red wine gone too, Yoongi shifted to reach into his back pocket and he pulled an envelope free.

“Here,” he said, as he shoved it across the table towards Namjoon. “Your cut of the profits.”

Yoongi could sense that Jimin was eyeing the envelope, but he wasn’t going to see his just yet. No, he was going to have to wait awhile first. The dealer got out of his seat without needing to be dismissed, transferring the envelope into his own trouser pocket.

“Thank you for the dinner, Prince Min,” Namjoon said, as he once again held his hand out. “It’s both an honour working in Moon Tiger Mob and for you.”

Yoongi hummed at this and he accepted his hand and shook it, squeezing hard before letting go. He saw that Jimin was moving to drain his glass of red wine first, wanting to drink his fill before leaving.

“You,” Yoongi said, as he lifted his hand and he gestured at him, just as he was about to get out of his seat. “Stay.”
At this Jimin froze, his ass still hovering over the seat. He glanced over at Namjoon with a rather confused expression, almost as if he was asking him what was going on. The dealer just reached over to give his shoulder a quick squeeze and then he left the room, leaving him with no choice but to sit down again.

Yoongi got out of his seat and he moved over to the serving table, grabbing the bottle of red wine and carrying it back to their table. He made an act of slowly filling up the two glasses, watching the liquid pouring slowly and quickly glancing at the other man. There was something coming off Jimin currently, something that might just be discomfort, but it was hard to tell. Then he put the bottle down on the table, the bottom clunking on the wood.

“I’ve half a mind to slap you across your goddamn face for talking to me like that,” Yoongi said, as he folded his arms on the table and he stared at the other man.

At least Jimin had the decency to lower his eyes at this, studying the table rather than hold his gaze.

“Who’d you think you are, huh?”

Jimin held his tongue, but Yoongi saw a ripple of muscle against the skin of his neck, a sign that he was clenching his jaw.

Christ, even when he was being berated he still so fucking haughty. Now Yoongi wasn’t just slightly enticed by the other man, he was starting to find himself getting turned on too.

“Your parents didn’t teach you respect, that much’s clear,” he continued, as he straightened up again and he wet his lips with his tongue. “Shit, I really wanna slap you and yet…yet, I ain’t gonna.”

Jimin looked up sharply at this, those droopy eyes of his widening somewhat.

“‘Cos I don’t believe that an honest man should be punished, disrespectful or not. That’s your problem, Park, you’re too fucking honest with people.”

“Usually I hear the word ‘blunt’,” Jimin retorted in a deadpan tone.
“It’s the same thing in the end, yeah?” Yoongi said with a lazy shrug, lifting his wine glass and draining it without much care. He eyed Jimin over the rim to see that he was looking straight back at him, clearly a little emboldened now that he knew that he wasn’t in too much trouble. “I like honesty in my men, it’s one of the only traits that never gets boring or irritating. When you’re surrounded by fucking sycophants all day, every day, you find bluntness incredibly refreshing.”

“It sounds like you need to surround yourself with friends,” Jimin remarked with a twitch of the lips.

Yoongi placed the glass down, returning the slight smile at the joke.

“I prefer not to, enemies don’t stab you in the back, but friends do,” he replied. “Enemies are therefore more honest.”

“Hmm, sounds like something Namo would say,” the mule said in a quiet voice.

“He’s smart, I like him,” Yoongi said, as he collected his wallet from his back trouser pocket and he opened it up. “Ain’t blunt like you, but he seems genuine. That’s better than nothing.”

“Namo’s a bit too considerate for bluntness,” Jimin agreed with a nod. “And nowhere near as conceited.”

“So, to cut a story short - I decided that I ain’t gonna slap you, I’m gonna go drinking with you instead,” he announced, as he proceeded to toss the bills on the table without much care.

Jimin eyed the bills almost hungrily, clearly entranced by the sight of so much money, and then he looked up at him again.

“Melt that iciness somewhat,” Yoongi added, almost as an afterthought.

“Um,” Jimin shifted at this, reaching up to touch his silver cross earring again in a habit that might just signify nerves. “Prince Min, I don’t think that you wanna go out with me. I’m, well, you might find the circuits that I hang in a little-”
“Gay?” he spoke over him, seeing the way that Jimin pulled his lower lip in to bite on it.

The private room fell incredibly silent at this, almost too silent, for his ears didn’t detect the faded sounds of conversation coming from the dining-area.

Yoongi waited for the mule to speak again, to say anything, but he just continued nibbling on his lower lip.

Was Jimin scared that he might have a problem with his sexuality? That he was homophobic? Was he possibly uncomfortable or even disgusted with his own sexuality, still stuck on that horrible train to nowhere that Yoongi was certain that every gay kid ended up on at some point in their lives? He should know, he had tried riding it to the end of the line for most of his teen years to sadly find that it never pulled into station and stopped.

“Jimin?”

At his name, Jimin’s eyes rolled up to look at him.

Yoongi was aware of the fact that it was the first time that he had said his given name rather than his clan name over the entire duration of the night. For some reason, the other man struggled to hold his gaze, his eyes shifting all over his face and not settling.

“It’s a lil what? Gay?”

“Yeah…yeah, Prince Min,” Jimin agreed in a quiet voice, all of that snappy bite gone. “I hang around The Castro most nights.”

“Mmm, you said ‘a lil’,” Yoongi remarked, as he cocked his elbow, resting his head in his hand. “The Castro ain’t ‘a lil’ gay, Jimin, it’s like the GLBT capital of the fucking world.”

At least this remark made the mule laugh, even if there was some discomfort in it.

“Jimin, why’re you acting so…coy all of a sudden, huh? Where’s the ‘fuck you’ attitude gone?”
Jimin just carried on playing with his earring rather than reply, and so Yoongi decided to fill up his glass with the rest of the red wine, drinking it just for the sake of it. He was bordering on tipsy at this point, would end up completely drunk if he was left to finish the champagne alone. As he lowered his glass, he saw that Jimin’s expression had shifted somewhat, that he had a slightly amused look on his face.

“‘What?’”

“I’ll go out drinking with you if—”

“If? I don’t remember giving you a choice,” Yoongi retorted.

“‘If,’” Jimin repeated with a slight hint of a smile on his face. “You tell me your name, so that I don’t have to keep calling you Prince Min.”

“Mmm, there’s the attitude,” he rumbled, seeing how his smile widened as he lifted his own glass of wine to sip at it.

Yoongi could see that Jimin looked smug for some reason, a reason that he had yet to work out. Maybe, it was all of the wine speaking, but he found that he wasn’t even mad at this point. He was starting to find the young mule’s obstinate attitude rather likeable. He couldn’t recall the last time that someone other than Hoseok had spoken to him like he was actually a human and not made him want to punch them in the mouth. He wasn’t including his father in this regard, of course, as that was a different matter entirely.

Jimin wanted to call him by his given name?

“Why, huh? Why’d you wanna know my name?” Yoongi asked, as the other man drained his glass and he placed it down on the table. He ran his fingers over the rim of his own empty glass slowly, noting that Jimin tracked the movement.

“You know mine,” he said with a soft shrug.

“I got men that’ve been working for my father for decades that I don’t even let call me by my name,”
Yoongi explained, his fingers still tracing the smooth lip of his wine glass. “D’you think you’re special enough to earn that privilege?”

“I was special enough to earn this dinner,” Jimin retorted without missing a beat, grabbing an abalone shell to resume running his thumbs over the bumps and whorls.

Yoongi stared at him dumbly for a moment and then he started sniggering, his shoulders lifting and falling hard as he did. The sound made the other man’s lips turn up at the corners, not exactly a smile but close to it.

“So, yeah. Yeah, I think that I’m special enough,” he finished.

“You really want that slap, don’t you?” Yoongi asked, eyeing the notes on the table.

Jimin made an amused sound at this as he carried on stroking the abalone shell.

“…Yoongi.”

“Yoongi?” Jimin repeated in a quiet voice, his fingers twitching so that the shell actually fell to land on the table with a soft clattering sound. “Yoongi…Min?”

“Yeah, so, get your ass up,” he stated, as he pushed his own chair out to get to his feet. “Show me ‘round that circuit, huh?”

The other man looked up at him, still and silent for a few seconds, and then he also got out of his chair to follow him out of the private dining-room.

As they crossed the wide floor to leave the restaurant, Yoongi was once again aware of eyes on them or, to be more exact, on Jimin. Clearly, the diners were still reeling from the sight of his jeans, and he found it pretty funny that the mule had probably dined on more expensive food and wine then they had even touched. The diners in here? They were nothing in comparison to him. He made most of them look like desperate social climbers and wannabes and they didn’t even have a clue. They were far too distracted staring at Jimin, oblivious to their own mediocrity.
When they stepped out onto the curb, Yoongi had to reach over and place a hand on his lower back, steering him around to the back of the building and into the parking lot where his car was. He had expected that the mule might try and knock his hand free, but Jimin didn’t. He let him keep it in place until they were weaving around the other vehicles to get to his car.

Upon reaching his BMW M1, Jimin stopped for a moment to look over it, his eyes running over the hood and the roof as he took in the sight of the red metal, the black leather interior and grills.

“You like her, huh?” Yoongi asked, as he pulled his keys free and he hit the fob to unlock the car.

“Sweet ride. I saw a Testarossa a couple of days ago, red, outside a diner in Pacific Heights,” Jimin explained, slowly running his hand over the hood. “Namo told me it belonged to our supplier, said that I might’ve seen you in the joint. I think that I did.”

“I’m in that diner most mornings,” Yoongi agreed, as he popped the door open and he climbed inside. “You probably did see me.”

Jimin stayed in place by the car for a moment, still taking in the sight of the exterior, and then he moved to get into the passenger-seat. As he slammed the door shut and moved to grab his seatbelt, Yoongi snapped his own belt in place and he slipped the keys into the ignition, twisting them so that the engine purred to life like a beast.

Yoongi steered the car out of the lot and onto the main road, curving to go down the street and across the neighbourhood.

Jimin had said that he frequented the areas around The Castro, so they had a slight ride ahead of them. He was pretty thankful that he hadn’t finished the champagne now that he was behind the wheel, for he already felt a little tipsy. He didn’t have to go to The Castro, but considering the fact that he didn’t hang around any circuits or drink in bars at all, it made sense to go to his usual haunts instead. Jimin might just know the best places, or at least somewhere decent.

Why Yoongi wanted to go out drinking with him he wasn’t really certain. Had times been a little different, had this happened a couple of years ago, the reason would have been pretty obvious. He would have wanted them both outrageously drunk and fucking in the backseat of said car, but these days…these days Yoongi didn’t fuck casually or at all period. Far too many risks, it kind of outweighed the fun.
Therefore, it seemed like the current appealing reason was that he wanted a little company, someone
to talk to rather than himself as he sat alone at home nursing a bourbon on the rocks because he
couldn’t seem to sleep any more. But, if he had wanted company…why not include Namjoon in the
mix? Or better still, why not go drinking with him alone because he was by far more civil and
educated in regards to the empire?

Yoongi slid his eyes over to look at Jimin, studying his profile and then running his gaze
downwards. Pretty face, with a good-looking body judging from the tightness of his jeans around his
thighs. He wanted something, that much he was certain of. He supposed that they could always get
outrageously drunk and just wank each other off in the backseat, if it came to that. That was
practically sex, was pretty much more exciting than what he was used to these days.

Yoongi turned back to the wheel and he carried on driving across the neighbourhood, and it was as
they were passing through Upper Market and working their way down south in The Castro that
Jimin decided to break the silence.

“So…you’re gay,” Jimin said, more of a statement than a question.

Yoongi could feel his eyes on him, running up and down his face without a hint of reservation.

“Or bisexual, there’s that too. I know a couple of bisexual guys and girls, twice the fun.”

“What’d you think, huh?” Yoongi retorted, as he turned his head to meet his gaze.

The mule thought this over for a moment before giving him a soft shrug, signalling that he didn’t
know as he turned to look out of the window.

Upon entering The Castro, Yoongi followed the occasional directions from him to find a bar, rather
clueless as to where they were even going because he had never been in this particular
neighbourhood before. From what he could see in the current late night darkness and atmosphere, it
looked rather nice, looked pretty clean and decent unlike some areas of the city. But one thing that he
couldn’t help but notice as they were driving were the droves of men out on the sidewalks, hanging
around seemingly. He didn’t think that they were rent-boys, he was pretty certain that they were just
regular men.

“What’s with the guys, huh?” Yoongi asked, as he stopped at a set of lights and he eyed a small
crowd of said men.
A few of them glanced over at his car, their expressions showing appreciation as they did so.

“Yoongi, that’s The Meat Rack,” Jimin explained, as he watched the men through the window carefully. “You know, the guys that didn’t get any action earlier or they want a little more, they all line up around here and wait for someone to come along and take them home. Or at least until the police show and disperse them, that is. Seriously, you’ve never been around these parts before?” he asked him in surprise, turning his head to stare at him dumbly, and so Yoongi made a noise in agreement without returning the look. “Well, it’s well known.”

“…You ever done that, huh?” he asked him in a quiet voice, sparing a quick glance over at the lights to see they were still red.

“Done that? What, got desperate enough to stand on a street corner like a fucking prostitute?” Jimin asked, before snorting. “No, I don’t need to. Besides, I don’t wanna go home with any of them. That’s not what I come here for. I come here for a drink, not a fuck.”

When the lights changed again, Yoongi carried on driving across the district, following his directions until they were drawing close to a bar. As he pulled up to a lot just facing the street, he saw that it was called Twin Peaks, a neon red sign placed on clear view, and the exterior had a stretching glass window over most of the walls to show the interior. He could see a lot of glowing lights coming from inside it, got a sense of relaxed and calm air from it rather than loud and packed.

Jimin got out first and he waited for him, and when Yoongi slammed the door shut behind him and he shoved his keys into his pocket, he found the mule placing his hand on his back just like he had done so earlier, to steer him out of the lot and onto the sidewalk. He didn’t know whether to let him keep it in place or shrug it off so that he could take hold of his wrist instead, but he ended up letting Jimin escort him across the road and into the bar.

The interior was lit with low and warm lights, a stretch of counter to the left with many stools along the length and tables and chairs to the right. There was another area through a set of doors at the back, where people could presumably dance and mingle more easily, and even a small balcony over the doorway with a couple of tables too. Yoongi saw that there were quite a few people inside at the tables, could hear music and voices coming from the back-area, and as Jimin practically pushed him along the bar, he couldn’t help but run his eyes over the inside until they reached the end of the stretch of wood.

Yoongi sat down on the stool and he glanced at the colourful displays of bottles and decanters behind the bar, the metal pumps that ran along the length, and the hanging lampshades dangling above them.
“You’re acting like you’ve never been in a bar before,” Jimin remarked in an amused tone, as he waved at the bartender.

Yoongi dragged his eyes away from a pink carnival glass lampshade to look at him.

“Surely you’ve been to a bar before, Yoongi?”

“I ain’t a social drinker,” he replied, seeing how the other man shook his head at this softly. “What?”

“Have you ever drank a beer before?”

“Prefer bourbon, whisky, scotch; whatever.”

“OK, well, you’re not drinking light or any of that shit so-” Jimin turned to the bartender and he gave him a smile, “two Guinness Draughts, please.”

“Oh, so, you’re ordering for the both of us now,” Yoongi remarked, as the bartender moved to grab two bottles from under the bar.

“We’ll pay for rounds,” Jimin retorted with a grin, dropping a $5 bill on the counter. “Enjoy your beer, Yoongi.”

“Mmm, sure I will.” Yoongi said with a soft nod. “Earlier, at the restaurant, you were acting all coy with me. Why?”

“No one’s ever asked me out for a drink before,” Jimin explained with a rather uncertain twitch of the lips. “I dunno, I wouldn’t call a drink a date, but it’s the closest that I’ve ever gotten to one. Had guys buy me drinks in the past, but I usually turn them down. I don’t wanna give them any ideas.”

“Meaning?”
“Meaning I don’t fuck guys that buy me drinks,” Jimin retorted, perfectly timed just as the bartender placed the beers down.

Yoongi glanced over at the man to see him smirking slightly as he collected the bill and he walked back down the bar.

“So, when you asked me to go drinking with you, I was kinda…surprised.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah, I was expecting you to slap me across the face instead,” Jimin said with a laugh, as he lifted his bottle and he took a deep swig.

Yoongi watched him swallowing, the way that his Adam’s Apple bobbed up and down, and he felt the most pressing urge to wet his lips.

“I was kinda asking for it,” Jimin continued, as he lowered the bottle and sniffed hard. “Dunno what came over me back there. Looking back on it, I think it was pretty stupid of me.”

“Nah, if you hadn’t acted like that then I doubt we’d be drinking right now,” Yoongi disagreed, as he lifted his own beer and he sniffed at it. His nose detected a strong yeasty scent and so he lifted it to take a sip, feeling grainy and foamy liquid on his tongue as he swallowed. “You never really talked that much back in the restaurant, ‘bout yourself. Got me pretty curious, I wanted to find out a lil more.”

“I show you mine, you show me yours,” Jimin offered, holding his bottle out to him.

Yoongi eyed the bottle for a moment before lifting his own and clinking them together hard in silent agreement. So Jimin started talking again, this time opening up a lot more than he had back in the restaurant.

“There’s not much to tell. My parents immigrated here just before I was born, not a lick of fucking English between them. That was in ’64. I was raised here in San Francisco - The Bayview.”
Yoongi lowered his bottle from his mouth slowly, the beer settling on his tongue before he swallowed.

The Bayview? It seemed that his earlier assumption about him being poor, or coming from a poor background, was entirely correct. That was the poorest region in the entire city, and so Jimin hadn’t just experienced hard times, he had pretty much experienced poverty too. Suddenly, the fact that he was a mule, that he eyed money like he was hungry, made perfect sense to him.

“Yeah, I can see from your face that that shocks you,” Jimin continued, as he took a quick sip of his own beer. “I grew up in poverty just several blocks down from rich businessmen living The fucking American Dream.”

“That’s a fallacy, America don’t make dreams it fucking crushes ‘em,” he retorted, and at this the younger man snorted.

Yoongi took another deep swig of beer, finding that he did actually quite like this even if it wasn’t that strong at all.

“So, I went to school, learnt English as my native tongue to be able to cope, picked up a lot of Korean through my parents educating me too. Got to junior high school, got a little too fond of hanging around outside bars looking for older men that might give me a shred of attention before or after fucking me, I wasn’t picky. Poor, daddy issues, gay - I’m ticking every single box like every other guy in this joint,” Jimin said before sighing heavily, his shoulders rising and falling as he did.

Yoongi found the corners of his lips lifting wryly at this, finding the way that Jimin spoke about himself incredibly fascinating. He was aiming for that statement to sound like a joke and it almost did, would have passed for one had he not been looking at his face and noticed something in his eyes that said otherwise. Yoongi drained his beer and he placed the empty bottle down, seeing the young mule knocking back the last of his.

“That’s bitter, do I sound bitter?” Jimin asked suddenly, as he turned his head to look at him.

Yoongi didn’t reply to this and he gestured at the bartender to grab them more beers as he felt for his wallet to slip a $20 out. The man grabbed the empty bottles and bill, and a moment later two more were placed down with his change, the caps popped free and just begging to be knocked back hard too.
“Yeah, bitter as fuck,” Jimin sighed softly.

Jimin was a haughty bitch with a multitude of self-esteem issues that he was burying underneath his snappy comebacks and fake disinterest.

“What’s up with your father, huh? You hate him? Don’t most guys grow up hating ‘em?”

“Oh, I loved my dad, that’s the problem. I loved him, he fucking hated me,” Jimin explained, as he started playing with his earring again and he fingered the little silver cross. “I’ll let you figure why. So, yeah, from the age of…ten? Yeah, ten; from the age of ten the only attention that I got came from the back of his hand or a rolled-up newspaper. The bastard had good aim, I’ll give him that.”

“So, how old were you when you ran away, huh?” Yoongi asked, already seeing where this story was going because it was as obvious as a Hollywood blockbuster.

“What? Do you mean for good or the first time that I did it?” Jimin asked, just as Yoongi picked up his fresh bottle. “First time, eleven, last time, sixteen. Sixteen, summer of ‘80, I ended up finding a hippie commune and got taken under their wings. Some older couple, I dunno, kinda adopted me for awhile and I lived with the little messed up family of runaways, stoners and liberals. I stayed with them, for…a year, a year and a half? That’s how I ended up meeting Namo in the early winter of ‘81. He was dealing in the area, I got connected to him through one of the hippies, and from that point I started running for him like I told you earlier. I dropped outta high school and ran full-time. Namo took a chance on me that he didn’t have to do, he could’ve risked a lot on my ass, but we found I’d a talent in…illegal activities.”

“Kim, you call him your partner, called him Daddy-o,” Yoongi stated after swallowing another deep mouthful of beer. “You talking business or romantic?”

“Namo? Oh no he’s…well, he’s kinda hetero,” the other man said with a twitch at the corners of his lips.

“Kinda hetero?”

“I dunno, I mean, I think he’s experimented, but who hasn’t in this fucking city?” Jimin replied with a lazy shrug, making him smirk in agreement. “But he’s been around long enough to fit into the community, mostly through the hippies and artists rather than the gay kids but ‘free love, man’. The daddy-o thing? It’s from that old song, you know? “Charlie Brown”, the part that goes “he’s gonna
get caught, just you wait and see”. I heard it once on the radio when I was in his car and it reminded me of him, hence why I started calling him Daddy-o. We’re just partners through business and friends, we’re not together.”

Jimin paused for a moment to collect his beer, but he didn’t drink it, staring at the bottle intently instead. After some thought, he started speaking again, this time in a much softer voice.

“Yoongi, I haven’t had anything remotely close to a romantic partner once in my whole fucking life. Why’d you think I hang around The Castro so much? If I’d a guy, don’t you think I’d be with him right now?”

“Ain’t had one or ain’t looking for one?” Yoongi asked, as he watched him taking his first sip of fresh beer.

Jimin just shrugged at the question and glanced over the bar rather than reply.

“You ran off with hippies, yet, you don’t seem like a hippie to me.”

“Nope, I like money a bit too much to be a hippie,” Jimin explained with a sheepish grin. “But I understand the sentiment, feel a lot of it too. Now, your turn.”

Yoongi swallowed his mouthful of beer and he studied the younger man, watching him collecting his own bottle.

Jimin cocked his head at him, his earrings dancing slightly from the movement. The glow from the display behind the counter cast over his face, a soft white hue that reflected off his eyes and tanned skin wonderfully. It almost seemed to thread itself between the locks of his black hair like seams. He lifted an eyebrow languidly, inviting him to start speaking.

“One set of my grandparents, they moved to America as children to escape the height of Japanese imperialism. They met right here in San Francisco, got married and did all of that shit. My father was born here, my mother’s family immigrated to escape World War Two when she was a teen, tryna save what was left of their wealth before it was all stolen. It’s through my grandfather that Moon Tiger Mob was created. See, he used to work in Fisherman’s Wharf and he and a bunch of his buddies, they started smuggling shit like opium into this city through Chinese mules. Eventually, he started moving up and up; started getting immigrants to make connections back in Korea and started smuggling shit over there too. By the time my father came to power, the empire was firmly set and he
just took over and continued the business, ‘cept he got bigger and better. There, a history lesson for you.”

It was only when he stopped talking that Yoongi realised that Jimin had been listening to every single word coming out his mouth, barely even blinking. He hadn’t even moved to take a sip of his beer, and after a few seconds of silence, Jimin finally blinked and lifted his bottle.

“And?”

“And? Uh, shit you want that personal crap, don’t you?” Yoongi sighed, as he turned to eye the display behind the counter, hearing the young mule humming in agreement. “How ‘bout I summarise, huh? How ‘bout I just say: rich, daddy issues, guh-gay, and leave it at that, huh?”

“Nope, that’s not showing me yours, Yoongi,” Jimin argued, suddenly putting bottle down on the counter. He was certain that he felt the younger man shifting on the stool to get closer to him, could detect the warmth of his breath and the scent of beer and spicy cologne. “Daddy issues, huh? Wanna share stories? I got hundreds.”

Yoongi stuck his tongue out to wet his lips as he eyed the decanters of liquors, and after a moment, he turned his head to see that he had indeed moved closer to him.

Jimin had his arms folded on the counter, his leather jacket creased deeply, and he was leaning closer so that his chin was almost hovering over his shoulder.

Yoongi held his gaze and then he shifted his eyes to watch his lightly dangling earring. Was he drunk enough to say any of this aloud or should he just bullshit? Yet, Jimin had finally melted some of that haughty and icy exterior, and so it seemed only fair that he be honest with him too.

Show you mine, show me yours.

“Born in ‘61, raised by my grandparents ‘cos my parents didn’t wanna see me until I was old enough to stop shitting myself and able to speak in proper sentences,” Yoongi explained slowly, as his gaze shifted to settle on Jimin’s mouth instead. “My mother found me bearable at best, but only with a maid present, my father just acted like I didn’t exist. My first introduction to the empire was through my… I guess you could say my theoretical uncle? Not related through blood, but through the mob family, much like how you ain’t really my lil brother. He taught me shit, not my father. My father thought I was weak, so, I got tough. Now he thinks I’m an animal, yeah, well…fuck him.”
Yoongi took a deep and hard knock of beer, feeling his fingers tightening around the bottle as he drained it.

Jimin was staring at him with wide eyes as he lowered it back down onto the counter.

“Y’see, the funny thing is,” he continued, his lips twisting down as if the beer was bitter. “He ain’t ever hit me as a kid, not once. He don’t wanna touch me, never mind hit me. He ain’t never touched me once, not even for a handshake.”

“…Why?” Jimin asked him in a soft voice.

“If I knew the answer, d’you think I’d be bitching ’bout it like I am now?” he retorted, a little sharper than he had been intending.

Yoongi stared at the beer bottle for a moment before turning his head ever so slightly to look at the younger man. Maybe it was the wine and beer talking, but he felt the most sudden urge to apologise to him even though he didn’t know why.

“That’s why I thought a summary was a smarter idea…”

“No, it was a silly question,” Jimin said with a head shake. “You might as well have asked me why my dad fucking hated me. No answer really explains it good enough, right? Nothing seems to fit in that weird little hole inside you that he created. You tell yourself: it’s because I’m gay, yeah? But then you look around and you see people all over this goddamn city full of love and acceptance and you think…you think, that that isn’t right. It has to be something else, he must’ve hated me for something else, but then all you can think of is: it’s because I’m me. And that doesn’t make any fucking sense at all.”

Yoongi stared at him unblinkingly, completely taken aback by his words.

Jimin had damn near knocked him flat on his ass, and the other man seemed clueless because he was too busy staring at the label of his beer with that sullen pout back on his face.

Not once had Yoongi ever spoken to another person about his father, about his family, about his
sexuality. Not even Hoseok had managed to delve too deeply because his friend wasn’t exactly the best person to turn to in times of advice and comfort, as he had enough of his own problems to have to deal with. It had taken this young mule, this man who had been a stranger to him completely just a week ago and he had only just physically laid his eyes on tonight, to finally break down a little of that wall that he had built up over a decade ago and let some light shine through again.

“It doesn’t make sense to you when you’re ten, it doesn’t make sense to you when you’re nearly twenty, it just doesn’t make fucking sense,” Jimin finished, as he placed the empty bottle down on the counter and he reached up to rake his fingers through his hair.

Yoongi felt the most pressing urge to reach over, to touch his shoulder maybe in a sign of solidarity. So he reached over…and he found his hand settling down on his head instead.

For a second or two, Jimin didn’t seem to register this, but when he did he turned his head to look at him in confusion. Yoongi petted at his head and then slowly moved his hand down to his shoulder, where he had been intending to touch before his drunken body had decided otherwise. He squeezed his shoulder hard and Jimin just continued staring at him like he didn’t understand what he was doing.

“Don’t make no sense,” Yoongi agreed in a quiet voice, as he dropped his hand back onto the counter. “And after awhile you get sick of hating yourself, so, you-” he hiccuped and reached up to touch his chest in surprise, “you find a way to invest those destructive tendencies into something else like…like booze or drugs or-”

“Fucking around,” Jimin added in a quiet voice.

“Fucking ‘round,” Yoongi reiterated with a nod. “And then you think it’s all good but you ‘member you’re just giving him more reasons to fucking hate you, so-”

“You go right back to hating yourself,” Jimin finished for him, gesturing for another round of beers.

“Exactly! Exactly,” Yoongi said, as he reached over and he placed a hand on his knee, not exactly squeezing it but more fondling it. “So, nothing fits in that stupid fucking hole inside of you, nothing fits. Not booze, not pills, not a cock - nothing.”

When the bartender placed down the two fresh bottles, Yoongi stopped Jimin from scrounging for cash, instead tossing one of the bills from his earlier change down to cover the costs. Maybe it looked
condescending that he did so upon learning that he had been through poverty before, but Yoongi was a little too drunk right now to care. Jimin deserved a round of beer, and the mule didn’t at all look fazed as he collected his fresh bottle and he nursed it between his hands.

“But a cock feels better than nothing,” Jimin said after a moment of thought.

Yoongi guffawed at this and then he took another sip of beer - his final beer, he told himself.

“You know, you didn’t know what The Meat Rack was, which must make you the only gay in the whole of fucking San Francisco that didn’t,” Jimin stated, as he gave him a pretty drunken smile. “So, I can’t help but wonder what else you dunno.”

“Educate me,” Yoongi retorted, folding one arm on the counter and resting his chin in his hand. “Teach me some…some shit, whatever.”

“Um, massage parlours?”

“I’m well-versed in massages,” he replied. “Uh, what ‘bout those…bathhouses?”

“You’ve never been to one of those either, huh?” Jimin asked him with a knowing lift at the corner of his lips.

Yoongi hummed as he lifted his bottle to take another deep sip of beer.

“You know when you go inside, when you get to the sex rooms,” the younger man explained, as he shifted on the chair to get that little bit closer to him, his chest brushing against his shoulder now. “It’s not at all strange to see guys just lying on the beds waiting for someone to come along. You got guys lying with their asses up to let anyone just walk along and take them, or some lying on their backs to let you know they’ll take you or a blowjob.”

Yoongi lowered his beer bottle from his mouth slowly, not swallowing just yet in case he choked on the mixture.

Was Jimin being serious or just joking because he wouldn’t know a truth from a lie? After a few
seconds, he swallowed, much harder and more audibly than he had intended.

“The hallways, they’re like mazes and there’s dark little niches in the walls,” Jimin continued in that same low voice, not breaking eye-contact with him. “Guys just fuck in them, right in the open. There’s very few doors inside, so, you can see and hear everything in this haze of red neon tubing and steam from the baths and saunas. It’s like…the most erotic trip.”

Yoongi stared at him and he found himself unable to reply, to even move his tongue because it was lying at the bottom of his mouth.

“It’s so hot you just break out into a sweat stepping into the place, it makes your head feel all funny,” he added.

“The…uh, the…” Yoongi forced himself to stop speaking because he could hear himself stuttering stupidly. “The sex rooms?”

“Mmm, some of them are themed,” Jimin continued. “You can ride cowboys, you can get punished by the cops, you name it and you’ll find it somewhere in this city. Yoongi?”

“Huh?”

“You…you look a little flustered,” Jimin said before smirking at him.

Yoongi felt the most pressing urge to argue against this, but considering his currently useless tongue, it might be best not to.

“What? What got you all flustered? The cowboys? The maze? The voyeurism?”

“I ain’t flustered, I’m just drunk,” he retorted, as he avoided the question and he stared at his beer bottle instead. Yes, he was pretty drunk at this point, but he knew that Jimin didn’t believe him one bit.

“…You wanna go to one?” Jimin offered with a somewhat mischievous eyebrow raise.
Yoongi dragged his eyes away to stare at the display again, and a moment later, he felt the younger man’s hand touching his arm. His fingers were so warm through the silk of his shirt, warm and inviting.

“I know the best one in this city, guaranteed fun. You can get some…hands-on education.”

“What if I just want your hands on me?” Yoongi retorted, as he twisted to look at him.

This made Jimin’s lips turn up in a grin as mischievous as his eyebrow raise from a moment ago, and he moved his hand from his arm to place it down on his thigh instead. Jimin dug his fingers into his thigh, almost kneaded at him as he leaned close enough to whisper in his ear.

“Come with me to a bathhouse and you might just find my hands all over you,” he replied, breathing down his neck and making Yoongi gulp hard. “Might find me filling that…empty hole inside you, nice and deep. I bet you could fill it for me too, I bet you could.” Jimin’s hand moved upward so that he could lightly grind the heel of his hand on his crotch, “stretch me wide open.”

Yoongi sucked his lower lip in and he started gnawing on it as he stared at the beer bottle on the counter. Jimin’s palm was still on his crotch, warm and heavy and rubbing just right. He wanted to collect his bottle and finish the beer, just to wet his mouth because it had went so terribly dry on him, but he seemed unable to do so.

“I’m special enough, right?” Jimin asked in a simpering tone, his lips edging close to his neck, so close that Yoongi could almost feel them on his skin.

“You’re-” Yoongi wet his dry lips with his equally dry tongue, “you’re a good boy and…” He turned his head and he felt his nose bumping against Jimin’s, their faces so close. “Good boys deserve rewards.”
When Jimin climbed back into the BMW M1, he knew that he should have fastened his seatbelt up, but he was much too comfortable right now to not want to have the material digging tautly into his ribs. Without it on, he got to move around about as much as he wanted to on the seat; could wriggle, twist, and slump without a single care. Had he been sober, then he would have most certainly have fastened the seatbelt up, but right now…right now, Jimin was pretty fucking drunk and Yoongi wasn’t much better.

Yet, Yoongi was starting the car again and he was backing out of the lot regardless of this fact, his eyes a little glossy from the booze and his cheeks flushed wonderfully pink.

When Jimin caught sight of his own reflection in the rear-view mirror, he saw a startlingly similar sight staring right back at him: flushed pink cheeks, slightly messy hair, completely blown eyes. Shit, they both looked a mess.

But right now, Jimin thought that Yoongi looked pretty fucking fantastic sitting in the seat beside him, his flushed cheeks and wet eyes included. The sight of the Rolex on his thin wrist certainly helped add to this somewhat heightened illusion, for he found his eyes latching onto it as he watched the older man twisting the steering-wheel to get them back out onto the road again. He ended up driving up onto the curb for a moment, the car bouncing slightly until they were onto the road fully.

“Where to, huh?” Yoongi asked, as he spared a quick glance over at him.

“Head straight along Castro Street, I’ll tell you where to go,” Jimin explained. “I know these streets like the back of my hand, I’ve been here so often that it’s, like, it’s in my blood.”

“You come here a lot, huh?” Yoongi asked, turning back to the road just to end up stopping in a slight traffic jam in their lane.

When Jimin made a noise in agreement, the other man thought his reply over before continuing.
“Why? I mean, I know why you come here; you come for a casual fuck like every other guy, but I mean…why? I don’t get it?”

“You don’t get…what? The casual attitude?” Jimin asked back, as he studied him.

Yoongi hummed at the question.

“What, weren’t you casual? You got a guy or something?”

“No, never had one,” the other man replied without a hint of hesitation. “I messed ‘round with my friend a couple of times, mostly when I was younger. See, back in the bar, when we were talking ‘bout empty holes and hating ourselves - all of that shit? Well, I was less keen on filling said emptiness, more like tryna pretend it didn’t fucking exist, so…suppression until I was aching and ready to explode was my drug of choice. Y’know, the kind that spills free one night when you get drunk for the first time and find yourself with your head between your best friend’s thighs whilst you cry and try to suck him off at the exact same time?”

Jimin couldn’t remember his first sexual experience, all things considered, but he knew that it would have been in the backseat of some older man’s car in a parking lot: pinned to the leather with a mouth that tasted like cheap alcohol and the overwhelming scent of cologne coming from the heavy and hot body pressing down on him. Therefore, he felt like he could relate to this particular aspect; could feel the mingling shame, fear and twisted excitement and pleasure all mixing together into a toxic soup of emotions and sensations. Just thinking about it made him feel a rush of disgust coursing through his body, made him get a sudden sour taste on his tongue.

“How old were you- take the right at the end of the block,” Jimin said, as he spared a quick look out of the front window. “How old were you when that happened, Yoongi?”

“How old was I?” Yoongi repeated after he guided the car around the corner, swallowing a hiccup as he did so. “Uh…I think I was sixteen? I can’t ‘member, but I didn’t really do much of that. I told you, I’d keep it all inside and then just explode. Usually on him, I trusted him to…to deal with that shit. It’s not the casual thing I don’t get, it’s…nah, I-I dunno, I dunno,” he muttered, as he lifted a hand up off the steering-wheel and he waved it around limply with a series of noises.

Jimin could see that he was trying to get the right words out, but he was struggling to do so in his rather drunken state.
“I’ve been semi-casual with him before. I guess that makes me a fucking hypocrite, huh?”

“No, it makes you many things, but not a hypocrite,” Jimin replied with a slow head shake. “You’re confused, struggling to really accept or understand everything mostly. You’re still in the hating phase, I think.”

“Mmm, thought I got outta that loop,” Yoongi mumbled, before making a soft noise under his breath. “But you-you don’t seem so hung up on this shit. You seem kinda…”

“I’m not hung up about it, because I don’t think about it,” Jimin stated, as he moved to get more comfortable on his seat, turning to his side and folding his thighs up so that he could look at him fully. “Technically, I haven’t fucked around, haven’t really been active in a bathhouse, for awhile now. Whenever I used to go there for action, I’d get guys asking me why I wasn’t lying on a bed already. Because I’m just asking for a pounding, apparently. I had guys asking my age because they wanted to know if I was underage and, when I told them my actual age, they just walked away. I was asked what I ‘was’, like, as if that fucking mattered, but it did to the guys that owned an ‘ass of the worlds’ checklist. “Hey, pretty, you a chink? A Jap? A gook? Thai, huh?”, I was every-fucking-thing, Yoongi.”

“Fucking pricks,” Yoongi muttered with a head shake.

“I just got sick and tired of being manhandled by guys that couldn’t take a hint when I said that I wasn’t interested after the first groping, so, I’ve been going there to watch mostly these days. Sometimes, I’d leave with a guy if he kept my interest in a conversation long enough, but…well, I’ve been trying to cut down on all of that shit. With everything going on, you know?”

“Yeah, I get what you mean,” the older man said in a quiet voice.

“Have you been active? Like, you said semi-casual. You wanna tell me what you mean by that?”

“Define active?”

“Are you currently fucking guys you dunno or getting fucked by them - that kinda semi-casual active?”
“Nah, I haven’t received or gave in…five years now,” Yoongi replied without looking over at him, his eyes glued to the road instead.

Jimin couldn’t help but let out a squeak of surprise at this, completely taken aback by his words. He had said semi-casual! Did Yoongi maybe not understand the words ‘semi’ or ‘casual’ at all? The mere thought that he believed that that was a relatively normal thing to declare showed that he probably didn’t have a clue at all.

“Jesus! Are you kidding me?” he declared in an scandalised tone, unable to curb himself. “No sex since 1979; what the actual **fuck**, Yoongi?”

“When you put it like that, it does sound a little…”

“Nuts?” Jimin suggested.

Yoongi snorted hard as the car rolled down the next street, following his given directions to reach their destination.

Jimin spared a quick glance out of the front window to see that there was quite a lot of traffic in the area like usual, meaning that they had to keep stopping in lights and jams every now and again. The sky outside was pitch-black and devoid of a single star, but the neighbourhood was well-lit with streetlights for the safety of the residents and patrons in the bars, and combined with the glowing buildings, the streets outside were practically a sea of neon signs. Artificial replacement stars, sure, but at least they came in a rainbow of bright colours to make up for the fakeness.

“You stopped getting ass right around the time that I was finally getting good ass,” he added, before laughing softly. “Christ. Five years? I don’t think I could go five weeks without something, never mind five years.”

“I still hire massage boys,” Yoongi explained, as he spared a quick glance over him. “Every now and again, I call my friend up to, y’know, get a pretty massage boy from Chinatown sent to my mansion. I maybe…tuh-touch ‘em, undress ‘em, but when it comes to the, uh, the massaging, I get on my knees, back to ‘em. Kinda don’t wanna look at ‘em during it, yeah? I’ve been dealing with prostate massages and handjobs over that time. It ain’t **that** hard, Jimin. I can make the massages last a long time. You’re exaggerating and…what?”

“You like prostate massages?” Jimin asked, completely taken aback by this open declaration.
Yoongi hummed in agreement as he turned back to the road.

“So…you liked receiving, huh?”

“I liked both,” the older man corrected. “Sticking to one thing’s boring, switching’s more fun, yeah?”

“I don’t think I’ve met many switchers,” Jimin remarked in a quiet voice. “Or any…come to think about it. Too many guys in the bathhouses, they think you’ve gotta be one or the other. Giver or receiver. I think that’s kinda stupid. It kinda splits us up into weird pairs for hetero folk to understand. Yeah?”

Yoongi made a noise at this, a noise that sounded like a hiccuped agreement to his ears.

“If we stick to roles, why, we’re practically hetero. Sure, the woman’s got a cock but—”

“Jimin,” Yoongi drawled out, before guffawing under his breath.

“But, you know,” he finished with a grin, rather pleased that he had made him laugh. “Gotta be a man, gotta be a woman, can’t work without it. You think, um, you think lesbians get those kinda questions too, huh? Wait, is there a receiver and a giver or…or is there like a different term for it?”

“Fuck should I know?” the other man with a hard snort.

“I’ll have to ask, I know a couple of hippies,” Jimin declared, as he turned his attention back to the road in front of them.

“What ‘bout you?” Yoongi asked, giving him another quick look and making him glance back over at him as he did so. “What’d you like?”

“Me?” he asked, raising his eyebrows as he did so, and the other man nodded at the question. Before he looked back out the front window, Jimin gave him a quick and mischievous smile. “…I could get used to switching.”
“Oh, yeah?” Yoongi asked, as he slowed down in a traffic jam, and when he hummed in agreement, his lips also lifted up in a slight smile. “Good.”

Jimin didn’t really know how he felt about the other man right now, how he felt about Yoongi. Whilst he was distracted looking out of the front window, he took a moment to study his profile.

Yoongi had a somewhat flat face, rounded with wide cheeks and a soft jawline. He didn’t have the kind of face that Jimin usually liked upon first glance, but after some studying, he found his features rather likeable. His eyes were kind of small but with a nice curve to the lid that made them rounded, and he had a nondescript button nose. But his mouth, that spoilt little pucker of a pout, that was what Jimin liked. He liked how his lips lifted to show straight white teeth and how the older man had a habit of sticking his tongue out to wet them; how he sometimes nibbled on his lower lip until it bounced back from his teeth slightly flushed.

Yoongi had a cute face, but he was kind of a bitch, he guessed. Which was fitting, because Jimin himself could be a bit of a bitch when he needed to be if dealers tried to cut or burn a deal on him. But, there was one obvious thing about Yoongi that helped keep up his current level of interest. He was rich. Not just comfortable with money, had a little spending paper for fun every now and again. Yoongi was fucking loaded and the heir to a mob empire.

What wasn’t to like about that?

Jimin shifted his gaze downwards, following the curve of his throat to his shoulders, his frame hidden underneath his white silken shirt. But Jimin was sure that under the loose fabric, he was svelte. It was obvious just looking at his narrow waist, hips and thighs, and his forearms. Yoongi was, quite simply, a twig that no amount of loose clothing could disguise, and for some reason Jimin found himself finding this…attractive rather than displeasing. He thought that placing his hands on his waist would be kind of nice, that he could just slip his arms around him and-

Yoongi glanced away from the road for a second, and so Jimin quickly shifted his eyes to look at the steering-wheel instead.

Jimin had probably been caught staring at him very openly, but that hardly mattered now, after everything. Yoongi had one hand held firmly on the steering-wheel, his other arm folded on the window rest comfortably. He could see the curbed knob of his wrist, his knuckles and tendons standing out against his thin and lightly tanned skin. He had nice hands, very nice. They were maybe Yoongi’s nicest feature, excluding his rich bitch pout.
Jimin tried to imagine what it would feel like to have those hands gripping onto his thighs, and he found himself shifting in his seat at the thought, a funny little stirring starting in the pit of his stomach. His thighs, his biceps, his hips; Jimin knew that the other man’s hands would squeeze just right, his fingers dimpling into his skin.

And those fingers…

Jimin had had both Namjoon and Taehyung’s fingers inside of him over the last two weeks, but both of those instances had sadly been for business and nothing more than that. Quite frankly, he was tired of being edged only to end up being disappointed in the end. There was only so much teasing that he could take, and Jimin really didn’t like being teased at all. But tonight, tonight he might finally be able to find release of some kind, and he wasn’t going to play coy or tiptoe around it at all.

Yoongi had said that he wanted his hands all over him back at the bar, and Jimin wanted his hands all over him too. And his mouth, he would also like his mouth all over him.

Hell, Jimin was almost tempted to reach over and place his hand on his crotch again right now, just to let the other man know that he was eager. But he really wanted to wait until they were in the bathhouse at least, because everything was just so much more enjoyable there. The atmosphere was guaranteed to turn Yoongi on, the heat made every single sensation feel that much more intense, and it was always that little bit more exciting for Jimin knowing that there was an audience. That was why he was almost squirming in his seat right now, drunk and aroused and so very impatient.

Maybe it was the alcohol speaking, but Jimin would happily fuck Yoongi’s brains out. Maybe, let him fuck him too, if he wanted to. But not because he was rich or kind of cute. No, Jimin was pretty certain that it was because he kind of liked Yoongi, that he kind of wanted to get to know him better.

Like a friend, perhaps?

Yoongi might have had a completely different upbringing to him, a completely different life full of contrasting experiences, yet there was something inexplicably familiar about them both.

Gay, daddy issues, a hole somewhere deep down inside of them that nothing would fill or fix.

Jimin didn’t know anyone else like that because he didn’t particularly want to know the kind of men that he had used to hook-up with. He had never wanted to get to know a guy better after sex, usually because he hadn’t even known them to begin with. Sometimes, he hadn’t even known their names,
had just simply called them something vaguely flirtatious to keep them keen. But he knew a little about Yoongi already, and what he knew had resonated so deeply with him that he had a feeling that learning more about him might just be...fun.

Nice, even.

Oh boy, it was most definitely the alcohol speaking.

Jimin couldn’t help but let an exasperated little noise out as the car stopped at a set of lights, once again having to wait that little bit longer.

The view outside of the vehicle was the same as usual out in The Castro because it was packed with men and women hanging around the sidewalks, and he could hear drunken but friendly laughter and conversations bleeding in through the open windows of the car. Jimin couldn’t recall the last time that he had seen anything close to trouble on the streets of the neighbourhood, because he had been born quite a few years after the horrors of the police on the streets busting open bars, arresting and beating people out in the open like animals. No, he had seen some bad shit in Haight-Ashbury when the addicts on the streets got pissed off, but he had never seen violence out in the open here before; though he had no doubts that quite a few officers might just cruise around the area waiting for trouble so that they could break out their batons for fun.

At his rather weary sigh, Yoongi glanced away from the car in front of them to look at him.

“Mmm?” the other man almost purred, as he languidly lifted an eyebrow.

“I’m drunk, I’m horny, I’m impatient,” Jimin explained, making Yoongi laugh again. He had such a funny laugh, a deep guffaw that made his slight shoulders shake and his eyes crinkle at the corners. “Don’t laugh, this is kinda your fault.”

“My fault, huh?” Yoongi reiterated, quickly glancing between him and the front window. “What? Did I get you hard or something?”

“Yoongi?” Jimin said, as he turned his head to look at him again, eyeing his profile. “I can feel it twitching.”

At this, Yoongi tore his eyes away from the front window so fast it was almost comical. Jimin was
surprised that his eyes didn’t roll straight out of his head and land in his lap. The first thing that he looked at was his face, as if he was trying to gauge if he was being serious or not, and then he spared a quick glance down at his crotch just to check. But he hadn’t been joking, for he really was aroused right now just thinking about touching him at the bathhouse.

Yoongi stared at his jeans for a second before turning back to the road and slowing down at a set of lights, and Jimin saw the way he sucked his lower lip in to bite it; saw him shifting in his seat as he glanced back over at him.

“Can I, uh, can I feel it twitching too?” Yoongi asked him, sticking his tongue out to wet his lips and gulping as he did so.

Jimin moved to sit back in his own seat properly, unfolding his knees and spreading his thighs wide open in silent invitation instead.

Yoongi switched his grip on the steering-wheel, taking hold with his left so that he could reach over with his right hand and place it down onto his thigh. He drove forward through the set of lights, following his next given direction, and then he slowly shifted his hand up towards his crotch.

Jimin could see how…unsteady that his hand was, a complete contrast to the one firmly gripping the steering-wheel. Yoongi’s fingers stroked at the slowly raising swelling that was starting to strain against his jeans, and he was suddenly so very glad that he had decided to not wear underwear earlier.

“Don’t be shy,” Jimin joked, as he watched the other man almost experimentally touching him.

Yoongi rounded the corner at the end of the block and then he spared a quick glance at his crotch again, no doubt catching sight of his erection now straining against the tight seam of his jeans. Judging from the little noise that escaped his mouth before he bit down on his lip, that was.

“I ain’t had a guy hard for me since ‘79,” Yoongi retorted. “Forgive me for being a lil, I dunno, reserved?”

“It’s like riding a bike, baby,” Jimin stated, seeing how the other man looked up at the sudden affection. It was hard reading his face to figure out if he liked it or not. “All you need’s a little spit and some elbow grease.”
Yoongi turned his attention back to the road again, but as he did so he at least moved his hand into a better position.

Jimin could feel the weight and warmth of his palm settling on his very upper thigh, and when he gave him a soft stroke it felt so much better. After some momentary fumbling, Yoongi decided to try and cup his palm and fingers around his erection, squeezing and stroking harder down against the tight denim as they once again stopped in traffic.

“Yoongi, you can’t feel me through all of that denim. How about I just…”

Jimin didn’t break eye-contact with him once as he popped the button of his jeans open and then moved his hand down to play with the zipper. He could see Yoongi watching him doing so intently, his eyes focused on his fingers and his cheeks still so flushed from the beer that it was hard to tell if he was blushing right now. When Jimin gave it a slight tug, Yoongi sank his fingers into his thigh hard, almost kneaded at him through his jeans. So he ran the zipper down, the metal teeth rasping, and then he reached over to grab his wrist.

Yoongi was so distracted watching the lights that he allowed him more-or-less slip his hand down the front of his jeans for him. Jimin felt his palm gliding down his lower stomach, pushing his tee-shirt up and wrinkling the fabric. He had to use his free hand to tug it up and hold it in place, exposing all of his stomach and his lower ribs as he did so.

Yoongi jerked his hand back just as he slipped it down inside of his jeans leg, rubbing the heels of his knuckles across his groin again so that he stroked at his smooth skin. It was as if he was taken aback by his lack of pubic hair and he had wanted to check again.

“Shit, you this smooth all over, huh?” Yoongi asked before laughing, a rather breathless sounding laugh to his ears. “Smooth and-”

“Yeah, I gotta shave for muling, so-”

“and soft,” the older man finished over him, as he moved his hand down again; his fingers stroking at the base of his cock until he managed to slide his hand mostly down the thigh of his jeans.

Jimin let go of his wrist with a quick intake of breath, leaving Yoongi in control. He had expected that he would fumble like had done so earlier, would struggle, but he stroked his palm and the heel of his hand against his length in a way that had him closing his eyes and sighing. Yoongi slipped his
hand inside his jeans leg as far as he could with the tight fabric, his fingers rubbing at his head in soft circular movements as he pressed his thumb down hard against his shaft.

“Shit, Yoongi, just like that,” he breathed out, hearing Yoongi swallowing hard rather than reply.

When Jimin opened his eyes to glance over at him, he saw that Yoongi was almost gnawing through his lower lip as he stroked him.

But his jeans were just too restrictive, far too restrictive. Yoongi could barely do anything more than rub his palm along his length and stroke his head with his fingertips, and he couldn’t fully take him in his hand and pump his wrist. But even that limited contact alone was enough to have Jimin sinking down into his seat, his head rolled back against the rest and his fingers digging into the leather seat cushion. The friction, the warmth and smoothness of his palm, was just right.

“Open ‘em up,” Yoongi said in a rather impatient tone, as he pulled his hand out of his jeans and he proceeded to lift it to his face.

Yoongi spat on his palm just as Jimin managed to fumble the flaps of his jeans wide open to release his erection. It practically sprang free, stiff and flushed, and the other man eyed it almost hungrily.

“The lights, Yoongi, the lights- ah!”

Yoongi grabbed him firmly in his hand, his grip so tight around his base that Jimin couldn’t help but cry out in mingled surprise and pleasure. He kept his fist in place as he rolled the car forward through the now green lights, carrying onto the next block. But as soon as they were on the new street, he started really touching him.

Yoongi loosened his grip as he slid his hand up his length, reaching his head and squeezing just enough to cause a throb of heat and jolting pleasure to shoot up into the pit of his stomach. Then he thumped his fist down hard to his base again, giving him a kneading twist as he did so.

“The, fuck, the left and then a-ah a right,” Jimin directed, his fingers digging into the seat cushion as Yoongi carried on relentlessly pumping and kneading his fist around his cock.

Oh, fuck the bathhouse, he could fit a warm-up session in right here.
“Does that feel good, huh?” Yoongi asked, as if his audible and fast breathing wasn’t starting to fill up the car.

Jimin made a noise in agreement, feeling the vehicle shifting under him as the other man followed his directions. He had never been so glad for the heavy night traffic in this area before, for it kept them in the car much longer than usual.

“Thought you didn’t fuck ’round with guys that buy you drinks?”

“Yeah, but you also, mmm, bought me dinner too, so…”

Jimin watched Yoongi shifting to quickly lean over his crotch, dribbling more saliva down onto both his palm and his cock, and then straightening up again. He twisted the wheel hard, swerving them back into their lane before he ended up driving into the wrong one. His drunken reflexes were luckily still good enough to stop them from crashing into anything, even if the car weaved from side to side for a moment before righting itself again.

When he gave another hard squeeze to his head, his palm slick with spit, Jimin couldn’t help but buck his hips up and thrust into his fist. A corkscrew of pleasure ran through him, made him grunt as he carried on trying to rock in rhythm with his hand.

“That it? The building at the end?”

“Yuh-yeah, there’s a lot coming up.” Jimin replied, seeing Yoongi quickly scanning the road to locate said parking lot and then twisting the wheel to enter it. “And speaking of cumming, I think I’m gonna-”

Yoongi pulled his hand away just as Jimin was convinced that he was going to climax, the sudden lack of warm and slick friction catching him by surprise. He hiccuped on his moan and he twisted to see that he was killing the car and removing his seatbelt, about to climb out of the vehicle and leave him like this.

“Wait,” Jimin reached over to grab hold of his upper arm, finding his hand wrapping around most of his bicep as he did so. “Wait, where’re you going?”
“We’re here,” Yoongi explained, as he twisted to look back over his shoulder at him. “At the bathhouse.”

“Yeah, I know, but-” Jimin lifted his hips up off the seat, drawing attention to his still steadily throbbing and stiff cock. “You had me peaking there, seriously. Just a little more and I’m done, finished in record time.”

“. . .I don’t wanna ruin the leather,” Yoongi retorted with a drunken smirk, as he shrugged his hand off him and he climbed out of the car.

Jimin stared at his empty seat dumbly for a moment, his head still spinning and his cock demanding attention, and then he felt an irritated groan escaping his mouth. He made sure to do so loud enough for the other man to hear, and judging from the hard snort of laughter, Yoongi found it highly amusing.

“You’re a fucking-” Jimin awkwardly shoved himself back into his jeans and he struggled with the zipper, “cocktease. Literally! What was that, huh? What was that, Yoongi?”

“Dunno,” he replied with a shrug, as Jimin also got out of the car, slammed the door shut, and then moved around the front to stand beside him.

Yoongi hadn’t even parked in the space correctly, was actually taking up most of two spaces because he had parked on a diagonal slant, but that didn’t really matter right now.

“I didn’t slap you before, think of that as punishment instead; yeah?”

“I would prefer a slap, it hurts less,” Jimin argued, as he shifted on the spot and tried to readjust himself inside of his jeans. It was rather useless trying because no matter what, it was uncomfortable and awkward. He could see the other man watching him, could see the amused smirk on his face at the sight of the bulge running along the inner thigh of his jeans. “You said that you haven’t been active in years and yet…”

“Huh?” Yoongi mumbled, lifting his eyebrows at him.

It seemed that he was a little too drunk to follow his vague joke right now.
Jimin reached over to place a hand on his lower back, aiming to guide him across the lot onto the sidewalk. But he found that he ended up slipping his arm around his waist instead, tugging him closer. Yoongi let him do so, stumbling until he ended up leaning on him slightly for support.

“Never mind,” Jimin said, as they both left the parking lot and started walking along the sidewalk to get to the bathhouse.

What he had been trying to say was that he was so surprised to find out that Yoongi hadn’t really had sex in several years, and yet he had managed to work him over like an expert. Jimin had had guys in the bathhouses touching him just minutes after pleasuring someone else struggling to make him feel that good, that had needed guidance in the form of his own hand and words to get him close to climaxing. Maybe, it was because he was drunk? Maybe, it was because he had already been so aroused by the time that the other man had started touching him? Or maybe, Yoongi just really knew how to wank a guy off because he was an expert in doing it to himself?

Jimin didn’t really know, but he was already trying to think of a way of…paying him back in the bathhouse.

Yoongi fumbled at his lower back, his fingers brushing and scratching at his leather jacket until he settled on moving his hand down to the waistband of his jeans instead. He snagged hold of one of the belt loops tightly, clearly appreciating the support as they crossed the thin side street to get onto the other sidewalk. Just like Jimin had assumed earlier, he was thin, was easy to support even when they were both pretty drunk. For some reason, he started laughing to himself, that same rather low guffaw that he had heard a few times over the evening.

“What?” Jimin asked him, sparing a quick glance at his face as he did so.

“I dunno, I’m just-” Yoongi snorted and dropped his head, his black hair temporarily obscuring his eyes. “The fuck’s going on right now? I dunno, but it’s kinda funny.”

“Kinda funny? I guess it is,” Jimin agreed with his own soft laugh. “Can’t say that I expected to be coming to a bathhouse with Prince Min himself tonight.”

Yoongi let out another guffaw at this, reaching up with his free hand to cover his mouth as he did so, and Jimin gave his waist a quick squeeze.
“Mmm, you’re pretty cute when you’re drunk.”

“Only when I’m drunk?” Yoongi asked him with a curious expression, cocking his head at him.

Yoongi blinked hard a few times, his eyes wet with booze, and Jimin felt the most overwhelming urge to cup his cheek in his free hand. So he did so, probably grabbing hold a little too tightly, and he felt his warm and smooth skin against his palm.

“You better mean always, or I really will slap you.”

“Yeah, sure you will,” Jimin agreed sarcastically, as he patted his cheek thrice.

The exterior of the bathhouse was built to look like a gym, a wide building made of tan stone with dark glass windows on the main doors. If it wasn’t for the glowing signs outside advertising it as a ‘men’s health spa’, then people might just pass it and be completely oblivious to the actual truth.

Yoongi stared at the glowing pink and purple sign for a few seconds before turning back to him, his expression showing that he was uncertain what to do next.

“Do I gotta pay for this or something?”

“Um, you’ve gotta pay for a ‘membership’, for legal reasons,” Jimin explained, as he shifted to balance the other man’s slight weight better so that he wasn’t slumping against him. “Just a small fee, that’ll get you inside for the night, and if you wanna come back you just pay each night. You might just find yourself coming back here.”

“I doubt it,” he retorted without a hint of hesitation.

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah, there’s only one reason I’m here,” Yoongi explained, dragging his eyes away from the exterior to look at him fully. “You.”
Jimin held his gaze for a moment, playing his words over in his head as he did.

Yoongi had just admitted to him that the only reason that he had come to the bathhouse with him tonight was because of him, which meant only one thing. Yoongi had absolutely zero interest in hooking-up with any of the other men inside of the building, only wanted to do so with him. He had tagged along with him purely for fun, fun that he was very much expecting from him at this point. Which also meant that Jimin was going to have plenty of fun too...fun in teasing him just for a little rush of revenge. He couldn’t help but grin at him, and Yoongi let out another laugh before rubbing at his nose roughly.

“There’s gonna be a lot of guys in there,” he explained. “You so sure that you’re only here for me?”

“Mmm, I don’t do casual, ‘member?”

“Then, what’re you doing here with me, huh?”

“I know your name,” Yoongi stated. “That ain’t casual, it’s-”

“Semi-casual,” Jimin finished, before they both started laughing.

“Exactly! Exactly!” Yoongi agreed, as he guided him through the front entrance of the bathhouse, having to support both him and shove the door open at the exact same time. It was a challenge but he managed to do it.

Inside of the bathhouse, there was the check-in desk right in front of the entrance: a small room that was connected to both a changing-room and also the rest of the bathhouse. The area was tidy and clean, was pretty warm and brightly lit. On the walls, there were even more posters advertising the dangers of AIDS, the importance of condoms, and helplines for advice and health check-ups than there were on the kiosks out on the streets, and there were also schedules to let visitors know which nights of the week were exclusive lesbian or fetish nights.

Jimin eyed these with little interest, having seen them all already, but he noted that Yoongi stared at them like he had never seen them before. He supposed that he might not have, on account of that fact that he had mentioned having a mansion earlier in the drive from the bar. Along with those posters, there were also rules stuck here and there, in bold black print so that no one could possibly miss them. They would certainly help Yoongi understand the type of behaviour that he would see inside of the joint, because it could be pretty intimidating for a first time visitor.
Touching of the genitalia is allowed in this establishment. This includes: penises, testicles, buttocks, breasts and the labia. If he/she are not interested, no means no.

Groping your intended partner after being told no is against the rules. You will be removed from the establishment and not refunded.

If your intended partner wishes to use protection and you do not, find another partner. AIDS is deadly.

Protection is advised.

Prostitution is not allowed in this establishment. Do not exchange cash for services on these premises. This is illegal. You will be removed from the establishment and banned from further visits.

Smoking/drinking/drugs are not allowed on these premises.

Private rooms are strictly private, do not enter these rooms without permission from those using one.

Jimin removed his arm from around his waist as they went over to the counter, seeing the older man shuffling ever so slightly but not stumbling as he turned to eye more posters on the wall with a great interest.

“3 dollars for entry, 1 dollar for a storage locker in the changing-room,” the guy behind the counter said.

He looked young, a college kid maybe. He looked bored and tired, but was pretty cute, Jimin supposed, in that aloof and rather spoilt kind of way.

Before Jimin could even attempt to fumble for the cash inside of his inner jacket pocket, Yoongi beat him to it; slipping his wallet out once more to open it and pull a note out. He slapped it down onto the counter without much care at all, clearly not even noticing that he had just placed a $50 bill down to cover the $8 fee for entrance and a locker for them both.

The young man behind the counter eyed the bill for a second before collecting it, placing down change a moment later and then disappearing into the backroom. When he returned, he did so with two folded towels, which he put down on the counter. Then he retrieved a pair of locker keys from a
board on the wall, also adding them on top of the towels.

“Remember, safe sex is the best kinda sex,” he said in a rather perfunctory tone, his eyes going straight to Yoongi’s Rolex as he picked up one of the keys and he studied it.

Jimin ended up grabbing the towels and steering him across the entrance-area to the changing-room. The other room was separated from the main-area of the bathhouse and was actually a place where no one hooked-up, seeing as people were discouraged from engaging in sexual acts inside. Therefore, it was usually empty, for guys only entered to get undressed and then leave. When they stepped inside, it was currently empty of even a single man.

“42,” Yoongi read aloud, looking at his locker key intently. “Where’s 42? Huh?”

“Beside 43,” Jimin retorted, as he dangled his own key and then pushed him over to the right row of red lockers.

The air inside of the changing-room was only slightly warm but it was warmer than the entrance-area, a noticeable increase that also carried the strong scent of mineral rich water and steam with it.

After a moment, Jimin managed to find their row of lockers, and so the first thing that he did was dump the towels on the bench between the two rows, unlock his door, and then step out of his loafers to put them inside. He spared a quick glance over at Yoongi to see that he was in the act of unlocking his own door, struggling a little with the key. So Jimin waited for him to do so, watching him giving it a hard twist until the locker door swung open with a slight creaking sound of metal in desperate need of oiling.

Just like he had done so, Yoongi got out of his shoes first, bending down to grab them and placing them inside of the compartment. Then he started unbuttoning his shirt whilst he slipped out of his leather jacket, his fingers fumbling but managing to pop the buttons free, and then loosening his bolo tie to slip that off too.

Jimin had just shoved his jacket inside his own locker, and he was in the act of pulling his tee-shirt off over his head when Yoongi slipped the shoulders of his shirt down and he revealed something unexpected.

Yoongi’s entire back was covered in a mob tattoo.
Jimin paused in the act of getting undressed, staring at his now exposed spine with a great interest whilst Yoongi folded the shirt up to go inside of his locker. The other man hadn’t even noticed the fact that he was staring at his spine in complete shock.

In true Moon Tiger Mob fashion, the main focus of the tattoo was a tiger, and the tiger on Yoongi’s back was a pouncing and snarling beast. Its tail was curled up close to the base of his neck but just low enough to be hidden underneath the neckline of his shirts, and its body was curved in a soft s-shape. Its back legs were placed on his mid-ribs, its lower body ran down so that the tiger’s head was situated just above the dip of his spine, and its fore paws and claws were placed right on the soft swell on his buttocks in the most pleasing manner. The tiger was still mostly line art right now, thick and thin black, white and red details currently tattooed onto his skin, but there was more colour in the backdrop behind the pouncing beast.

Behind the tiger, there were blooming flowers and lush green leaves, Rose of Sharon from what Jimin could tell, judging from the thick bundles of petals. Along his very lower side, there was a series of characters, hanja characters that Jimin couldn’t possibly read. It could say his family name, the mob name, absolutely anything. It could even be the artist’s signature, for all that he knew. What Jimin knew was that it was the most intricate and stunning tattoo that he had ever laid his eyes on, and he couldn’t seem to stop staring at it.

Yoongi dropped his trousers and underwear down to his ankles and then he stepped out of them, bending down to retrieve them and finally giving Jimin something to stare at that wasn’t his tattoo. He was in the act of grabbing his towel when he seemed to notice him staring, and so Yoongi twisted to look back over his shoulder at him.

“Huh?”

“Your tattoo,” he explained, as he finally dragged his tee-shirt off over his head and he shoved it inside of the locker. “I was looking at it, it caught me by surprise.”

“You like it?” Yoongi asked, slinging the towel around his thin hips and securing it in place.

“The bigger the better, huh?” Jimin retorted with a smirk, as he started unbuttoning his jeans again. He could see that Yoongi was watching him do so intently, not even trying to be discreet. “Namo, he’s got a roaring tiger head on his arm. I’ve seen a couple other mob tattoos, but they were all small, nothing like yours.”

“Where’s yours?” Yoongi asked, running his eyes over his exposed upper half and trying to locate a tattoo of some kind. It also gave him the perfect excuse to stare at his naked flesh, of course, not that
“I don’t have one,” Jimin explained, as he ran his zipper down and then grabbed the waistband of his jeans. Before pulling them down, he paused and he turned to look at the other man, seeing that Yoongi’s eyes were right back on his hands again and waiting pretty eagerly for him to pull his jeans down. “You know, being a mule means that I’m pretty low-ranked—”

“A lil brother.”

“Yeah, so, no tattoo,” he finished with a shrug.

“You should get one, it’s a sign of allegiance,” Yoongi explained, as he shuffled closer to him.

At this, Jimin cocked his head, and the older man reached out to place a hand on his chest.

“Right here,” he said, as he ran his fingers over the slight swell of his right breast muscle and down to his ribs. “Would look good.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Mmm,” Yoongi hummed, moving to grab at the waistband of his jeans - his grip tight on the denim.

Jimin moved his own hands away, letting him gently tug his jeans down over his hips to his thighs for him.

Yoongi had to bend forward slightly to get them to his knees because the denim was so tight, and as he did so, he pressed a rather sloppy attempt at a kiss on his lower stomach. The contact was brief but highly pleasing; ticklish, warm and soft as his lips pouted out against his skin. Jimin almost got to see what he would look like on his knees for him, but then he straightened up again, his now loose jeans dropping to his ankles in a puddle of denim.

“Maybe I’ll get one?” Jimin remarked, as he stepped out of his jeans and then bent down to grab them.
As he did so, Yoongi actually reached down to touch his hair, ruffling it with his fingers in a way that he very much liked.

“Or, maybe I’ll show my allegiance another way?” he suggested, tossing his jeans into the locker and grabbing his towel from the bench.

As Jimin secured it around his hips, he looked at the other man and he lifted his eyebrows at him provocatively.

“Like?”

“Like…” Jimin shifted to turn his face so that he could lean incredibly close whisper down his ear, “making you lots of profit.”

When he pulled his head away, he caught sight of Yoongi’s grin, his lips fully lifted enough to make his eyes crinkle at the corners.

Jimin turned back to his locker, shutting the door and slipping the key into the lock to twist it hard. He didn’t really know why, but there was something incredibly fun in playing around with Yoongi like this: the underlying innuendo and little touches, the flirtatious sensation that was hanging in the air between them that didn’t feel forced or awkward for the first time in such a very long time. Jimin couldn’t remember feeling this comfortable flirting with someone before, save for Namjoon, who he did so with for childish fun rather than seriously. He couldn’t even do something like this with Taehyung because it was a lot harder playing around with his words in Korean to make jokes that the younger man could understand. But now that Yoongi was drunk and a lot more amicable than he had been in the restaurant earlier, Jimin found himself easily making jokes and flirting…and it felt nice.

It felt nice and it was fun, the kind of fun that he hadn’t even realised that he was craving until now. He had been so busy working that he hadn’t been able to just unwind like this, to get drunk and flirt with a pretty cute guy with a bank account in the nine digits and a rather infectious guffaw. Shit, he really did kind of like Yoongi, and Jimin had never fucked around with a guy that he had actually liked before. It was hard trying to figure out how much of that liking was the result of alcohol right now, and so he wasn’t even going to try and figure it out. He was just going to enjoy the good feeling for as long as he could, even if it only lasted a single night and nothing more than that.

After all, Jimin was so used to nothing more than one-night stands, and this might just add itself onto
the list. Or…it might become something a bit better than that.

Jimin sat down on the bench beside the lockers, lifting his leg to place his foot down on the wood and tie his locker key around his ankle.

Yoongi watched him doing so before locking his own compartment door and moving to drop on the bench beside him, copying his actions so that he could also knot the key in place.

Jimin got upright again a moment later, fixing his towel in place, and then he cocked his head in the direction of the open doorway as he looked down at the other man.

Yoongi finished tying the key around his thin ankle, looking up at him with those too wet and rounded eyes of his, and so he reached down to ruffle at his hair too. His fingers sank into his black hair, snagged little springy locks that just seemed to beg to be pulled on.

“You ready to go have some fun?”

23rd August, 1984, 2:11am: The Castro, San Francisco, United States of America

When Jimin offered him his hand to help him get up off the bench, Yoongi didn’t need to accept it because he could get upright without the assistance. He was only slightly drunk (or at least that was what he was telling himself) and he wasn’t going to fall flat on his face just getting to his feet. But there was actually an added bonus in accepting his offered hand, for it meant that he could hold his hand, even if only temporarily.

So he reached up to take hold of his hand, slowly entwining their fingers together as Jimin gave him a slight tug to get him up off the bench. He expected that the younger man would then let go because he had no need to hold onto his hand, but he didn’t do so.

No, Jimin just dropped his hand down to his side instead, his fingers still snagged between his rather
easily for he had such slight hands that he could almost envelop in his own. Had they been anywhere else, back at the restaurant or bar perhaps, even just sitting in his car in a parking lot, Yoongi would have been tempted to lift their entwined hands up to his mouth to kiss the backs of his fingers, like Hoseok had used to do playfully when they had been mere kids. But it didn’t seem like the right time or place to do something like that.

A bathhouse wasn’t the right location for such soft touches and kisses, for playful flirtatiousness.

Yoongi knew that his father would choke at the thought of him even looking at a bathhouse, and yet here he was right now: inside of one, wearing nothing more than a towel and holding onto the hand of another man. The thought brought a rather smug sense of satisfaction to him, but he just knew that that would eventually be replaced by crippling self-disgust and shame just like always. Next time that he had to go and see his father for business matters, he would probably be unable to even hold his eyes without breaking out into a clammy sweat.

But right now, Yoongi wasn’t going to think about his father, about disgust and shame. He was going to think about Jimin instead. Jimin, and the soft little upward curl at the corners of his lips. Jimin, with his small frame but the hard little dimples of muscles across his toned stomach and thighs. Jimin, who giggled giddily at his rather lame drunken jokes, but was also blunt enough to hold his eyes when sober and not look away from him as they spoke.

Oh, fuck his father.

For one night, just one night, Yoongi was going to look at another man and find him attractive; wasn’t going to close his eyes or turn away if they got intimate or refuse to kiss him. No one was going to know, no one had a fucking clue that he was in this bathhouse across the city rather than at home in his mansion like always. Rather than nursing a glass of whisky in his fist, he was going to hold onto Jimin’s hand. Instead of lying awake all night feeling like there was something wrong, that there was something missing so that he couldn’t close his eyes and rest his busy mind, he was going to stay awake all night and feel something good; feel like he was actually doing something right so that he didn’t even want to close his eyes and sleep.

“Uh, not really,” he replied with a rather nervous upwards twitch of the lips. “I ain’t sure I’ll ever feel ready, Jimin.”

“Yoongi, it’s not that scary,” Jimin replied with a soft laugh. “Just think about it like this: it’s just sex, yeah. One of the most natural things in the world, nothing scary. You’re not even doing it either, you just might see it happening in the other rooms. What’s so scary about that, huh?”
Yoongi instantly thought of the witty retort: “my father’s disgust”, but he managed to bite his tongue and keep silent. He just hummed something that sounded like an agreement under his breath instead.

“You’ve had sex before, right? Like actual sex and not just messing around with your friend?” Jimin asked him in a whisper-soft voice, cocking his head slightly to study his face as he did so.

“I, uh, I can’t ‘member,” Yoongi replied, reaching up to rub at the back of his neck. “Maybe, once or twice when I was drunk, but I dunno. My friend he, uh, he said that we had, so, I must’ve. I just can’t ‘member ‘cos I was so drunk, ha.”

Yoongi suddenly found it pretty hard to hold Jimin’s gaze, and so he looked over the changing-room and he scanned the opposite row of lockers instead.

Couldn’t remember? Or didn’t want to remember? Both were fitting, either one could be the truth and Yoongi would never know. He had a great way of blocking things out and never thinking about them ever again, after all. Alcohol was a convenient excuse that could cover up pretty much everything. Why, he was actually using it right now; hoping to appear more drunk than he actually was so if he woke up and he wanted to wipe this particular memory from his mind, he could lie about not remembering this night to Jimin too. After scanning the lockers, he gave Jimin a quick glance, seeing that he was eyeing him with a hard to read expression.

“But you’re right, it ain’t scary, it’s just-”

“Been awhile?” Jimin suggested, as he squeezed his hand ever so slightly.

Yoongi made a noise in agreement at this, and that was when the younger man sadly relinquished his hold on his hand to start crossing the changing-room. He turned his head to watch him go for a few seconds and then he followed along after him, his locker key lightly shifting to bounce off his ankle bone with each step. He had no choice but to follow him around because he had no clue what the interior of the bathhouse was even like.

After they exited the changing-room, they moved to go to the door that would grant them entry, a heavy wooden door that Jimin had to wrench hard on to budge open. The first thing that hit Yoongi was a strong waft of hot air, followed by the deep red lighting inside. The younger man entered the other area first, looking back over his shoulder invitingly, and so he took a deep breath and he took the plunge, stepping into the bathhouse after him.
When the door shut behind them with a thumping sound, it finally hit him just how hot that it actually was inside of the building. Inside the hallways of the bathhouse, the warmth from the other rooms: the sauna, the Jacuzzi, the pool, and the showers, had all combined together to make a heavy wall of heat. When Yoongi breathed in, it was as if the oxygen had depleted considerably, and he found himself inhaling through his mouth because that seemed easier.

The ceiling of the hallways had most of the light fixtures attached them, circular naked bulbs placed here and there along the stretch, but there was also the occasional mounted neon tube close to the ceiling. The first one that Yoongi saw was shaped like a heart, glowing crimson and dimming with soft flickers and a low buzzing hum. He stared at the heart for a moment, before looking over at Jimin to see that the younger man was studying him intently. The neon glow cast over him, made him look like he had been washed in blood and made his eyes almost glint at him. Then Jimin started walking down the first hallway, taking a left at the end rather than a right to lead them deeper into the bathhouse.

“Are you gonna follow me all night, huh?” Jimin asked, before giving him a grin, one that made his eyes almost disappear into the folds of his skin. “Like a puppy?”

Yoongi hummed in agreement as he reached up to brush his hair back off his brow, finding that the weight of the heat reminded him of being trapped on the stupid Presidio Golf Course. He knew that he would break out into a sweat after just a minute or two of being inside of this place, could almost feel his face starting to warm up so that his cheeks would be flushed pink. His ears detected sounds coming from somewhere in the maze of hallways, but he couldn’t seem to figure out where exactly it was coming from or what it was. It almost sounded like…creaking to his ears; faint and constant creaking. His nose could detect various scents, however: the mineral-tinted water, a mixture of cologne and sweat, and something rather pungent that he was certain was semen lingering underneath it all.

Jimin carried on guiding him along another series of hallways, seemingly heading somewhere, though he could just be wandering for the sake of it.

Yoongi saw an upcoming niche in the hallway and he assumed that it was just one of those hollow and dark alcoves that Jimin had told him about in the bar, the ones that were sometimes used. So when they passed it, he turned his head to see what it looked like, only to find out that it actually was a room, one that was filled with beds. His gaze settled on the backs of a couple using one of said beds, and Yoongi couldn’t help but stare in surprise at the sight of them both caught in the midst of sex.

The giver, he was taking his partner from behind on his knees and he looked to have hold of his hips. He was pretty well-built from what he could see, his back covered in muscles that were rippling and shifting under his skin as he thrust forward. The way that his thigh muscles clenched, the soft bounce of his buttocks, had Yoongi suddenly finding it hard to breathe.
“...you take it so good, you take my cock so good. You want it that much, huh?”

“Uhuh, give it to me, baby,” the receiving guy moaned, and that was when his partner started pounding into him.

Yoongi dragged his eyes away from the doorway, and he saw that Jimin was disappearing around a corner to leave him behind in the hideous maze of hallways. He had to quickly chase after him just so he wouldn’t get lost, painfully aware of the fact that he was starting to get aroused and feeling both mingled embarrassment and disgust at this knowledge.

Yet, Jimin didn’t seem to be affected at all, didn’t seem fazed by the amount of sex going on around them, or the cloying heat and obnoxious red lighting.

Yoongi could hear the sound of other men kissing and fucking clinging to the air of the narrow hallways; coming from the rooms; the niches; and even out in the open. Because of the maze-like system, it was impossible to figure out where the noises were coming from, whether they were close or far away. There was the wet sounds of lips and tongues connecting, the gasps and sighs of heavy breathing, the constant slap of skin against skin and, of course, the one sound that seemed to echo through his head: the dry creaking of bed springs.

Yoongi could feel himself starting to get a little... disoriented as he followed Jimin along the hallway to reach the end. It was the heat, or at least he thought that it was. His head felt like it was starting to float, attached to his body much like a balloon, and with every new twist around a corner and more unwinding paths, he could feel the ground almost tilting underneath his feet. This time, when they passed one of the open rooms, Yoongi made sure to not glance inside and he kept his eyes glued straight ahead instead to save any more accidental voyeurism.

“You know, we’ll just end up walking around in circles at this rate,” Jimin said suddenly, as he spared a quick glance back over his shoulder at him.

Yoongi wondered if he had any clue that he had just been watching another couple have sex, and even though the answer was probably: no, he still felt like he knew. It was enough to make his stomach feel strange.

“Where’d you wanna go, huh?”
“I, uh, I dunno, you decide,” Yoongi mumbled, as he tried to keep his gaze ahead and not look at any possible niches and doorways, even when he could hear breathless whimpers echoing on the air.

Jimin thought this over for a moment before carrying on around the next corner, leaving him with no choice but to follow behind him.

There was another couple in the hallway, completely out in the open without a hint of reservation. Who needed a bed when there was a wall? The thought made Yoongi want to snort laughter, but he couldn’t seem to do that because his lungs had almost shrivelled up inside of his rib cage. He physically averted his gaze to stare at the floor instead of the two men, his cheeks growing even hotter if that was even possible.

But Jimin wasn’t shy in the slightest, for he actually reached over as they passed to jokingly grab one of the men’s buttocks, a man that he assumed he knew.

“Our little lotus blossom brought a friend,” the currently nameless black male said, before letting out a rather breathless laugh. “That’s where you’ve been running off to, huh? You got yourself a cute new boy-toy without telling us?”

When Yoongi spared a quick look up, he saw that he was still *ploughing* into the other guy even when he was talking to Jimin. That was enough to make him twist his head away and gulp hard.

“Oh, he’s shy.”

“It’s his first time here,” Jimin explained, before hastily adding. “But don’t try your luck with him, David, I’m not up for sharing.”

“O-ho, he’s getting some tonight,” David declared enthusiastically, which made Jimin burst out laughing. “Besides, he ain’t my type. I don’t like them shy, I like them adventurous and-”

Whoever he was currently pounding into let out a series of muffled moans, and Yoongi felt a funny stirring in the pit of his stomach just hearing them. Would Jimin sound like that, if he were to hold him against a wall like that and just-

“And loud,” the other man finished.
“Uhuh, well, have fun,” Jimin said, before reaching over to once again place a hand on his back.

“You too, lotus blossom.”

Yoongi was so very thankful for Jimin pushing on his lower back, firmly steering him down the hallway away from the couple, for he seemed to find it incredibly difficult to walk right now. Sure, an arm around the waist would be even better, or a hand around the elbow, because that would actually support him. They turned a corner and passed more niches and open rooms, which Yoongi ended up glancing inside of even when he knew what he might see inside.

Through one doorway, he caught sight of two guys tag-teaming another, quite a few other guys inside watching them; in another dark niche, he caught sight of a guy getting a blowjob.

It was too much, Yoongi decided in his disoriented and shocked state. This was too much to take in at once: too much heat, too much sex, too much everything. It was enough to make him feel dizzy and he found himself fishing out to snag hold of Jimin’s hand because he was convinced that the hallway was moving underneath his feet. He didn’t mean to, but he grabbed hold of his hand pretty tightly, squeezing so much that it likely hurt the younger man.

Jimin twisted to look back at him and then he stopped walking, instead leaning back against one of the crimson walls.

“Yeah?”

“Feels weird,” Yoongi muttered, as he reached up to rub the heel of his hand against his brow and he groaned deeply. His palm rubbed against beaded sweat and smeared it all over his skin. “My head feels all weird.”

“It’s your first time here, I’m not surprised you feel weird with the heat and lights and shit,” the younger man remarked, quickly glancing along the hallway and then turning back to him. “Hey, are you OK?”

Yoongi had just lowered his hand from his brow when Jimin moved to get closer to him, grabbing his face in his hands and turning his head so that he could look at him properly. His grip was firm, his thumbs digging into his skin as he studied his face and held his gaze. Yoongi reached up to take hold of his wrists in his hands too, holding onto them just to stay anchored. It was the stupid
corridors that were making his head feel all funny, for they had twisted and turned so many times that he had lost all sense of direction and his drunken mind was completely spinning right now. Even in the dim red lighting, he could see Jimin’s face clearly, could see something that looked like concern on his features.

“Yuh-yeah, I just…” Yoongi swallowed the lump trapped in his throat hard and then he stuck his tongue out to wet his lips. He could taste sweat, could feel some running down the side of his cheek and the back of his neck from the sweltering heat. “The fucking maze’s making my head feel weird.”

Jimin gave him a slight smile at this, moving one hand from his cheek to brush his hair back off his brow instead. It was starting to clump from both sweat and the condensation in the air, and Yoongi could see that his hair was also starting to look damp, his brow beaded with sweat. He tracked one such bead rolling down his neck, watching it run down to his collarbones and then his chest.

From somewhere down the hallway came a rather loud cry, something that could have been from pleasure or pain, Yoongi couldn’t tell.

“Let’s just stay here for a minute,” Jimin suggested, as he stopped running his fingers through his hair and he dropped his hands back down to his sides. “Let the dizziness pass.”

“’K,” Yoongi mumbled, dropping his head and taking a few deep breaths.

When he closed his eyes, Yoongi couldn’t seem to force the images out of his mind, however; couldn’t seem to block out the noises coming from the rest of the bathhouse all around them. It was hard trying to fight the dizziness when everything was still happening around him, but it was even harder trying to fight a particular urge that was starting to get too strong to ignore. The urge to actually kiss Jimin, to finally kiss another man after so long spent waiting and yearning and hating the mere thought.

Yoongi glanced up at Jimin, studying the slight gleam of sweat coating his chest from under his half-lidded eyes.

He should just do it. He should just kiss him. Jimin had already made it clear that he was interested in him sexually back in the car, so surely that meant that he wouldn’t mind him giving him a single kiss? After all, Yoongi had had his hand shoved inside of his jeans just ten or so minutes ago, so why was the thought of kissing him so…unnerving?
Before he could help himself, Yoongi placed his hands on his shoulders and he gently pushed him backwards, right into the closest dark niche in the wall.

Jimin didn’t stop him, let him push him right up against the wall until his back hit it with a soft thump. Now that they were inside of the niche, he found that the space really was dark, for he could only just make out Jimin’s features in the hints of neon glow that still bled into the recess. Jimin held his gaze unblinkingly, almost seemed to encourage him, and so Yoongi moved his head forward and he kissed him. He did so tentatively at first, pressing their lips together and then pouting them out in a chaste kiss.

After a few seconds, Yoongi decided to deepen the kiss, opening his mouth and slipping his tongue out to lick at his lower lip. Jimin made a soft noise at this and then he opened his mouth, invited him to take control of the kiss as his hands moved to settle on his waist and he pulled him closer. Yoongi felt their chests touching, and Jimin’s fingers sank into his skin as he tightened his hold on the balls of his shoulders. When their tongues brushed together, he couldn’t help but sigh at the contact, pressing himself up against the other man so that he could softly grind against him.

Yoongi broke the kiss to take a gasp of air and Jimin darted forward to take over, bringing their mouths together roughly enough that he felt the hard press of his teeth behind his lips before he turned his face and opened up the kiss. The younger man’s hands shifted down from his waist to grab at his behind instead, first through the towel, and then slipping up under the soft white cotton to grab onto his skin instead. When he squeezed hard, Yoongi couldn’t help but buck his hips forward and grind against him harder.

Jimin moaned into his mouth and kneaded at his buttocks, urging him to carry on grinding against him even when the friction between their two towels was maddening.

“Shit, Jimin,” he gasped, as the other man ended the kiss and took several quick intakes of breath.

For some reason, this utterance made Jimin laugh, and Yoongi saw the red glow from the hallway playing off his face: making his teeth almost glow in the shadows of the niche.

“Yoongi, kiss me again,” Jimin said, as he stuck his tongue out to wet his lips, his hands squeezing his buttocks tightly so that his fingertips pressed into his skin.

So Yoongi did so, turning his face into another open kiss and deepening it with his tongue. He licked it against his, tasted hints of beer and champagne still on his breath, and then he curled it upwards and flicked it against the roof of his mouth. Jimin shuddered at this, making a funny little noise as he snagged his lower lip between his teeth and he sucked it into his mouth. Yoongi let go of his
shoulders to press his palms against the wall, his blunt nails scratching at the paint whilst the other man nibbled and sucked at his lip. When Jimin released him, he decided to copy his actions, also catching his plump lower lip in his teeth and tugging. After sucking and biting it lightly, he let go, seeing how his lip bounced back flushed deep pink and slick from his tongue and teeth.

Yoongi pressed their brows together as they both tried to catch their breath, their chests rising and falling rapidly and their pulses racing. Jimin didn’t hold his gaze, staring at his lips instead and breathing hard and fast through his own slack mouth. When Yoongi placed his hand on his neck, he could feel how quick his heartbeat was going, how hot that his skin was.

“Now I’m feeling dizzy,” Jimin said with a breathless laugh, his chest vibrating against his as he did.

Jemin decided to slip his hands out from under his towel to grab hold of his hip with one hand instead, slipping the other between their bodies to stroke up his stomach. Yoongi could feel his fingertips tracing around his navel, skittering along his skin as if trying to read Braille; his touch so soft and gentle.

“I like it, it’s a nice sensation.”

“Yeah?”

“Mmm,” Jimin almost purred. “Keep my head spinning, baby.”

Yoongi cupped the back of his neck in his hand and he kissed him again, feeling his fingers tangling in his hair. Every single time that Jimin’s tongue brushed against his, that the other man sighed or moaned into his mouth, he could feel little shivers of pleasure running down into the pit of his stomach and stirring his currently stiffening erection. The sight of the other men earlier had started turning him on, and now Jimin’s touch and kisses were just building on that arousal. He didn’t really know how much that Jimin was enjoying this, but he could feel a hint of an erection digging into his lower stomach, which was a good sign.

“Yoongi,” Jimin breathed out between kisses, his voice uneven as he took quick gasps of air, “Yoongi, there’s- private rooms, we can-can-”

Yoongi moved his head away to take his own deep intake of breath, and Jimin moved to press his face against his throat instead. He felt his breath against his skin, hot little puffs of air escaping his slack lips that made shivers of delight run down his spine.
“We can fuck in there and-”

“No, no sex,” Yoongi said, as he turned his head away and his mouth brushed against his damp hair. At this, he felt Jimin stiffening slightly, falling still and not kissing at his throat. “I told you, I ain’t giving or receiving right now.”

“We could use condoms, they’re safe,” Jimin suggested, but Yoongi made a noise in disagreement as he slowly traced his fingers along the nape of his neck.

When he moved his face away from his hair, Yoongi thought that he would see something like annoyance on Jimin’s face, irritation that he had waited until right now to tell him that he didn’t want to have actual sex with him, but he didn’t see that. He saw a quick flash of drunken confusion on his features as he thought this over, and then he moved his head to get closer to him and speak in a low voice.

“Mmm, no need to move too fast tonight,” Jimin agreed, his lips brushing against his ear as he did. “Playing around can be just as fun, right?”

Yoongi felt his tongue curling out to lick a broad stripe up behind his ear, hot and wet right against his sensitive skin. He couldn’t help but shudder as he pressed quick and nipping kisses against the back of his ear.

“Sauna.”

“Sauna?” Yoongi repeated.

Jimin lightly shoved him away, pushed him out of the dark wall niche. Then he grabbed hold of his wrist, wrapping his fingers around it tightly, and he tugged him down the hallway and across the bathhouse.

“Uhuh, let’s go to the sauna,” Jimin said, as he looked back over his shoulder at him, a rather wide grin on his face. “It can get so hot in there…”

Yoongi let him tug him along several more disorientating hallways at a quick pace. Jimin moved so
fast that he didn’t even get more than a second to glance through open doorways, which was a bit of a relief. As they drew closer to the sauna, Yoongi could see condensation starting to form on the walls, the floor under their feet growing damp, and the air getting somewhat hazy from steam. The sauna, unlike most rooms inside of the bathhouse, actually had a door to help contain most of the heat, and so Jimin shoved it open and he pulled him inside.

Unlike the crimson hallways, this room was covered in a pink cast, radiating from the floor lights and mounted tubes on the walls. There was a heavy mist hanging in the air that was coming from an open stove, and most of the men sitting right in front of the stove were naked. But they weren’t engaging in sexual activity. No, they looked to be happily conversing with one another instead, some with others lounged against sides, arms around necks, or across their laps comfortably. Other men further away from the fixture were either making out or touching one another rather than having sex. Considering the sweltering heat inside of the room, it was of no surprise that none of them had the energy to fuck.

Yoongi felt much more comfortable in this room, even with some mutual masturbation happening, for at least the conversation helped distract away from it and from them being inside.

Jimin moved to sit down on one of the wooden benches against the wall, and so Yoongi moved to copy him. But before he could sit down beside him, Jimin reached up to grab hold of his hips, stopping him from dropping onto the bench and tugging at him until he was standing right in front of him.

Yoongi glanced down at him to see that he was looking right up at him, and then he reached up to take hold of his towel and…he pulled it off. Jimin dropped the towel onto the bench without a care, the material landing with a soft thumping sound, and he ran his eyes down his body until his gaze settled on his erection.

“I don’t offer this service to most guys, but, Yoongi, I’d suck you off right now if you’d let me,” Jimin said, as he lifted his gaze to stare at him.

Yoongi tried to not gulp at this, aware of the fact that his still stiffening cock gave a hearty twitch of approval.

“Not…yet,” he managed to reply, as Jimin took hold of his hips again, his grip firm. “I ain’t ready for that yet.”

“Hmm, well when you’re ready, buy me more wine and abalones and I’ll get on my knees - no problem.”
“Jimin, I’ll buy you a fucking wine cellar,” Yoongi retorted, making the younger man laugh.

Jimin opened his thighs wide to create some room on the bench and then he patted at it with his hand, silently telling him to sit down. Yoongi furrowed his brow in confusion but he turned around to do so, sitting down in the space that he had made. Jimin slipped his arms around his waist in a loose form of an embrace, resting his chin down on his shoulder as he did so.

At first, Yoongi felt a little uncertain by this position, by this intimacy, but after a moment he found himself relaxing slightly and slumping back against him to get more comfortable. He even lifted one hand to place it on Jimin’s forearm, clasping hold and stroking his thumb along his smooth skin. Jimin was so warm against his bare back, warm and soft, and he could feel his breath brushing against his shoulder in a gentle rhythm that matched the sensation of his pulse against his ribs. Despite being so far from the stove, the air around the outer sections seemed to be just as hot, if not hotter, and he wasn’t surprised to find his skin heating up incredibly fast.

“Hmm, this is nice,” Jimin said after a moment of thought, shifting ever so slightly against him. “Not how I expected the night to go, I gotta say, but—” Yoongi snorted at this and he finished, “but still nice. Dinner in a high-class restaurant, beers at a bar and now…now this. Whatever this is.”

“I should’ve told you, in the car or bar or some shit,” Yoongi said, as he slowly rubbed his thumb along Jimin’s forearm, trying to not wriggle on the bench in discomfort.

Across the sauna, the conversing men started laughing at something, their laughter bouncing off the wooden walls, and one of them moved to pour water onto the rocks on the open stove. Steam took to the air, thick and hot, and then it started spreading out across the sauna.

“I should’ve let y’know ‘bout the sex thing, but I…”

“You what?”

“I…I dunno, thought I might pluck up the courage ‘cos I was drunk enough, but it didn’t work,” he explained before laughing softly. “Getting drunk used to get me loose enough for anything, but now, now it don’t work too much.”

“It’s been awhile, you’re just warming up,” Jimin replied in a quiet voice. “For guys like us, Yoongi, guys that still feel uncomfortable in our own skin; guys that deny or hide, that try and destroy
themselves, courage’s hard, yeah?”

Yoongi hummed at this rather than reply, his thumb still rubbing little circles against his skin.

“Did you think that the only reason I went drinking with you was to get a fuck at the end, huh?” Jimin asked.

At this, the air fell silent between them both, and it took him a moment to process his words. Then Yoongi slowly turned his head to look at the younger man, seeing that Jimin had rolled his eyes to look at him too. He wanted to say something in reply to this, but he lacked the capacity to do so, opening and closing his mouth rather dumbly for a few seconds until he continued speaking.

“Yoongi, I went out drinking with you because you asked me to, and you looked like you needed something,” Jimin explained in that same quiet voice. “You looked like you needed something, something you didn’t know or understand, but you still felt a need for. Maybe, that something was just a fuck, that’s what it seemed like at first, but now I know differently. Yoongi, you need a friend.”

“A…friend?”

“You need someone to turn to when things get bad, when you start feeling bad about… yourself,” Jimin man stated, as he stared back at him dumbly. “Someone you can talk to that you know you’ve got no need to be reserved around, and you know understands you. Yeah? Someone you can talk to and maybe fuck if you wanna, whatever.”

“And that someone’s you?”

“Yoongi, when’s the last time that you went drinking with a guy, huh? When’s the last time that you went to a bar?” Jimin asked, knowing the answers already and doing so just to put him on the spot. “Your last kiss, the last guy that you flirted with before tonight? Was it back in ’79? Because, the more that we talk, the more I think that it was.”

Yoongi had no replies at all to these questions. He had actually never went out drinking with a guy before, neither had he even been to a bar. Jimin was the first guy that he had shared drinks in a bar with because he usually drank alone in his mansion, or in the company of Hoseok at his home. He had been telling him the truth earlier when he had said he wasn’t a social drinker. He couldn’t remember his last kiss and it would probably take him all night to do so, and as for flirting…well, he
didn’t think that Hoseok counted.

“All I’m saying is - I could be your friend,” Jimin finished, as he moved to place his cheek on his shoulder and held his gaze. “And as your friend, I don’t care that you don’t wanna fuck tonight because I can just do this instead.”

Jimin slowly moved one hand down his stomach until his fingers were brushing against the thatch of his pubic hair. Yoongi dropped his head to watch him, catching him just in time to see him clasping him in his hand.

“Do you want me to touch you?” Jimin asked in a whisper, breathing the question out against his neck.

Yoongi felt his own breath hitching in his throat as the other man’s fingers curled around the underside of his cock. He could just about form a fist around his girth, the cold press of his rings against his length exquisite.

“Do you want me to wank you off, baby? Do you like that, being called baby? Or do you want me to call you something else you like more, like-”

“Baby…boy,” Yoongi stammered out before he could stop himself, pulling his lower lip in to bite it nervously.

“like baby boy,” Jimin finished, a smile audible in his voice. He moved his fist ever so slightly, gave him a teasing little tug. “Just tell me what you want, I’m game for anything. You wanna stay here with me for the night, talk some more, experiment a little - say yeah. You wanna go home and never see my face again and pretend that we never met - say no. But you gotta let me know, baby boy, because I’m tired of all of the teasing.”

Yoongi swallowed hard and he tightened his grip on his forearm as he did so.

The word was right there on the tip of his tongue and yet saying it was something akin to a Herculean task. He didn’t want to go home tonight and end up masturbating to fleeting thoughts of Jimin because he would feel disgusting afterwards. Therefore, did it really matter what happened tonight? Did it really matter whether he touched himself or Jimin did; if he spent the night at this bathhouse or drinking alone in his kitchen? It had just been so long since he had felt the warmth of another pliable body against him, so long since he had kissed someone, that Yoongi could actually
feel that old ache back in his chest that he hated almost as much as he hated himself.

“Yuh-yeah, Jimin, yeah,” he managed to force out. “Touch me, hold me, just-”

“Just?”

“Just help me forget ‘bout the bad shit, just for tonight,” Yoongi finished, as he closed his eyes. “Just make me feel good, I ain’t felt good in so long I forgot what it even feels like.”

“Sure thing,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, before moving to press a kiss against his throat. The contact made him tense up again in his arms for a moment. “So, just relax, hmm, just relax and let me take care of you, baby boy.”

Yoongi kept his eyes tightly closed, not wanting to open them and look across the sauna lest anyone be looking over at them. If the heat of the sauna wasn’t bad enough, making beads of sweat roll down his cheeks from his hair, then Jimin’s baking body pressed up against his most certainly didn’t help. He could feel his hot skin against his spine, could feel slick sweat trapped between them both, and the younger man’s warm and soft breath against his neck just added to the sensation of it being too hot. It was a woozy kind of sensation, just like he had explained to him in the bar, and Yoongi didn’t know if he loved or hated it.

Jimin moved to slip his other hand down from his waist and he took hold of his base firmly in his left hand, his grip tight. Then he started pumping his right hand around his length. The friction was maddening and when he gave his base a kneading twist, Yoongi couldn’t help but take a sharp intake of breath and tense up against him again.

“Oh- mmm,” Yoongi stammered, before he pressed his lips together hard to try and control himself.

“Just relax,” Jimin said in a soothing tone, his fist pumping in a smooth but rather slow rhythm. “It’s just me and you, yeah?”

Yoongi wanted to point out the fact that there was a dozen or so other men in the sauna with them, but he decided to hold his tongue instead. He didn’t think that he could possibly open his mouth to speak anyway, not without making a series of rather pathetic noises.

“Just forget about all of the other shit,” Jimin continued, as he carried on touching him and made him
feel the most pressing urge to squirm between his thighs. “Tonight was a good night, right?”

“Yuh-yeah, real good,” Yoongi managed to stammer out, opening his eyes to look down.

He regretted it the moment that he saw Jimin’s fist slipping up his length to his head, his fingers curled around him and those rings of his glinting in the pink neon lighting, and he closed them again almost instantly, wanting to shut that particular mental image out if possible.

“First, me and Namo made you all of that profit,” Jimin stated, as he let go of him for a moment to spit on his palm. He kept his fist around his base, however, giving him another playful knead as he did so and eliciting a weak groan from him. “Then we shared that expensive dinner, hmm, and went to the bar together so you could try beer, and now this.”

“Nnn, this’ the best part,” Yoongi muttered, almost regretting saying the words aloud until he heard Jimin laughing in agreement. The younger man reached down again to start pumping his fist around his length, his palm now slick with saliva so that it felt so much better: so wet and hot. “Shit.”

“Aren’t you glad that you didn’t slap me, huh?” Jimin joked, as he increased his rhythm and he jerked his wrist hard and fast and made him take a sharp intake of breath.

Yoongi dropped his head back against Jimin’s shoulder with a low groan, not even trying to be quiet at this point. He was too dizzy from the heavy heat in the sauna and the throbbing waves of pleasure that were starting to build up in his lower stomach to care if the other men heard him. Everything was just so…wet, so hot and wet so that he was woozy and weak. Yoongi could feel sweat rolling down his throat, down his chest and stomach, and Jimin’s breath was puffing against his neck in an uneven rhythm. So he turned his head to look at him from under his heavy eyelids.

“Does that feel good, baby boy?” Jimin asked, his breath intermingling with his own breathless gasps.

“Mmm, feels so good,” Yoongi sighed, as he moved a hand to his thigh and he grabbed hold. He sank his fingers into the muscle, almost kneaded at him whilst Jimin carried on jerking his wrist in a smooth and fast rhythm. “Feels so…oh, Juh-Jimin.”

Yoongi felt himself leaking in his excitement, a weak dribble of precum spilling free with a hard twitch. Jimin moved his hand up to his head to palm at it, to smear the liquid against his fingers and then resume pumping his fist around his cock. The sensation was too much for him, and he could
feel that pressure starting to swell and cause little sharp jolts of pleasure to shoot down his thighs and up into his stomach.

“Jimin,” he sighed, as he found his hips weakly lifting up off the bench to try and thrust into his fist. “Uh-oh, fuh-”

Jimin squeezed his fist around his base hard enough to make his hips stutter in surprise, that hot burst of pleasure unable to explode, but rather just stopping suddenly with a hard throb. Yoongi heard a pathetic whimper escaping his slack mouth and sure enough Jimin laughed at the sound, pressing his lips against his neck to mute himself and also make him squirm.

“Huh-wuh…Jimin?” he breathed out, as he reached down to weakly tug at his fist. “What-”

“Consider that payback,” Jimin replied, before he moved his face away from his throat. Yoongi managed to roll his head enough to look at him, seeing a wicked smirk on his lips. “I told you, I don’t like teasing, and the car thing was just mean.”

“Shit, I was gonna cuh…cum,” Yoongi complained, as he rolled his head back to stare up at the ceiling. “I was gonna-”

Jimin relinquished his tight grip around his base and he resumed pumping his fist, making Yoongi moan softly and grow limp in his arms again. He moved his hands back onto the younger man’s thighs and he sank his fingers into them hard and deep, dimpling his sweat-slick skin. Between the fluid motion of his fist and the wetness of his saliva and precum gliding around his cock, Yoongi knew that he wasn’t going to last long at all. Had Jimin had not cruelly cut him off from his pleasure then he would have already climaxed, but the fact that he had just meant that he got to enjoy the build-up all over again.

If that was meant to be punishment, then it wasn’t very cruel.

Yoongi turned his head so that he could look at Jimin, almost encouraging him to kiss him again. He returned his gaze, and after a moment he moved to kiss him, the contact just making him feel another hard throb of pleasure in his stomach. He slipped his tongue free eagerly, feeling it brushing against Jimin’s and tasting him all over again.

Yoongi couldn’t remember the last time that he had felt pleasure as intense as this before, for this made the occasional massage boy visits seem like nothing special at all. Maybe, it was just the
atmosphere of the bathhouse making him feel strangely relaxed, like he could actually blend into the scene and become a nobody, even if just for the single night? Maybe, it was because he was actually kissing and touching another man rather than pressing his face against his forearm and trying his very hardest to block it all out? He really didn’t know, but he did know one thing - he was going to climax, and this time Jimin wasn’t going to stop him.

Yoongi broke the kiss in surprise, seeing the way that Jimin’s tongue tried to greedily chase after his for a second before he realised that he had pulled his head away. His orgasm hit him hard, so hard in fact, that he felt his breath leaving his lungs in a wheezy groan. His hips bucked once, twice, three times upward into Jimin’s fist, his back arching and his head lolling back against the other man’s shoulder as he ejaculated on his stomach and all over his hands.

“Oh, oh fuck, Jimin,” he breathed out, as that rush of tingling pleasure flooded his system and made his eyes roll up under his eyelids.

The blooming heat in his groin exploded with pounding throbs that made his toes curl up and his fingers squeeze down hard into Jimin’s thighs. Jimin guided him through his orgasm by kneading at the base of his cock, milking him fully until his pleasure faded out, and then he grabbed his cast-off towel and he used it to wipe at his stomach and hands.

Yoongi could do nothing more than slump back against him, limp and breathless with pleasure and soaked with sweat. He was so weak that he could feel his limbs almost shaking, breathing shallow and fast as he tried to catch his breath. It took him a moment to even open his eyes, having to blink sweat free as he did so. When he stuck his tongue out, he tasted the tang of sweat on his tongue too.

“Juh…Jimin,” he breathed out, as he reached up to try and wipe the beads of sweat off his brow. “You were right: it’s fucking hot in here.”

This made Jimin laugh, the sound sweet and rather drunken-sounding to his ears.

Yoongi twisted to try and look back at him, his gaze dropping instinctively to eye the towel around his hips. The sight of the material tenting and creasing heavily around his erection was not at all surprising to observe.

“We should go to the Jacuzzi,” Jimin suggested with a smile. “It’ll help cool us down and wash away all of this disgusting sweat; yeah?”
Yoongi got to his feet, his knees and thighs almost trembling as he did so for a moment because a wave of vertigo hit him. He let the younger man secure his rather soiled towel around his waist for him, reaching down to stroke at his soaking wet and glistening black hair for a reason he had yet to discern. Yoongi rather liked the feel of it against his fingers, even when his hair was clumped together from the sauna heat.

Jimin looked up at him as he stroked at his hair, almost as if he was going to say something to him. But then he moved to get to his feet and he took hold of his hand instead, guiding him out of the sauna and back through the bathhouse.

Yoongi found himself so blissfully lightheaded that he didn’t find the hallways intimidating at all now. No, there was no need to feel so frightened by the niches and rooms filled with sex, because he was so very content. The hallways were just as disorienting to his mind because they really were like a maze, but he just let Jimin take the lead and he kept his gaze on their entwined hands to ignore the dizzy sensation.

After a minute of taking snaking and narrow crimson-lit paths, Yoongi was pulled into a large room in which there were several large and deep pools that had bubbling and steaming water inside. Just like the sauna, there was quite a lot of men present, but no sexual activity, likely because of the fact the Jacuzzi machines were open for all to use. Good, Yoongi was relieved by this fact, because the thought of climbing into a Jacuzzi that was filled with filth was highly unappealing.

Clearly, Jimin had done this before during his visits to the bathhouse, for he watched the younger man strip his towel free and then move to lower himself into one of the less populated Jacuzzi machines. He placed the towel down on the floor just beside it and then he looked up at him, cocking his head to tell him to join him. So Yoongi did so, also dropping his towel and lowering himself into the water. It was hot and the flow of the bubbles was rather high, but after a few seconds the sensation was highly pleasing to him because it almost felt like a body massage.

Jimin actually dropped to dunk himself under the water fully, no doubt wanting to cleanse all of his body in the heated water. He emerged a few seconds later, brushing his soaking wet hair back off his face and hastily wiping water free to open his eyes.

Yoongi decided to copy his actions, dunking under and feeling the bubbling water entering his ears and nose until he jumped back up and he snorted hard. He brushed his hair back with one hand and blinked water out of eyes with a laugh. Beside him, Jimin had just finished wiping rivulets of water out of his eyes, and he stared at him for a moment, still and silent.

Yoongi couldn’t help but return the stare, seeing beaded droplets of water clinging to his chest and shoulders. His tousled and parted hair was slicked back to reveal all of his face to him and, for a moment, all that he could think about was how…beautiful Jimin actually was. How handsome, in
fact, even with his delicate features. There was no more smudged kohl around his eyelids, no gloss on his full lips. No, Jimin looked so much more beautiful with his golden skin glowing from the heated water and neon lights and a smile curling up the corners of his lips to reveal his teeth.

“

“You’re so pink, baby boy,” Jimin said with a laugh, as he cupped his wet cheeks in his hands.

Yoongi could see that his cheeks were also bright pink from the sauna, flushed under his golden tan so beautifully.

“Mmm, do I look like a baby?” he asked with a lazy grin, wondering what exactly had been going through Jimin’s mind when he had been staring at him too.

“It’s cute,” he replied. “All of that booze made you get a little flushed earlier and now you’re so pink, hmm: a pink baby.”

Yoongi moved to slip his arms around his waist loosely, just wanting him to stay close to him and not let go of his cheeks just yet.

Jimin actually let him do so, shifting to lean against him and letting go of his face to slip his arms around his neck instead. The position was incredibly intimate, almost seemed to demand a kiss or two, and he wondered if he should try and initiate the contact first. But before he could do so, Jimin beat him to it, turning his face into the kiss and opening it up with a slip of his tongue.

The kiss was surprisingly tender to Yoongi, ended with no bitten lips but rather just soft sighs. He could see that Jimin had his eyes mostly closed, his eyelashes beaded with water that was still running down his face from his soaked hair.

Yoongi felt no need to do anything to break the silence between them both, actually enjoying the close contact and intimacy for several minutes until the other man broke it.

“How’s this for a good time, huh?” Jimin asked, as he gave him another one of those rather dazzling smiles of his.

“I’m having a great time,” Yoongi replied, letting the younger man reach up to wipe a bead of water off his brow for him. “What ’bout you, huh?”
“I’m still waiting for you to wank me off,” Jimin stated in a matter of fact of voice, pulling away to hold his eyes with a mock serious expression.

Yoongi suddenly found himself unable to reply to this, his tongue falling still in his mouth.

“You did say something back in the bar, remember? You said-”

“Good boys deserve rewards,” Yoongi finished for him, noting the way that Jimin started nibbling on his lower lip. “Yeah, I ‘member, I ain’t gonna break my promise.”

“Oh, yeah? Then, where to next, hmm?” the other man asked with a suggestive eyebrow raise. “Themed rooms, private rooms, the backseat of your car?”

“Let’s go find out,” he declared, as he sadly relinquished his hold around Jimin’s waist so that they could leave the Jacuzzi again.

Yoongi’s head felt much more sober after being in the sauna and the brief soak that they had had in the Jacuzzi; felt clearer and lighter but not in a foggy or disorienting way. It actually allowed him to start thinking again, because that ability had temporarily been robbed off him after the sights and sounds of the bathhouse had first assaulted his brain. His mind felt lighter, his body was so relaxed and clean, and he felt strangely comfortable for a moment until he passed one of the open bedrooms and recalled where he was. Sadly his nose, which had been cleansed from the hot air of the sauna and the mineral-tinted Jacuzzi water, started to detect the strong scents of sweat and semen once more.

Wherever they were going next was mostly certainly not one of those open bedrooms. Themed rooms…well, he didn’t know about that. That implied a fun and rather lighthearted approach to sex, which was so far from his reserved fears it was almost laughable. No, he wasn’t close to ready for such things like that, he knew that he wasn’t.

Yoongi lifted his eyes to look at Jimin when he saw that there were actually a series of closed doors coming up on the next hallway. They must be the private rooms that he had mentioned, and he found himself slowing down to stare at one of the doors.

“Jimin…” he breathed out, hearing him stopping to glance back at him.
“Yeah?”

Yoongi dragged his eyes away from the door to look over at him, finding his lips curling up into a smile. He lifted one hand to gesture at it and he saw the way that the younger man rolled his eyes to stare at the vacant green square underneath the handle. After a few seconds of staring, he returned his look, his expression showing that he was slowly figuring out what he was hinting at. So Yoongi pulled down on the handle to push the door open and reveal the small room to them both.

“Seriously?” Jimin asked, as he moved to stand beside him and he glanced inside. “I’ve never actually used one of these before…”

“There’s a first for everything,” Yoongi said, placing his hand on his lower back to gently push him inside and stepping in behind him. Then he shoved the slide lock in place to ensure complete privacy.

The private room, Yoongi discovered, contained just several things. There was a bed, a bare mattress on metal mesh springs that was minus covers but had a single pillow present. Judging from the smooth surface, free from an indent, the room was unused so far into the night. There was an armchair at the bottom of the bed that he assumed was for watching, or maybe for certain sexual positions, and a side table beside the bed with various bottles and a box of tissues on the surface. Other than that, the interior was empty and still lit by the same crimson neon tubing as the other sections of the bathhouse.

“Bed,” Yoongi said, as he gestured at it, and Jimin turned to look at him before snorting loudly.

“Did you just give me orders?” he asked, moving to stand beside the bed and slipping his towel free to toss it at the armchair without a single care.

Yoongi ignored him as he went around the bottom of the bed to eye the bottles on the side table. He lifted one up to see that it was lubricant, water-based and apparently condom safe if the label was to be believed. There was also a string of condoms left on the surface invitingly, and when he pulled the single drawer open, he saw several more inside. At least the establishment was emphasising safety, he supposed. The other bottle advertised itself as massage oil, which he proceeded to sniff curiously. The sweet scent of vanilla hit his nose, much more pleasing than the pungent scent of semen, but rather cloying in strength after a few sniffs.

“I’m giving you your reward,” Yoongi explained, as he glanced over at the younger man.
Jimin was sitting on the bed, his legs folded to the side and his cock currently only semi-hard, for it seemed that the Jacuzzi had relaxed him considerably.

“Lie down, on your stomach.”

“Like this?” Jimin asked, as he stretched out across the bed, moving to hug the pillow against his chest and settling on his stomach like he had requested. “You want me like this, baby boy?”

Jimin lifted his hips up teasingly before arching his back and lowering them again, almost grinding against the mattress as he held his gaze unblinkingly. Yoongi saw the way that he opened his thighs as he did so, spreading them wide open and pulling his thigh muscles and buttocks taut. When he glanced back at his face, Jimin almost smirked at him, that same lusty streak back in his eyes just like back at the bar.

“Perfect,” Yoongi said, as he slipped his own towel free and he shifted to get onto his knees on the mattress. The springs creaked loudly under his weight, that same dry creaking that he had heard constantly since entering the bathhouse. “Let’s start off with a massage.”

“I like how you said ‘start off,’” Jimin remarked, a smile audible in his voice. “That implies that there’s more to come. Have you ever given anyone a massage before?”

“I know how to give massages,” Yoongi replied, as he slowly lowered himself down to straddle his lower back and he heard the younger man laughing underneath him. “What?”

“You know how to give massages?” Jimin asked, folding his arms on the bed and twisting to look back at him. He had a grin on his face that showed that he found this highly amusing for some reason.

Yoongi hummed in agreement and he popped the cap up on the bottle.

“You get guys killed, but also know how to give professional massages; what a strange set of skills you’ve got, baby boy.”

“I didn’t say professional,” Yoongi muttered, as he squeezed out a liberal amount of massage oil into
his palm and he placed the bottle down on the mattress. He brought his hands together to smear the thick oil over his palms. “This shit ain’t acupuncture, anyone can give a massage, Jimin.”

Yoongi shifted forward to reach down and place his hands on his trapezius muscles, his palms rubbing oil onto his skin as he did. The warm and sudden contact made Jimin shift underneath him, wriggling on the bed for a few seconds before he placed his chin on the folded-up pillow and he settled down again.

“You’re not gonna tease me again, are you?” Jimin asked after a moment of light massaging. “You’re not gonna build me up and then stop, right? I mean, don’t get me wrong, this feels good, feels really good, but-”

“It’s part of the reward,” Yoongi stated, as he carried on gently kneading at his shoulders. He gave him several soft rubs before pressing his thumbs down harder, hearing him making a noise against the pillow. “It’s what you get at the end that makes this one different, y’know, for being such a good boy.”

Jimin actually let a soft moan free at this, signalling that he might have gotten excited by the promise of satisfaction, or that he liked being called a ‘good boy’.

“No teasing, I’m gonna give it to you.”

Yoongi worked his way down his body, starting with his shoulders and trapezius muscles and moving down his back slowly. As he started pressing the heels of his hand along the curve of his ribs to knead at his skin, he had to add more massage oil to his hands, the heady scent of vanilla filling the private room like perfume and making his skin almost glisten in the red lighting from the walls.

Jimin stayed still underneath him for most of the time, but as he reached his waist, he started to squirm ever so slightly. Perhaps because he was ticklish, or just because he was starting to get aroused and the friction between his body and the bed was highly pleasing.

Yoongi struggled to resist the urge to pinch at his sides, eventually giving in and earning himself another wriggle underneath him that made him smile.

“You ticklish?”
“A little,” Jimin admitted, either doing so in the hopes that he wouldn’t tickle him to find out, or because he actually wanted him to do so.

Yoongi shifted to get off his lower back and he straddled his upper thighs instead, gathering more oil onto his palms so that he could start kneading at his lower back. His fingers and thumbs rubbed hard circles into the soft swell of his buttocks, just knowing that the contact would be teasing enough to annoy him. Maybe, Jimin would give him a little more of that snappy bite from the restaurant and make him laugh again?

“You know where I’m most ticklish?” Jimin asked, as he shifted and started massaging at his upper thighs instead. This made the younger man lift his hips off the mattress again, making it easier for him to knead at his muscle.

“Where?” Yoongi asked, rubbing hard circles into his left thigh and feeling the muscle tensing underneath his touch.

“Right between my thighs, baby boy,” Jimin retorted, the witticism making them both laugh.

Yoongi moved onto his right thigh, giving it a quick massage, and then he reached up to pat at his buttock.

“Roll over,” he instructed, the younger man doing so on command rather eagerly.

“I told you earlier, don’t be shy,” Jimin joked, as he dropped his head on the pillow and he opened his thighs for him, his knees bent and his heels digging into the mattress.

Yoongi slotted himself between his spread thighs, spreading his own thighs wide to settle on the mattress and resume massaging at his thighs for him. He worked his way upward to his hips, his fingers actually kneading his upper and inner thighs and making Jimin close his eyes and make satisfied noises under his breath. When he ran his hand over his stomach, he opened them again, reaching down to try and knock his hand away. It seemed that he had found where he was most ticklish, and so Yoongi moved his hand to touch his stomach, his fingers skating across the soft and smooth curve of his pubis up to his stomach and making him wriggle again.

“Don’t tickle me!” he complained, even as he let out a laugh.
“You said “don’t be shy”,” Yoongi argued, quickly repeating the teasing stroke across his stomach before he could knock his hand away. He found himself guffawing as he tried to stop him from touching him. “Mmm, wait, lemme just—”

Yoongi moved to drop his head, pressing a soft kiss just to side of his navel. Jimin’s stomach jerked from the contact but he didn’t knock his head away, rather he let him press several more open kisses against his skin. He tasted the strong vanilla oil on his tongue as he lapped it out to trace little circles on his skin with the tip, and it was that that made Jimin reach down to gently push his head away.

When Yoongi opened his eyes, he saw that his arousal was finally stirring his cock into full hardness, twitching softly until it was flushed and curved to almost lay on his stomach.

The sight of it was enough to make his mouth suddenly turn dry, but he found that his tongue wanted to curl out to wet his lips despite this fact. Even though he knew that he shouldn’t, his first instinct was to just grab hold of his base so that he could angle his cock and take his head into his mouth, but he managed to fight the urge with a hard gulp.

“Baby boy?” Jimin asked in a quiet voice, dragging him out of his momentary musing.

“Mmm?”

“Are you OK?”

“Yeah, just…” Yoongi made a series of noises as he tried to think of the right thing to say, finding that his mind had went horribly blank on him. “Just thinking.”

Yoongi leaned over to grab the bottle of lube and his cast-off towel from the bottom of the mattress, hastily wiping the massage oil free from his palms as well as he could to instead pump a liberal amount of the thin and runny liquid onto his fingers. He knew that Jimin was watching him intently as he let the cold liquid warm up for a moment, saw him shifting on the mattress out of the corner of his eye so that he could fold his thighs up and lift his hips off the bed for him.

Yoongi had already seen his cock at several points over the course of the evening, and though the sight of it still caused a funny stirring in the pit of his stomach, he hadn’t seen his entrance at all. Therefore, the sight of the tightly puckered skin between his wide open thighs was enough to make him stare dumbly for a moment. It crossed his mind that quite a lot of men saw this sight regularly, and not even in a sexual manner. No, his partners had to prep him with drugs and remove them just
like this every single time that he smuggled keys of cocaine and heroin for his gang.

Yoongi blinked a few times to clear his mind of such thoughts, and then he reached down with his left hand to press his thumb against his perineum and rub at it in hard and fast circles. The contact made Jimin take a sharp intake of breath, and after a minute of teasing to help him loosen up, Yoongi moved his other hand into position. He smeared a hint of lube over his puckered entrance and then he slipped his middle and ring finger inside of him.

“Oh…” Jimin breathed out, as he sank his fingers forward into his heat and tightness, the very sensation making Yoongi suck his lower lip in and bite down on it hard.

Oh, it felt so good, and it was only his fingers. The idea of feeling such a sensation around his actual cock was too much for him to even imagine.

“D’you, uh, d’you like that?” he managed to ask, as he sank his fingers in to the knuckles, his index and pinky finger brushing against the curves of his inner thighs. He reached over with his free hand to grab at his thigh, softly kneading at it encouragingly. “Does it feel good?”

Jimin nodded as he reached up to lightly grab at the pillow, his fingers seizing hold of the casing but not squeezing at it yet.

Yoongi slipped his own fingers free to the first knuckle before sliding them back in deeply again. He could feel his prostate but he didn’t massage it just yet, wanting to stretch him a little more first.

“D’you like being called a good boy, huh?” Yoongi asked curiously, sticking his tongue out to wet his lips as he carried on slowly fingering him.

“Yuh-yeah, it’s better than bad,” Jimin explained, a soft moan escaping his lips when he scissored his fingers inside of him. “Buh-bad boy makes me think about my, um, my dad.”

Yoongi dragged his gaze upward, no longer looking at his own hand but rather at Jimin’s face. He saw that he had squeezed his eyes shut to not hold eye-contact, his lips slack and quivering as he carried on slowly thrusting his fingers back and forth. Was it shame on his quivering features that he could see? Shame, embarrassment, disgust; it could have been any of them at all, and they were all emotions that he knew that he felt often when thinking about his own father. There was anger too, of course, but that was much less prevalent than his own self-hating compulsions.
“He uh-used to call me that when he hit me,” Jimin continued in a soft voice, his brow twitching as he slipped his fingers free to add his index finger and stretch him even further. “So, I don’t- Yoongi, I don’t like- just tell me I’m good. Please?”

“You’re such a good boy, Jimin,” Yoongi said in a whisper-soft voice, his fingertips settling against his prostate so that he could start massaging little whorls against the hard bump. The very act made Jimin’s thighs tremble, and he snagged the pillow between his own fingers tight enough to wrinkle the case severely. “The way that you helped make me all of that profit, so good, and you work so hard for me. Yeah? You’re such a good boy.”

“Oh my god,” Jimin moaned before letting go of the pillow with one hand, pressing his fist against his lips to try and mute himself. “How can yuh-you stand these massages, I wanna touch myself so badly, I wanna-”

Yoongi stopped softly kneading at his thigh to reach over and do so for him, grabbing his cock in his fist firmly.

Jimin almost whimpered as he threw his head back against the pillows, his neck straining enough to make his veins cable under his skin. When Yoongi slipped his hand up his length, the younger man rolled his hips upward to almost chase after his fist, highlighting just how desperate he was in want of release.

Yoongi gave him a few teasing pumps before letting go of his cock to get some lube on his palm to heighten the pleasure for him. Jimin actually reached down to grab at his wrist and guide his hand back to his stiff cock, wanting to ensure that he kept his promise of giving him his earned pleasure. This was enough to make him feel a hard throb in the pit of his stomach, drawing attention to the fact that he was also aroused again, because he had been so distracted that he hadn’t even noticed.

So Yoongi smeared the liquid over his length and he started slowly pumping his wrist again until he found a rhythm to massage his prostate perfectly to. As he moved his fist in a fluid motion, he jabbed his fingertips against the bump inside of him until Jimin was stuttering out broken moans, and then he dragged him back down by palming at the head of his cock and rubbing slow and hard circles against his prostate.

“Next time you make me a profit,” Yoongi continued, once again jabbing his fingertips into his sensitive spot. “I’ll buy you another dinner and-”

“Yuh-Yoongi, nnn-”
“and I’ll give you more rewards,” he spoke over him, his fist slapping down to his base hard. “Whatever food you want, I’ll buy it. Wine, champagne, booze, shit, whatever, I’ll—”

“Oh, baby boy,” Jimin whined, as he squirmed on the mattress, bucking his hips up against his fist and clenching his stomach tight. “Like that, just like that—”

“Maybe, I’ll buy you a car?” Yoongi muttered to himself, as he slowed down his rhythm and made the younger man almost whimper as he dropped his hips back down onto the bed. “Maybe, I’ll suck you off one time, dunno, just keep making me a profit; yeah? Like a good boy.”

“Uhuh,” Jimin breathed out unevenly, his chest and stomach rising and falling rapidly as he rolled his head back on the pillow again. “Nnn, I-I’ll be a good boy for you, if you touch me like that again.”

Yoongi ran his eyes over his body slowly, taking in the sight so that he could try and burn it into his memory.

Jimin was lying on the mattress in front of him, his thighs spread wide open and one hand holding onto the pillow tight. In the crimson neon lighting, the massage oil made his skin glow and glisten like he was coated in sweat, his black tousled hair still damp and strewn over the pillow in a mess. After a moment of slow and teasing fingering, Jimin lifted his head to look at him again, that pretty face of his contrasted in shadows and highlights so that his eyes glinted at him wantonly. But no amount of intense study would be able to imprint this into his mind as much as he wanted, however; for he would be unable to recall that tight heat stretched taut around his knuckles, or the taste of the vanilla oil on his tongue.

“Just make me feel good for tonight, baby boy,” Jimin said in a soft voice.

So Yoongi started jabbing his fingertips against his prostate again, seeing the way that he tensed up for a moment before he tried to roll his hips in rhythm with him. Gone was the temptation to tease him, to try and let him feel the slow ebb and flow of pleasure that could last quite some time. No, he wanted to give Jimin his pleasure because he wanted to make him feel good, as good as he had made him feel.

“Oh, ah!” Jimin cried out, as he rubbed his thumb over his head in hard kneading circles, almost keening from the joint sensations. Oh, Yoongi wanted to touch himself so badly, but he couldn’t, could do nothing more and awkwardly try and press his erection against Jimin’s thigh for a little bit of friction. “Buh-baby, I’m- oh!”
Jimin orgasmed with a breathless cry of pleasure, his back arching and entire body trembling as his system flooded with pleasure. His cock twitched hard several times in his fist, cum dribbling free from his slit to run down his fingers steadily whilst he softly massaged at his prostate to milk him fully. Jimin lowered his hips back onto the mattress after a few seconds, letting him slip his fingers free as he let go of his cock and he reached down to grab his own in his slick fists.

Unsurprisingly, Yoongi found himself prematurely climaxing, too excited by it all to possibly edge around his orgasm like usual. It was everything from touching Jimin and bringing him to his own orgasm, hearing his moans of pleasure and seeing his eyes roll up under his fluttering lids in ecstasy; to just knowing that he had actually managed to pleasure another man successfully. He had no clear memories of ever doing that with Hoseok, for he had always been too drunk, too quick to finish, and always too ashamed by this fact to return the favour to his friend. But not this time.

No, this time Yoongi knew that he had done so and he was overcome with a strange surge of happiness that was quickly drowned in pleasure when his orgasm suddenly washed over him in a hard wave.

“Uh, fuh-fuck,” Yoongi groaned, as he bucked his hips forward weakly, ejaculating onto Jimin’s lower stomach by accident. He closed his eyes and felt a wonderful rush of heat coursing through him, hard throbs of pleasure radiating up into his stomach from his cock.

For a moment, Yoongi just stayed in place, his head held low as he took shallow breaths and felt his orgasm fading out and leaving him weak and light again. Then he opened his eyes and he looked down at Jimin, seeing that the younger man was sprawled on the mattress in a rather blissed-out state, his stomach covered in splatters of semen.

Yoongi fumbled for the box of tissues on the side table to try and clean him up, his fingers trembling as he did so, and then he started wiping his hands clean with several more tissues. He balled them up and tossed them aside without a single care.

“Showers,” Jimin breathed out, as he struggled to sit upright. “Gotta shower and then…then leave, shit, I’m gonna fall asleep on you.”

After a quick and rather tepid shower in the block across the bathhouse, they left the main-area to go back into the changing-room. Jimin showed him the basket in which to toss their used (and very much soiled) towels, and then they proceeded to get dressed again from their lockers.
Yoongi felt rather strange as he slipped his shirt back on, felt like a different person than he had upon entering the bathhouse, for he was no longer wanting to pretend to be drunk and feeling crippling waves of shame. He actually felt like he had sobered up, felt much lighter as if he had gotten rid of some burden that had been weighing him down.

After slipping into his shoes, he collected his Rolex and he checked the face to see that the time was 3:45am. That explained why he was still wide awake, of course.

As he secured the watch around his wrist, Yoongi watched Jimin getting into his leather jacket, closing the compartment and locking it again before pulling the key free. So Yoongi copied him, slipping his key free from the slot and reaching over to grab his hand. The younger man let him do so, let him tug him out of the changing-room and back to the reception desk to hand over the locker keys.

“Come back again anytime,” the college kid on the counter said in a flat voice, far too distracted by a magazine to even look up at them.

Yoongi guided Jimin back to the lot where he had parked earlier, and after climbing in and starting the engine, he asked him where to. The younger man gave him the address of a house in Haight-Ashbury, so Yoongi pulled out of the lot and he proceeded to head off across The Castro.

On the ride to get to the address, the car interior remained silent, but the atmosphere wasn’t uncomfortable or awkward at all. Yoongi found the silence highly pleasing, because whenever he spared quick glances over at Jimin, he saw that there was a soft smile permanently curling up the corners of his lips as he eyed the sights out of the window. That had him smiling too, even though he didn’t really know why.

When Yoongi pulled up to the curb on the street that Jimin had given him, the dashboard clock declared that it was 4:06am.

Yoongi stalled the engine for a moment and he looked over at him, seeing Jimin unsnapping his seatbelt and popping the door open to climb out of his car. He watched him walking around the front of the vehicle, and before he could help himself, he unrolled his window.

“Jimin?”

Jimin stopped on the curb suddenly, twisting to look back at him with wide eyes and raised
eyebrows. So Yoongi let go of the steering-wheel and he gestured for him to hunker down at the window. The younger man stepped closer and did so, bending at the waist to look in at him and making a soft ‘hmm’ noise under his breath. The shift in angle made his loose hair fall forward over his brow, and Yoongi reached out to brush the lock behind his ear for him. He tucked the lock in place, his fingers brushing against the shell of his ear and making his earring dangle softly.

“What, you want a good night kiss?” Jimin asked with a rather mischievous smile.

“…Yeah, maybe I do?” Yoongi retorted, as he slowly ran his fingers down the back of his ear to his neck.

Jimin seemed to think this over for a few seconds, and then he moved forward to kiss him, gently pressing their mouths together.

Yoongi closed his eyes and he moved his hand to cup the back of his neck, turning his face into the kiss as he opened it up with a slip of his tongue. Sadly, the contact was only brief, but it was much better than nothing.

“Here,” Yoongi said, as he pulled the envelope out of his back pocket and he held it out to him.

Jimin eyed it and then he reached over to accept it, taking his cut of the profits without a single word.

“Keep up the hard work, yeah?”

“Sure thing, Prince Min.” Jimin said, as he straightened up, and he was about to move away from the window when he bent down again and shot him a quick smirk. “Or do you prefer-”

“Don’t,” he intoned, lifting a finger to point at him, and all that it did was make Jimin’s smirk widen.

“‘baby boy’?”

Yoongi shifted to lean out of the open window, throwing his hand out just in time to catch Jimin on his behind. It was nothing more than a light spank at best, but it made him jump and let out a shocked noise, reaching behind to touch the seat of his jeans.
“Oh! There’s that slap that you promised!” Jimin exclaimed, before laughing rather giddily.

The sound made Yoongi grin as he glanced between the wheel and the young man, watching him go up the front steps of the Painted Lady to get to the door. Rather than unlock it, he rapped his knuckles on it instead, clearly because he had no key with him. After a minute or two of waiting, the door swung open to let him inside, and Jimin spared a quick glance back at him before lifting his hand and actually blowing him a kiss.

As soon as Jimin was inside the house and out of sight, Yoongi pulled away from the curb again to head home. The drive was going to take him some time, but right now he didn’t really care about that because he was far too content. He just felt good right now, good in a way that he hadn’t in such a very long time, and he tapped his fingers on the steering-wheel in a offbeat rhythm as he stopped at a set of lights.

Sure, that goodness would probably fade in a couple of hours, but for now it was a wonderful feeling.

By the time that he was unlocking his front door, the sky was already pink with the rising sun, orange-tinged clouds still heavy on the horizon that would move on soon and let the summer heat bake him alive. Yoongi locked up and slipped out of his shoes, going up to his bedroom and undressing as he did so. He actually yawned at some point as he fumbled with his shirt buttons to try and free himself, struggling to keep his eyes open because he suddenly felt exhausted. It seemed that the last few weeks of fractured sleep were finally catching up on him, and he dropped to sit on the edge of his mattress and rub at his heavy eyelids for a moment before removing his last items of clothing.

Yoongi’s head seemed to have only just hit the pillow when he found himself sinking down into a deep blackness; curled up in his bed with the slightest remains of a smile still at the corners of his lips.
Chapter 5

23rd August, 1984, 1:17pm: Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco, United States of America

When Jimin finally managed to open his eyes, the sight that he saw in front of him was that of the other half of the mattress - empty, but the sheets and pillow wrinkled from use. Namjoon was nowhere in sight, and he could see that the bedroom was flooded with sunlight: strong, bright and warm. This seemed to hint that it was much later in the day than the early morning.

For a few seconds, Jimin didn’t want to move, didn’t even want to keep his eyes open, but then his stomach gave a rather hard rumble that caught him by surprise. It made him lift his head up off the pillow and make a series of disgruntled noises under his breath. Clearly, his stomach wanted food and it wasn’t going to stop until he gave it what it wanted. His bladder was also protesting from the alcohol from last night, and so he decided to just get out of bed and go to the bathroom.

Getting out of bed seemed to be a lot easier in his mind than in reality, for he couldn't seem to do so. His limbs were sluggish and didn’t want to work properly, and every single movement made his head ache. The pain was a hard throb that shot through his poor dehydrated skull and made him whimper weakly. But after a momentary struggle, he got to the edge of the bed and he swung his legs over the side, giving himself a moment to adjust to the sudden dizziness that washed over him.

Jimin took several deep breaths and then he got to his feet, his bare soles padding on the flooring as he made his way into the bathroom. He found himself reaching out to lean against the wall as he walked, dragging his feet all of the way into the other room.

It hadn’t been that long since Jimin had gotten wasted with Taehyung over in Seoul, and so he should have been used to the sickening sensation of a hangover, but he really hadn’t adjusted to it yet. He didn’t tend to get drunk these days, rather he stuck to beer to avoid waking up with an aching head and loose stomach. But last night he had downed quite the amount of red wine and champagne, before adding a couple of beers on top. That was a bad idea, a very bad idea, because that was just as bad as downing soju shots and beer. But it was pointless regretting it all now. Jimin just made a mental note to try and avoid drinking so much champagne in the future, a note that he knew he would completely disregard when faced with a glass of the bubbling golden liquid.

Though Jimin much preferred evening showers before sleeping, he found himself running the shower after he had relieved himself. He couldn’t seem to recall if he had done so last night because he was struggling to remember anything that had occurred shortly after stepping inside of his friend’s
house. Had he showered at the bathhouse? Maybe, but that still didn’t make him feel very clean, and so he shifted to step into the tub and get under the scorching hot stream.

“Hmm,” Jimin almost purred, as he felt the water running down his face and the back of his neck so wonderfully.

Jimin closed his eyes and he let the stream soak into his hair for a moment, the locks slipping forward in a sopping black curtain until he reached up to brush it back off his face. The heat certainly made his aching head and stiff limbs feel better, but sadly it didn’t aid the nausea as he lathered soap on his skin and then washed it free. His eyelids felt puffy against his fingers when he reached up to wipe the stream away, that usual horrible swelling that would hit him the morning after a night of heavy drinking. He knew that a splash of cold water on his face before leaving the bathroom would remedy it, for it was a good way to try and combat the swelling.

After showering, and slinging two towels around his waist and shoulders, Jimin proceeded to brush his teeth in front of the sink hastily. He felt so much better now that his mouth didn’t feel as dry as a carpet and reek of stale alcohol, and it was even better after he had rinsed it thoroughly with more pilfered mouthwash. He wiped condensation off of the mirror to look at his reflection for a moment.

Jimin could still see a faint hint of redness lingering on his skin from last night - a result of the heavy drinking. The heat of the shower had made his cheeks flush a little more to exacerbate the redness, but a quick splash of freezing cold water would hopefully bring the redness and swelling down. After patting his wet skin dry, he eyed the faint smudges of eyeliner still clinging to his lash line, and then he moved to leave the bathroom and go back into Namjoon’s bedroom.

As he got dressed, Jimin found his aching head thinking about Yoongi, just a brief thought crossing his mind because he was finally getting dressed for the day.

Yoongi had probably been dressed for hours now, had likely completed countless business deals whilst he had been snoring in his friend’s bed completely dead to the world. The thought brought a smile to his face for some reason as he slipped into clean underwear, and then decided to grab Namjoon’s chambray shirt from last night up off the floor.

The fabric smelled like the faded scent of cologne and marijuana, but that didn’t bother him in the slightest as he slipped it on, fastened up the buttons, and rolled the too-long sleeves up to his elbows. It was good enough for him because he really wasn’t sure if he was even going to go out for the day, and so there was no need to slip into anything more than that. Hell, he could walk around the house in just his briefs if he wanted to, and Namjoon wouldn’t even react to the sight.
Jimin left the bedroom on his still unsteady legs, going along the landing and down the staircase to get to the ground-floor. He glanced into the living-room to see that the television was playing but Namjoon wasn’t on the sofa inside of the room. No, when Jimin entered the kitchen a few seconds later, he saw that he was inside it, seemingly in the midst of preparing food of some kind.

Jimin saw a variety of ingredients present that he had never even see before. There wasn’t just tins of kimchi, bags of pasta, loaves of bread and an eclectic mixture of soups and noodle meals that usually filled up the pantry. No, he actually saw meat other than bacon present, the sight of which made him freeze in the doorway in dumb shock. Namjoon had chicken, there was chicken in front of him right now. Was he really awake, or was he in fact really just having an incredibly vivid dream?

“What’s going on, Daddy-o?” he asked, his tone actually sounding somewhat cautious and making him snort under his breath because it was just groceries. “What’re you doing?”

“Oh, look who finally decided to wake up today,” Namjoon remarked, as he turned to look back over his shoulder at him. “I thought you’d still be dead to the world for another couple of hours, at least.”

“Shit, what time’s it?” Jimin asked, reaching up to rub at his eyes roughly and trying his very hardest to force them to stay open fully.

“It’s 1:30pm,” his friend replied, as he moved to get to the sink and he grabbed a glass from the counter. “Good afternoon, Jimmy.”

“1:30pm?” Jimin repeated, freezing in place with the glass hanging underneath the tap but his hand not twisting to turn it on.

Namjoon made a noise in agreement at this, and he thought it over for a moment before twisting the tap to fill the glass up.

It was really no surprise that it was that late, all things considered. Hadn’t it been 4am when Yoongi had finally brought him back here? Sure, he had still slept in pretty late, but he thought that the fact that he hadn’t fallen asleep until near dawn negated this fact. After filling the glass up fully, Jimin turned the tap off and he glanced over at the other man.

Like usual, Namjoon was dressed casually, wearing a pair of long denim shorts with a white polo shirt. His feet weren’t bare like his, rather he was wearing a pair of sandals that served as house
slippers. After a moment of studying him, Jimin figured out that his friend had clearly went shopping whilst he had been asleep. Yet again, someone else had done all of the hard work whilst he had been unconscious.

Jimin downed the water in several fast swallows before refilling the glass and proceeding to gulp even more down his throat. He could see that Namjoon was staring at him from across the kitchen, no doubt wondering what he was doing, and so he finished the second glass and he moved to fill it up again, water dribbling down his chin messily as he did so.

“I’m hydrating myself,” Jimin explained, as he filled the glass up and he roughly wiped at his chin. “I’m flushing out all of those stupid toxins, I’m-”

“You need coffee and aspirin,” Namjoon spoke over him, as he tried to swallow a third glass of water and spilled quite a lot of it down his chin and onto the neckline of his shirt. “Stop that, Jimmy, you’re supposed to drink eight glasses a day, not eight glasses in eight seconds.”

“Gimme the drugs, Daddy-o,” Jimin moaned weakly, as he put the glass down on the counter and he reached up to start massaging at his aching head. “I need something, shit, my head’s gonna explode.”

Whilst the coffee brewed in the cafetière, Jimin knocked back two aspirin with another glass of water, relishing the cold liquid on his parched throat. Then he crossed the kitchen to draw closer to his friend, eyeing an open book on the counter and seeing even more bags of random food across the surface. It looked like a cookery book, judging from the photographs, a book that he was pretty certain was a new addition to his friend’s bookshelf because he had never seen it before.

Jimin decided to stand behind him, slipping his arms around his lower ribs and getting up on tiptoe to look over his shoulder. He saw that Namjoon was in the act of creating a salad: freshly washed vegetables on the chopping board and a pan of water on the stove waiting to be boiled for some other ingredient in the meal.

“What’chu doing?” Jimin asked in an immature fashion, feeling the urge to be clingy overcoming him because he felt sick from his hangover and he wanted attention and care to make him feel better.

“I’m attempting to cook something more nutritious than kimchi spaghetti,” Namjoon declared, as Jimin firmly planted his chin on his shoulder and he looked down at the counter in front of him. “You know, because eating that meal last night really got me thinking about how goddamn unhealthy we both are.”
“Not our fault,” Jimin retorted, as he eyed the deep bowl filled with salad. His nose detected a hint of vinegar, a bottle just to the side of the chopping board. “I can’t eat much with muling, I’m always binging and purging, and you’re so busy dealing that you barely get enough time to stop and eat fast food most nights, never mind actual cooked meals, Namo.”

“Yeah, well, whilst both of our asses are firmly planted here for the afternoon, I’m experimenting with food,” his friend argued, before grabbing the knife again and proceeding to slice up the tomato. “The key word here being: experimenting. Hopefully, that means I don’t poison us or something, because we’ve still got work to do tonight and tomorrow.”

“Don’t we always?” Jimin muttered wryly, as he ran his eyes along the counter.

In another bowl several feet away, he saw that there was finally fresh fruit again, and so Jimin relinquished his hold around Namjoon’s ribs to go and retrieve a peach. When he grabbed it, he was surprised to find that it was firm and ripe, for whenever Namjoon bought food from the local store it had to be left to ripen for a couple of days. That was a sign that his friend had actually went somewhere other than the usual store this morning, which made him make a noise under his breath.

“Wait, Namo, where did all of this food come from? Did you go to the market? That’s way over the weekly budget, isn’t it?”

“It usually is, but considering the fact I got a pay packet last night containing 1,500 dollars, I thought.”

“Shit, what?”

“that like 10 or so bucks extra on groceries for the week was nothing, right?” Namjoon finished, before twisting to look at him and dumping the tomato into the bowl. “Yeah, that was what was inside of the envelope that Prince Min gave me: my cut of the profits. Yours is in the living-room, you started stripping in there last night, so, you should find it somewhere in that room.”

Jimin thought this over for a moment before moving to go into the other room, his pace so quick that he heard Namjoon laughing at him.

Just like his friend had said, Jimin found his leather jacket cast aside by the front door in the slight hallway. When he stepped into the living-room, he saw that his jeans and tee-shirt were in a puddle in front of the television. Nice, he had stripped out of them last night and he hadn’t been wearing any
underwear at all, meaning that Namjoon had likely needed to help him get into bed whilst he had been fully naked and he had been disoriented from sleep.

The envelope wasn’t with his clothing, shoved into his jeans pocket like he had expected, but was rather placed on the low coffee table. When Jimin moved to sit on the sofa and he lifted it up, he found the paper peeling free, having gotten stuck to a tacky patch of spilled beer. He grimaced and peeled it off the table, before tearing it open and tipping the contents into his lap. A flurry of bills fluttered down in a shower, mostly twenties and tens, and so he started hastily counting them, muttering under his breath as he did so.

Unlike usual, Jimin found himself in awe at his payment, for he had actually been paid as equally as Namjoon had. Usually, he got a slight cut, and so he had been expecting $1,250 at the most. But when he finished counting, he found that he had $1,500 - just like his partner.

Jimin placed the bills down on the table, cautious to not drop them down in the puddle of beer, and then he stared at the small stack for a moment.

$1,500.

Jimin usually earned that amount over two months if he only managed to squeeze in three smuggling trips. He received $500 for each successful transaction and yet, when the bills for the communal home that he hardly ever crashed in anymore were deducted, a tidy chunk of that amount was taken away every single month. When his spending at bars, bathhouses, and food joints were all taken into account, it also drained on the remaining amount and left him with just a couple of hundred to go into his bank account. Sure, those hundreds added up, but when he had no health insurance of any kind then it could easily be blown away in just one desperately needed trip to the hospital.

But $1,500 for just a couple of days out running cocaine on the streets? It was crazy, completely crazy, and Jimin couldn’t help but grin to himself as he shifted on the sofa to get comfortable.

Yoongi might be a rich bitch, but he most certainly wasn’t stingy, that much was clear. No, not when he rewarded little brothers pay packets as good as that for managing to rip off a bunch of desperate addicts and supplying brothels with over-inflated cocaine. It seemed that the heir had told him the truth when he had said that hard work would be rewarded…and good boys too.

Jimin stuck his tongue out between his lips to wet them for a moment, finding that just thinking about that had made him feel a little like squirming on the sofa cushion. His head might still be aching and foggy from the alcohol last night, but he could vividly recall the way that Yoongi had called him a ‘good boy’, and how he had promised to pleasure him and buy him things for his hard work:
expensive food and wine over dinners mostly, but he had also heard him say something to do with a
car. What exactly he had said, he wasn’t completely certain on, for it had been a little hard to listen
when Yoongi had been jabbing at his prostate hard and fast enough to make his head spin, but he
was certain that he had said something about buying him a car.

Would Yoongi really buy him a car for earning him some profit? If haggling with dealers more could
result in cars, blowjobs, and expensive dinners like that from the other man, then Jimin would be
more than happy to risk taking a bullet or a baseball bat to the knee.

It wasn’t like he was taking advantage of him after all…was it?

Sure, Yoongi had revealed to him some rather crippling insecurities, had shown that he was in
desperate need for someone that could help him overcome his fear and hatred of intimacy and his
sexuality before the negativity ate him alive. But Yoongi had been the one to make the first move by
suggesting that they go to the bar, which showed that he had initiated and taken control of the
situation. If anything, the other man could have taken advantage of gang hierarchy and his power
and influence over him to demand sexual favours, yet he had done no such thing. No, in the end,
Yoongi had revealed to him that he had been quite simply content to have just spent the evening
receiving nothing more than attention, kisses, and secretive touches before he had suggested a deeper
intimacy and had made him give in to the temptation.

Therefore, Jimin was pretty certain that neither one of them were being taken advantage of in this
scenario, and so it was perfectly acceptable for him to take the older man up on any potential future
outings.

Hell, even Jimin felt like maybe he needed someone the way that Yoongi did too, though he would
never admit such a thing aloud. At least not yet. After all, he was almost twenty years of age and he
had never had a proper boyfriend before. Not even a casual one when he had been a teenager that
had resulted in nothing more than hand-holding, bad kisses, and all of the confusion and angst that he
had witnessed his classmates going through. This particular fact was starting to make him feel like he
never would have one; that there was something wrong with or unattractive about him.

Jimin never liked dwelling on negative thoughts like that, but after spending a night with another
man that had clearly wanted him but had wanted to wait, had made him realise just how unsatisfying
his sexual experiences had been so far. It was hard not being negative about the fact that he didn’t
even know when his first sexual experience had been (because he had since blocked it from his
memory), and that he had had nothing more than brief hook-ups in bathhouses and bars so far. Brief
being the most irritating part that he kept thinking about.

But Yoongi wanted to wait until he was comfortable and felt safe with the idea of sex, rather than
just sloppily fuck him once and then walk away like every other guy had ever done. That meant that
Yoongi wanted to be with him in some way or the other, a thought that made Jimin’s stomach clench weirdly under his ribs.

It wasn’t a relationship exactly right now, not yet, but it could become one. If he carried on being a good boy, it could be a relationship with many more benefits than just cash and cars.

Jimin was just about to start eating the peach when Namjoon entered the living-room, a mug of steaming coffee in hand just for him. So he moved to dump the snack on the table instead and he asked him what had happened last night, far too curious by the sight of his cast-off clothing all over the place to help himself.

“You came back half-asleep and completely wasted in the early morning hours, but that didn’t stop you from talking,” Namjoon explained, as he moved to hand him a mug of coffee. “You were talking so much, at the speed of fucking light, and you seemed to be really excited about something. But I couldn’t catch what, I was still mostly asleep myself at that point.”

“Do you remember anything that I said?” Jimin asked, nursing the mug between his hands and suddenly feeling a ripple of embarrassment coursing through him.

What exactly had he said to his best friend last night, when he had been drunk and faded from the pleasure of the bathhouse?

Jimin had told Namjoon some pretty lurid stories in the past to amuse him, not at all embarrassed about sharing bad hook-up stories with him because he found them just as funny as the other man did. But last night felt like something completely different to a casual hook-up story, seemed much more serious, even when he didn’t know why he felt that it was. He might just have said things about Yoongi that he shouldn’t have shared with his friend, not only things like his sexual preferences and favoured nickname of choice, but about his private life that he had said to him in a moment of confidentiality.

Jimin almost cringed at the thought of drunkenly blurting out the fact that Yoongi was a self-hating gay guy with an asshole for a father just like him, and he found that he needed to sip at the coffee just to wet his tongue. The beverage was scorching hot and he gulped it down hard to save his tongue from being scalded. Shit, what had he said to him exactly?

“Uh, you kept saying something like “he’s just like me, Namo’,” Namjoon said, as he moved to sit on the other sofa cushion beside him. He reached up to scratch at his hair for a moment, his brow furrowed in concentration. “But when I asked you what that meant, you just kept giggling at me. It was cute, you’re cute when you’re really drunk, Jimmy. It’s no wonder guys flock to you when you
are, but you’re also confusing as hell.”

Jimin tried to not sigh in relief at this, thinking that he was in the clear because he had clearly not said anything too bad about Yoongi to his friend. Saying something like that could have meant anything, could have been referring to his personality or even his interests rather than his sexuality. But before he could even close his eyes and feel a quick rush of relief, Namjoon opened his mouth and he quickly added.

“You also said that he had so many fingers up your ass at one point that you felt like a puppet, and-”

“Namo!” Jimin exclaimed in complete shock, his eyes widening so much that he was surprised that they didn’t roll right out of his skull. His expression made his friend burst out laughing, and yet he was completely mortified and unable to even snort laughter at what he had just said. “No, no I didn’t, I never said that, I-”

“OK, you didn’t say those exact words, but you did say something about that,” Namjoon clarified, but that didn’t make him feel better in the slightest. “Which’s a surprise honestly, I didn’t expect that, so-”

“Shit, Namo, what’d I say to you last night?” Jimin muttered, as he let go of the mug with one hand to press it against his brow, the warmth of his palm somewhat soothing on his aching head. He closed his eyes and he felt his cheeks burning with shame. “Just hit me, just let me know.”

“You said that you went drinking at the Twin Peaks bar with Prince Min, mumbled a bunch of nonsense about that, and then said that you went to a bathhouse together,” Namjoon explained in a slow fashion for him, no longer making crude jokes because he could clearly sense his distress. “Then you said that you both messed around a little and I caught bits and pieces, but I heard the ass thing the most. I didn’t catch anything else, so, don’t worry about that if that’s what you’re worrying about, Jimmy.”

“Did I mention anything personal, like private shit?” Jimin asked in a quiet voice, as he opened his eyes and he took another sip of coffee.

“Uh…” Namjoon thought this question over for a moment, his brow twitching as he searched his memories from last night. He made a series of noises under his breath before shaking his head. “Not that I recall, I mean you said a lot of shit, Jimmy, and most of it was nonsense like I said. If you said anything personal about Prince Min, then I didn’t understand what you said.”
Prince Min? Was Namjoon still using the title to be respectful, or had he not even blurted out his actual name in his early morning ranting? It seemed like he might not have, which appeared to be a sign that he really hadn’t spilled any of Yoongi’s personal life to his friend either. It was enough to make him finally let his breath out in a heavy sigh of relief, and Jimin turned his attention back to his mug of coffee, eyeing the deep brown contents intently.

“You sounded pretty happy going on about it though,” Namjoon added, shifting on the sofa cushion to get more comfortable by leaning back against the armrest and folding his arms over his chest. “It was funny, you had such a face on you during the meal, but then you came back here buzzing, and-”

“Oh god, don’t mention the meal,” Jimin muttered under his breath with a head shake.

“Are you regretting your behaviour now? I did try telling you to step back several times, but you ignored me.”

“I’m not entirely regretting it, it’s the reason why Prince Min asked me to go out drinking with him,” he explained, as he looked up at his friend. “But I did look like a bitch, so, there’s that.”

“Maybe he likes bitches?” Namjoon suggested.

Jimin uncurled one leg to kick out at him, his foot connecting with his knee hard.

“Christ, Jimmy,” his friend muttered, as he reached down to rub at his no doubt stinging knee. “I’m honestly surprised that Prince Min didn’t get you in a chokehold right there for talking to him like that, you know?”

“I know,” he agreed in a quiet voice, pulling his leg back in curling up on the cushion comfortably.

“At one point, I honestly thought to myself that he might just whack your ass off,” Namjoon continued. “But then I remembered that shit like that doesn’t really work in reality. It’s highly detrimental to profits to just off a guy when he pisses you off. You only whack off the important guys, yeah?”

“What? You don’t think I’m important, huh?” Jimin asked, raising his eyebrows at him mischievously. “Funny, I was important enough to get whacked off last night, ha!”
“Goddammit, Jimmy,” Namjoon muttered, as he shook his head in disbelief. “Talking like that, that’s the exact reason why you don’t get invited to fancy restaurants.”

Jimin just beamed at him, rather proud of his dirty wit because he couldn’t believe that his friend hadn’t thought of the witticism first. He was in the act of taking a deep sip of coffee when he noticed something flitting across Namjoon’s face, and so he lowered the mug and he twitched his eyebrows at him, signalling for him to talk.

“Prince Min though,” Namjoon said in a quiet voice. “I gotta say, I knew that he was young before meeting him, like, just a little older than us. But seeing him up close…he’s not what I expected.”

“Right?” Jimin agreed enthusiastically.

“I was dreading last night for various reasons, but he was more accommodating than I’d been imagining him to be,” his friend continued with a soft nod. “I mean, even with you acting like a bitch - don’t kick me - he was pretty alright. Pretty cool and collected.”

Jimin thought this over for a moment, wondering if Namjoon had any clue about how messed up inside that Yoongi really was.

Oh, he played it cool and collected on the surface because he had learnt to compartmentalise the negative shit to allow him to process and function like any other human being, but underneath that frozen exterior, Jimin knew what was really going on. He imagined that deep down inside, maybe in his chest or down in his belly, Yoongi had this constant dull ache that didn’t go away exactly, it just quelled itself for awhile. He should know, he had felt the exact same sensation since the age of eight and had only just recently noted its absence because he had found Namjoon to help him keep going.

Cool and collected, but aching and vulnerable; that was exactly what Yoongi was in his eyes.

“I bet when he was drunk he wasn’t a cool guy, huh?” Namjoon joked, and Jimin looked up from the mug of coffee to hold his gaze.

“Um, he was kinda-“ he let go of the mug with one hand to start playing with his earring. “I guess he was more sensitive? More open with his words for sure, so yeah, I’d say he was less cool but more…human.”
“Deep, Jimmy.”

“He said that he liked you,” Jimin stated, before taking another sip of coffee, seeing the complete look of surprise on his face. “He said that you were genuine, intelligent, and he likes that in his men.”

“By that do you mean likes it in his business men or…?”


“Hey, I was just checking. After all, until you blurted shit out last night, I was doing the standard norm of assuming that Prince Min had, like, twenty different chicks on the side, yeah?”

“We both were, and we were both so far from the truth that it’s fucking hilarious.”

“Prince Min’s got the hots for Jimmy,” Namjoon announced, before quickly adding. “But has Jimmy got the hots for Prince Min? Ooh, that’s the million dollar question.”

“What’s your guess, huh?”

“The answer is usually: “ew, fuck no, Namo”,’” his friend said, imitating his voice pretty well, he had to hand it to him. “But that’s because the choices aren’t usually rich heirs with a Rolex. So, this time, I’m gonna go with a high potential for…maybe.”

“You think I’m only interested in the Rolex?” Jimin asked in mock surprise.

“Jimmy, I’d let a guy fuck me for a Rolex,” Namjoon admitted without a hint of shame.

“Yeah, well…like I said, he’s like me, so, there’s that.” Jimin stated, as he turned back to his coffee. It was a convenient way to avoid holding eye-contact with him. “So, I actually do kinda like him.”

“Oh my god,” Namjoon breathed out, his expression falling slack. “I never thought the day would
come when Jimin Park would say those words to me.”

“Shut up, Namo,” he muttered, more than aware of how flushed that his cheeks had gotten. “You’re such a loser.”

“Actually, speaking of words, I was waiting to hear you say some to me last night, but you never did,” his friend suddenly remarked.

Jimin had no clue what he could possibly mean by this, and so he told him to explain.

“Condoms, or maybe just the singular condom. You never mentioned them last night and I know I didn’t raise no fool, Jimmy, so, you better tell me that you used one or I swear, I’m gonna hit you with one of my sandals.”

“There was no sex, Daddy-o,” he replied, as the other man actually moved to pretend to slip his sandal off. “No need to worry, I’m perfectly clean. But for future reference, I’ll be sure to use one; yeah?”

Jimin turned his head to look at the television screen, seeing that the news was switched on and that there was currently a series of political rallies being played in the run-up to the upcoming quadrennial presidential elections. On the screen was a rather unassuming man running for the Democrats, a man that he thought had no chance at winning any seats at all.

“God, Mondale’s gonna fail so bad I can feel it,” Jimin said, as he placed the mug down on the table and he folded his arms across his chest. “I can barely even remember what he’s been campaigning about, it’s going that badly for him.”

“He wants to bring an end to nuclear arms, amend rights for women, among other things,” Namjoon explained slowly. “He’s a good guy, or seems to be. Why do you think he’s got no chance, huh?”

“Namo, you know he wants increased taxes,” he said, wriggling on the cushion to get more comfortable. “ Doesn’t matter what else he says, the second that he said taxes, he lost the vote right there and then. He’s dead in the water, mark my words: The Prick’s gonna get in again, four more years of hell. God help the minorities, diseased, and addicts of this state.”

“You’ve got no optimism, Jimmy,” his friend said with a soft head shake. “You won’t make change
happen if you don’t have any optimism.”

“It’s hard to have optimism when thousands of your brothers and sisters are dying all across the country and your government doesn’t give a shit,” Jimin retorted, perhaps a little more brusquely than he had been intending to do so.

Namjoon seemed to think this over for a moment before shifting to get off the sofa, leaving him to stare at the television and watch the failure unfolding right in front of his eyes.

After a few seconds, Jimin detected the sound of him doing something in the kitchen, and so he just shifted to lie down on the sofa and get more comfortable. The aspirin was still kicking in and relieving him of his nausea and headache, and right now he could happily nap on the sofa without a single care at all for what was going on with politics, in the mob, nothing at all. But he was rather hungry and far too curious about Namjoon’s mystery food concoction to nap right now.

Jimin grabbed the remote off the table, hitting the buttons to flick through the channels aimlessly until the flashing lights irritated his head even more. So he decided to type in the code for Music Television, dropping the remote on the cushion in front of him. The channel was halfway through playing Wham!’s ‘Wake Me Up Before You Go-go’ and he tried to not groan under his breath as the video transitioned into ultraviolet glowing lights whilst people danced across the screen. Great, not only an annoying song but an annoying video too.

In the next following hour or so, Jimin found himself staring at the screen in a rather dazed state, his eyes and ears assaulted by terrible fashion, videos and lyrics. A few songs came on that he thought were alright, not great but good enough. But the best choice by far that came on the television was Joy Division’s ‘Love Will Tear Us Apart’. He made sure to turn the volume up, even when Namjoon complained about him playing that “depressing record again” from the kitchen.

It was funny, Jimin thought, that there was a 7” vinyl of this exact record back in his old family home, probably still there if his parents hadn’t cleaned the place out over the last four years. Hell, it could still be placed inside of his record player for all he knew, just waiting to be turned on and for the needle to drop; now coated in a thick layer of dust. Funny in a strange way, in a way that made him feel kind of cold as he stared at the television screen and he reached up to start playing with his earring slowly.

Jimin had since bought another copy of the record, though that edition had a creased case so very unlike his old records. He had always taken good care of them, had kept the cases inside of dust sleeves and everything, and just thinking about the possibilities of his favourite record gathering dust like nothing more than trash over these last several years, like something unwanted and unloved…it was strange.
Namjoon’s old family home was likely nice and clean, everything packed away in boxes because he had left like a normal human. Taehyung’s family home was probably the same, he wasn’t sure at all.

But Yoongi’s family home?

Would Yoongi have bothered taking anything from a home with bad memories? Would his parents have had it cleaned out at some point, or had they not cared at all like they hadn’t cared about him?

All that Jimin had taken with him had been a canvas holdall bag filled with clothing and blankets, and a backpack filled with food and a pitiful amount of cash, yet he had made it this far.

Jimin might have abandoned his old records, might have given up caring for them, but he had found a way to care for himself instead.

He must have drifted off in his musings, for when he was next aware of something, it was his friend prodding at his behind with the television remote to try and get his attention. Jimin jerked in surprise before reaching up to rub his eyelids roughly.

“Did you fall asleep with your eyes open or something?” Namjoon asked, his tone revealing that he was actually curious and not joking.

“Huh, oh.” Jimin shifted to sit up on the sofa with a groan. He reached up to massage at the back of his neck, finding that the muscle was stiff from lying on the awkward angle. “No, was just thinking. Some of things that we talked about last night got me thinking about the past, you know?”

“Some of the things we talked about, or you and Prince Min?”

“Um, both.”

“OK, well, dinner’s served, so, just give me a second to actually serve it.”

“Mmm, I’ll help,” he rumbled, as he stretched and shifted to get off the sofa, kicking his stiff legs
Jimin entered the kitchen after his friend, instinctively going over to the fridge to open it and look inside. He saw that the interior was filled with many more things than usual, including the remains of the vegetables, and after a moment he located the bottles of beer. He pulled them free and he placed them down on the counter. Then he moved to retrieve two plates and some cutlery, popping the caps free from two bottles and carrying it all into the living-room with a slight skip in his step. He was still highly curious as to what his friend had even prepared, and so he got comfortable on the cushion and he waited for him to reappear.

Namjoon did so after a moment, carrying a large bowl that he placed down on the coffee table in front of him.

Inside of it, Jimin could see a ridiculous amount of chicken and pasta salad, and the other man proceeded to start serving it out between them. There was clearly going to be extra helpings and leftovers from that bowl, that much was clear.

“Namo, I’m pretty sure that the last time that we touched salad it was on a burger,” Jimin remarked, as he eyed the plates in front of him in wonder.

He had not been intending for that to sound like a joke, but the other man laughed anyway. Maybe, it was because there was no other possible reaction to the pitiful and worrying truth?

Jimin moved to grab his plate and he placed it in his lap, incredibly comfortable sitting cross-legged on the cushion without a table to use. Then he speared a random mixture of salad, pasta and succulent-looking chicken onto his fork before sampling it.

“Um, Namo,” Jimin said, as he cheeked the mouthful of salad and he reached up to wipe a dribble of dressing from his lips.

At his voice, Namjoon looked up, also in the act of chewing a mouthful of food. Rather than speak around it, he just lifted his eyebrows to signal that he was listening, showcasing all of his faüx manners that had appeared over the duration of the meal last night.

“Forget Prince Min’s expensive dinners,” Jimin said with a smirk. “Give me more of this, Daddy-o.”
“We’re far too excited over salad,” Namjoon remarked with a head shake, making him also laugh because it was true. “Wait, so, what was all of the thinking about?”

Jimin paused in the act of lifting up his bottle of beer, the neck covered in beads of condensation.

Namjoon’s question had caught him by surprise, and he realised that by explaining the scenario, he might have to mention the fact that Yoongi had told him things about himself. Sure, his friend might not even ask because he understood privacy, but considering how little they had both known about the heir, the temptation to do so could be highly compelling. Jimin himself knew that he would want to know if Namjoon had had any information on the other man, and so it made sense that Namjoon might want to know too.

“Well, the song came on TV, you know, your favourite song ever, and-”

“No, Jimmy, don’t even joke about that,” Namjoon intoned, as he lowered his next forkful of salad and he stared at him. “You know how much that song annoys me.”

“Just the greatest song ever made, but sure, whatever,” Jimin continued after his sip of beer. “Anyway, I used to have that record when I was a kid. I used to play it a lot and piss my dad off too. When I ran away, I left all of that shit behind, and just talking about the past over the dinner and hearing the song again reminded me about it all; you know? Like, man, I used to have so many records. I didn’t even like all of them, just bought them because I wanted to expand the collection, and like…I’d save up for them.”

The room fell quiet at this, save for the music still playing from the television speakers - Tina Turner’s ‘What’s Love Got To Do With It’ playing at a much more reasonable level of volume.

Jimin found his free hand playing with his earring just like usual as he moved his fork around his plate rather than eat.

“See, you know that my family didn’t have much cash at all, typical Bayview trash upbringing and all that-”

“Not trash and not a trashy upbringing either,” Namjoon interjected. “You might have issues with them, which is completely understandable. But your parents raised you into who you are now, Jimin, and you’re not trash.”
“It’s hard accepting that when I know what I’m about to say next,” Jimin said, as he grabbed his beer and he tightened his hold around the bottle. “Namo, I bought most of those records with the cash that middle-aged and old guys gave me for climbing into the backs of their cars outside of the cinema or whatever bar I was hanging around vying for older male attention. I mean, the leftover cash, because I gave most of it to mum without telling dad so she could keep it safe. Just in case. I started that collection when I was like…thirteen or something, so, you put it all together. That’s the kinda shit that I told Prince Min about at the bar, if you can believe it?”

“Well, he didn’t ditch you and run after you did, so, that says something about him,” Namjoon remarked.

Jimin turned his head to see that his friend was still eating his serving of food, most of it gone whereas his plate was still almost full. Clearly, his recollections hadn’t ruined his appetite and it wasn’t a surprise, for Jimin knew that he had told him far worse things than that over the years.

But Namjoon did have a point. Jimin had mentioned being pretty fucked up, something that should have had most men running away from him, and yet Yoongi had just downed his beer and had returned his own fucked up stories too.

What a wonderful pair they were.

“Did you used to collect shit, huh?” Jimin asked, as he turned back to his own dinner, his appetite also still present and accounted for.

“I saved up for comics,” Namjoon replied. “Just like you, I didn’t care what it was, just bought it. I used to check all kinds of charity shops looking for old ones in decent condition, and try and get as many as I could for a dollar.”

This made Jimin smile around a mouthful of salad, finding that he could easily picture this.

“All of them are in a box somewhere in my old bedroom. Might be worth something one day, I guess, but that’s not why I did it. I bought them all because they were colourful and fun to look at, sometimes,” Namjoon finished.

“Being a kid’s weird,” Jimin said, as he stabbed at his salad again.
“I wonder what Prince Min collected? You think he collected things as a kid?”

“Dunno, but I know that our supplier probably collected suits.”

This remark cracked Namjoon up and made him almost choke on a mouthful of beer, marking the second quip of the day that Jimin was proud of himself for making.

Rather than adding to this or saying anything that might make his friend bring up Yoongi again, Jimin decided to focus his full attention on the meal in front of him. Namjoon also decided to carry on eating, adding another generous serving of food onto his plate as he did so. Only when there was a few bites left did Jimin decide to break the silence again.

“You know, I just realised that this dinner is really early,” he said, as he checked his watch. “Which means that something’s up. What’s up, what’s going on; huh?”

“You’re up tomorrow morning,” Namjoon said, placing his almost empty bottle of beer down on the table. “More coke, another trip around the globe. Exciting, huh?”

“I just stopped feeling like shit,” Jimin muttered under his breath, as he eyed the remains of the salad in the bowl and he considered helping himself to more of it. “Great, I can’t wait to feel it all over again, I just love feeling like shit, Namo.”

“Hey, look at it this way,” his friend argued. “You get back here and add your usual payment on top and you got…what?”

“2,000 dollars,” Jimin said, before making a surprised noise under his breath. “Wait, Namo, that’s a fifth of 10,000 dollars right there. Shit!”

“Might wanna set up a savings account,” Namjoon remarked with a smile.

“Seriously, a few more muling trips and maybe a pay packet here and there, and I could reach that amount easily.”

“Yeah, usually you gotta do twenty trips to reach it, that’s almost half a year of muling, Jimmy.”
“I hope that someone else pisses Prince Min off or burns us!” he remarked with a grin, as he turned back to his plate. “But fuck it, I’m gonna be downing laxatives later, might as well gorge and nap and then wake up and shit it all out again; yeah?”

Jimin grabbed the bowl and he hastily shovelled more of the dinner onto his plate, caring not for the amount. He could enjoy the sensation of being full and content for a little while at least. So he devoured as much of the pasta salad as he could stand, making a mental note to get Namjoon to make it again at some point when he returned from the muling trips. When he was pretty certain that he could eat no more, meaning that his friend would have to try and finish the leftovers all on his own in his absence, he placed the plate aside and he turned his head to look at the other man.

“Did you get the stuff?” Jimin asked in a low voice, raising his eyebrows mischievously as he did so because it was an ongoing joke of theirs.

“Check the drop-off point,” Namjoon said in his own serious tone.

Jimin got to his feet to go into the kitchen, having to retrieve a chair to open the cupboard set high over the sink and pulling the box out. He probably should have grown out of his Pop Tarts phase and yet he was still very much unable to fight his sweet tooth. Some guys were hooked on cocaine or heroin, he was hooked on saturated fats and sugar.

As he tore open the packet, frosted brown sugar cinnamon scent wafting to hit him in the face, Jimin made a mental note to one day introduce Taehyung to these snacks. Surely, he could find them somewhere in Hong Kong, albeit not in Kowloon Walled City. If he went nuts over Burger King, he could only imagine what his reaction to Pop Tarts would be like.

Whilst the snacks were toasting, Jimin found his mind playing over something that Namjoon had said to him during their lunch: about how Yoongi hadn’t ditched him and ran. Well, he might not have done so on the night, but only time would tell if what his friend had said turned out to be true. Maybe, when he returned from his muling trip, Yoongi might just contact him in some way?

It was only when the two pieces of tarts popped out of the toaster that Jimin realised that he actually wanted to see Yoongi again.
Just like the previous morning, Yoongi found himself waking up later than usual, opening his eyes for the first time to look at the clock on the side table beside his bed to see that it was later than 10am.

The sight was enough to make him groan weakly, for he still felt like he could close his eyes and fall into a light slumber again. He was so used to the sight of 5:00am on it, or sometimes 7:00am, if he happened to sleep for longer than his standard three hour naps, but 10am was most certainly a shocking sight. 10am meant that he might just have gotten seven solid hours of sleep, which explained why he felt so bad.

“Mmm, shit,” Yoongi breathed out, as he rolled onto his back and he stretched out across the bed.

Even with both of his arms stretched to their fullest reach, his fingers barely even got close to skimming the edges of the mattress, for the California King Size bed was really something. It could probably fit four people on it no problem, which was unnecessary for him, but Hoseok might just find useful. No, Yoongi just liked it because it was comfortable. He could literally burrow his entire body within the massive covers, and the fact that he could have a mountain of pillows against the gilded headboard was a bonus. After a few seconds of stretching and weakly grunting under his breath, he opened his eyes to stare up at the glass sunroof over the bed, squinting at the bright blue summer sky.

Yoongi was used to the sight of a still orange-tinged pink, or sometimes violet sky; filled with the faintest wisps of clouds. Clear blue was most certainly new, and so he turned his head to stare at the clock again, just wanting to make sure that he had seen the correct digits.

10:17am…

In the usual time that he was awake and active, Yoongi could sort out all of the morning phone calls to ensure that everything was running smoothly, shower and dress himself, eat breakfast at Mickey’s Joint, and even spend some time driving around the city or go to visit Hoseok if he wanted to do so. He could have that all done by 10:30am easily, for it was a schedule that he had been following for quite some time now.

Yet, Yoongi hadn’t done a single one of those things today, not even something simple like taking a
shower. He wasn’t really looking forward to moving to do so at all. He might just need to start setting alarms to combat this sudden problem with sleeping in.

Yoongi forced himself to sit upright in bed, slumping forward and feeling the shirt that he had fallen asleep in hanging off his frame as he did so. He wasn’t sure why he had slept in it, and he just reached up to try and pull it back up onto his shoulder as he ran his tongue around his dry mouth. He tasted bourbon, and when he looked back at the side table, he saw a glass that still had the remains of the deep golden liquid in the bottom. At least that explained the horrible taste lingering on his tongue. He stared at the glass for a moment before deciding to climb out of bed and go down into the kitchen, needing to rinse away the booze with strong coffee.

After several minutes of brewing coffee (and quickly leaving his house to check the mailbox in his wrinkled shirt), Yoongi returned to his bedroom with the mug and a single letter in hand. There was never any bills placed inside of the mailbox, nothing financial, for Hoseok’s mother was his private accountant. She sorted out everything from bills to taxes on his behalf to allow him to focus on the important matters pertaining to the empire instead. He had her to thank for securing this very mansion for him, assisting him in a way that his own mother or father should have done do so.

Yoongi practically thought of her as his own mother, though he had never explained this strong feeling to his best friend. He doubted that Hoseok needed to know this fact, however, for he had probably long since figured it out. Yes, at one point in his life, Yoongi had almost been convinced that he had been in love with the woman until he had figured out that his pining for her had quite simply been that of a child desperate for love and attention instead; two things that Hoseok’s parents and older sisters had most certainly given him.

Yoongi dropped the letter onto the creased bed covers, before sitting down on the edge of the mattress and reaching over to pull his bedroom phone closer to him. He grabbed the receiver from the cradle, slipping it into the crook between his head and shoulder so that he could reach over and dial Seokjin’s car phone number from memory. He hit the buttons with his thumb and he listened to the dialling tone droning before there was a static crackle, signalling that the older man had picked up.

“Good morning, Yoongi,” Seokjin said without even needing to hear him speak. “I was considering calling you a while ago, on account of the time. But I know that you prefer calling first, so, I refrained from disturbing you.”

“Mmm, in the future, if I don’t call you by 8:30am, come here and see me personally,” Yoongi suggested, as he grabbed his mug again and he took a quick sip of the scalding hot liquid. “If you’re sorting out business, call instead. You doing business right now, huh?”

“I’m in the midst of going to collect earnings from several dealers, before negotiating more
transactions in Thailand, Hong Kong, and Korea,” Seokjin replied, and underneath his voice, he could detect the sound of what sounded like a rumbling engine. That signalled that he was in the act of driving across the city right now, rather than parked on some random curb. “Just the usual morning shift, but by the early afternoon, there’ll be a lull.”

“You got any updates for me?” Yoongi asked, shifting on the mattress to try and get more comfortable. “That new mule we sent over to cover Rhee’s ass, did she actually land in Bangkok, huh?”

“Yes, I received a call about an hour ago to let me know that the transaction was completed; in fact, all ongoing transactions from yesterday have been completed,” his supplier confirmed.

“Good,” he mumbled, as he reached up to rub at his eyes roughly with one balled-up fist. “I was hoping you’d say that. I don’t wanna have to deal with another backstabbing fucker like Choi. Still ain’t sorted out the trouble in Bernal Heights with Lee and Mission with Kwon, so, the last thing I need’s another fucking problem.”

“I believe that Hoseok actually wants you to see him at some point in the afternoon, in regards to the Sacramental Snow situation,” Seokjin explained, whilst Yoongi took another sip of his coffee. “He contacted me this morning to pass the message to you during this very call. But, other than that, there’s nothing to report to you. Just like yesterday, the mules are all working, no reported runaways. No missing parcels either, and all of the deals are still running smoothly as we speak. I daresay you might find yourself with another afternoon free from drama, Yoongi.”

“Great, ain’t like I got plans or nothing,” he muttered, as he moved to place the heavy mug down beside the phone. “This afternoon, huh? I’ll be sure to go and see him then.”

Had he have known all of this, then Yoongi might just have gotten another hour or so of sleep, but it was too late for that now. He had just made coffee and started his usual morning ritual, and so he was just going to have to power through the day and consider sleeping earlier than 3am instead.

“Is there anything in particular that you require from me currently, Yoongi?”

“Actually, you got contact details for the dealer and mule from yesterday?” Yoongi asked suddenly, his fingers shifting to grab at the phone cord so that he could play with it.

“The dealer, yes. The mule, no. He’s on his way to Seoul right now,” Seokjin explained, before
making a soft noise under his breath as he had presumably just checked his watch. “Actually, he would’ve boarded his flight a while ago, around 7am. He’s literally not in the country right now, so, you’d need to get the details from Kim.”

“Oh…”

Yoongi paused in the act of playing with the phone cord, thinking this over for a moment.

Jimin was currently in the air over the Pacific Ocean right now as they were speaking, making his way to Seoul whilst he had been sleeping the entire morning away. That was to be expected, considering the fact that he was a mule. Why he hadn’t thought to try and contact the other man yesterday instead, he wasn’t entirely certain, but he had two possible reasons.

Naturally, Yoongi had still been processing the events that had occurred between him and Jimin yesterday morning upon waking up. His mind had been foggy with sleep for the first time in months, meaning that he had shuffled around his mansion rather sluggishly until a mug of coffee had remedied his lethargy. It had not even crossed his mind to think of contacting Jimin, until Hoseok had mentioned the dinner over lunch in some new joint in Chinatown and he had asked him how the evening had went.

That had been the exact moment that Yoongi had stopped chewing a mouthful of kung pao shrimp because his mind had been flooded with images of Jimin undressing in the changing-room of some random bathhouse over in The Castro; of him lying on a creaky bed bathed in red glow with oil-slick skin glistening like some godly being right in front of his eyes. He had almost choked on his food, but had managed to save himself from doing so at the last second, catching his friend by total surprise.

Of all of the places to recall vivid sexual experiences, a packed restaurant was never a good option, and Yoongi had found himself overcome with burning cheeks and a suddenly limited ability to hold his best friend’s gaze over the duration of the meal. Which Hoseok had obviously noticed, and had harassed him about on the entire drive back to his mansion until Yoongi had been tempted to pop the door open and just roll out of his own car to get away from him.

Not only had his slow realisation been a strong reason for not acting sooner, there was also the fact that Yoongi had never been in a situation quite like the one that had happened that night before; an incident involving a man that wasn’t his best friend or a hired massage boy that he never had to see ever again.

Yoongi didn’t really how or when it was the right time to contact Jimin after what had happened,
even when he knew that he wanted to do so. Was he supposed to wait awhile, let them both process it and then contact him? Was he supposed to show him that he was eager to see him again instead, or was that off-putting? Whatever the case, he could have still found a way of contacting him through Seokjin yesterday afternoon and waited until the evening hours after several bourbon on the rocks to consider doing so, but it was far too late for that now.

Now Yoongi was going to have to wait several days to do so, several days on his own with his oftentimes toxic thoughts creeping up on him and ruining everything.

Yoongi could only hope that by the time that Jimin returned to San Francisco, he was still comfortable with the idea of seeing him again like he was currently.

“Why exactly do you want their details, Yoongi? If you don’t mind me asking?”

“I, uh, I might’ve need for their services in the future, and I thought it’d be better to contact ‘em directly instead of through you,” he lied, letting go of the kinked phone cord. “Didn’t cross my mind to ask over the dinner, y’know? But I thought it over since yesterday, and I thought it’d be easier for us both.”

“Well, like I said I can give you Kim’s details,” Seokjin replied. “He should be able to give you the mule’s details, should you require both.”

Yoongi popped the side table drawer open, grabbing a pen and his black book out so that he could jot down the number that his supplier gave him. He made sure to add Namjoon’s name beside it just so he didn’t get confused, and then he dropped the pen down on his bed without a single care. There, as soon as he was certain that Jimin would be back in the country, he would call the number and request that Namjoon put him on the line if he was available, or give him another number if he wasn’t. The problem was solved, and yet a strange part of him felt like it wasn’t, not yet.

No, not until he and Jimin actually spoke again would everything feel right.

“Is that all, Yoongi?”

“Ohuh, keep up the hard work,” he remarked, before pulling the receiver away and moving to place it back in the cradle.
Yoongi shifted on the bed, pulling his legs up in front of him on the mattress to get comfortable. Though he was now aware of the fact that he had no solid plans for the day, he still had several things to do, like take a shower, get dressed and eat breakfast. All of those things seemed too much for him right now, however, and so he just collected his mug to take another few quick sips of coffee before turning back to the letter on his bed.

Yoongi knew that it was a letter from his grandmother, for he recognised her painfully small and flowery print almost as well as his own, and not only just because it was covered in various stamps from across the country. After handing power over the empire down to his father, his grandfather and grandmother had moved to Florida to spend their privately amassed and considerable fortune on their retirement. He had been receiving letters randomly spaced across the year since he had been nine years of age, and he had every single one stored away safely in a box, envelope and all. So he tore the envelope open down the side and he pulled the letter free to see that there were several sheets of paper inside, fragranced and printed with floral designs around the borders.

Whilst he finished his coffee, Yoongi slowly read the various pages, poring over every single line and finding not a single error, for it seemed that his grandmother either created drafts first or was just impeccable with her words. He would struggle to write a single paragraph without messily scribbling something out and adding words here and there until the letter was incredibly hard to read, and so he envied her perfect letters.

When he was finished reading, Yoongi proceeded to go downstairs to store the letter inside of the box in his first-floor private study; the empty mug and glass also in hand. His copy of ‘Different Seasons’ was still placed on the table beside the window from yesterday, waiting to be opened again and finished at last, but he had no time for that today. Yoongi went down into his kitchen to leave the used cups in the sink, because his hired maid service would be here soon to clean for the week. That meant that he needed to leave, and so he went into his bathroom to get washed up for the day.

Yoongi selected a pair of jeans instead of loose trousers, considering the fact that he seemed to have no business to see to today. He hesitated between his usual choice of a plain tee-shirt or shirt of black or white, before pulling something free that he had never worn before.

Hoseok had given it to him quite some time ago, upon telling him that he needed to wear more colour because he was boring. The shirt was white and printed with red seashells, hardly the most colourful thing but eye-catching nonetheless. A quick glance inside of the collar showed the label to be Valentino, with the fashion house name stitched in black with the trademark ‘V’ above it on the strip of white cotton, and Yoongi eyed it for a moment.

There was something at the back of his mind telling him that this was a woman’s blouse, judging from the placement of the buttons and the loose sleeves that pulled into fitted cuffs. Hoseok had told him that it was vintage, that it would suit him and that he had thought of him when he had seen it, but it was a woman’s blouse.
If his father saw him wearing a woman’s blouse...

Yoongi reached out to stroke one of the billowing sleeves before deciding to slip it off the hanger. Fuck what his father would think, he wasn’t going to see him today. He hadn’t found out about him being at the bathhouse that night, and after that incident, wearing a blouse seemed like nothing at all. It was a sudden surge of bravado that made him pop the buttons open and slip his arms through the sleeves, but even that surge couldn’t seem to stop his fingers from shaking annoyingly as he buttoned it up and he shoved the ends of the blouse down inside of his jeans.

As soon as he had fastened the top button, a flash of his collar bones visible through the v-neckline, Yoongi reached up to run a hand through his slightly damp hair. No, no cap today, he felt no need to add any other accessory save for his Rolex. So he secured the watch around his wrist and then he collected his wallet and keys before leaving his mansion, deciding that driving today would be the best idea.

It was just as he was rolling down the hill on his way to Lower Pacific Heights that Yoongi found a sudden thought hitting him. He should go to Western Addition, to the newly renovated building that he had seen that morning, and he should check up on it. Maybe it sold food? If so, he could use it as an excuse to enter and check the place out, crossing two things off his list of things to do for the day at the same time.

Rather than go to Mickey’s Joint for an incredibly delayed breakfast, Yoongi found himself continuing down south until he was passing through the other neighbourhood. After some momentary cruising across several blocks, he located the building that he and Hoseok had noticed that morning, the exterior most certainly in much better condition now. The paint job on the sign had not only been finished, it had also extended to the window frames to add more character to the building. Now it was unmistakably an Asian joint to anyone passing on the street, for there was black and red paint present along with English letters and Korean characters on the sign above the window.

‘Taste of Pusan!’, the sign declared.

Yoongi pulled his car up to the curb before killing the engine and pulling the keys out of the ignition. As he climbed out the vehicle, he wondered if the family that he knew were working here had had much business over the last week or so. Perhaps they had, considering the location, but he had a strong feeling that they were receiving business for something other than the possible dishes on offer inside of the building.

As he pushed the door open, his ears detected the sound of a bell ringing overhead. Yoongi glanced
up at the bell before dropping his gaze to look over the interior.

There were several low tables placed around the store at which plush red floor cushions were placed. The walls were painted a deep red, the flooring was dark brown and, because of the small windows across the room, the interior was rather dim instead of bright and welcoming like most cafés and small restaurants.

It was a gambling front, Yoongi quickly figured out. It was disguised as a food joint, or maybe just a tea house from what he could discern, but in the backroom there would be a staircase leading down to a card club in the basement. He had never actually been inside of an illegal card club before, unless he included playing cards with Hoseok and his father as a teenager in their family mansion, but right now he was standing inside a gambling front for the very first time in his life.

Though card clubs were legal in the state, unlike the lottery which was a major focus of the upcoming quadrennial elections, there were still strict laws regulating the trade. Any club required legal registration because of the Gaming Regulation Act, which all of the Moon Tiger Mob clubs most certainly didn’t have. Legal clubs resulted in far less profit and participants only paid a fee to play rather than become members and place actual bets. Which was why card clubs were so profitable for the mob currently. Who wanted to play cards without a wager of some kind? It removed all of the fun.

After a moment of study, Yoongi decided to cross the room to get to one of the tables close to the counter. As he did so, he detected movement coming from the backroom. Rather than a solid door, there was just a piece of thick fabric hanging in place to separate the two areas, and he saw it twitching as someone pushed it aside and stepped into the main-room. Presumably the sound of the bell might just have drawn their attention, and it was only then that he realised that there was music playing at a low volume from somewhere in the front: the current piece a rather haunting ballad being sung by a woman with a rather high-pitched and nasally voice.

Yoongi saw that it was a woman rather than the man or possible boy that he had seen before. She wasn’t particularly tall, but she was certainly taller than his own mother, who lived in heels to try and combat this fact. She was wearing a yellow blouse, with short scalloped sleeves and a rounded collar, with a high-waisted and presumably long soft blue skirt: both items made of cotton. Her hair was pulled up into a neat bun so that it was hard to determine the exact length, but he thought that it might be down past her shoulders at least. Upon first glance, Yoongi saw a woman that didn’t look old at all, for her face was covered in just a hint of makeup and showed no noticeable wrinkles, her features rather large in a strangely mousy way. He assumed that she might be in her mid or late thirties, if she was the mother of the boy that he had seen that day. But she could be in her forties for all he knew and she had just aged incredibly well.

“Good day,” she said in heavily accented English, likely using ‘day’ because ‘morning’ was a little difficult for her to pronounce. “Welcome to taste of the Busan.”
The woman gave him her most widest smile, and yet it didn’t seem forced, rather entirely genuine. It was a nice smile, made her look even younger.

As Yoongi moved to sit down at the table, she ducked under the counter to draw closer to him, revealing that she was indeed wearing a long skirt and a pair of flat pumps without even a slight heel.

“Are you here for the business? Husband do the business but-”

“It’s ‘k,” Yoongi spoke over her, as he settled down onto the cushion and he broke out his Korean to make things a hell of a lot easier for them both. “We can talk like this, yeah? Morning to you too, ma’am.”

“Ah, I don’t know it in English, I keep forgetting,” she admitted with a rather sheepish smile, also switching to Korean so that her words flowed out smoothly. “My husband is much better, and my son too, but I keep forgetting certain words. This is my first time in America, and now I’m living here too. Time moves so slow sometimes that when things happen, it all seems so fast.”

The woman came to a stop just beside the table, and Yoongi glanced up at her before shifting his gaze across the front again. He was trying to locate a menu of some kind, because he saw none present on any of the tables. He was in the act of looking back at her when he saw that she was staring at him rather openly, her expression blank and her eyes rounded.

“Mmm?”

“You…excuse me, but you look familiar,” she said, before deeply furrowing her brow. It took her a few seconds to speak again and when she did so, her voice escaped her in a rather squeaky gasp. “Oh, Prince Min!”

Before he could even open his mouth, the woman moved to drop down onto her knees, leaning forward in a position that was somewhat reminiscent to kowtowing as she folded her hands on the floor and she placed her brow against them. Yoongi had never met the woman before, and yet she knew who he was. This was enough to leave him looking down at her head dumbly for a moment, trying to figure how she could possibly know his identity.

“Prince Min, ah, the man that gave us the documents, that gave us this establishment, he gave us a photograph of you and your father and some other men,” she explained rapidly, as she stayed on her
knees and low to the floor. “He told us to learn your faces and names because you’re very important, but I never thought that such important men would come to this establishment.”

“He did, huh?” Yoongi said, watching the woman sitting upright again. She had her hands clasped against her chest, however, and she was lightly tugging at the yellow cotton almost as if she was nervous. He longed to get rid of the awkward sensation hanging in the air between them and so he asked the only question that came to mind. “D’you, uh, d’you have a menu here?”

The front fell silent for a moment, and Yoongi heard no noises coming from the backroom save for the faint music. This signalled that they were currently alone in the building. Perhaps sensing the suddenness of her actions, the woman let out a laugh that sounded a little embarrassed, and then she reached up to tuck a stray lock of hair behind her ear.

“You’re the first man to enter here and ask for a menu, Prince Min,” she explained. “Most are here for business, but they do purchase lots of alcohol. Allow me to get you a menu.”

The still nameless woman shifted to get to her feet, moving over to the counter so that she could reach over and collect something from the other side. She returned with a sheet of laminated and glossy paper on which there were a series of orders and prices listed, but no photographs or illustrations. It was a good effort, considering the fact that they were new to the country and had quite obviously never ran a restaurant before, but it was going to need some work to make it seem like a legitimate business.

But that was easy enough, for Yoongi was certain that with a little monetary donation here and there, and some assistance from certain brothers, this place could be thriving with customers coming for both of the services provided. Maybe, when he had met the rest of the family, he might just considered kick-starting the joint.

“Prince Min, you eat for free here,” the woman declared, her hands still clasped against her chest as she spoke to him. “It’s an honour for you to come here this morning, truly. Please, order whatever you want and I’ll prepare it for you right away.”

“I don’t eat for free anywhere,” he retorted, as he glanced at the menu again. “That’s cheap, ma’am, I ain’t cheap. You work hard to provide services, it’s only right I pay for those services; mmm?”

Yoongi could see that he had confused the poor woman somewhat with this statement. Yet after a moment, she seemed to accept his reply as she dropped her head respectfully and allowed him to study the menu properly.
There was a small section at the top explaining that every main course came with three standard side dishes, and that more choices would be charged for 25¢. Water was free with orders, and the only current drink choices were several kinds of alcohol and various herbal teas.

Yoongi eyed the menu before ordering milmyeon with chicken, deciding that the cold noodle soup would be preferable to anything hot and spicy on the menu. The woman accepted the menu from him and she told him that she would prepare the best milmyeon that he had ever had. Considering the fact that Yoongi had never had milmyeon, just naengmyeon, he supposed that she could easily do such a thing. So he just turned his attention to the windows across the room, watching the lazy traffic and occasional pedestrian passing the joint until she brought over a small teapot filled with ginseng tea for him.

Yoongi nursed a single glass of tea and he watched the minutes passing by on his Rolex, and by the time it was just passing 11am, she appeared again with a large tray and she proceeded to start placing various bowls and plates down for him.

The milmyeon was in a deep stoneware bowl, the soup broth fragrant and filled with shredded chicken, vegetables, egg halves and wheat noodles. Though he hadn’t ordered extra side dishes, Yoongi counted six not including the rice: the small bowls filled with baek-kimchi, four kinds of namul - bean sprouts, mung beans, radish and mushroom mixed with various light sauces, and a serving of marinated chicken that hadn’t been put in the soup. He decided to add these onto the bill regardless, adding $1 just for the sake of it.

“Enjoy your meal, Prince Min,” she said with another respectful drop of her head.

“Thanks,” Yoongi replied, as he watched her ducking under the counter to go back into the backroom and allow him to eat undisturbed.

Considering the fact that he hadn’t eaten breakfast today, Yoongi was pretty certain that he could eat all of the meal save for the mushrooms, because he wasn’t fond of them. He retrieved the chopsticks in his right hand, the spoon in his left, and he proceeded to start eating with much enthusiasm.

For a front that was nothing more than a card club, Yoongi had to admit that the woman was a great cook, which seemed somewhat insulting to her talents. He went between the side dishes and mouthfuls of the noodle soup, trying his very hardest to not dribble the thick stock all over the table and his blouse. He had just swallowed the last mouthful of marinated chicken when he detected movement out of the corner of his eye, and so he turned his head to track it.
Yoongi saw a quick flash of a man passing the window, and a moment later, the door was being pushed open hard. The overhead bell rang loudly, catching the attention of the woman. She exited the backroom rather quickly just as the man stepped through the doorway, carrying a deep and large box with surprising ease.

“Where is he? He didn’t run off on you again; did he?” the woman asked, as the door shut behind him.

“He keeps stopping to take photographs with that camera of his, Mijoo. He keeps putting the box down and snap snap snap, ah!” her husband sighed heavily, as he moved to place the massive box down on the counter. “That boy’s acting like tomorrow the city will change into a whole new world, so, he needs to take photographs, just in case!”

“Jungil,” Mijoo said in a quiet voice.

Yoongi knew that she wasn’t meaning for him to overhear, that she likely thought that her voice was lost under the music or that he was too busy eating to hear, but he had. Yoongi liked to hear everything that was going on around him whenever possible, and he struggled to keep his ears shut respectfully a lot of the time. So he just stared at the remaining floating noodles in the deep bowl and he pretended to have not heard.

Yet, it seemed that the woman didn’t need to continue, for he suddenly became aware of the fact that the man was looking at him. Just like his wife, Jungil seemed to figure out who he was, and when Yoongi glanced up again, he saw that the man moving to get close to his table.

“Thank you for this opportunity for my family,” he said, as he also gave him a full and deep bow.

Jungil spoke better English than his wife for sure, his accent much less noticeable. But, just like his wife, he seemed to think that he was worthy of heartfelt thanks even when he had done nothing.

Yoongi almost felt bad being praised like some hero that had saved them, when he had done nothing at all and he didn’t even know their full names or who they even were. No, Moon Tiger Mob might just have ‘saved’ them by smuggling them across the Pacific Ocean, but he had had nothing to do with that. They should really be thanking the little brother that had probably gotten them smuggled into the country on a boat like cargo (if not actually listing them as that on said boat ride), rather than him.
“You asylum seekers or something?” Yoongi asked, before rapidly switching to Korean just in case he didn’t know the term. “You political dissidents? Commisses? Huh? You’re speaking like an educated man, and not the usual immigrants we house here. Most of ‘em can barely read and write, but you’re speaking pretty good English.”

“Back in Korea, I worked in government,” Jungil explained in a slow fashion, his words entirely clear even when his flow was a little stilted. “National Assembly, but not now. Not good time for work like that.”

“No, I heard it ain’t,” Yoongi remarked, as he studied the other man from across the table.

From what Yoongi had noticed, Jungil was several inches taller than Mijoo, with a wide frame that seemed at odds with the fact that he was a politician, hinting that he might just be an athletic man. He had a friendly-looking face, with thin but rounded eyes and a somewhat prominent nose. He looked to be a little older than his wife, and he was dressed like pretty much most men out of the streets right now: in a shirt and slacks. He gave off neat but pleasing vibes upon their first meeting, and Yoongi imagined that he would continue to give off those exact same vibes in future meetings, for that was the kind of man that he was.

“Our son is a student,” Jungil continued. “But not good time for students too.”

As Yoongi looked between them both, he realised that there was a politician sitting in front of him, an educated and seemingly morally upright man, and yet here he was helping run an illegal card club for the sake of political asylum and a green card for his family. It made him tighten his hold around the chopsticks as he dropped his gaze to look down at the table again.

“Well, whatever you’re running from over there, it ain’t gonna get you here,” Yoongi said in English, wondering if the older man even understood what he had just said. “You’re free here, so to speak.”

“Yes, America is very free,” Jungil agreed with a warm smile. “Beautiful country full of friendly people. America is a good place to call home.”

Yoongi wondered if he would say that if some racist asshole hurled abuse at him or graffiti’d it onto the building walls. He wondered if he would think that this country was so beautiful, friendly, and free, when he saw clips on the news of people dying in the streets and in hospitals because of an illness that the government didn’t seem to care about at all; if he saw protest marches, candlelight vigils and so much more. Probably not, but he guessed that anything would look like a good home to a man potentially fleeing a political purge.
“But, Prince Min, I disturb your meal,” Jungil said before shifting to get to his feet. “I am sorry.”

“Nah, it’s fine,” Yoongi said, as he limply waved his wrist to brush his words away. “I, uh, I actually enjoyed talking to you. Don’t apologise, yeah?”

Jungil and Mijoo both disappeared into the backroom with the large box a moment later, leaving him alone with the remains of his food. He stared at the empty counter for a few seconds, before turning his full attention back to the various bowls and plates.

Yoongi was in the act of sipping at the cold broth and finishing the remains of the rice when the door swung open again. It seemed that the elusive son had appeared at last, also carrying a massive cardboard box just like his father.

“Hey, kid,” Yoongi said, as he lifted his free hand and he lightly twitched his fingers at him respectfully.

At his call, the boy actually turned to look at him, placing the box down on the counter as he did so.

Yoongi saw that he was dressed in a similar fashion to what he had been wearing the first time that he had lain eyes upon him that morning on the street. Quite a lot of denim, which likely signalled was what popular in Korea right now. The boy was wearing loose denim dungarees over a thin pullover, black and white striped, and he had rolled the sleeves up to combat the current warmth, and on his feet there were a pair of no-brand white sneakers.

“Me? You talk to me?” the boy said, lifting a hand to place it on his chest.

Yoongi detected a hint of accent in his voice, something that made certain vowels and consonants a little bit off, but otherwise he spoke pretty clearly, all things considered. The family might have only been in the city for a week or so, but he had clearly been learning from his father before they had immigrated, which was a very good idea. The boy had a pleasant tone in English, his voice a little deeper than he had been expecting, and he wondered what his voice would sound like in Korean too.

“Yeah, talking to you, kid,” Yoongi confirmed with a nod. “Come here, I wanna talk to you. Y’know English, yeah? Speak English?”
“I speak only little,” the kid replied, lifting one of his hands to gesture by holding his thumb and forefinger apart by a few inches as he crossed the store. “Little American, but learning more. Is good?”

“Yeah…yeah, you speak good,” Yoongi confirmed with a slight smile. He didn’t know why he had felt the urge to do so, but his lips had just curled up at the corners anyway. “Nice accent, you speak clearly.”

The boy just nodded at this, clearly not following what he had said at all but doing so to not seem rude. Now that he was standing closer to him, Yoongi was able to see his face, and so he looked up at him briefly to see a heavy mop of hair that was trapped between black and a deep rich brown in the current sunlight, large eyes, and a rather strong nose.

“It’s ‘k,” Yoongi said, switching to Korean without a second thought. “We can speak like this right now ‘til you get better; yeah?”

“Wow,” the kid breathed out in awe. “Your Korean’s really good for an American.”

“American Korean,” Yoongi corrected, as he looked back at the kid. “I was just curious, ‘cos your dad speaks pretty good English and I was wondering if you could too.”

“My daddy’s amazing at speaking American,” the boy said, with a hint of something in his tone that sounded pretty smug to his ears.

“Sit down with me for a sec. What’s your name, huh, kid?”

“Jeon Jungkook,” he replied, as he shifted to sit on the floor cushion. “What’s your name?”

“No, listen here, kid,” Yoongi said suddenly. “Here you ain’t Jeon Jungkook, yeah? Here you’re ‘Jungkook Jeon’, otherwise people are gonna think Jeon or Jeonjung is your given name.”

“Huh?”
The look of confusion on the kid’s face was unbelievable, and Yoongi struggled to not laugh at it. His already massive eyes had grown to a rounded size so big that his irises were floating in a sea of white, and his mouth was pouted in a sweet little ‘o’ so that he could see a hint of buck teeth.

“Yeah, it’s given names first here, not clan names,” Yoongi explained slowly, hoping that he understood him because he was really trying to help him out. “How old are you, huh?”

“I’m almost nineteen, I was born in September, September 1st, and—”

“No, you ain’t eighteen going on nineteen here either, you’re seventeen going on eighteen. You were born in ‘66, right?”

The kid nodded vigorously at the question, his hair bouncing from the movement and catching more of the sunlight to show him that the shade was most certainly a deep chocolate rather than pitch-black like his own, Hoseok, and Jimin’s hair.

“Then you’re almost eighteen,” Yoongi reiterated, hearing the boy making a string of noises under his breath as he shifted on the floor cushion.

“Everything here’s so weird!” Jungkook exclaimed. “Everyone’s so weird, ah…”

“Yeah, that’s what people here’ll say about you too, kid,” he replied with his own smirk, unable to help himself.

This kid, Jungkook, he was really something. Yoongi didn’t know what it was about him, but he liked him a lot. It was probably because he gave off such a younger brother vibe, sweet and naïve in a way that Yoongi himself had never been and had never seen before. Hoseok had never been sweet and naïve when they had been younger, for even then he had been way too smart for his own good, highly inquisitive and spoilt for attention. Jungkook was none of those things on the surface, and so he guessed that that freshness had drawn him to him.

“So…introduce yourself,” Yoongi said, as he cocked his elbow up on the table to rest his chin in the palm of his hand. “Lemme see if you’re as good as your daddy; yeah?”

“Uh…” Jungkook shifted on the floor cushion, sticking his tongue out to wet his lips as he did so. “Huh…hello, I’m Jungkook Jeon and I’m seventeen years. Nice to meet you, man.”
Yoongi couldn’t help but snort under his breath at this, not laughing at the boy’s attempt or his accent, but rather how smoothly that the Americanised slang had just rolled off of his tongue. It seemed that Jungkook also found it funny, for he started laughing too, his nose scrunching up as he let out a quick burst of giggles.

“Is good?” Jungkook reiterated, raising his eyebrows as he did so and making them both laugh again. “Is so good.”

“You’re gonna fit in here no problem, kid,” Yoongi declared, as he reached over to give him a quick shoulder squeeze. “You’ll be speaking better American than your daddy in a month, I’ll bet.”

“What’s, uh, your name?” Jungkook asked him, glancing over the mostly empty dishes because his curiosity had finally gotten the better of him.

Yoongi had no need to tell him his name, or at least not his given name. That was something that people earned, like long-time business partners, or got lucky and pried it out of him like Jimin. But if he gave him his clan name, then Jungkook might put it all together and react just like his parents had; a scenario he was keen to avoid. He rather liked talking to the boy like this, found it highly refreshing, and the knowledge that he was first in line for inheritance of the Moon Tiger Mob empire might just ruin that lighthearted atmosphere between them both.

“…Yoongi,” he said, as he grabbed his cup of ginseng tea and he took a sip to wet his tongue. “I was born in ’61, I’m twenty-three here, not twenty-four.”

“You old,” Jungkook replied, before shooting him a rather mischievous smirk.

Oh, that little shit.

First, he had had Jimin acting haughty that night over dinner, cold and unflinching yet so very enticing in the end. The young mule had saved himself from a slap (but not a spank, he remembered, as he stuck his tongue out to wet his lips). Now, he had Jungkook acting like an actual child; calling him old and using informal slang when talking to him in both languages. Yet just like Jimin, who had melted his displeasure with his blunt honesty and burning gaze, Yoongi found that he didn’t want to slap the boy. Not even a joking slap to the side of the head or upper arm whilst he nagged something about respecting his elders. No, seeing Jungkook smirking at him like that actually made Yoongi want to smirk back at him even when he had no need to do so.
It was his stupid buck teeth probably, or that messy mop of hair in need of a cut as much as his own. Maybe his dungarees or something, or even all three things. Jungkook looked too sweet for his own good, and that innocent charm could work wicked magic on a lot of people.

“Uhuh, says the baby,” Yoongi stated in Korean, as he put the cup down and he grabbed his bowl of broth to drain it.

“Baby? Pft,” Jungkook snorted loudly, blowing a lock of hair back off his brow as he did so. “Rather be a baby than an old man, man.”

“Ah, I’ll pinch that nose of yours with these chopsticks,” he intoned, as he lifted them up and he tapped the wooden ends together hard.

Yoongi could have threatened to have had him killed, or even threatened to do so with his own hands on account of the fact that he had already murdered one man with them, but that joke seemed morbid even for him. Not for Hoseok though, his best friend would choke on his Pinot Grigio just hearing it.

Jungkook reached up to rub at said nose roughly before he wriggled on the floor cushion.

“Your accent, it’s hard to place with you being an American, but you kinda sound like you come from Daegu,” the boy said suddenly. He had likely been analysing his accent this entire time, trying to figure it out.

“My grandparents were from Daegu, I learnt Korean from ‘em mostly as a child,” Yoongi explained. “I ain’t ever been to Korea, so, I don’t have a fucking clue where your accent comes from.”

At his curse, he saw Jungkook’s eyes widening again for a moment, clearly taken by surprise by his harsh language. But the surprise was quickly replaced by a grin like usual.

“I’ll assume from the sign outside that it’s Busan though,” Yoongi added after a moment of thought, the boy making a noise in agreement. “Your daddy said he worked in the government, in Seoul. You been around a lot of the country, huh?”
“Not really, just Busan as a kid and Seoul when my daddy moved us there for work, but that was only for a few years. I met a guy from Daegu there though. You remind me of a friend when you say certain words,” he explained, his expression shifting to look a little nostalgic for a few seconds before the moment passed. “It’s a cool guy accent, all guys from Daegu act like they’re cool and tough; it’s pretty funny.”

“Your friend tough, huh?” Yoongi asked, as he shoved the plate of garlic, ginger and soy marinated mushrooms towards the boy and he offered him his chopsticks.

“Tough? Uh…”

“He got connections to us, to the mob?”

“Actually, yeah,” Jungkook said, as he accepted the chopsticks from him and he grabbed a chunk of the namul. “He does work for Moon Tiger Mob, he-” he shoved a chunk of mushroom into his mouth and he continued talking around it, “he’s got a tattoo and everything.”

“But is he tough, tough like me? Huh?” Yoongi asked jokingly, seeing the boy’s lips twitching upwards as he chewed the mouthful of food.

“I don’t think he’s tough,” Jungkook stated after a moment of thought, swallowing the namul and grabbing another chunk. “He’s smart, charismatic, good with people - not tough.”

“Course he ain’t tougher than me,” Yoongi retorted, moving to grab his spoon to finish off the last of the rice whilst Jungkook happily ate the mushroom namul and then decided to grab a leftover chunk of kimchi too. “I got a tattoo too, y’know?”

“Oh yeah? Where?” Jungkook asked curiously, as he placed the chopsticks aside.

“All over my back, I can’t show you right now without taking off my shirt,” he replied, that annoying voice at the back of his mind whispering blouse into the black void of his skull.

“Your whole back? Whoa, that’s actually tough,” the boy said, before letting out a surprised laugh.
“Told you I was tough,” Yoongi retorted, as he stuck his tongue out to chase after a grain of sticky rice stuck in the corner of his mouth.

Jungkook shoved his hands down inside of his loose dungarees suddenly, the very act catching him by surprise until he proceeded to pull a camera free from inside the layer of clothing. There was just a singular pocket on the front and he had shoved all of his film inside of it, which meant that he had needed to carry the camera like a kangaroo carrying her joey in her pouch. He put the device down and then he slipped the film free, allowing him to study the model.

Yoongi saw that it was a Polaroid Sun 660, a rather bulky and outdated model that had scratches here and there, but otherwise looked tough and strong. It was a black box of plastic with a slight protruding viewfinder coming out of the back, a wide slot at the bottom of the front, and a flash panel on the raised top section. Clearly, he had had it for the last three or so years, depending on when South Korea had finally gotten the product line, but it seemed to be working perfectly well.

“You taking shots like a tourist, huh?” Yoongi joked, watching the boy spreading out various pieces of film across the table. “You got a fave shot?”

“Yeah, I saw this dog,” Jungkook declared, as he started shuffling through the photographs quickly. “I’ve never seen a dog this big before! Never ever! Are all of the dogs here so big? Our dogs seem so small, like puppies and- wait, I found it!”

The boy grabbed one of the pieces of film and he proceeded to turn it around to show him.

Yoongi saw that the dog in question was a massive dog indeed, for it was an Old English Sheepdog, with a shaggy coat of white and grey. The angle of the shot seemed to hint that Jungkook had been hunkered down to take it, and he had probably received quite a few slobbering licks to the hands should he have been brave enough to touch ‘the biggest dog’ that he had even seen.

Yoongi studied the photograph for a moment before sliding his gaze back to the boy’s face, seeing that he looked rather pleased of himself for taking the shot.

“Big dog,” Jungkook said in English, before laughing softly and placing the photograph down with the rest.

Yoongi looked at his face for a few seconds and then he glanced down at the random pile of shots, seeing nothing that stood out to him immediately save for one bright red flash of colour that he
recognised. He reached over to pick up the snapshot, seeing the way that Jungkook looked up sharply as he did so because he had caught him by surprise.

"Y’know this car, huh? Y’know the model?" Yoongi asked, as he stared at the Polaroid shot of his own car parked outside of the front.

It looked pretty good, he had to admit. Jungkook clearly had some experience with his camera for he knew how to get good angles and to adjust the settings on the device to make sure that he had good lighting. Even on the older *Sun 660* model, he took some nice shots, and Yoongi liked the one of his car a lot. When he looked up from the glossy photograph of the cherry red car, he could see that the boy was looking at him blankly.

"Uh, no, but it’s a cool-looking car," the boy replied. “I don’t know a lot about cars, there’s not that much variety over in Korea, so, it’s kind of boring. But, now I’m here in America, I might start learning about them all. It could be fun.”

"This’ a BMW M1, 1980, just a few hundred were produced as street cars and the original retail price was 115,000 dollars,” he explained, turning the shot around to show him it whilst he spoke. “So, that’s about 158,000 dollars right now, not including extra fees for finding one of these babies, which there’ll be. Lots of fees, trust me.”

"Whoa, you also know a lot about cars," Jungkook said, as he leaned over the table to get a better look at his own shot.

"Kid, you took this shot about three seconds ago, it’s parked on the street outside,” Yoongi remarked in disbelief, before quickly adding. “It’s my car, yeah?”

"That’s your car?" Jungkook reiterated, as he rolled his eyes up to look at him, complete shock painted all over his features. “No way! Holy shi-”

Before he could finish this curse, there was a noise from across the front and Jungkook’s mother emerged from the backroom again. The first thing that she noticed was the box on the counter and so she moved to go and collect it, and that was when she caught sight of her son sitting at his table; the table which was covered in empty dishes and Polaroids shots, over which Jungkook was currently sprawled with his behind sticking up in the air rather immaturity.

Mijoo stared at her son before glancing at him, and then she moved to hold a hand out and she
waved at the boy.

“Jungkookie, come help your father,” the woman said in a quiet voice. “He needs help, so, come along.”

“But, mama, I was just showing him something and-”

“Jungkookie,” Mijoo said in that same quiet voice. “This is Prince Min, not him. Don’t speak so informally.”

At this, Jungkook stopped in the act of quickly grabbing another snapshot off the table, presumably because he had wanted to show it to him before his mother dragged him into the backroom and had ruined the moment that they had been sharing.

Yoongi saw his fingers twitching so that it dropped to land on the surface again with a soft sound, his eyes widening and yet the rest of his expression completely slack and devoid of emotion. Clearly, the boy had never been shown any photographs of him, his father, or any other important men in the mob at all, for he had been completely clueless to his identity. This was a sign that his parents were also trying to keep him away from anything to do with Moon Tiger Mob.

Good, he liked this particular fact. It reminded him of Namjoon, who had told him that he had spent his childhood completely dumb to the fact his family had been working for the mob until he had been old enough to start dealing under them himself.

“Prince Min is a very patient and polite man, but I think that you might have shown him enough for the day; yes?” she continued.

“It’s fine,” Yoongi said suddenly, just as the boy started snatching the Polaroid shots up off the table. “Let the kid do what he wants, I don’t mind at all. It’s nice.”

Jungkook paused in the act of shoving a handful of the Polaroids into his dungarees pocket, torn between racing into the backroom to get away from him and staying to show him the rest and continue talking with him. He had even shifted to get up onto his knees, ready to escape any second from now. But because he had just told him that he was more than welcome to stay at his table and talk, the boy looked incredibly conflicted.
“I apologise if he has been in anyway disrespectful,” Mijoo said, as Jungkook slowly sat back down on the floor cushion. “I can assure you that we raised him very well and that Jungkookie is a well-mannered boy, Prince Min.”

“Disrespectful? He called me old,” Yoongi retorted, before widely smirking. “He’s a good kid, ma’am, you ain’t gotta apologise for honest mistakes.”

“I’m sorry, Prince Min,” Jungkook said in a soft voice. “I didn’t know, um, I-”

Yoongi shifted to get up off the floor cushion and get upright, reaching into his back pocket to pull his wallet free. The act of doing so made Jungkook stop talking, cut off by his sudden movement.

“Let’s go for a ride, yeah?” Yoongi remarked, as he opened his wallet to search for some bills to put down on the table. “You and me, you can get a good tour of the city without worrying ‘bout getting in trouble; which you easily could. Too goddamn curious, kid.”

Yoongi’s order hadn’t even reached $10 with a basic tip, and yet he placed three of the bills down onto the surface regardless of this fact, before shoving the wallet back into his jeans. He ran his tongue around his mouth as he dropped his gaze down to look at Jungkook, seeing that the boy was lingering beside the table. He was staring at his mother with those massive eyes of his, clearly seeking permission from her, but the woman looked uncertain.

It was only then that Yoongi realised why the offer seemed so shady to her.

The heir to a mob empire, one that specialised in drug and human trafficking and everything in between, wanted to take her son out on a ride? A ride where they could talk privately, one where he might just lure Jungkook into becoming a runner for the gang so that he could make some cash and look cool? Yes, Yoongi could totally see that the uncertainty on her face was because of this fact, because of the thought of her son turning into another dope boy on the street just waiting to get a bullet in the side or a pair of handcuffs snapped around his wrists because he had been groomed into it by an older man that had seemed friendly and trustworthy.

But Yoongi would never dream of such a thing, for not only did he not recruit little brothers personally, he also wouldn’t pull such a kid like Jungkook into the mob. The boy was just too good, too sweet, and his lack of English made him pretty useless for the trade anyway. Sweet boys could become hard boys over time, but not this one. Jungkook wasn’t going to become a smart dealer like Namjoon, or a stubborn and disaffected mule like Jimin, and he most certainly wasn’t going to become anything close to Hoseok or Seokjin either: a pimp and supplier that controlled the streets and held considerable power and wealth. No, Jungkook was simply going to remain the son of an
immigrant family working under the mob, and if he was lucky, they might just get a green card before the immigration police found them and deported them for being illegal aliens.

“Just a ride,” Yoongi reaffirmed, as he slowly looked between the two of them. “Ain’t got no need to worry ’bout me, ma’am, but if your boy’s racing ‘round the city on his own he might get in trouble. At least with me present, he ain’t gonna end up climbing into some creep’s car; yeah? Or finding some smartass cop on a corner tryna pull him for skipping class and scaring him to death.”

Jungkook turned to look at him, his expression showing him that he thought that this was condescending, but Yoongi was telling the truth. All that the kid needed to do was take a wrong turn and wander into a new area and he might just find guys with cars, booze, and cash asking him if he wanted to have some fun, and with his limited English, Jungkook might mistake their intentions. It wasn’t like it was back in Seoul here, Yoongi knew that much, and a bit of innocent naïvety could end horrifically for the boy.

“Please, mama?” Jungkook said in a quiet voice, turning his sweet charm up to eleven so smoothly that it was amazing to witness. “Prince Min has been teaching me some things, about America and American words and stuff, and he’s the first person to talk to me properly here. Prince Min could teach me so much so I don’t end up in trouble. I know you and daddy keep saying I’m gonna get in trouble because I keep running off and-”

“They’re right, kid,” Yoongi interjected, watching the boy nervously fretting with one of his Polaroid shots in his hands as he waited for a reply from the woman.

“…OK, but, Jungkookie: behave,” she instructed in a firm tone, as she finally collected the box from the counter.

This made the boy huff loudly and brought a smile to Yoongi’s face, finding the babying rather fitting considering the innocent act that he had just pulled.

Jungkook shoved the last of the snapshots down into his dungarees pocket and then he collected the cash that he had left on the table, ducking under the counter to place it into the till without even asking about his order or offering him any change.

Yoongi moved to hold the door open for him, and a moment later, Jungkook was stepping out onto the curb first; his trusty camera in hand. Just a few feet away from the building, his car was parked against the curb, gleaming in the bright sunlight all cherry red and blinding chrome and leather. The boy took a few steps forward and then he stopped, twisting to look back at him because it had clearly only just hit him that they were going to be riding in the vehicle.
Yoongi pulled the keys free, and he dangled them from his fingers before hitting the button on the fob to unlock the vehicle.

“Holy shit,” Jungkook finally finished, as he moved to go around the front of the car and he popped the passenger-seat door open. “It looks so cool: the colour, the leather, so cool! How do you say that in American? Cool?”

“There’s many words for it,” Yoongi said, as he climbed into the vehicle beside him and he slammed his own door shut. “Cool, awesome, sweet, hot; the list goes on, kid.”

“Cool,” Jungkook repeated, before grinning widely and stroking the leather seating he was sitting on. “So cool.”

“Seatbelt on, yeah?” Yoongi said, fixing his own one in place and noting that the boy had yet to pull his over his body. “If your mother finds out I didn’t make you wear one, I’ll get my ass beat.”

Jungkook snorted loudly at this, as he moved to grab the seatbelt and he pulled it over his body to snap it in place and secure him in his seat.

Yoongi slipped the keys into the ignition and he started the engine with a sharp twist, pulling away from the curb a moment later and rolling into the lane.

“So, kid, where you been racing off to these last few days, huh?” he asked, as he let the car roll down the street to get to the end of the block. “You got any clue, or you just been running that fast you ain’t even noticed?”

“Well,” Jungkook said, shoving his hand back inside of his dungarees to pull something free - something that happened to be a map of the city. “I’ve been to a few places, but, um, I can’t really say the names.”

Jungkook unfolded the map, the thin paper crinkling and rustling until he had it spread across his thighs.

Yoongi wondered what else he was hiding inside the item of clothing before deciding that he really
didn’t want to know. A quick glance down at the map showed him that he had been marking it with
stickers to keep track of things, the largest and most eye-catching sticker a yellow star, on which he
had scribbled the characters for ‘home’, which was plastered onto The Bayview area. The other
stickers varied from that of hearts and little suns and rainbows, but Yoongi was clueless as to what
they possibly signalled. Perhaps he was marking off the places that he had been to?

“I’ve been around here a lot, um, West…un Addi…tee-”

“Western Addition,” Yoongi said for him, the words flowing off his tongue slowly.

“Uhuh, there’s not much here, so, I’ve walked into other districts like…this one, and this one, and-”

Yoongi spared quick glances between the road and the map, seeing that the boy was pointing at:
Pacific Heights, Marina, Nob Hill and Chinatown. He had been to mostly residential areas around
the north-east of the city, with the exception of Chinatown, which had some more commercial and
tourist friendly views for him to take photographs of. Had he went far enough north in Marina to get
a great view of the bay and ocean yet, or had he been unable to do so?

“There’s so many places I haven’t seen yet,” Jungkook continued, before reaching up to start
scratching at his mop of hair. “Ah, this place is so big, seriously. I’m pretty sure that I’ve seen the
whole of Seoul and that I could see most of it in a day or two with a car, but this place? It looks so
big, I think it could take me months to go everywhere.”

“You live down here, huh?” Yoongi asked, as he reached over to poke his finger at the star on The
Bayview, and the boy made a noise in agreement. “You checked that area out too?”

“No, not really.”

Yoongi was glad to hear that he hadn’t been hanging around The Bayview that much, for the area
wasn’t the safest place for a kid like him to be checking out.

From the fact that it was poverty-stricken and currently riddled with crime and an influx of gang
activity because of cuts to the welfare system that so many poor families had been relying on had
forced them into desperate measures; to the fact that it was just plain dangerous for him to be
wandering the streets with a pricey-looking camera like that and next to no English. Clearly, the boy
was smart enough to know to not take risks, but the fact that his parents probably dragged his ass all
of the way up to Western Addition every single morning to keep an eye on him probably helped too.
“‘K, well, I got some places to take you today, places much more interesting than those
neighbourhoods,” Yoongi said, as he turned his attention back to the road in front of them. “Places
with history, culture, all of that shit, yeah? Maybe some more big dogs too; who knows?”

This made Jungkook look up from the map, giving him a wide grin that showed him that he was
rather excited about the ride.

The grin was pretty infectious too, for Yoongi found himself also feeling a little kindle of excitement
even though this was nothing new to him. He had been all over this city since childhood, had been to
every neighbourhood at least once, and he travelled through most of his jurisdiction daily, but that
didn’t seem to quell the good feeling that was going through him today.

Considering the fact that Jungkook had already seen the commercial sights of Chinatown, and had
maybe gotten far enough north to see the bay and ocean up in Marina, he had covered quite a few of
the more appealing sights in the north-east area of the city. But Yoongi knew several places that he
had yet to visit further east and more central that would most certainly result in his camera button
being hit over and over.

So Yoongi headed over across Western Addition to enter the Civic Centre, a place of great
importance and sights that he couldn’t believe the boy hadn’t stumbled across yet. He had to kill the
car in a parking lot a short distance from the main attractions and plazas, but Jungkook just simply
shoved the map back inside of his dungarees and he followed him out of the lot and across the streets
of the new neighbourhood without a single word of complaint.

“Where are we?” Jungkook asked, dropping the ‘Prince Min’ thing surprisingly quickly now that his
mother wasn’t present to complain about it.

“This’ the Civic Centre,” Yoongi explained, as he gestured around the street that they were walking
along. “This’ where all the important things are: City Hall, the Supreme Court of California, yadda
yadda. There’s also the War Memorial Opera House, the district courts and FBI shit here too.
Basically, there’s a lot of history here, and everything that affects the city and its people happens in
this neighbourhood.”

“There’s not a lot of people though,” Jungkook remarked, looking up and down the street slowly as
they walked. “It’s so important, but there’s no one here…”

“Yeah, the fact there’s a lot of homeless ‘round the area most days puts a lot of people off coming
here, but everyone should come here at least once to look at the place,” he replied.

Jungkook finished looking around them and then he set his sights on the unmissable view of City Hall across the plaza, showing that he was keen to head straight there.

Yoongi realised that this little trip meant that he was going to have to haul his ass around the area too, but the knowledge wasn’t as disheartening as usual. Maybe, it was because Jungkook’s upbeat nature and enthusiasm had put a bit of a spring in his step? Whatever the case, he just carried on walking down the sidewalk, the boy right on his heel.

Jungkook looked like a proper tourist with that camera of his in hand, snapping shots of the various tall and impressive white federal buildings and statues that were placed across the plazas. It was pretty funny watching him from his position on a bench a few feet away, seeing the way that he took so much time between shots because he had limited film to work with and he didn’t want to waste a single piece. From there, the boy moved across the plaza, taking a couple more snapshots of the impressive architecture, before deciding that he had enough. So they headed back to the parking lot to travel across the city again. But it was clear that he was going to come back here with more film in the future, for Jungkook studied the photographs with a great interest as Yoongi pulled out of the lot and he started rolling the car down the streets.

As he turned his attention back to the road, Jungkook collected his map from his dungarees and he opened it up wide again, the paper rustling loudly as he retrieved something different from inside of his front pocket. Yoongi saw that it was the stickers, of course, a small sheet that was missing quite a few. After some deliberation, he selected one of the suns and then he asked him where on the map the area was.

Yoongi shifted to lean over and touch the map for him, seeing him adding the sticker a second later.

To get to the next area of interest, Yoongi had to go through Western Addition again, moving slightly south-west to enter another district.

Haight-Ashbury offered streets filled with clubs, fascinating houses and graffiti; a marked difference from that of the Civic Centre with its clean streets, flawless white buildings and statues. But this was an area with a lot of ongoing history, from the rise of the comedy clubs on the circuit to the recent past with hippies in the area. Now, it was a shade of that era thanks to even more cuts to the system rendering certain parts of it unpleasant and filled with addicts, but the sights had still remained even after the hippies had moved on: like The Red Victorian Hotel and independent theatre of the same name, and, of course, the Painted Ladies that lined quite a few of the streets too.
As Yoongi rolled past a row of Painted Ladies, he couldn’t help but recall the fact that Namjoon, and perhaps even Jimin, lived inside one of them. Should they live together as well as work together, that was. A lot of the houses were a myriad of colours: blues, greens and pinks with fascinating trims and glass windows that clashed greatly against the mansions and apartment complexes in Pacific Heights.

Jungkook seemed to greatly love the sight of them in comparison to the much more boring houses across the city. Rather than kill the car and get out with the boy, Yoongi decided to just pull up to the curb outside one particularly long stretch of houses, allowing him to climb out and take a photograph of the one or ones that had caught his eye on the block. He just waited in the driver-seat whilst he did so, his elbow on the window rest and his eyes glued to the sidewalk as he found his mind once again drifting and thinking about Jimin.

Jimin was a mule, which in a way made him a bit of a tourist. Did he do shit like this too: walking around taking photographs of sights in different countries that he went to, carrying maps covered in stickers or scribbles, and trying to learn random words in foreign tongues? Or did he not care for those kinds of things and preferred to just let his associates in each country do all of the work for him? The younger man seemed rather nonchalant about things, and so he thought that he might just not care at all and would prefer to just eat and sleep between the gruelling trips around the globe that he undertook.

When Jungkook returned to the car again a minute later, two photographs in hand that went right into his dungarees pocket, Yoongi once more pointed out the neighbourhood for him on the map. This time, a rainbow sticker was placed onto the neighbourhood, which might signal something or might mean nothing at all.

“Where to next?” Jungkook asked curiously, showing that he was incredibly eager to continue this journey.

“How many pieces of film you got left, huh?” Yoongi asked, as he watched the boy fastening his seatbelt in place just like he had told him to.

“Um, a few? Maybe five or a little more?”

“’K,” he said, as he pulled away the car away from the curb. “Then I know just the place to finish this road trip, kid.”

Though Yoongi hadn’t really been through The Castro before, mostly as some strange way of forcing himself to ignore the sights, sounds, and temptations that the streets offered, he knew that the area was a thriving place for people that wanted to really see the kind of city that San Francisco was.
There would be so many things for Jungkook to snap photographs of, and he might just learn a little bit about the culture whilst he was here.

Sure, he might not be the best teacher, but he was willing to give it a shot regardless. The kid didn’t need to know about the more seedier parts of the neighbourhood, like The Meat Rack and the bathhouses, for more palatable facts would suffice.

As they passed through The Castro, Yoongi noticed that Jungkook didn’t take his eyes off the views outside once, not even to look at his map or camera. From the countless AIDS kiosks and posters stuck to most walls and fences, to the sight of the gay folk out of the streets: men with moustaches and jeans and plaid shirts, guys in tiny skin-tight shorts and vests, the occasional drag queen outside entertaining tourists, or the women with oversized leather jackets, cigarettes and short and cropped or permed hair; Yoongi knew that such sights would never been seen in Seoul, not even the fashion. Did the boy have any clue about what this area was or was he completely clueless? After they passed another large cluster of kiosks, Jungkook finally decided to break the silence.

“What are all of those things for? The posters?”

“Right now, in America, there’s a virus,” Yoongi explained slowly, as he stopped at a set of lights. “A really bad virus that’s killing a lot of people all over the country. It’s pretty bad here in this city for a couple of reasons. It’s killing a lot of gay folk, men and women, and addicts too. But they’re not the only people dying, it’s killing everyone no matter what colour skin they got, how much money they got, what they like fucking, if they do heroin or don’t even drink: it don’t care ‘bout that shit.”

“How’s it killing people?” Jungkook asked with a quick glance back at him, his expression looking torn between a mixture of curiosity and maybe fright.

“That, uh, that ain’t entirely clear right now, but we know two things that definitely spreads it: unprotected sex and drugs.”

“Why are we only seeing these posters here? Why not in other parts of the city?”

“Well, the area we’re in right now’s got a lot of gay folk, like I said, and it’s hitting this community harder than most.”

“‘Gay’? You said that a moment ago too, but what’s that word mean: ‘gay’?”
Yoongi was painfully aware of the fact that he couldn’t seem to think of a Korean word to explain it to him, just the English word. Was there even such a word in the other language? The only other word to come to mind was right there on the tip of his tongue, telling him to just say it, but he almost didn’t want to.

“…Homos,” he finally said, trying to not flinch as he did.

Yoongi felt his eyelids doing so ever so slightly at the corners, but the boy was so distracted looking out of the window at the posters to even notice. It seemed that his weak defensive mechanism had been missed, but it usually wasn’t. No, whenever his father found the smug opportunity to drop the word ‘queer’ in passing around him just to make him squirm, or he just decided to be upfront and go straight for barbed words to get him to leave his company, Yoongi’s little twitches and audible gulps were always detected.

“Oh,” Jungkook breathed out. “I’ve heard it said before, usually it’s whispered though, like people don’t want to be heard saying it or something. But I still don’t know what it means because it’s not Korean.”

“Yeah, I’m suddenly figuring out there ain’t no fucking word for it in Korean,” Yoongi muttered, as he let go of the steering-wheel to reach up and rub at his eyes roughly. “It, uh, it means when a man loves another man; yeah? That’s what the word ‘gay’ means. Homo is a-a bad word, we don’t use that- I mean, people don’t use that unless they hate the men.”

“…What if a woman loves a woman?” Jungkook asked curiously. “What word is that?”

“Then a woman’s a lesbian.”

“What’s the bad word for that?”

“There’s more than one bad word, just like there’s more than one bad word for gay,” Yoongi explained, as he eyed the traffic lights. “But the usual bad word’s dyke.”

“What if someone…likes both?” Jungkook asked, before quickly adding. “Is that real? Can that happen?”
“Yeah, it’s called being bisexual, kid.”

“That’s a big word. Is there a bad word for that?”

“I, uh, I dunno. I ain’t heard a bad word yet, but they still got people hating ‘em too. I got a friend that’s bisexual.”

“I’ve never heard of any of these things, and I don’t think I know anyone that has either,” Jungkook admitted in a quiet voice. “In Korea, you don’t even see or hear people talking about sex. Not even between a man and a woman, you don’t see stuff like that on TV. It’s almost like it’s a bad thing. Is it?”

“Nah, nah it ain’t bad, kid,” he replied with a head shake. “Some people, some countries, they act like it is but it ain’t, it’s…it’s one of the most natural things in the world; yeah?”

Yoongi knew that he was paraphrasing Jimin right now, doing so completely without thought because it had seemed like the right thing to say to Jungkook.

“I saw a film on the TV here a few nights ago and they showed a naked woman,” the boy continued. “I haven’t seen a naked woman since I was like a little kid and my mother would take me to the public baths.”

“Welcome to America, kid,” Yoongi remarked, before snorting to himself.

“It just got me wondering about how much I don’t actually know, you know?” Jungkook said, as he turned to look back over at him. “No one ever told me that men can love men, women can love women, that people can like both. I was never told about diseases you can get from sex, or from drugs. I’ve never even seen a drug before. What does ‘unprotected sex’ even mean? I’m just really…”

“Confused?” he suggested.

“No, angry,” Jungkook corrected. “I was part of a protest movement fighting for rights for people, and I didn’t even know that people like this even existed. I wasn’t fighting for their rights. I…I don’t know. Is this gonna happen to me a lot? Am I gonna keep learning things?”
“Yeah, probably for a long time, but no one stops learning, kid. Ain’t nothing wrong with learning, not when it can save your life. I’ll be like…I’ll be your big brother,” Yoongi suggested, guiding his car around a corner at the end of the block. “I’ll teach you shit, important shit you need to know about this country to keep you safe.”

“Big…brother?”

“Yeah, don’t call me ‘prince’ or any of that shit; call me ‘big brother’ instead.”

“Big brother,” Jungkook repeated, before giving him a rather embarrassed smile. “Heh, my big brother.”

Yoongi saw the way that he turned his head to look out of the window, catching sight of the sudden pink blush that spread across his cheeks. It was the first hint of embarrassment that he had shown since they had started talking back in the front, and it was strangely sweet in a way.

“Y’know, for someone that’s just learnt something rather shocking like that…you don’t seem to care that much at all,” Yoongi said, as he started rolling through the lights again. “Most people start off caring a lot about gay folk, and not in a good way. They get scared or confused, disgusted or really angry, but not you.”

“Um, I guess I’ve never thought about it before,” Jungkook said with a soft shrug. “I’ve never thought about it or knew anyone like that, so, why would I feel any of those things towards those people? Before moving to America, I’d never seen a white person in real life before, or a black person, but now I see lots of white and black people, and other colours too, every single day. I guess some people might find that scary or confusing, but not me. I like it, I think it’s nice. I think that these other people are just like that too, so, I’m not scared or disgusted by them. They’re just different, is all.”

“Jungkook, I said this before, but I’ll say it again: you’re a good kid,” Yoongi said, reaching over to place a hand on his knee and giving it a soft pat.

“Like I said, back in Korea, I used to be part of a protest movement full of students against the government,” Jungkook replied. “I stood up for freedom and liberty, so, I think that that applies to everything and everyone.”
“Hey, uh, I got a question for you,” Yoongi asked, as he moved his hand back to the steering-wheel. “You getting any right now?”

“Getting any what?” the boy asked curiously, his brow slightly furrowed.

“Pussy - you getting any of that?”

“Oh…” Jungkook said in a quiet voice. “Um, no. No, I’m not getting anything like that I mean, I’ve only been here a few days, big brother. How fast can you get stuff like that here?”

The boy let out a sheepish laugh at his own question, clearly finding it funny, but the funniest part about it was that he had no idea at all.

“Real fast if y’know where to look,” Yoongi retorted, before giving him a sidelong glance. “But, listen, kid. Don’t get any, don’t mess ’round. Not until this crisis’ over and it’s safe, yeah?”

“Sure,” Jungkook agreed, turning his head to look back out of the window. “Not like that’s going to be a problem for me when I can’t speak American…”

Just like with the two other neighbourhoods, Yoongi waited in the car for the boy to take his final shots, trying to remain patient as he did so. It took him a few minutes before Jungkook returned to the car, having snapped shots of simple streets packed with pedestrians, little cafés and things like rainbow flags dangling from the sides of tall buildings. So Yoongi pulled the vehicle away from the curb, and he was in the act of driving along the street when his ears detected a sound, a very familiar sound that was unmistakably that of a camera shutter closing and opening.

Jungkook had just pointed the camera at him and had taken a photograph of him.

Yoongi turned his head to stare at the boy, seeing a wide grin on his face as he waited for the piece of film to develop. He was so dumbstruck by the fact that he had just done that all he could do was stare at him for a moment before turning back to the road.

Jungkook didn’t even show him the shot, for he just shoved it inside of his dungarees pocket and he proceeded to add another sticker to his map. The Castro had earned itself a heart sticker rather than a rainbow or a sun, a rather large heart at that.
“So, those photos; what’re you taking ‘em for, huh?” Yoongi asked, as he reached over to shift gears without looking away from the road in front of him. ‘Gonna put ‘em in an album? Send ‘em back to someone in Seoul?’”

“Uhuh, I’m taking photos of San Francisco to send to my friend, so that he can see America,” Jungkook explained. “And he’s gonna send some back of Korea, so I can see home again. I’m all out of film though, but I’ve got enough shots to send in a couple of letters at least. I’ll have to find a way of buying some more…”

Yoongi thought this remark over as he drove down several streets, until the sight of a camera store suddenly appeared nestled between two plain-looking buildings. Before he could help himself, he found himself pulling over to the curb and stopping the car, gesturing at the boy to follow him. Jungkook seemed confused by this, but he did what he asked, placing the map and camera down on the dashboard of the car before climbing out and slamming the door shut.

Yoongi was already standing by the store window, glancing inside of the building to see a display of various Polaroid cameras and other makes and models, along with massive camcorders, lenses, travel cases and more. The boy wandered over to join him beside the window, still giving off a sense of confusion by this sudden event.

“Oh, my friend’s got that camera,” Jungkook said, as he placed his hands against the glass and he cupped them around his eyes to try and lessen the glare on the glass. “It’s way better than mine, I’ve used it a few times and it’s so much clearer and lightweight.”

The model in question that he was talking about happened to be the Polaroid SLR 680, a much more streamlined version of the one that he had been using all day. It seemed to be a better camera too, judging from the fact that it was a new model and not several years old like his Polaroid Sun 660.

Yoongi studied the camera and then he turned his head to look at the boy, an idea forming in his mind.

Before he could help himself, he moved to enter the store and he went right over to the counter to ask the woman behind it how much the SLR 680 in the window cost. $265 was the affixed price tag, a rather significant tag, but not high enough to put Yoongi off in the slightest.

“I’ll take it, and throw some film in with it,” he said, as he pulled his wallet free and he proceeded to slip his credit card free.
Jungkook hadn’t moved to enter the store after him, and when he stepped outside again a moment later, he found that the boy was still standing on the sidewalk beside the car. Perhaps he had done so because he thought that it was respectful to wait for him to complete his errand, or maybe it was because his lack of English had made him uncomfortable with the idea of entering the store. Whatever the case, Yoongi just unlocked the car and he proceeded to climb inside, shifting to place the store bag on his lap whilst the boy joined him in the passenger-seat.

“Kid, I got something for you right here,” he said, as he pulled the camera box out of the bag and he showed him the Polaroid SLR 680.

The sight of the camera box made Jungkook’s eyes widen, a breathy noise of surprise escaping his mouth as he stared at it. It was like seeing a kid’s reaction to a shiny toy on Christmas Day, except infinitely better.

“For…for me?” he repeated dumbly.

“Yeah, but you gotta promise me something though,” Yoongi said, as he pulled the box away from him and he held it against his chest almost protectively. “You gotta seriously promise me something, kid.”

“OK,” Jungkook said, dragging his eyes away from the box to look at him. “What do you want me to promise?”

“What we were talking about earlier, the virus, ‘member that? Now, listen carefully, you gotta do what I say. No drugs, ‘specially not stuff you inject, that’s rule number one.”

“No problem,” Jungkook replied without a hint of hesitation. “Cigarettes make my head feel funny. I’m not gonna use those kind of drugs, big brother.”

“Rule number two: no messing ‘round, alright, that’s just as serious as the drugs. You see a cute thing, wanna date ‘em, sure, but no sex. Not until this crisis ends. It’s too risky, kid, this city’s been hit so bad. I know I sound like some creep, yeah, like some preacher telling you to save yourself or whatever, but just don’t do it.”

“Have you been…doing it?”
“Not the way you’re thinking, no, not for a few years,” he replied honestly.

Yoongi wasn’t lying, for he had been practising intensely safe sexual practices for the best part of five years now. But he was much older and much more in control, therefore he thought it was wise to tell the boy to avoid it entirely instead of relying on non-penetrative methods or protection.

Jungkook was seventeen going on eighteen, and the second that he caught sight and scent of wet pussy, or had a guy spring a boner right in front of his eyes, he was going to have the same level of self-control as a dog being thrown a chunk of steak. Therefore, a little white lie wasn’t that bad, right? Especially not since the boy had admitted to him earlier that he didn’t even know what ‘unprotected sex’ meant.

“Promise me: no drugs and no fucking, and this’ all yours,” he said, holding the box out to him. “You ain’t gotta pay a single cent for it, you just gotta be a good kid for your mama and daddy.”

Yoongi expected that there might be some hesitation from the boy, all things considered. Sure, he didn’t give a shit about the drugs, but sex? That was something pretty big, especially for a boy of his age. Yet, Jungkook thought it over for roughly three seconds before moving to take the camera box from his hands eagerly.

“I promise, big brother,” Jungkook said with a happy smile. “And a Jeon clan man never breaks his promises.”

“Oh, and one more thing,” Yoongi said, as he moved to fasten his seatbelt in place again. “You see any more big dogs, you gotta snap a shot and show it to me. Promise?”

Judging from the way that Jungkook’s smile widened into a grin, they had reached a perfect agreement.

25th August, 1984, 12:27pm: The Mayfield Hotel, Gangseo-gu, Seoul, South Korea
When the car finally pulled up in front of the hotel, Jimin could have cried in relief. Not only was his body aching from the usual horrors of smuggling: his stomach and thighs in absolute agony because it felt like he had ran a marathon and had torn every single muscle in his lower half. But just like last time, he had another raging headache from the heat and he was longing for shade of some kind. Sure, the car wasn’t the greatest form of comfort, for it would roll over all of the horrible bumps in the roads all of the way across the capital, but if it meant that he was no longer standing on his aching legs then he didn’t care at all.

The chocolate brown Hyundai *Pony II Sedan* pulled up to the curb, the usual goon popping the door open for him so that he could duck and climb inside of the vehicle. As he did so, Jimin’s nose detected a variety of scents: cologne, sweat, and leather, and his face felt a rather pleasing waft of cool air-conditioning hitting him. He slowly slid along the backseat and he settled in the far window seat, quickly dragging the seatbelt in place over his body.

Taehyung shifted to look back at him, just like he did every single time that he climbed into the car.

“*Hey, bro,*” he said with that characteristically wide grin of his. “*I got new word, yeah?*”

“Oh yeah, what is it?” Jimin asked back in English, as Ahn pulled the door shut.

“Howdy,” Taehyung declared, before heartily laughing. “*Howdy, bro.*”

“Tae, where did you learn that?” Jimin asked, quickly switching back to Korean because he was far too curious about this sudden development to attempt a conversation in English.

“A G.I. said it,” his partner explained, as the car started rolling forward down the street. “I heard him say it at a bar I was at, it’s one of the only ones that lets foreigners inside, so, they gotta keep it underground. But he was there, and he said it meant ‘hello’. You Yankees got so many words for hello, it’s so crazy.”

“Yeah, but we’ve got just as many words for goodbye too,” he retorted, settling back in the seat with a low groan. “And probably even more for ‘fuck off’.”

This made Taehyung laugh heartily as he moved back in his seat, thankfully saving him the effort of more conversation.
Jimin always loved talking to the younger man about things, but today was different. No, his head was aching just as badly as it had yesterday, when he had been afflicted with that horrendous hangover, and everything just seemed to make it worse. He ended up closing his eyes to try and combat the bright sunlight and the glare from the chrome of the other cars going past the window, hoping to appease his throbbing brain for a little while at least.

Right now, back in San Francisco, it was about 7:30pm, give or take several minutes. It would be getting dark now, the skies that beautiful mixture of purple and orange and red that he loved the most. Who needed sunrises of pink and lilac, or bright sunny days of vivid blue, when the sights of the sunsets over San Francisco were so divine? Because it was that late, it meant that Namjoon was likely still asleep, but he would be awaken soon to hit the streets and bar circuits of Haight-Ashbury just like every night. He might actually be awake, having already showered, and if so, then he would likely be lounging around the place in his underpants refusing to clean up. He might just be stoned and eating one of many strange concoctions that he might have experimented with in the kitchen whilst he had been on that stupid plane.

But as Jimin floated around the soothing blackness behind his eyelids, he found himself wondering about what a guy like Yoongi would be doing at this current hour too.

If he wasn’t muling, then Jimin would either be snoring away in bed for as long as he could to catch up on all of his missed hours flying across the globe, or he might just have decided to hang around a bar or bathhouse for a couple of hours before retiring to bed in the late night. It meant that he wouldn’t be working like Namjoon would be, but did Yoongi do that?

Did the older man work non-stop from dawn until dusk like his frail frame and lightly bruised eye sockets seemed to hint: the lighting in the restaurant and bar discreetly hiding what the bathhouse had been unable to disguise for very long? Or was he not as busy as his position seemed to hint? Sure, he was the heir to an empire, but that didn’t mean that he didn’t have other men doing most of his work whilst he got to relax for great portions of the day.

But judging from what he had discerned from the other man over the duration of that night, Yoongi was not one to sit back and relax when there was work to be done. No, he definitely seemed to be the type to work from dusk to dawn without sleep, the mere thought too much for him to possibly imagine.

Jimin had slept for most of the flight and yet, here he was, falling asleep again in the backseat of the car.

Okay, so now that he had figured out that Yoongi would be working away…what exactly would he
be doing? Now, that was something that Jimin struggled to figure out, for all that he could think about was the fact that he had said that he was going to have Chow murdered for him. All that he could imagine was that Yoongi’s work probably involved a lot of phone calls and maybe faxes, and presumably less footwork than his.

But there was one thing that Jimin’s sleepy mind found itself focusing upon for some reason.

Had Yoongi even thought about him once since the night of the dinner?

The rather obvious answer seemed to be: yes, of course he had. But that wasn’t necessarily a good thing, after all, Yoongi could have thought of him briefly and found himself never wanting to do so again. The older man was still so caught up in that sickening spiral of self-hatred that he might find all memories of the night that they had shared disgusting, and he might try to find a way to compartmentalise it away so that he never had to think about it ever again.

Jimin was rather surprised by how the thought made him feel so…uncomfortable, that it made him hope otherwise.

There was always the incredible chance that Yoongi had thought about him again and it had been for a good reason, rather than a bad one. Maybe, he had helped him feel a little bit less alienated in that huge city, had shown him some friendliness that he had desperately needed, and so Yoongi actually thought of him fondly? It seemed like a pipe-dream, but considering how bad he felt right now, it was nice to think of that possibility. It was nice to think of the chances that Jimin might just have found a man that he had an interest in, a man that might actually reciprocate his feelings.

Nice, and a little weird.

Jimin wasn’t sure if he ended up napping on the ride to the apartment block in Apgujeong-dong, or whether he just ended up passing out in the backseat. But what he did know was that it was only when Taehyung snapped his fingers in front of his nose did he come back to reality. Jimin took a sharp intake of breath and he twisted to look over at him, staring at him rather dumbly because he was standing beside him and not seated in the passenger-seat.

Why was he standing there?

It took Jimin a few seconds before he realised that the car wasn’t even moving right now, and probably hadn’t been for quite some time. Yes, he had just blacked out in the backseat completely
unknowingly, and he could see something that looked like concern on his partner’s face.

“Jiminie, hey, you OK?” Taehyung asked, as he cocked his head to study him more intently.

As Jimin stared at him blankly, he watched a lock of his dark hair slipping forward over his hair scarf, obscuring the ‘liberty’ message on the front. He longed to lift his hand and stroke it back in place for him, but the act of doing so seemed far too difficult currently.

“Um, yeah,” Jimin mumbled after a few seconds of intense concentration. “Yeah, I’m OK, brother. I just feel a little weird, that’s all. Probably the heat, it’s so hot here.”

“You ain’t lookin’ so good,” Taehyung stated, as he reached over to touch his brow; almost as if he had read his mind. “C’mon, let’s get that shit outta you and get you back to my place.”

“Please,” Jimin almost groaned, letting the younger man grab hold of his upper arm and help him get out of the backseat because he probably would have struggled to do so on his own.

The walk up the flight of stairs to get inside of the apartment room was hell, for Jimin’s wobbling legs didn’t seem to want to work with him. He had to rely on both Taehyung and the stair rail to get to the room, feeling rather weak and pathetic the entire time. It should have taken him thirty seconds tops to enter the other room, but today it took well over a minute. Considering the fact that he had a job to do, one that was constantly measured in ticking seconds, causing any kind of delay was never a good idea.

Eventually, Yoo was unlocking the door so that they could enter the room, and so Jimin dumped his holdall bag on the floor and he went right to the table. He slammed his thighs into the edge rather hard, but the impact was strangely sobering in a way. He pulled at his shirt buttons roughly for a moment, struggling to work them free before he finally got it right and he was able to shrug the black silken shirt off and dump it down onto the table. He dropped his hands down to the front of his trousers, hastily unbuttoning and unzipping them, and then he wrenched them down to his ankles before twisting to stretch across the table for Taehyung.

“What’s the deal, huh?” he asked, as he turned his head to look at Ahn.

“Same as last time: 32,564,000 won,” the man replied, which was exactly what Jimin had been hoping to hear.
Just like always, Taehyung hunkered down behind him, the latex gloves on his hands and his fingers lubed up to let him slid two of them inside and locate the ends of the parcel. He snagged hold of it, tugging on it so that it started moving deep inside of him.

Jimin felt a weak groan escaping him at the sudden sensation of it moving and stretching his entrance around its width. But after a moment, the slick parcel was free and being dumped onto the table beside him.

Jimin shifted to sit on the table, both him and Taehyung tugging at the strips of tape crisscrossing over his thighs to peel them free and let him remove the two baggies.

Whilst they did so, Ahn set up the scales to check the weight of the cocaine, just so they could hurry up and complete the transaction.

As soon as the first two parcels were free, they removed the ones hanging under his armpits, the tape tearing free and leaving deep red marks behind on his skin. Jimin winced as Taehyung tore the strips free without hesitation, doing so quickly to get them free rather than slowly to ensure that it hurt less. The five parcels of cocaine were stacked onto the table beside his shirt, and as soon as he was free off tape, Jimin bent down to pull his underwear and trousers back up.

Taehyung started stabbing the condom parcels with his flick knife and spilling the powder into the scales to check that it was exactly a kilogram just like the deal specified. It was as Jimin was buttoning up his shirt again, the ends tucked down inside of his trousers, that the last parcel was emptied into the scale bowl.

“It’s…a kilo,” Taehyung announced just like always, like it would ever be anything other than that amount. “Ahn, call it in, I’ll pack the shit up.”

“Sure thing.”

Jimin fastened his trousers up and then he moved to sit down on the edge of the table, watching Taehyung transferring the contents of the bowl into more baggies for the other men. He did so quickly, having had plenty of experience, and across the room Ahn proceeded to follow the several steps needed to contact their supplier back in San Francisco. Jimin reached up to brush his hair back off his brow, feeling that it was starting to get clumped with sweat, and not just from the heat.

When Taehyung was done, barely anything more than a tiny remainder of dust stuck on the sides of
the bowl, the large baggie and equipment went inside of the usual briefcase, which he then snapped shut.

“All done?” Taehyung asked, just as Ahn dropped the receiver back in the dusty cradle. When the man confirmed that it was, his friend moved to grab his holdall bag for him, and then he cocked his head in the direction of the door. “C’mon, let’s blow this place.”

“Can we head back to your place?” Jimin asked, as he left the room and headed for the stairs. He prayed that his legs didn’t end up spilling him down to the very bottom of the flight.

“Sure thing, Jiminie,” Taehyung replied, reaching over to snag hold of his arm without him even needing to ask for the added support. “I can make food.”

“You can?” Jimin asked in wonder, taken back by this because Taehyung had always taken him to restaurants whilst in the country.

“Uhuh, ain’t as good as my momma; but who is?” he asked, before laughing at his own remark.

For some reason, this brought a smile to his face as his partner helped him out of the block and back onto the street.

Just like he had requested, rather than go to one of several restaurants in the area for lunch, Taehyung hailed a cab and they went straight to his bungalow instead. The taxi was cramped and stunk of tobacco, considering the fact that the old man driving it was still puffing away on a cigarette whilst driving. But the journey took just a few minutes, and Jimin was thankful for the pungent scent and second-hand smoke.

Upon entering the house, Cheonsa greeted them like always, pausing in the act of chewing on a toy to trot over and get hugs and ear scratches.

“Who’s a good girl, huh?” Taehyung asked her, dropping to his knees to grab her face in both of his hands and almost aggressively ruffle at her furry neck. The dog’s tongue lolled out, pink and wet, to show how much that she loved it. “It’s you, it’s you.”

Jimin retrieved his holdall bag from where his friend had dropped it, unzipping it and rifling through to find a clean tee-shirt and underwear to change into along with his baggie of toiletries. His skin was
covered in sticky tape residue, sweat and old lube, and he needed to freshen up right now. So he went into the small bathroom to do so, washing up hastily and even brushing his teeth whilst standing under the stream for convenience.

After getting dressed, he went back into the main room, finding that Taehyung was still sitting by the door, in the act of wrenching on a chew toy and playing with his dog.

“I think I’m gonna nap,” Jimin said, rubbing at his heavy eyelids roughly. “Just a little nap.”

“You should eat first, Jiminnie,” Taehyung pointed out, as he carried on teasing Cheonsa; the toy squeaking loudly.

“No, just a nap, just a little nap and then I’ll be good,” Jimin replied around his yawn, crossing the room to enter the bedroom and heading straight for the bed.

Taehyung’s bed was so soft, fragrant with cologne and shampoo and no lingering scent of marijuana like Namjoon’s bed. Lying down in it, pulling the thin summer covers right over his body and burrowing down against the pillows, Jimin told himself that he would just nap for an hour or two and nothing more than that. Just a quick refresher to rest his aching body was all. Yet, when his head hit the pillow and he found utter blackness beckoning, he was powerless to resist it.

It was 4pm by the time that woke up again, and he still feeling a little sluggish, but far better than he had earlier. Jimin tossed the bed covers aside and he got to his feet, wandering out of the bedroom to find that Taehyung was lying on the sofa with his dog, the small television across the room switched on and playing a film of some kind. He couldn’t see what exactly it was, but he could hear rather over-dramatic female voices that hinted that it was likely a soap opera of some kind.

Jimin shuffled over to where he was and then he reached down to ruffle at his hair roughly.

Taehyung shifted to roll his head back and look up at him, that student protest scarf absent from his head and his too-long hair still pulled up into a slight ponytail on the crown of his head. He gave him a grin and then he shifted to sit upright, disturbing his dog so that she snuffled loudly. Jimin glanced over at the television screen, and so Taehyung hit the remote to turn it off and plunge the bungalow into silence.

“You feelin’ good?” Taehyung asked, as he dumped the remote down on the cushion and he started stretching.
“Yeah, much better, brother,” Jimin admitted honestly. He really did feel so much better now, now that his nausea had passed and his muscles had gotten some relaxation. “What about you, huh?”

“Awesome,” Taehyung replied, patting at Cheonsa’s back to get her to jump down off the sofa so that he could get upright. “I made food earlier, but you were asleep, so, I saved some. Just lemme heat up the kalguksu, got some kimbap too.”

“Alright,” Jimin said with a wide grin, as he moved over to the makeshift dining-area across the bungalow. “Kimbap, my fast food favourite. Who needs Burger King when there’s kimbap around?”

The dining-area consisted of a small low table and two large floor cushions, on account of the fact that Taehyung didn’t seem to need a large one with more room and cushions. It was placed by one of the windows to cast light over the table, and there were bug nets over the windows to keep any pests from flying in and disturbing the meal. But the nets couldn’t keep a certain pest away, of course, that pest being Cheonsa. No, the dog trotted over to him for attention now that Taehyung was no longer present to lavish her with strokes, hugs, and kisses.

“I need Burger King, bro!” Taehyung called from the kitchen, the softest sound of the stove hissing to let him know that he was heating up the noodle soup. “I need one right now!”

“One day, maybe one day,” Jimin called back, as Cheonsa rather rudely climbed onto his lap and she proceeded to settle down comfortably. “Are you really gonna use me as a cushion, huh?” he asked, reaching down to start stroking her. “Just gonna lie all over me?”

The dog made a noise in what sounded like agreement, her short but thick tail wiggling and slapping against his stomach as she received the affection that she so desperately wanted. She was far too big to be a lap dog even when she was just a medium-sized dog, but clearly she had been spoilt by his friend. That was of no surprise to him, Taehyung clearly loved animals, and he had probably fucked up the hierarchy system to let her think that she was on top.

“Guard dog, my ass,” Jimin muttered to himself with a soft smile.

After a couple of minutes in the kitchen, Taehyung stepped back into the main area, carrying a deep and steaming bowl in one hand and a large plate in the other, a bottle of something that looked like soda in the crook of his elbow. When he proceeded to place the items down, Jimin found out that it was Pepsi, for it seemed that it was sold here. He even grabbed the bottle to check, eyeing it to see a manufacturing mark and something to do with Lotte. Then he placed the bottle down and he turned
his full attention back to the bowl of kalguksu in front of him.

“Time to find out just how good you can cook,” Jimin joked, as he accepted the chopsticks and lifted the bowl to sniff at the broth.

Jimin ate the soup as quickly as he could without burning his poor tongue, sipping at the thick broth and shovelling the noodles and chunks of egg and vegetables into his mouth. It turned out that Taehyung really could cook good, for it seemed that everyone but him could.

What next, Yoongi too?

For some reason, the thought of the older man cooking was strangely amusing, made him almost snort as he sipped at the soup. No, Jimin was pretty certain that he could probably cook better than him because Yoongi had probably had maids making food for him his entire life. That was hardly competition, but so long as he was better than someone, it was good enough for him.

As soon as he was done with the soup, Jimin placed the bowl down. Cheonsa’s nose went straight to it to sniff at it curiously, the dog still lying across his lap contently.

Taehyung had made so much kimbap that it was clear that he had been leaving it until now for them to share, for there was a large plate covered in what must have been six cut up rolls of random ingredients. Jimin could see the usual tuna, mayonnaise and cucumber rolls that he had sampled many times here, but he could see many more kinds that he had never eaten before: mixed vegetables, stuffed with kimchi, slices of what looked like crab meat mixed with chilli, one that seemed to have cheese too.

Jimin was in the act of studying them when Taehyung shifted to get to his feet and he went back into the kitchen, emerging a minute later with a pack of beer, a green bottle of soju and a glass in hand. His partner dropped back down onto the cushion with a grunt, getting comfortable and then pulling a bottle free from the pack.

“No soju for you, not after last time,” Taehyung remarked, as he offered him a bottle of beer instead, the caps already popped free from the whole pack in the kitchen. “I think we both wanna avoid that happenin’ again, yeah?”

“Sure thing,” Jimin agreed with a smirk.
Yes, if his memory served correct, then Jimin could recall drinking far too much cheap soju at that restaurant and coming back to this house in a state the last time that they had drank together. He had stumbled around Taehyung’s bungalow like a newbie drinker because he had been so weak from lack of food and liquids over the horribly long plane ride. Though he had rested and just eaten, it was still probably a better idea to just accept the beer instead and enjoy that, for it could be nice. Sure, his experience with most Asian brand beers had been pretty bad so far, but he might just find a good one one day if he kept trying.

Jimin accepted the bottle from him and he eyed it for a moment. The bottle had an appealing shape to it, light brown glass that showed what looked like a decent dark stout inside if the label was to be believed: for it loudly declared ‘stout’ in black English letters on the silver and gold label. He lifted it to sniff at the contents and then took a deep swig, savouring it on his tongue for a moment.

HITE Black Beer Stout was most certainly unique tasting on his tongue because it most certainly wasn’t stout, that much was certain. No, it tasted more like a dark lager to him and he wondered why all of the beers that he had drank in Korea and Hong Kong seemed to have misleading names.

When Taehyung poured his bottle into his glass, he saw a deep golden liquid with a head of foam rather than almost black, which just proved his tongue correct, and the other man grabbed the bottle of soju to dump a shot or two into it as a mix.

“Anythin’ happen in America, huh?” Taehyung asked him, as he lifted his glass of somaek and he took a deep swig just like him.

“What, like political shit or-”

“No, I meant for you, bro,” Taehyung clarified with a hard sniff, sticking his tongue out to wet his lips. “Y’know, like anythin’ happen to you whilst you were back there?”

“Oh,” Jimin said in a soft voice, stopping in the act of collecting his first chunk of kimbap.

Taehyung had just asked him a personal question, a question about what was going on in his life that wasn’t simply related to the gang.

Had they ever asked each other about such things? Jimin had only been muling for around a year, but he had known Taehyung for considerably less time than that, for they only ever spent several days a month together. Therefore, most conversations between them tended to focus on the current
events going on with them, rather than the past. The fact that Taehyung wanted to talk to him like this was highly pleasing, however, and he just knew that he had to take him up on the offer.

“You wanna talk like that, huh?” Jimin remarked, as he grabbed a slice of tuna, mayonnaise and cucumber roll and gave him a grin. “You know what we call that in America? Shooting the shit.”

“Shoo…tin’ duh shee-shit?” Taehyung repeated, before snorting. “The fuck does that mean, Jiminie?”

“Shooting the shit,” he repeated in Korean, making the younger man almost choke on a mouthful of somaek when he started laughing. “Oh, some crazy shit happened actually,” he explained, as he placed his beer down and he reached over to thump him on his back hard. “You wouldn’t believe it.”

“Hit me,” Taehyung said, roughly wiping at his chin to wipe a dribble of beer free. “I’ll believe anythin’ these days.”

Jimin decided to eat his kimbap slice first, too hungry to ignore the gaping hole that was still panging under his ribs. It gave him enough time to think his words over carefully and to also let Taehyung finish his first drink so that he wouldn’t choke on the somaek again. His partner waited for him patiently, grabbing his own crab and sweet chilli slice to shove it into his mouth, whilst Cheonsa settled down on his lap again and she decided to nap for the time being.

“That phone call, the one that day when we were in Kowloon City,” Jimin started explaining slowly. “It was Namo, Namjoon, he’s my partner back home. He was telling me that we had an important matter to fix when I got back. You know how I used to run, yeah, like, I’d move the drugs around the streets for Namo by getting them to sellers and trading for cash.”

Taehyung made a noise around his mouthful of food to show him that he was following him. He didn’t even know if they had such things here, but his partner was intelligent enough to understand regardless.

“Well, when I got back home, I had to do that again for a few days,” he continued.

“Was it a bad deal? Someone burn your guys back home whilst you were with me?”

“Yeah, that’s exactly what happened,” Jimin said with a nod, grabbing another chunk of kimbap.
“Some dealer, some higher ranked brother, he burnt the gang by trying to steal, like, a 40,000 dollar key of coke.”

“Holy shit,” Taehyung said, before whistling out of the corner of his mouth loudly.

“Got his ass put in the ground,” he continued quickly, wanting to hurry up so that he could resume eating. “The key was recovered though, and that’s what me and Namo were running for a couple of days. But wait until you hear this, this is the best part.”

“I thought a guy gettin’ his ass murdered was the best part,” his partner remarked.

“We were running on behalf of Prince Min himself,” Jimin said with a rather smug smile. “He bought us dinner as a thank-you for making him so much profit.”

“You’re right, I ain’t believin’ that,” Taehyung joked, as he took another sip of beer and he allowed Jimin to quickly eat his next chunk of kimbap. “Prince Min? Wow, you’ve been doin’ some crazy shit, Jiminie.”

Jimin hadn’t even told him about the other crazy shit, like how he had went drinking with him and had ended up in a bathhouse for the night. Like how Yoongi and his father clearly didn’t get along, like how the mob heir liked massages and being called ‘baby boy’. No, he didn’t think that Taehyung really needed to know about all of that, so he just gave him another smug grin as he swallowed more of the beer.

Taehyung grabbed another bottle of beer and he poured the contents into his glass, clearly wanting to get drunk rather than eat. Good, that meant that he could eat most of the serving of kimbap instead.

“What about you, huh? What have you been up to in my absence? Causing more trouble, Tae?”

“No, for once, I ain’t been causin’ trouble ‘cos there ain’t been any protests. There’s finally a student rally happenin’, I’m actually gonna be there tomorrow for the mornin’,” Taehyung explained, as he dumped another soju shot into his glass of beer and he lifted it up. “I mean, you stay in bed if you wanna and sleep.”

“A rally?” Jimin repeated, slowly rolling his wrist to make the contents of his bottle slosh against the sides. “I’ve never been to one of those before, well, not here anyway.”
“You been to one back in America?”

“I’ve been to a good few, marches mostly rather than rallies,” Jimin explained, seeing the younger man eyeing him curiously. “Human rights shit, stuff like that. The occasional protest against the government too, but mostly human rights shit. Sleep? I’m almost tempted to come and see you in action, brother.”

“My main man ain’t gonna be there,” Taehyung stated, before sighing wearily and knocking back the glass and draining the somaek in several deep swallows. He dropped his head and he sniffed hard, once more moving to fill the glass up with beer and a liberal splash of soju. “He moved outta the country with his parents, back when we were in Hong Kong.”

“Oh yeah? That sucks,” Jimin remarked, as he reached across the table to give his shoulder a sympathetic squeeze. It was hard doing so with the dog on his lap, but he just about managed to do so. Taehyung finished making the drink and then he reached over to grab a chunk of kimbap from the plate. “What’d he do at the protests, huh?”

“He used to write the speeches, y’know, protest chants to get the students united and let ‘em voice their anger without riotin’ and shit,” Taehyung explained around his mouthful of food. “His father used to be in the National Assembly, if you can believe that? But then The Butcher fuckin’ dissolved it and he lost his job, so, for the last couple of years they’ve been strugglin’. Guess they finally got sick of this place and ran off ‘fore they ended up gettin’ purged like every other politician that speaks the truth and calls him a fuckin’ pig.”

Jimin couldn’t help but wonder how much of this was the truth, and how much was the usual exaggerated hearsay and conspiracies that always revolved around governments. He must have heard a million theories himself growing up, but this was different. He had not grown up under a literal military dictatorship like Taehyung and his friend had; hadn’t been sheltered as heavily as they had by the lack of freedom of speech and the press. Truthfully speaking, such a thing as political purges with violence really could have happened and he was never going to know the real truth.

“So, where’d he run off to?” Jimin asked, grabbing another chunk of kimbap to shove it into his mouth greedily. The crab and chilli one wasn’t actually that bad, which was a surprise.

“America!” Taehyung declared enthusiastically. “Cali…pornia? Poh? How’d you say that?”

“California,” Jimin said, the word rolling off his tongue smoothly as he did so.
Taehyung narrowed his eyes and he observed his lips keenly, trying to copy his tongue and mouth movements with his own.

“I’m from Cali, brother. You know where he’s calling home now, huh? Is it San Francisco?”

“San Pancisco!” the younger man exclaimed with that same tipsy enthusiasm, grabbing another chunk of kimbap from the plate.

“San Francisco,” Jimin corrected for him with a smile. “Tae, I’m from there, that’s my hometown; no joke.”

“Seriously, Jiminie?” Taehyung asked in shock, unable to keep his expression neutral.

“Seriously,” he reiterated with a nod. “That’s literally where Moon Tiger Mob have all of their power and sway in the country, and it’s where a lot of immigrants go. So, I’m not surprised that your friend did so too, because his family can get a green card working for the gang like Namo’s parents did.”

“Oh yeah? What’s it like there, huh?”

“Hot,” Jimin replied without a moment’s hesitation. “It’s hot, sunny, it’s like paradise on earth, Tae. He should love it there, and if his parents got there with assistance from the mob, he should be fine.”

“I hope he does love it,” Taehyung said, before taking another sip of beer. “He promised to send photos here of the place as soon as he could, I’m gonna send some back too, but I’ve gotta wait for his letter first to find out where the fuck he’s living.”

“Give it a week or so, that letter will come soon enough,” Jimin said reassuringly, as he carried on eating the kimbap. Forget beer, he really wanted more of that crab and sweet chilli roll. “So, you’ve lost your speech writer? You gonna look for a new one, or start writing them yourself?”

“Nah, I ain’t good at the speech writin’, but I can give ‘em good,” Taehyung explained, as Jimin placed his empty bottle down and he grabbed another one. “Writin’ is too hard, you’ve gotta be careful what you say. Say somethin’ too inflammatory and you might cause trouble, so, you’ve gotta
think hard. I get carried away.”

“You should hear some of the shit we say at protests over in America,” Jimin said with a head shake, quickly swallowing his mouthful of kimbap.

“Like what? What kinda shit d’you say, huh?” Taehyung asked curiously.

“Uh, there’s this old one from the Vietnam War that’s really famous and it went: “hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids you kill today?”,” Jimin replied, before quickly explaining in Korean. “It was a protest against the president and the war, and it was asking him how many kids he had killed for the day.”

This made Taehyung’s eyes widen comically so, unable to keep the shock off his face.

“Yeah, we really don’t give a shit.”

“So, uh, you gonna go to the rally tomorrow?”

“Yeah, I think I so,” Jimin said with a nod, as he took another sip of beer. “I mean, so long as it’s not at like 6am, I’ll tag along, it could be fun.”

“D’you ever give speeches at those marches you went to?”

“Speeches? No, usually everyone follows just one person or a small group of people with a megaphone and they guide the movement across the city and…” Jimin paused for a moment to think this question over. “Tae, you don’t want me to…to say something at that rally, do you?”

“Uh-”

“I’m not good at that kinda stuff,” he spoke over him, putting the bottle down and dropping his hand to start stroking at the dog’s head. “You don’t want me to, trust me.”

“But, Jiminie,” Taehyung said, as he shifted on the floor cushion to look at him and he gave him his
most pitiful expression.

And it worked, for Jimin found it suddenly a lot more interesting to look at Cheonsa’s fluffy white head.

“You’re from America, bro, d’you know what that means? Half of these students ain’t seen an American before, ‘cept for on TV. I know there’s a lotsa anti-American shit in the air right now, but listen - I think you could totally amaze ‘em.”

“But I suck at things like that, Tae,” Jimin said in a quiet voice. “I failed so many presentations in high school, I couldn’t give presentations for shit. I freeze up and get confused, I say stupid things, you don’t want me doing that.”

“You don’t even need to give a speech, yeah?” his partner said, as he put his somaek down and he reached up to wipe at the back of his mouth. “Just say a few things, let ‘em know that there’s some hope, that they’re fightin’ for a cause that could really come true. Please, Jiminie?”

Jemin carried on stroking the dog for a moment longer, tangling her fluffy fur between his fingers and watching her pointed ears flickering around hard. He knew that if he showed up at the rally tomorrow that Taehyung would find a way of getting him to speak, whether it be a few words or an actual speech, and so he had two choices. He could decide to sleep in tomorrow and just not go to the rally even when he wanted to watch it, just to avoid this scenario. Or, he could go to the rally and say a few things just for the sake of it, to please the younger man.

After all, Taehyung did so much for him already even if it was all related to the job. He went around the world with him, he let him stay in his home and fed him just like he had a moment ago, and so all that he needed to do was do this simple task in return. Besides, there probably wouldn’t even be that many students present tomorrow, so it was nothing.

“OK, fine,” Jimin said to break the silence, sighing the words out. “Fine, I’ll go tomorrow and say a couple of things for you but-”

“Alright, Jiminie!” Taehyung whooped excitedly, his lips split in the widest grin that he had ever seen on his face.

“But don’t expect a speech!” Jimin finished with his own smile. “Just a couple of words, that’s all.”
“Trust me, Jiminie,” Taehyung said, as he grabbed his somaek again and he moved to lean back on his wrist. “That’s what I said the first time I went to a rally, but when that microphone was placed in my hands, I changed my mind real fuckin’ quick.”

26th August, 1984, 9:23am: Seoul City Hall, Jung-gu, Seoul, South Korea

The sight out of the front window at the end of the block happened to be that of Seoul City Hall, a building that Jimin most certainly hadn’t expected to be so important just looking at it.

It looked more like a library to his eyes than a city hall, the massive block of light tan stone covered in four floors worth of windows with a peaked chunk of roof on top that gave it some character. He saw several flags blowing in the slight breeze from their distance, but he couldn’t possibly discern what three flags that they were. The taxi that they were sitting in had stopped at a set of traffic lights, the entire road packed with vehicles just like always, and this meant that they would probably be waiting for several minutes before the taxi started rolling forward again.

Sadly, Jimin was used to the terrible traffic jams that happened all over the capital, for it had yet to find a way to combat the sudden influx of vehicles inside of the city. Soon enough, it hopefully would, when the rest of the districts started getting urbanised better and changed from dirt paths to tarmac and apartments, just like Gangnam-gu and Jung-gu and the other lucky areas in the capital that had been modernised.

During the ride, which had already stretched close to thirty minutes, Jimin had been silent. He had looked out of the front and side windows, had fiddled with Taehyung’s Polaroid camera - which was loaded with film in preparation for the rally because he had asked him to take a few photographs. But he had not said a single word. He had been waiting for Taehyung to say something first to break the silence, like a thank-you for coming with him today perhaps, or to maybe try and educate him on what to expect at the rally because he had never been to one in the country before. Yet, his friend had held his tongue too. He knew that he was going to have to break it first, and so he shifted on the seat and he cleared his throat.

“Anything important that I should keep in mind at this rally, huh?”
“There’s really only one thing - don’t say my name durin’ the rally,” Taehyung said, as he twisted to look at him. “Seriously, don’t say it.”

“Why not?” Jimin asked, wondering what that even meant.

He wasn’t supposed to say his name? As in: because he might just be hiding it from the protesters so that no one knew that he was here, like the police or the local neighbourhood soldiers, perhaps? The thought was absurd and yet Jimin was pretty certain that that was what he had meant. Should he ask him to clarify? Would Taehyung even do so, or was it best to just keep his mouth shut and attend the rally instead?

Several minutes passed, and Jimin found himself caving from a mixture of confusion and curiosity whilst they were stuck in traffic. So he ended up blurting out the question again.

Taehyung moved to pull something free from his shirt pocket and he saw that it was his passport, which he then flipped open and he flashed at him.

It took him a moment of staring until Jimin figured out that the I.D. that Taehyung was showing him was fake.

Jimin had been travelling with him this entire time using forged documents and he had had no fucking clue. The knowledge was enough to make his jaw almost unhinge, his mouth dropping open wide as he stared at the photograph of Taehyung affixed to a series of falsified information: Jang Jeongmin, D.O.B: 17/04/1964. The I.D. was claiming them to be the same age, for him to be older in fact, and that was the last straw for him.

“Tae, what the fuck?” he hissed under his breath, hoping that the taxi driver wouldn’t overhear their conversation. “How long were you gonna hide that shit from me, huh?”

“As long as I needed to, that was the plan, but then I fucked up on day one and told you my real name when you asked…”

Taehyung smirked at this, but Jimin didn’t feel like smirking that much right now.

“I didn’t see the point in tellin’ you, Jiminie.”
“Why’d you even have that?” he asked in disbelief. “Why’d you need something like that, Tae? Seriously?”

“Shit, why’d you think I started workin’ for the mob, huh?” Taehyung said, as he shoved the passport back into his shirt pocket. “D’you know how safe it is workin’ for ‘em and receivin’ a fake identity, when I can’t go to class in case I get a bunch of police officers stormin’ the place to arrest me? That’s what they offered me, complete immunity so they can’t get me now. I made too much of a name for myself down in Daegu as a student protestor earlier last year, but they saved my ass and got me up here on this I.D., and here I am - still kickin’ and not rottin’ in jail like the rest of the guys and gals I was fightin’ for freedom with.”

“Holy shit,” Jimin breathed out, as he reached up to cover his gaping mouth. “I know you said that it was bad, but I didn’t…Tae, holy shit.”

“Yeah, I know,” his partner man said, shifting to sit back in his seat. “The other guys - Yoo and Ahn, they know I’m into this protestin’ shit, but they dunno the half of it. Only you do.”

“Why me? Why did you tell me your name, you stupid asshole,” Jimin muttered, as he reached over to lightly punch his friend on the upper arm. “We’d only just met and you blurted it out just like that.”

“Y’wanna know somethin’?” Taehyung asked, rubbing at his tender arm. “Somethin’ funny? I don’t even know why I did, I just did it.”

Jimin lifted his gaze from his hand to look up at his face, seeing that Taehyung was staring out of the front window with a rather wistful smile on his face. He could have pressed further, but he really felt no need to do so, rather he turned his attention back to the front window just in time to see that the lights had finally changed. It took a minute until they were rolling forward again, at a horribly slow speed. But luckily, Taehyung told the man to pull up on the next street and saved them the hell of travelling even further.

Whilst he paid the fare, Jimin popped the door open and he climbed out, lifting his gaze to study the building just a dozen or so feet away. His partner climbed out beside him and he slammed the door shut, the taxi pulling away from the curb and leaving them on the sidewalk seconds later.

Jimin had expected to see the students assembled in front of the city hall, but considering the fact that there was a massive stretch of main road in front of it, that was impossible. But he could see where
they were gathered when he turned his head to look over his shoulder. The place that they had
decided to make their stand happened to be a fountain directly facing the city hall, meaning that they
would be unmissable to all inside of the building. He could see a considerable amount of white and
red clothing from their distance, a rather shocking sea of the two colours that took him by surprise as
he turned to look across the road properly.

“Is there anything else that I should know about? Other than the fact that you’re Jang Jeongmin
now?”

Taehyung laughed at the question and then he shook his head, watching the packed road intently to
find the exact moment for them to race across it.

“What about what you want me to say, huh? What should I say to the students?”

“Trust me, you’ll know what to say when you get the megaphone,” Taehyung stated rather
cryptically, as he grabbed hold of his hand and he pulled him off the curb.

Jimin stumbled but managed to not trip, running across the wide road to get over to the fountain
whilst there was a momentary break in traffic. It didn’t stop the incoming cars down the road from
honking at them, however, but that was something that he was used to whenever he was on his
Stüssy board back home in San Francisco.

Great, he had no clue what was going on, what to say or do beyond taking photographs for some
reason.

This was going to be a great morning.

Taehyung pulled him onto the opposite curb and then towards the assembled mass of students that
were waiting for them. Surprisingly enough, there was very little noise going on right now, for he
had expected to hear quite a bit as they all chanted whatever the elected leader had readied for the
rally.

Jimin was to quickly find that the protest rallies in Korea were drastically different to those in
America, for there wasn’t a single placard in sight. There were no handmade placards with slogans
on, no banners being held by multiple people that had messages emblazoned on them, not even a
single flag on display. No, he saw just a single banner, and that was hanging across a guardrail
behind where the students were sitting. The only flag that was in place was one that was placed
beside a small soapbox on which Taehyung was clearly going to stand. Other than that, there was nothing else present in the area save for the students, whom he slowly ran his eyes over.

Unlike American protests, which took to the streets in the form of marches mostly save for the rare sit-in demonstrations, it seemed that protests happening in this country were exclusively sit-ins. Considering the presence of the military on the streets, it made sense that the students stayed seated and not risked pissing the soldiers off, and so they were all sitting in neat rows in front of them. The students had formed a circle with a small space in it, and the ring was packed with so many more bodies than he had expected to see. Nearly every single one of them had hair scarves on just like Taehyung, knotted around their brows and covered in words, and a few even had writing all over their shirts and tee-shirts.

Jimin glanced over the assembled heads to see what must have easily been a hundred people, and he felt a little eddy of discomfort in his stomach. He had expected there to be a small group of people, but this looked to be a considerable number. It was a lot more than he had been anticipating, and suddenly the idea of getting up and saying a few words to them all seemed like what it would be like to give a speech in front of every single kid in his old high school standing on the podium in the auditorium.

Jimin was in the act of trying to count the first row of one set of students when a woman came over and caught him by surprise, ruining his attempt. She was wearing a loose fitting pullover of soft pink on which she had scrawled ‘power to the students’ in thick black marker pen, with her medium-length hair pulled back into a high ponytail. She had a clipboard in the crook of one elbow and a megaphone device in her hands.

“Thank you so much for agreeing to come today,” she said to Taehyung, her tone hinting at some kind of reverence towards his friend. “I know that there’s been troubles, with your partner leaving the cause, but you came and we really need someone like you to keep up the spirit.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Taehyung brushed her words aside, as he gave the other students a quick glance. “How long’s it been goin’ on for now, huh?”

“The first students arrived at 6am yesterday and they’re still holding on,” the woman said, as she looked between them both. “We expect that we’ll need to switch soon, but so many are still going strong and they don’t want to switch yet.”

“They’ve been here since 6am yesterday?” Jimin asked in shock, turning to run his eyes back across the assembled crowd of students.
Maybe, his first guess of a hundred had been wrong. Maybe, it was actually close to two… or three.

“Yeah, these rallies last for as long as they can,” Taehyung explained. “The students, they all gather here and they stay until reinforcements arrive and let ‘em switch places. We’re aimin’ for this one to go on for a week, got plenty of reinforcements comin’ in over that time.”

“OK, but why so long?” Jimin asked, looking back at his partner. “Do you all just sit here for a few days and then go home and repeat it a few days later? What’s the point, I don’t get it?”

“Just listen,” Taehyung said with a quick smirk, as he accepted the megaphone from the woman and he moved to enter the circle.

“Are you new to the cause?” the unnamed woman asked him, and Jimin tightened his hold around the camera.

“Um no, I’m a friend, from America,” he blurted out, as he tried to avoid her gaze. “I’m here today to, um, watch…”

“From America?” she repeated, before making a soft noise. “Wow, America…”

Jimin decided to lift the camera and check the viewfinder, seeing that the lighting was decent and that he could get some good shots with a little adjustment. So he did so, looking between the device and over at Taehyung as he moved to stand up on the soapbox. The megaphone was in two parts, the large red speaker device which was connected to a wire in one hand and a control pack in the other.

As he watched him, Taehyung shifted from foot to foot and he ran his eyes over the students. Jimin saw that every single set of eyes was staring right back at him.

“Brothers and sisters,” Taehyung decided to open with, the megaphone giving a hint of static feedback as he spoke. “I’m here today to do two things: to thank you all for your hard work and commitment to this great country, and to tell you the truth.”

Jimin lowered the camera from his face the second that he had hit the button, turning to stare at his friend as the piece of film shot out the front. He had only just opened his mouth and yet he was completely enraptured by the younger man, for this Taehyung standing in front of him seemed different. He was talking more eloquently for sure, his strong Daegu accent having softened, but that
wasn’t the only thing that had changed. As he pulled the shot free, he tried to figure out what it was exactly that had caught his attention, shaking the square piece of film slowly as he did.

“So, let’s start with the thanks,” Taehyung continued. “Right now, you might think that we’re in the minority, ‘cos it sure as hell looks that way; right? Well, we ain’t the minority, we’re the majority. Every single one of you in front of me, you ain’t just one person, you’re a hundred people, a thousand people. You represent all of those men and women out there too scared to stand up for what’s right. You represent all of the kids growin’ up with voices too quiet to be heard, and you represent every single lost soul from the battles that we fought for freedom from the commies and the imperial devils.”

Jimin shoved the developed piece of film in his shirt breast pocket, lifting the camera up and focusing on the fountain whilst he listened to his friend speaking.

“Everythin’ starts off small. Trees grow from a seed, and democracy grows from a single mind willin’ to make a change,” Taehyung said, as he lifted his hand and he swept it over the students. “You’re all those seeds, just waitin’ to grow into trees and fill this country with liberty at last.”

Jimin took a photograph of the fountain, the sight of quite a lot of students visible in the shot, and then he turned his attention back to the city hall to get that too. Taehyung was starting to get very deep now and it was fascinating listening to him. When he brought out ‘the truth’, as he had labelled it, it was no doubt going to get even more fascinating. Had he thought of this himself, or was he just rehearsing a speech that his friend had already created for him in the past?

“So, I give my thanks to you, as does every other human in this country too frightened to stand up and make a change,” Taehyung finished, before moving the megaphone away from his mouth. He stuck his tongue out to wet his lips, and after a few seconds, he brought it back up to his mouth. “But there’s someone standin’ in the way of our change, and you all know who I’m talkin’ about. The Butcher and his lap dogs.”

This made the students make some noise, just a ripple of murmurs, but it was enough to make Jimin turn back to look at them as he shoved the next photograph into his shirt pocket.

“He thinks we’ll forget! They all think we’ll forget but we ain’t gonna forget! Samchung!”

At this, Jimin noted that the assembled students made noises of horror and disgust, something surging through the crowd that signalled that Taehyung had mentioned something bad about the country that he was clueless about.
“Samchung Re-education Camp! We know what happened! Forced labour! Abuse! He called it ‘social cleansin’’ but what’d he do? He cleansed the poor, the innocent! He grabbed ‘em from their homes without warrants and called ‘em gangsters! Students and women: gangsters? Never forgive, never forget!”

“Never forgive! Never forget!” the students chanted, lifting their fists and pumping them as they did.

Now Jimin was starting to see what the rally was like. Taehyung was going to stand on that soapbox and rouse spirits to get the students to remember what they were here for, what they were fighting for. He was going to bring to light all of the reasons why they were fighting against the government and he was going to do so by listing the worse things that he could. Samchung Re-education Camp, Jimin didn’t really know what that was but he knew that the words ‘re-education’ and ‘camp’ together were never a good thing, and so he could assume the horrors that those three words brought to the students.

“Some of you had family snatched back then, family that came back from those camps half-dead from starvation, their brains-” Taehyung said, as he stabbed a finger against the side of his head for emphasis, “messed up from the lies that were beat into ‘em! That’s one of the first things that he did with his power, so, what else can he do when he gets even more powerful?! How many more innocent humans will he turn into zombies?!”

Jimin glanced over at the crowd to see that there were quite a few students crying at this, quite possibly because they had indeed had families grabbed in those raids Taehyung had just mentioned. He stared at one young woman that was weeping terribly, wiping at her eyes with her lips pulled back in a grimace, yet she still had a fist held up in support for this rally. The sight of her made him feel a shiver coursing down his spine and he dragged his eyes away to look at Taehyung again. His friend was standing on a small soapbox, clad in double denim and plaid with a scarf tied around his too-long hair, and yet he was as good a politician as any of them; if not better.

When Jimin looked at him, he saw an eighteen year old kid that was obsessed with Burger King, one that helped procure cocaine for military camps and yet seemed to have a smart head on his shoulders regardless. He saw Taehyung for who he really was in that moment, and Jimin felt the most strongest surge of fondness for the Yankee-loving young man just like what he felt for Namjoon.

“Goddamn, Tae,” he muttered under his breath, as his lips curled up at the corners in a smile. Then he lifted the camera and he took a snap of him just as he threw his fist up into the air.

“Before The Butcher we had universities, places to learn and to be who we wanted to be,” Taehyung continued, as he shifted on the soapbox. “A haven for ideas and politics to thrive, but now? What’d
we have now, huh? Nothin’! Our classes are lies, our teachers are waitin’ for the soldiers to come and get ‘em whenever they open their mouths! ‘Commie sympathisers’, ‘gangsters’; the list goes on! You stand up and tell the truth and the soldiers come for you! The Butcher’s revisin’ history and we ain’t gonna let him! Truth not lies!”

“Truth not lies!” the students chanted back, quite a few of them still sobbing as they did so.

“Brothers and sisters,” Taehyung said, bringing his voice down to a more reasonable volume. “I’ve got with me today a friend; a friend from America who also fights for freedom there too. No matter where we go, there’s still fights to be had, so, we ain’t alone.”

Jimin lowered the camera at this, the device dangling around his neck on a lanyard. He realised that he wanted him to go up onto that soapbox any moment from now. Taehyung had just given a massive speech that had caused tears, and now he wanted him to take over. He suddenly found it rather hard to breathe as Taehyung turned to look at him, holding the megaphone out in offering.

For a moment, and just a moment, every single muscle in his body seemed to lock up and stop him from possibly moving forward. But then Jimin found himself moving to accept the device, taking hold of the speaker and the control box.

When Taehyung got down off the soapbox, he stepped up onto it, shaking slightly and breathing in shallowly through his nose. He lifted his gaze from the red megaphone to look over the students, seeing that all of those eyes were staring at him now too: curious, awed and sharply attentive. He was standing in front of them today to not only give a speech, but to also represent his country to most of them like Taehyung had said, and so that meant that he shouldn’t fuck this up.

Jimin stuck his tongue out to wet his lips, and then he lifted the device to his mouth, finding the words spilling free on their own accord.

“I mightn’t call this place home,” Jimin said slowly, deciding to stare at the banner across the circle rather than look at any of their faces, “and I mightn’t live in a country that’s going through what you’re all going through, but once it was. America has a, um, a history with democracy and fighting for freedom. It’s one of the foundations that the country was built on, and it’s something that means a lot to my people. But right now, all over the country, people are suffering because of a bad president too.”

Jimin wet his lips again and he spared a quick glance over at Taehyung to gauge his reaction. His partner gave him a nod, gesturing for him to continue, and so he took a deep breath and did so.
“Let me, um, let me explain something about America,” he said quickly. “We’ve got the right to vote between two parties, to pick a president of the country from either one. Our current president, he’s from the party that I don’t support, that a lot of people don’t support. But because more people like him, he’s president. But he’s a bad president, and his party’s a bad party. They only care about certain people and they let everyone else suffer, and right now we’re suffering so badly. He froze the minimum wage at a terribly low amount so workers can barely afford to live, he’s cut everything: public housing and Section 8 welfare, social security and more. These are all things that people need to survive in my country. Poor people need those things, but he’s cut them! Poor people are suffering! Disabled people are suffering! He’s even cut the goddamn CDC funding!”

Jimin realised at that moment that none of the students had a fucking clue what that even meant.

“The CDC that’s, um, a centre that helps people when a virus breaks out,” he explained in a quiet voice, the megaphone turning it into a shout. “They’re supposed to save lives, but they aren’t. Because our president is cutting funds to them!”

Jimin could see shock on the faces of the students assembled in front of him, for they had clearly not expected to hear any of this. They had probably imagined that America was a haven, but such rose-tinted views were so very far from the truth.

“Right now, a virus is killing thousands of people in my country, we need that funding, but he cut it! People like me, my own brothers and sisters, they’re dying every single day!” Jimin continued, seeing that Taehyung was staring at him from across the circle in rapt attention. “Innocent people are dying and no one cares because just like here, people are scared. People are scared to fight for a change and people are frightened of those that actually want them to carry on suffering. But we’re still fighting back even if our voices won’t be heard, because that’s what a democracy is about! You all have voices! Voices that deserve to be heard and—”

Jimin lowered the megaphone and he took a deep breath, suddenly finding that his eyes were stinging. He could feel that his pulse was racing in his chest and he was almost dizzy from the rush of adrenaline running through him.

“Let them hear your fucking voices!” he added, before switching to English to start chanting. “Fucking-A! Listen to what I say! Freedom in Seoul, Chun’s an asshole! Democracy! Give it to me!”

Jimin knew that the students might not understand him, but Taehyung could understand some of his words. As he carried on chanting, he turned to look right at him, holding his fist up and pumping it into the air as Taehyung started nodding his head in rhythm with his words.
“Democracy! Give it to me!” Taehyung echoed back at him, slurring it quite a lot, but still copying his words good enough. “Democracy! Give it to me!” he chanted, lifting both hands up to start pumping them into the air. “Democracy! Give it to me!”

Slowly but surely, the students started chanting it too, their voices soft and uncertain as they tried to copy the foreign sounds. But as more joined in, the chant grew in volume, and soon enough there were wide smiles on faces as they all pumped their fists in rhythm with him and Taehyung.

Jimin saw wet cheeks and euphoric smiles spreading out in front of him, and he lowered the megaphone and let his breath out in a breathless laugh.

Jimin had done it - he had just given his first speech at a protest rally, and he had nailed it.

“Oh my god,” he breathed out heavily, as Taehyung reached over to pull him down off the soapbox. “Oh my god, I did it. I just did that, I-”

“What’d I tell you, huh?” Taehyung interjected with a massive grin, as he took the megaphone from his hands. “When you get a hold of this baby, you can do anythin’ up there.”

Taehyung gave the device back to the woman, who showered them with so much thanks that Jimin was rather overwhelmed. He could see that her eyes were wet too, for it seemed that quite a lot of the students were highly emotional. He supposed that lack of sleep, coupled with fear of the police or military arriving, would make most people incredibly emotional. The students were still chanting his words over and over, and he could see passing drivers looking out of windows at them. They would probably keep the act up for quite some time, emboldened and energised by his speech. His friend reached over to slip an arm around his neck and he steered him away from the rally back onto the sidewalk.

“Wait, let’s get a shot right here,” Taehyung said suddenly, as he gestured at the camera. “With ‘em in the background.”

So Jimin held the camera up in front of them, but his fingers were too short to snap the photograph properly. Taehyung had to do so instead, getting a much higher and better angle and then hitting the button, a piece of film shooting out of the slot a second later.

Jimin pulled the piece of film free and he waited for it to develop, seeing a wonderful snapshot of
them both that brought a smile to his face. He flashed it at his partner, and he was in the act of pulling the other pieces of film out of his shirt pocket when his friend moved suddenly.

Taehyung grabbed his head and just like Namjoon had, and he proceeded to give him a hard and loud kiss right in his hair.

Jimin burst out laughing, taken aback by the act, but greatly liking it.

“Goddamn, Jiminie,” Taehyung said, as he carried on walking along the sidewalk. “That was fuckin’ amazin’. I didn’t expect you to pull any of that out, ’specially the brothers and sisters part! I expected you to show support and cheer ‘em up, but, shit, listen to that.”

Jimin could hear all of the students still chanting as he offered the film pieces to his friend.

Taehyung accepted them and he quickly checked them out, sadly having to slip his arm free from around his neck to do so. After he had glanced at them all, he looked at him again.

“I know you might never meet my friend, but I want you to take these in case you do,” Taehyung said, holding out the small stack of photographs to him. “If not, you can always keep ‘em: memories of your first rally, huh?”

“Take them? Sure thing,” Jimin replied, as he accepted them. “Wanna throw in a letter, huh? I can bring that too, if you want? What’s his name, huh? Who am I looking for back in San Francisco?”

“Jeon,” Taehyung replied, as he slipped the photographs inside of his shirt pocket again for safekeeping. When he returned to America, he would be sure to put them in his wallet, just in case he ever met this elusive boy. “His name’s Jeon Jungkook.”

“Jungkook, got it.”

“Now, what say we go back home, grab Cheonsa and head to Dosan Park, huh?” Taehyung offered. “Spend the whole day doin’ nothin’ at all ‘cept sunbathin’, eatin’ patbingsu and shootin’ the shit; yeah?”
“Tae,” Jimin sighed out, as he turned his head to look at him with a pleased smile on his lips. “That sounds heavenly, brother.”
Chapter 6

28th August, 1984, 8:42am: Pacific Heights, San Francisco, United States of America

The sight of his bedroom phone was right in front of him, just waiting for him to pick it up again and start dialling, yet Yoongi found that he was unable to do so.

Rather than reach over and lift it free from the cradle, he was just sitting there, messing with the sleeves of the shirt that he had fallen asleep in and studying the device. It was black plastic, the casing still shiny and free from cracks or damage despite being several years old now. It wasn’t an interesting thing to study, was bulky and plain of everything save for the buttons and the curled cord, and yet he had been staring at it for the best part of five minutes now.

Had he even blinked? He couldn’t seem to recall, but he had a feeling that he hadn’t.

Yoongi had actually set an alarm for the morning today, just to ensure that he had sorted out business as a priority first and foremost. The idea of not making the usual calls until past 10am had been enough to force him to wake up earlier, but at least he had sorted everything out for a few hours. Seokjin had had no need to phone him or to even come to his mansion like he had told him to, for he had managed to drag himself out of bed to phone him first, just like usual.

So far, today had been like the start of every normal morning prior to meeting a certain mule. If Yoongi ignored the fact that he had yet to leave his home to go get breakfast and he had spent five solid minutes staring at his phone rather than phoning Namjoon, that was.

Yoongi knew that it was pointless calling the other man like this right now. Seokjin had already told him several days ago - on the morning of the 24th, in fact, that Jimin was out of the country and would be for a couple more days. Therefore, he should at least wait another day or two just for the sake of it, because then the young mule might just be on his way back to the country, or even cruising the streets of Haight-Ashbury and The Castro like usual. Phoning Namjoon right now was a rather moot point, because he knew exactly what he was going to say to him.

Yet, despite knowing these things, Yoongi still found himself eventually slipping his black book out of the drawer as he grabbed the receiver and he shoved it into the crook between his shoulder and neck to free up his hands. He flicked through it to locate the page that he had jotted the number down
on and then he paused for a moment, listening to the dull droning sound of the dialling tone blaring down his ear. It was right there at the bottom of a page covered in scrawls of black ink and crossed out notes to self: Kim, Namjoon, and a string of digits.

Yoongi stuck his tongue out to wet his lips almost nervously as he read the phone number over a few times.

In the restaurant that night, Yoongi had had no trouble at all talking to either of them, if he excluded a slight clash of heads with Jimin and his attitude. He had most certainly not struggled with talking to Namjoon in the slightest, for the younger man had been amicable, educated, and respectful without being too obedient and spineless. He had made a few jokes here and there, had initiated conversation to keep the atmosphere light, and he had shown himself to be incredibly likeable and genuine.

There was no need for Yoongi to feel nervous talking to him on the phone at all, but he was still shaking in the fingers as he reached over to start hitting the buttons to dial the dealer’s landline number.

After hitting them all, Yoongi shifted to sit back again, letting his breath out in an uneven sigh and reaching up to start running his fingers over his dry lips. His entire mouth felt just as dry currently, like his tongue had shrivelled up into a sponge in his mouth and like dust would puff out from between his lips when he tried to speak. The mental image should have made him snort laughter at least, but he found himself worrying far too much for that.

The dialling tone sounded several times down his ear, and though he didn’t count the amount of times that it did so, he was almost certain that he was nearing the end of time allocated before the call would be terminated or he would be redirected to an answering machine. If the dealer even owned one. Sure, there were some really old shitty models still available, but the newest line of reliable and hi-tech ones were still pretty expensive. Maybe, he would own one for business, just to ensure that he received all messages and-

When a static crackle sounded down the line, Yoongi felt his heart skipping in his chest in shock.

Namjoon had just picked up, he was convinced that he had. After a few seconds of more crackling bursts of static and mutters that he couldn’t really hear or understand, he heard breathing down the line.

“Hello?” Namjoon said in a heavy voice, one that seemed to signal that he had been sleeping.
Yoongi shifted his gaze to stare at his alarm clock, seeing 08:43am flashing back at him in ugly green characters on the black and grey device. Maybe, the young dealer was sleeping in because he didn’t start working for some time? Or maybe, he actually worked nights instead of daytime, because it might be easier to float around the bar and comedy circuits in his neighbourhood to peddle marijuana, cocaine, and whatever else he dealt in personally? Yoongi might just have disturbed his rest after an entire night of work, but it was a little bit too late to feel bad about this fact.

“Uh.” Yoongi quickly cleared his throat, as he dragged his eyes away from the clock and he stared at his black book instead. “Namjoon?”

“That’s the name, don’t wear it out,” Namjoon replied, the sound of bed springs creaking and covers rustling as he presumably moved to sit up in bed. “Are you phoning because a friend recommended you? Or are you-”

“Actually, no,” Yoongi interjected. “I’m phoning ‘cos I’m Prince Min and I wanted to talk to you.”

“Prince…oh, excuse me, Prince Min,” the young dealer said, all hints of background noise disappearing because he had probably just frozen in place in shock. “I wasn’t aware of the fact that you had my number. Did Jimin give it to you? He never mentioned doing something like that to me, he, uh, he never mentioned anything at all, actually.”

“I got it from your supplier,” Yoongi explained, as he snagged the kinked cord with his index finger and he started twisting it around it in a fidgeting manner. “Considering how good you and, uh, Jimin were in shifting that blow for me, I thought that it’d be best to create a connection with you both, mmm? I might’ve need for your services in the future, so, having your contact number’s a smart investment.”

“Well, Jimin’s services are much better than mine, trust me,” Namjoon replied for some reason, a hint of something in his tone that he was struggling to figure out.

Was it…amusement? Was he purposely trying to be suggestive with his words, or was Yoongi just interpreting it wrongly?

“He did most of the hard work, like usual, but he can take it. He can take it good. You’ll likely want his services more than mine in the future, especially if it’s, you know, hard.”

No, Yoongi was most certainly not interpreting it wrongly.
For a few seconds, he didn’t really know what to say in reply to this, and he could sense that Namjoon was trying his very hardest to not laugh down the line and sound disrespectful. Was Namjoon half-asleep right now, or was he stoned? Yoongi suddenly found himself unable to ascertain which scenario might be true. But he did know that hearing Namjoon attempting (and failing) to make innuendo about Jimin brought a sudden blush to his cheeks that he hated, because it was so very childish.

“Actually, I was phoning you to check something,” Yoongi blurted out, unable to help himself. He was going to play dumb and act like he was clueless just for the sake of it, to see what happened. “Is Jimin there currently, or is he working?”

“Jimin? Uh, I hate to be the one to tell you this, Prince Min, but Jimin’s in Hong Kong right now. He probably landed a couple of hours ago, come to think about it. So, he’s most certainly not here to take this call for you.”

Yoongi let out an awkward laugh at this, both amused and embarrassed by the current situation. He had known that this exact scenario was going to happen before he had even dialled the dealer’s number, and yet he had decided to do it anyway, and so this awkwardness was all his fault. And it was awkward, he knew that it was, and it probably seemed pretty fucking desperate too.

Namjoon probably knew exactly why he was phoning him like this, judging from his attempted innuendo, and he could feel his already flushed cheeks heating up even when there were miles between them both.

“I don’t even have a contact number in that country to give you, seeing as Jimin and his partner there only contact me from a safe house in regards to transactions,” Namjoon explained after a moment of thought. “Other than that, I don’t see him or speak to him until he gets back here, Prince Min. If I had a contact number, I’d give it to you right away; long distance charges are no problem for you. Right?”

“Right; d’you, uh, d’you know when he’s gonna be back?” Yoongi asked, as he reached up to start rubbing at the back of his neck nervously.

“Well,” Namjoon dragged out, thinking his reply over intently. “I’m more than certain that it’s the 30th, Prince Min. That’s the evening of the 30th over here, of course, but actually the 31st over in Hong Kong. He should be landing between 9:30 and 10pm for his flight, which’s later than usual. By the time we get back to up The Haight, it could be about 11pm. I’m estimating it all, to tell you the truth, Prince Min, but 11pm to 12am would be your best window. It’s late, I know, but-”
“That ain’t late for me,” Yoongi spoke over him. “That’s actually a good time. On this number, yeah? I should call you back on this number, or is there another one that’s better?”

“That number, Prince Min,” Namjoon agreed, and though Yoongi couldn’t see him right now, he was certain that the younger man had just nodded to himself. “Though Jimin doesn’t technically live with me, these days, he’s kinda decided that he does. You won’t find him on any other contact number, and the night that he arrives back in the city, we’ll both be here to answer your call.”

“Alright,” Yoongi said, as he lowered his hand from his neck at last, instinctively dropping it to his thigh and playing with the lengths of his shirt. “I’ll do that, Namjoon, and, uh, thanks.”

“You’re more than welcome, Prince Min, and I’m more than happy to help,” Namjoon replied, his tone revealing that he was being honest with him and not pretending for the sake of it.

It crossed Yoongi’s mind, in that moment, that Namjoon still called him ‘Prince Min’, just like every other Moon Tiger Mob little brother and associate that he dealt with. During the dinner, it had seemed fitting for him to do so, but right now he wasn’t so certain. Should he tell him that he could address him by something else, perhaps? Maybe, just his clan name instead, or even his given name? He was about to open his mouth and tell him that he could, when he curbed the urge.

No, Yoongi would wait for a little while first and see what happened when Jimin finally got back to the country. Maybe then, he would allow the dealer to call him by his given name, because he would owe him for actually helping him.

It was only fair, after all. Hoseok and Seokjin had both known him from childhood thanks to their fathers being uncles within the mob, and so naturally they had earned his name (though Seokjin had only visited them sparsely in those days growing up). Jimin had earned it through barefaced cheek and enticing him, and Jungkook had done so quite simply because he wasn’t really connected to the mob, and also because he liked the kid a lot.

Though Yoongi also had a fondness for Namjoon and would like to have more discussions with him about hegemony, politics and morality, he was a dealer, and that meant that he was still a business associate to him right now. But if Namjoon could somehow assist him in seeing Jimin again and it actually went alright, then he would be more than happy to replace this title with ‘friend’ instead.

“I’ll call this number then, 11pm to 12am, got it,” Yoongi said, as he shifted on the edge of the mattress. “Until then, keep up the hard work, yeah?”
“I will, Prince Min, have a good day and stay safe,” Namjoon replied.

“You, uh, you too,” he quickly added, before moving to drop the phone as fast as he could, as if prolonged contact with it was burning him.

Yoongi actually clapped a hand against his chest for a moment, just to feel how hard and fast that his heart was racing in his chest. The answer was: very. He had to take a couple of deep breaths to try and regulate it, and he was almost convinced that there was a slight hint of sweat on his brow. He reached up to check, discovering that his forehead was actually free from beaded sweat. He didn’t have to embarrassed about that particular aspect at least; just his racing pulse and uneven breathing.

The phone call had been awkward as hell, but Yoongi had at least gotten an answer from Namjoon that was helpful. Rather than guessing and hoping to strike at the right time and maybe missing a window of opportunity, he was now able to plan his next call with better success.

If Yoongi called the dealer at some point in that time-frame on the 30th, then there was a very high chance that Jimin might just be there and he could talk to him again.

What exactly he was going to say to him he didn’t know, he just knew that when the time arrived, he would have either planned a meticulous conversation out in his head in preparation, or he would just simply know what to say to him on instinct. Yoongi was hoping for the former over the latter because spontaneous conversation could go wrong so very fast, and he was well-versed in disastrous conversation thanks to his father.

That phone call had been spontaneous, however, and despite being a little awkward, it had still been a success. So long as the one that he and Jimin might share also ended in a success, nothing else mattered to him.

Yoongi didn’t really know what the success that he was hoping to achieve was either, but he had a feeling that it was something like an agreement to go to another dinner perhaps, maybe followed by a trip to a bar. Something like the first night that they had went out together, but without the iciness during the meal and him threatening to slap him across the face at some point. Yes, that was what he was hoping for, but only time would tell if he managed to not fuck it up.

Yoongi shifted to place his black book back inside of the drawer, pushing it shut and smiling to himself. He felt like he had earned the momentary smugness.
The time on his alarm clock told him that it was 8:47am, which meant that he could get to Mickey’s Joint for breakfast just after 9am if he got showered and dressed quickly. But right now, he didn’t really want breakfast, for he didn’t feel that hungry at all. What he wanted was coffee, and so he got off his bed to exit his bedroom and go and prepare some.

Whilst the blend brewed in the cafetière, Yoongi left his mansion to check the mailbox at the end of his drive. Most morning, it was empty, and he never bothered checking until before he left for the day. But because he was waiting on something to arrive, he had been checking it consistently over the last few days.

When he opened the flap, Yoongi found that there was more than the usual single letter or piece of irritating junk mail shoved inside, for there was actually a small package that he recognised instantly. He stared at the slightly rectangular bulk of brown paper for a moment, before pulling it free from the box and walking up the path to get back into his mansion. As he did so, he studied the parcel, seeing the several telltale stamps from Japan and thick rolls of tape and customs stickers covering most of the paper. So Yoongi crossed the ground-floor at a quick pace to go back up into his bedroom and sit down on his bed, all thoughts about coffee completely forgotten about.

Yoongi turned the parcel over in his hands several times until he found a way to open it, his fingers feeling a seam at the edge of the thick tape that he could catch with his nail. He peeled the tape free and then he tore at the paper, tossing it onto his bed and staring at the cover of the box.

Yoongi was always so shocked by the covers of the VHS tapes, for they could be rather…explicit. The one that he was currently holding in his hands had a photograph of a young-looking man on the front, lounged on a stack of throw cushions in ridiculously tight light blue briefs that showcased a hint of a bulge through the material. The actor wasn’t the cutest truthfully, but that was hardly the reason for him buying it.

When he turned it over, Yoongi saw several smaller photographs and a large paragraph of characters that he couldn’t even hope to read. The smaller photographs consisted of one of the guy on the front of the case with another man, clearly in the act of helping him out of those tight briefs, another of them both kissing, and a final shot of them lying in bed together. The photograph only revealed their bodies down to the ribs, but he knew that they were both naked, and presumably in the midst of intercourse if their expressions and bodily positions were anything to go on.

Yoongi dragged his eyes away from the photograph and then he turned the case over again, fiddling with the box for a moment. He knew that he should just get to his feet and put it away with the other tapes, but he seemed to lack the ability to move right now.
At first, Yoongi had started having the VHS tapes sent over from an associate in Japan because he had had a use for them. Before discovering the inventive possibility of massage boys and handjobs, he had just simply relied on the tapes for...entertainment purposes. Yoongi really didn’t know why he was still paying extortionate fees to purchase these adult videos now, but he had yet to find a good enough reason to stop doing so.

Sure, he hardly ever touched them, unless he was drunk as hell and the idea of wanking off to pixelated gay sex seemed like a great alternative to curling up into a tight ball because there was an ache in his chest somewhere that no amount of bourbon could nurse. That meant that every few weeks, a new parcel would come in the mail, and it would go straight onto the VHS shelf in his bedroom.

All that was on that goddamn shelf was Japanese adult videos and nothing more. No actual films, no copies of old family recordings, just a hundred or so cheap pornographic films that he hardly ever watched.

But, despite discovering an alternative, some nights Yoongi still found himself too...tired, too sick to want to contact Hoseok and have him do all of the haggling for a massage boy on his behalf. Actual human contact, the touch of another man, it could sometimes be too much for him, and so he turned to the tapes instead. They were cheap and disgusting, and Yoongi found that that was rather fitting for him.

Now...now, he wasn’t so sure.

Right now, looking at the cover of the VHS box, Yoongi felt embarrassed but not disgusted. It was all still a result of that foolish surge of bravado that he had been feeling since that night with Jimin, of course; the bravado that he knew would fade soon enough. It was probably amplified because he was at home, safe within his sanctuary in which he could shut everything and everyone else out and just be himself. Even if he then had to hide his true self away the very second that he stepped off the front path and he went back to reality again.

In his sanctuary, Yoongi could have an entire shelf of imported gay pornography and shunga art prints on his walls that no one else knew about. Not his father, not his associates, not even his friends. The four walls and glass ceiling could contain so many dirty secrets and vices of his, and bring him comfort that he had yet to find from another warm body.

Yoongi glanced back down at the cover of the VHS tape, and that was when a rather sudden thought came to mind.
Jimin had told him that he liked going to bathhouses to watch other men having sex to get his satisfaction these days. If he liked watching, then what better thing for him then pornography?

Yoongi stared at the box for a moment, completely surprised by the fact that he had thought of such a thing, and that was when an unexpected noise cut through the air.

Someone had just rang the doorbell.

Yoongi looked up sharply from the box in his hands in befuddlement, wondering who was ringing his doorbell at this hour. He got off his bed and he was about to cross the room when he realised that he was still holding the goddamn VHS tape. So he dropped it on the bed and he proceeded to leave his bedroom, going down the double flight of stairs to get to his front door. A quick glance through the Judas revealed a rather surprising sight, and so he opened the door.

“Seokseok, what’re you doing here?” he asked, squinting against the sudden beam of bright sunlight as he did.

“I decided to come and collect you this morning instead,” Hoseok explained, as he shifted to enter his mansion by forcing him to move out of the way so that he could get inside.

Yoongi could see that his car was parked at the end of the drive behind his, the black Porsche 944 gleaming in the early morning sun and clashing against his cherry red BMW M1. It was a beaut of a car, had much softer curves in comparison to his, with a long hood and double rectangle headlights. It also had a soft walnut and cream leather interior that was incredibly attractive. He stared at the vehicle for a moment before turning his head to look at his friend, seeing that Hoseok was moving to go over to his kitchen without an invitation.

Typical, he would probably break open a bottle of champagne before he left too. At least he had been respectful enough to step out of his monkstrap shoes first, so that he didn’t track dirt all over the marble flooring.

“Collect me?” Yoongi repeated dumbly, as he closed the front door. “What’d you mean?”

“Daddy wants to see you today, Gigi,” Hoseok explained, stopping by the stretch of counter and eyeing the cafetière. “Actually, correction: daddy’s available to see you today.”
“Huh?”

“You asked me to find out when he was free,” his best friend stated, as he turned to look back at him. “So that you could discuss the Sacramento Snow situation with him; remember?”

Yoongi closed his mouth at this, suddenly realising the reason why Hoseok was here this morning.

Of course it was because of the Sacramento Snow situation, because he had asked him to contact his father several days ago to assist him with the problem. But the last few days had been such a whirlwind of unexpected, unusual, and exciting events that he had almost forgotten about this fact. Luckily for him, Hoseok hadn’t, and his friend had actually followed through with his promise to contact his father on his behalf.

For all of his antics, Hoseok always followed through on a promise no matter how small it was. He might not be the most dependable when the pills and champagne finally hit his system and doped him up, but Yoongi sometimes forgot the fact that his best friend had yet to break a promise or halt a business transaction for him. If Hoseok broke open that bottle of champagne like he had been expecting, then he had easily earned it at least.

The mansion fell silent for a minute at this, and so Yoongi studied his friend as he tried to think of something to say to break the silence.

Unlike usual, Hoseok wasn’t dressed preppy, with pullovers knotted around his shoulders, blinding polo shirts and shorts, for he looked somewhat more professional. Or as professional as he could possibly get, that was. He was wearing a black shirt with full sleeves and a high collar, the former buttoned at the cuffs but the latter open to expose his throat and a thin and plain silver necklace chain hanging around his neck. The black cotton had a white pattern on it that wasn’t an intricate design, but was rather just tribalistic-looking concentric circles and random shapes like palm fronds. It was a shirt and not a blouse, Yoongi saw, because of the cut and placement of the buttons. He had matched the shirt with fitted black trousers and his shoes, which were across the room by his front door: deep brown leather single monkstrap shoes with a slight heel.

Hoseok looked good (but that was a given), and he was standing several feet away from him in the wrinkled shirt that he had slept in, staring at him from under his sleep-tousled hair.

“You, uh, you been drinking, huh?” Yoongi asked, moving to draw closer to his friend.
“No,” Hoseok replied, as he grabbed the cafetière and he proceeded to pour some of the brewed coffee into his mug. “Just a single Valium, no champagne. I don’t drink and drive, Gigi.”

Yoongi didn’t drink and drive usually either, unless there was an attractive young man sitting in his passenger-seat and trips to bars and bathhouses planned for the evening.

“Nah, you just drive after popping pills instead,” Yoongi, remarked, shifting to sit down on one of the stools at the counter. “So much smarter, Seokseok.”

Hoseok gave him a look that told him that he didn’t find this joke funny as he placed the mug down for him. It was almost black like usual, just a dribble of milk added to lessen the tart and acidic aftertaste.

When his friend made no move to make his own mug of coffee, Yoongi decided to move across the ground-floor to go to the sitting-area instead. He heard Hoseok following after him as he settled down on his leather settee, fixing the wrinkled lengths of his shirt in place to try and not flash too much thigh at him.

“You looked wrecked, Gigi,” Hoseok said, as he sat on the other end of the settee and he crossed one leg over the other comfortably. “What were you up to yesterday, hmm? Up to no good in my absence?”

“Yesterday? Yesterday I…did nothing,” Yoongi stated, shifting on the settee to get more comfortable. He was painfully conscious of his bare thighs and he was trying to distract away from them, but he was failing miserably. The blunt statement made his friend snort laughter. “Nah, I sorted out some shit over in Nob Hill in regards to some dealer that was pissed off with Choi’s absence, and by sort out I mean I got goons to go over to his place and chip his front teeth. Other than that, it was same shit, different day, y’know? What ‘bout you, huh?”

“Same shit, different day,” Hoseok repeated, as he took his first sip of coffee. “Got a few missing darlings that are being tracked down as we speak. I’m hoping they just tried to jump a greyhound coach out of the city like usual, because if they didn’t then that means some fucker’s poaching them from us.”

“What dumb fuck’d possibly attempt to poach from us?” Yoongi asked, lowering his mug from his lips as he stared at his best friend. “Seriously, when’s the last time that happened to us?”
“Let me see, it was…four months ago for me, but that was just some creepy brother who decided that he wanted to become a pimp and tried to poach his darling sister from me,” Hoseok explained, as he reached up to fiddle with his necklace chain. “He’s in jail right now, on attempted kidnapping, drug possession charges and outstanding parole violations. No one steals from me, Gigi, especially not thugs that would sell their own sisters for drug money.”

His friend gave him a wide smile at this, and Yoongi reached over to squeeze his knee softly before taking another sip of coffee. It was incredibly strong and left a lingering taste on his tongue, just like how he liked it.

“So, with the exception of the runaway or poached darlings, yesterday was just like always for me,” Hoseok finished.

“What? Drug-hazed orgies in your mansion?” Yoongi asked wryly, unable to keep his smirk off his face.

“You’re so funny today, Gigi,” the younger man said in a deadpan voice. “Reminding me of my casual drug addiction twice in the space of minutes, wow. The Haight comedy circuit’s got a spot for you tonight to deliver that comedy gold.”

“I aim to please, Seokseok,” Yoongi stated with a nod, letting go of his knee to reach up and brush a messy tangle of hair back off his brow.

“You didn’t do anything else other than that?” Hoseok asked curiously, wriggling on the cushion to get comfortable. “Surely, you did something exciting? Or did you just do the usual: listen to depressing music in your car, parked in a hot cruising spot, and cry because no one wanted to fuck you?”

“Mmm, see, you’re hilarious too,” Yoongi said, running his tongue around his mouth to chase after a hint of coffee. “Reminding me of my crippling insecurities in my own home: classic comedy.”

“The pleasure’s all mine, Gigi,” he replied with a smirk.

“Mmm, lemme see,” Yoongi sighed, as he shifted to pull his legs up onto the cushion and get more comfortable. “All I ‘member doing’s going for a drive, finishing a book I was reading, that’s it and… oh. Oh! I forgot to tell you a couple of days ago, but I went to that front, last Friday.”
This piqued Hoseok’s interest, for his friend raised his eyebrows and implored him to continue.

Yoongi twisted on the cushion to look at him properly, lounging so that he could fold his arm on the low back of the settee and hold the mug in his other hand.

“‘Member, the one in Western Addition?”

“I remember.”

“It’s a card club disguised as a restaurant, from what I can tell. The family’s called Jeon, just like you said, and there’s three of ‘em,” Yoongi explained slowly. “Husband, wife and son. The husband, he used to work in the government over in Seoul; can you believe that shit?”

“And now he’s an illegal alien with an outstanding debt to pay,” Hoseok remarked with a wry twitch of the lips. “Got to love The American Dream, Gigi.”

“Good English, he speaks good English, and so does the son. I’ll admit that I was surprised by how good they both were.”

“You know this because…?” his friend asked, drawing the word out as he gestured at him to continue talking.

“‘Cos I took the kid out on a tour of a couple neighbourhoods in my car,” Yoongi explained. “He wanted some camera shots to send to a friend back in Korea, I offered to show him ‘round.”

“Wait, did you just say ‘kid’?”

“Uhuh, he’s seventeen,” he confirmed. “He’s a good kid: smart, funny, cute. I, ha, I actually bought him a brand-new camera that afternoon, Seokseok. He’s very…what’s the word? Not persuasive, but more endearing, I guess? He made me feel like his big brother, so, I told him to call me that instead of Prince Min.”

“Big brother? Seventeen? Shit, Gigi, are you sniffing around jailbait, right now?”
“Jail…bait?” Yoongi repeated dumbly, as he paused in the act of sipping at his coffee. “The fuck, Hoseok, don’t even joke about shit like that.”

“Hey, I’m not the one taking kids out for a drive in my flashy car and buying them ‘hush hush’ gifts,” Hoseok remarked, but he didn’t return the amused expression. “Is the camera a future investment, or did you get him to suck you off in a parking lot?”

“No, the kid’s a virgin and I’m tryna to get him to stay that way,” Yoongi replied in a rather sour tone.

“It’s getting weirder, Gigi…” Hoseok said with a sniff, as he glanced across the sitting-area.

“Seokseok, I know you’re pretty happy these days to just fuck ‘round recklessly with everyone and anyone, but-”

“Ouch, I’m the walking bisexual stereotype, huh? Hit me right in my insatiable slut heart, shame on you, Gigi,” his best friend muttered, as he clapped a hand against his chest for a moment before dropping it lazily onto the armrest of the settee.

“Listen, that kid didn’t even know what AIDS was. I’d to explain to him that morning,” Yoongi explained slowly. “I know you’re just doing this to piss me off like always for cheap laughs, but I’m being serious. He didn’t know what AIDS was, he’s never been ‘round drugs or anything like that, and he even asked what ‘unprotected sex’ was, ’cos he didn’t know.”

“Is he retarded?” Hoseok asked without missing a beat.

“Nah, he ain’t retarded, Seokseok.”

“No offence meant, but he sounds a little…sheltered.”

“That’s what living under military dictatorships in strictly conservative countries does to you,” Yoongi explained with a soft head shake. “Most people are sheltered, he ain’t the only one. That’s why I’m teaching him, why I wanna be his big brother, Hoseok. ‘Cos the kid needs guidance to make it in this country. He’s almost eighteen and he knows jackshit ‘bout the world. I like the kid, I
don’t want him ending up in trouble or dead, alright? So, stop with the teasing.”

“Cute,” Hoseok said, moving to copy his sitting position by drawing his longer legs up onto the cushion. “It’s cute, I guess. You made it sound weird at first, Gigi, but it’s actually cute. You’re making me want to go and visit this front and take the kid out for a drive myself. To teach him all about the world, yes?”

“Seriously, I ain’t interested in him like that. He’s literally a kid, Seokseok, and by that I don’t just mean in age. Besides, I-”

Yoongi stopped himself before he blurted anything more out, but he had already said too much by accident. Hoseok had the sharpest ears that a human could possibly possess, coupled with relentless nosiness, and that alone was going to make his friend harass him for the entire morning until he caved and finished that sentence, he just knew it. When he looked at Hoseok, he could even see the curiosity starting to appear on his face, his eyes wide and glinting at him.

“Besides what?”

“Ain’t nothing you need to know ‘bout,” Yoongi muttered under his breath, as he stared at his coffee and he avoided his gaze.

“Oh my god,” Hoseok exclaimed theatrically, as he placed a hand against his chest. “Does Gigi have a thing for someone that he didn’t tell me about? Does little Gigi have a crush?”

“Shut up, Hoseok,” he retorted in that same sullen tone.

“You do, don’t you?” his friend asked, expertly ignoring him. “Who is it? Do I know him? Wait, I couldn’t know him or else I’d already know who it is by now. Who is it?”

“Ain’t you here on important business?!” Yoongi asked wryly, lifting his coffee to take another sip of it.

He didn’t even really want it at this point, but was just drinking it as an excuse to avoid eye-contact and stall answering questions.
“Fuck business, daddy’s free until 11am or something,” Hoseok remarked, as he waved his wrist limply and he shuffled along the cushion to get closer to him. “Who is it?”

Yoongi swallowed a deep mouthful of coffee and he ignored him, but he just shuffled even closer.

“Who is it, huh? Who? Come on, Gigi, don’t be a spoilsport. Who is it? I’m not going to shut up until you tell me, so…tell me. Who is it? I can do this all day and all night, so, just-”

“It ain’t a crush, alright?” Yoongi finally blurted out, as he twisted to look at him. “Don’t call it that, it sounds…weird.”

“OK, then who do you have…” Hoseok paused for a moment to think before adding, “an adult interest in?”

His best friend looked incredibly pleased with this, like he thought that that had been a pretty witty thing to say. But to Yoongi, it still sounded weird and it made him almost squirm on the settee.

“Seokseok, if I tell you this you better swear to not tell a single fucking soul,” he intoned. “Seriously, not a single soul. Promise me.”

Hoseok held his hand out to him, his pinky finger extended in offering, and so he moved to wrap his own finger around it tightly. Just like he had when they had been kids, Hoseok moved to press a quick and soft kiss against their entwined pinkies, and that was as solemn a promise as any.

Yoongi stuck his tongue out to wet his lips, more than aware of the fact that his heart was beating a little faster than usual in his chest.

“It’s the mule,” he explained quickly, wanting to get it all off his chest as fast as he could. “The one that ran all of that inflated blow for us. I-I’ve got a strong interest in him right now.”

“Wait, the one that was at that dinner?” Hoseok asked, furrowing his brow slightly. “The one that I asked you about, and you said that nothing interesting happened that night. But you were totally lying to me because you just admitted that something happened?”
“That’s the, uh, the one, yeah,” Yoongi mumbled, as he took another sip of coffee. “We’ve actually got a lot in common, Seokseok.”

“I’m sure you do; but how do you know that he’s into guys? Did he tell you, or are you just assuming? Or did you both-”

“Trust me, I just know,” he interrupted, trying his very hardest to not snort under his breath. “I just wanna get to know him a lil more. Maybe. It ain’t a crush, it’s just…”

Yoongi stopped talking for a moment, his breath escaping him in a soft sigh. He could see his best friend studying him intently, waiting for him to speak, and yet he really didn’t know what to say to him.

What was it exactly that he was feeling towards Jimin right now? An adult interest, as Hoseok had put it, or just a simple curiosity mixed with sexual attraction? Weren’t they basically just the same thing? Yoongi didn’t know, but he did know that he wanted to see Jimin as soon as possible to try and figure out what exactly it was that was gnawing away at the back of mind whenever he thought about the other man.

“I need to shower and get ready,” he said after a minute of silence. “I’ll be a couple of minutes, help yourself to whatever you want.”

Yoongi placed the mug down on the oak coffee table and then he got to his feet. As he moved away from the settee, he reached down to annoyingly ruffle Hoseok’s hair, just to piss him off, and then he went up the staircase to enter his bedroom.

Yoongi ran the shower water for a minute whilst he brushed his teeth, letting it reach the perfect temperature, and then he entered the bathtub and he quickly got washed up for the day. He didn’t want to leave his friend waiting on him, but whenever he stepped under the shower, it was incredibly difficult to leave again. So after washing his hair and skin, he grabbed the two towels from the rack, slinging them around his hips and his neck. He grabbed a handful of the soft cotton and he patted at his face, gently drying away beads of water.

Underneath the soft dripping of the shower, he could hear something coming from his bedroom, something that sounded like voices speaking in a foreign tongue.

Yoongi lowered the towel from his face, and after a moment, he figured out that he was listening to
his television, that he was listening to one of the countless VHS tapes placed on the shelf right beside it.

Hoseok had entered his bedroom and he had just popped one of his adult videos into the VCR player.

“Oh my god,” the younger man declared, before laughing shrilly. “This is the funniest shit, Gigi, come and watch this right now, I’m-”

Yoongi stormed into his bedroom to see Hoseok sitting cross-legged on the end of his bed, staring at the television screen with a wide grin on his face.

A quick glance at the screen revealed that the video was still very much working its way up to the sex, like usual. The thing in question that Hoseok was laughing at happened to be the fact that there was a rather dreadfully acted scene at a mechanics happening, that was supposed to be erotic on account of the fact that one of the guys was wearing a soaked vest and shorts and bending over a hood to wipe at the windows. But it really wasn’t. It was awkward, the angles weren’t tasteful and cheeky at all but rather cheap, and the guy in question really had no ass to fill the shorts with to begin with.

Typical cheap Japanese pornography.

At least the sex was usually decent, excluding the pixelated genitalia, of course.

Yoongi moved across the room to hit the button on the television, turning the device off and plunging the room into silence again. Then he turned his head to stare at his friend in complete disbelief.

Not only had Hoseok had the audacity to enter his bedroom uninvited, but he had also seen that stupid VHS tape on his bed, and rather than respectfully leave it alone and go back downstairs, he had started watching the goddamn thing for fun.

“Are you gonna bring that cute mule here one night, hmm?” Hoseok asked with a smirk, as he looked away from the dead television screen and he lounged back to pat at his messy stack of pillows. “Date night: watch some of these films, wank off under the covers like teens?”
“Seokseok… the fuck you doing in here?” he asked in a weary fashion, grabbing the towel around his neck to try and dry his damp hair. “Please leave.”

“Oh, so you can enter my bedroom at will and share my very bed, but I’m not allowed in here?” Hoseok argued. “Sure, that was all in the past but that’s not the point.”

Yoongi just lifted his free hand to gesture over at the television, hoping to prove his point without needing to actually say it.

“Pornos don’t do it for me,” Hoseok remarked, ignoring him completely in favour of changing the subject. “Especially not pixelated ones, but maybe that’s the Valium talking, it kind of deadens boners.”

Yoongi knew that he wasn’t going to get a proper answer or apology from Hoseok, nor would he leave his bedroom now, and so he had no choice but to move over to his wardrobe. It presented him with the option to ignore him and pretend that he was downstairs, at least.

“I do like the art though,” Hoseok announced to break the momentary silence. “Seriously. Do they have hetero versions? Lesbian versions? I’m intrigued and seriously considering stealing your interior design for myself.”

“Seokseok, you can find absolutely everything, including octopuses,” Yoongi retorted.

“Ew, no,” Hoseok said with a faux shudder of revulsion. “I don’t like them to begin with, I’ll hate them even more after seeing that shit. Slimy little monsters, ew.”

Yoongi snorted at this as he slid the glass door aside to reveal the interior of his wardrobe. He was about to reach inside and start rifling through his shirts and trousers when he caught sight of Hoseok moving in the reflection in the mirror. So he paused to watch him, seeing him shifting to snatch something up off the floor. The item in question happened to be his Valentino blouse, which he had left on the flooring along with several other items from the last few days.

“Wait, you actually wore this?” Hoseok asked, as he lifted it up and he studied it. “And by that I meant to go out in public in and not sleep in, Gigi.”

When Yoongi hummed in agreement, he saw Hoseok’s lips twitching upwards at the corners in
something that looked like happiness. He looked incredibly pleased that he had worn the shirt that he had bought him at last, and the sight of his smile actually made Yoongi forget about his irritation.

“I like it,” Yoongi explained, eyeing the printed shirt in his hands. “It was comfortable, loose and fitted in all the right parts. You’ve got a good eye, Seokseok, I should get you to shop for me more often.”

“Um, don’t say that as a joke, because I seriously will,” his friend retorted, as he lowered the shirt onto his lap and he shifted to cock his elbow on his thigh and rest his head in the palm of his hand. “I’ll go nuts, Gigi, I’ll buy you a whole new wardrobe in a day. I’m obsessed with Valentino these days, so, you should expect more of that, but you know…Gianfranco Ferré and Calvin Klein make some blouses that might-”

Hoseok’s voice trailed off at this, and Yoongi saw the way that he stopped tapping his fingers against his cheek when he realised what he had just blurted out.

“Shirts, I meant shirts; a slip of the tongue, I-”

“Seokseok,” Yoongi interjected, as he started going through his wardrobe. “I already knew it was a blouse. The button placement’s on the left not the right - it’s for women.”

“And you still wore it anyway?” Hoseok asked, sounding even more surprised than he had a moment ago.

“Yeah I, uh, I told you I like it, so, I didn’t give a shit,” Yoongi replied, pulling a black shirt free from the wardrobe and folding it over one arm. That was a lie, but not a huge one. He had stopped giving a shit after wearing it for several hours, but before that point he had cared far too much. “I mean, I mightn’t wear it a lot, but I still like it.”

“…Valentino and Ferré it is,” Hoseok stated, as he pulled out a pair of black trousers from the wardrobe. “Ferré does sunglasses too, I’ve been thinking of investing in a pair, and now you’ve given me a great reason to visit the boutique and do so.”

“Like you even needed a reason,” he remarked, crossing his bedroom to go back into the bathroom and finish getting ready.
As he went through the doorway, Yoongi heard Hoseok snorting under his breath at his joke.

Yoongi finished his morning cleansing routine by moisturising his face and body, spritzing on deodorant, and adding a splash of cologne. He was careful to not add too much, for Chanel *Antaeus* was a strong scent that could be overwhelming and linger for far too long. He gently patted it in place around his throat and wrists and then got dressed.

First, Yoongi slipped into his black shirt, buttoning up the light and loose cotton and then rolling the sleeves up to his elbows too. He sometimes hated the fact that the neckline was so open and low, but when the sweltering summer heat threatened to cook him alive, he was thankful for it. Rather than slip into underwear, he just got into his trousers, tucking the lengths of the shirt inside and buttoning them up.

Since meeting Jimin and discovering his penchant for avoiding underwear, Yoongi had found that it was both comfortable and unusual not wearing any. Sure, it meant less items of clothing to get out of when he finally retired to bed, but being so loose and free…it was strange. But he was starting to get used to it and find it rather nice.

When Yoongi re-entered his bedroom, he saw that Hoseok was still lounged on his bed, seemingly comfortable as he studied the dead television screen across the room, the shunga art prints on the wall, and the rest of the interior design with an appreciative eye.

Yoongi went back over to his wardrobe to collect a few things: a belt to pull his trousers taut around his thin hips, and a black baseball cap to block out the sunlight. As soon as he had secured the belt tight, he grabbed the hat and he went over to his bedside table, tugging his cap on and retrieving his Rolex. He was in the act of fastening it in place when Hoseok finally looked back at him.

“What’s with the cap? Planning on robbing a bank or something?” his friend asked, before giving him a smirk. “We both look like we’re going to a funeral.”

“It keeps the sun outta my eyes when I drive,” Yoongi stated, as he reached up to tug down on the brim of his cap. “Gimme the keys, we can go now, and-”

“No, I’m driving,” Hoseok argued from his position on the bed.

Despite Yoongi holding his hand out for the keys, he made no move to give him them, or to move at all. No, Hoseok just sat there and refused to look away from him because he was attempting to act
stern. So Yoongi twitched his fingers at him again, gesturing for him to just drop the keys into his palm.

“Seokseok, just gimme the keys, and-”

“You don’t trust me, do you?” Hoseok interjected, as he finally moved to get up off his bed. Yoongi saw that his blouse was still on the covers where he had left it, a wrinkled puddle of printed fabric in need of washing. “You think that I’m stoned right now, don’t you?”

“…How many?”

“Two,” Hoseok replied without missing a beat. “I’ve had just 4mg of Valium today, Gigi. Honestly, you’re exaggerating. I can handle twenty plus, some days.”

“You keep swallowing twenty plus a day and you ain’t gonna be driving that car much longer, Seokseok,” Yoongi muttered, dropping his hand and shoving it into his front pocket instead. “I’m serious. Cut down on the shit. You’ve got booze to mellow you out more, you don’t need more than 10mg a day. That’s, like…maximum prescription allowance.”

“Sometimes, I forget how many I swallow,” Hoseok said, reaching up to start pulling at his necklace chain. Before he could even open his mouth, his friend quickly added. “But I know how many I swallowed today, Gigi, so, shut up.”

“Well, at least I know it ain’t twenty or you’d still be lying in bed right now,” he retorted, as he let the younger man exit his bedroom first.

Yoongi spared a final glance down at the open VHS box on his bed, the one that had arrived in the mail that Hoseok had opened. Then he followed Hoseok out and along the slight landing, going down the double flight of spiral stairs until they were on the ground-floor.

Hoseok got into his monkstrap leather shoes and Yoongi decided to wear a pair of Oxfords today rather than sandals, just because he was going to see his father and it would look more professional. Whilst his friend left his mansion to jump in his car, he grabbed his house keys from the bowl beside his telephone and then he exited too, locking the front door securely and hastily crossing the drive to join him.
Yoongi popped the passenger-seat door of the Porsche 944 open and he climbed inside, settling down against the cream leather seating with a sigh and pulling the door shut hard. He was in the act of fastening his seatbelt in place when his nose detected a scent in the vehicle that was different to usual, and so Yoongi took a few sniffs as he snapped the belt in place. Then it hit him what he was breathing in: faded cigar smoke.

“Seokseok,” he said, as he wrinkled his nose. “Why does your car stink of cigars?”

“Why do you think?” Hoseok retorted, reversing out of the drive and giving the wheel a soft twist to roll onto the road smoothly. “Seriously, why do you think? I want guesses.”

“Uh,” Yoongi glanced over at him to see that he had no seatbelt in place across his ribs, and then he looked out of the front window again. “Son of an oil tycoon?”

“No.”

“Son of a CEO?”

“Nope.”

“Daughter of-”

“You’re getting cold, Gigi, very cold.”

“Trophy wife of- look, just tell me, I ain’t gonna get it,” Yoongi said, as he sank back in the seat to get more comfortable. “I could’ve a hundred guesses and still not get it right with you, Seokseok.”

“The answer is…” Hoseok drummed his fingers on the steering-wheel for effect before finishing. “Eunseok’s husband.”

“…Huh?”

Eunseok, as in his beautiful model of an older sister?
Yoongi turned his head to stare at him rather dumbly, completely taken aback by this reply. What was her husband doing riding in his car? He tried to think of a valid reason, and yet he just found himself growing even more confused until the younger man started laughing at him.

“Gigi, I took them out for a meal a few nights ago and the leather still stinks of the fucking things,” Hoseok explained, rolling his eyes to look at him. “That’s what you get for assuming it was just another one-night stand.”

“Can you blame me for assuming?” Yoongi retorted sharply, making his friend shift in his seat to smack at his upper arm hard. “You made it into a guessing game! It’s your fault I did.”

Hoseok let out a weary sigh and then he thankfully turned his attention back to the road in front of them, placing both hands on the steering-wheel as he did so.

Yoongi moved to place his hand down on his knee instead, their usual driving positions reversed, and then he decided to look out of the window beside him.

The sight of the streets of Pacific Heights was the same as always: more gently sloping sidewalks and the distant sights of other neighbourhoods visible across the low horizon, mansions and small apartment blocks placed here and there on the wide streets. It was nothing interesting or new, and so Yoongi didn’t really pay attention to the view outside of his window, rather he just stared at the sidewalks until they were blurring into nothing more than a colourful sea of bodies and passing cars, whilst a slight breeze came in through the open window to give him some relief from the heat. Had he not been wearing a baseball cap, then it would have teased at his hair like fingers, but instead it just ruffled at the collar of his loose shirt. Thinking about the wind playing with his hair made Yoongi think of something else too, something unrelated yet strangely fitting.

Had Jimin ran his fingers through his hair like that that night at the bathhouse? He couldn’t seem to recall him doing something like that, but he could recall his fingers running along other parts of his body.

Yoongi stuck his tongue out to wet his lips, dragging his eyes away from the window to glance over at his friend before turning back to it.

There had been his waist, of course, and down his sides to slip under his towel and grab at his buttocks rather roughly. Jimin had ran his fingers along his arms and stomach, his innermost thighs and…other intimate places. But what he seemed to keep remembering most vividly, was how Jimin
had wiped beads of water off his face before slipping his arms around his neck and kissing him softly.

Yoongi didn’t know why exactly, but if he and Jimin managed to meet again, he wanted him to run his fingers through his hair. He wanted to do the same to him too, for the young mule had had such effortlessly loosely tousled hair that had framed his face beautifully; so soft and sleek-looking, unlike his sometimes unruly and pulled-at hair. He just simply wanted to touch it was all, a rather unusual urge that he couldn’t seem to shake.

Yoongi could crave more of that intimacy, more heated touching and sexual contact, which he most certainly would like to experience with him again. Yet, his mind seemed to be more preoccupied on whimsical desires like touching the younger man’s hair. It was just like in the bathhouse, when he had wanted to kiss him so much that he had been trembling with nerves at the thought of such a small act of passion.

“Gigi, you OK?”

Yoongi was brought back to reality by the sound of Hoseok’s voice, catching him by complete surprise. He dragged his eyes away from the window to look at him, and it was only then that he realised that he had rather roughly started squeezing hold of his friend’s knee, his fingers digging into his leg tight. So he loosened his grip and he patted at his knee softly, before moving his hand back to his own lap instead.

“Yeah, just thinking,” Yoongi muttered under his breath.

“What? You wanna know more of my secrets after sneaking into my bedroom, huh?” he retorted, shifting in his seat to look out of the front window. “Ain’t nothing to worry ‘bout.”

“So, it’s got nothing to do with daddy?” the younger man asked, trying to keep his eyes on the traffic lights even though he was clearly struggling to concentrate on them.

When Yoongi made a noise in agreement, this made Hoseok’s lips lift into a sudden smile.

“Then that means it’s something you don’t wanna talk about. You always wanna talk business, Gigi,
you’re all work and no play. So, it’s something else. Thinking about that kid, huh? Or wait, that mule? It’s totally the mule.”

Yoongi struggled to maintain a neutral expression at this, knowing that he should have just lied and covered his ass. But he had made a stupid mistake and he was now trapped in the car with his friend until they reached Presidio Heights.

In other words, he was fucked.

“What does he look like? At least tell me that much, Gigi, that’s nothing at all; right?” Hoseok suggested. “I won’t bug you for anything else, so long as you tell me what he looks like, I promise.”

“…He’s a pretty boy,” Yoongi replied after a moment of thought. “Y’know, he’s got that look and air ‘round him. Tight jeans, v-necks and leather jackets, tousled hair - those kinda vibes-”

“Are we talking about a Rob Lowe pretty boy look?” Hoseok asked, before glancing over at him. “If so, you hit the jackpot.”

“I dunno, he’s just a pretty boy,” he mumbled, sinking down in his seat ever so slightly.

“What else? I need more vivid descriptions here, Gigi,” Hoseok almost demanded, as the traffic lights changed to amber. “I’ve got an idea about his fashion. Makeup? His face?”

“He was wearing a lil makeup, yeah,” Yoongi explained, as he reached up to start rubbing his fingers across his lower lip, searching his mind for his strongest mental image of Jimin to try and describe him for his friend. “Uh, he’s maybe the same height as me, but a bit more built. Still slim though, just not scrawny. Tanned, nice tanned complexion, uh…it’s hard describing his face, Seokseok.”

“Why? Too drunk to remember what he looks like?” his friend joked, as he carried on driving down the road.

“Nah, just…” Yoongi paused for a moment, before trying again. “Round face but a sharp jawline. He’s got these droopy eyes but they were kinda nice, ‘cos they fitted the rest of his features. He’s got, uh, this lil pointed nose, but his lips are just…wow.”
“Wow?” Hoseok repeated curiously.

“Yeah it’s, uh, it’s the only way I can describe ‘em,” he said in a quiet mumble.

For a moment, the car fell silent, nothing more than the faded sounds of the streets outside bleeding in through the windows along with the breeze.

Yoongi was still running his fingers over his lips, feeling little indents in the smooth skin from his own nibbling teeth, and he wondered if Hoseok had really been telling the truth and he was going to leave it at that and not ask any more questions. Yet, despite making a promise, he knew his friend well enough and he was anticipating another flood of questions to hit him any second from now. The younger man managed to hold his tongue for roughly thirty seconds before opening his mouth again.

“Did you see his dick?” Hoseok asked bluntly.

“I ain’t answering that question,” Yoongi replied without missing a beat, hearing his friend snorting obnoxiously as he did. “You got your description, so, there, that’s it.”

“You could describe his dick, just saying,” Hoseok remarked wryly, as he twisted the steering-wheel to turn a corner at the end of the block. “But fine, I’ll stop with the pestering if you answer this final question.”

“Seokseok…”

“Wait, hear me out, it’s not crude or stupid,” his friend stated, letting go of the steering-wheel with one hand to hold it up for emphasis. “All I was going to ask is: are you planning on seeing him again?”

“I…uh, I’m hoping to see him again, yeah,” Yoongi replied honestly, feeling no need to lie to him. “I mean, he mightn’t wanna see me again, but-”

“Gigi, let’s not shit all over ourselves before lunch for today, please?” Hoseok interjected. “Let’s try a little optimism instead, hmm? I know that you hate optimism, but sometimes it feels good to hope for something, and sometimes that hoping actually helps it come true. So, he’s going to want to see
you again."

True to his word, Hoseok didn’t actually ask him any more questions about Jimin on the rest of the ride to Presidio Heights. His friend decided to turn the radio on instead to help him ignore the urge to start talking again, leaving Yoongi to stare out of the front window and play his words over in his head.

Sure, there was nothing wrong with hoping for something to happen, but Yoongi still found himself not wanting to do something like that. Maybe it was as a result of his insecurities and worries about his interest in Jimin, maybe it was just because he was cynical and pessimistic at heart. It was just hard hoping for something good to happen when goodness was hard to come by in his life, especially when that goodness was the dazzling smile and warm touch of another man.

Yoongi was still waiting for his usual reflex to kick in and ruin this momentary goodness for him. That familiar bear trap hidden at the back of his mind that would clamp around his leg and stop him dead in his tracks in fear and pain, until he freed himself at the expense of entering another spiral of self-hatred and denial. Right now, he was tiptoeing around it, but it could snap close on him at any second. How cruel it would be if it waited until the next possible opportunity that he had to see Jimin before trapping him.

When Hoseok reached the family home, he pulled up outside of the front gate and he killed the engine, climbing out first whilst he undone his seatbelt.

Yoongi joined him on the curb a few seconds later and he ran his eyes over the familiar sight in front of him.

The Jung clan home had never changed over the years, for there was little reason for it to do so - save for the sake of flaunting wealth and desiring a change of scenery, that was. The pastel blue and white mansion was set on its own land, a small acre with pleasing side gardens and a front lawn surrounding the tall building filled with fresh greenery. It was a seven bedroom home of three storeys with a separate garage connected to it, and the front of the building had a set of steps to climb to reach the front door with a balcony right above it. The sight of the long stretch of pristine patio that ran the length of the front of the home, and the bay windows curving out of the walls, brought back so many memories for Yoongi that he found himself slowing down until he stopped walking.

This was the home that he had spent so much of his childhood inside, the home that made him think of birthdays and Christmas and hot meals. It was the building in which he had had his first kiss (sitting on the front balcony of the home watching the sunset with Hoseok one late summer evening, aged eleven) and where he had lost his virginity (in a bedroom hidden away from view on the other side of the house). It had been so long since Yoongi had visited the home that he couldn’t help but feel overwhelmed by a wave of nostalgia for a moment.
Hoseok pushed the wrought iron fence open and he glanced back over his shoulder at him, and so Yoongi followed him through and up the front path that consisted of tanned paving flags. His friend walked without a hint of nostalgia making him drag his feet, bounding up the steps to get to the door and ringing the bell.

Yoongi heard it faintly through the door as he also mounted the steps, and after a moment of waiting on the front porch, the door swung open to reveal the sight of the housekeeper - Miyoung.

Just like Woori, who had been working for Hoseok and his family for as long as Yoongi could recall, Miyoung had also worked for them. She oversaw the rest of the hired help, from the maids that were called in for cleaning service to the gardeners, and she actually lived in the house in one of the ground-floor bedrooms. Miyoung had also cooked most of the food (and likely still did), and though she had helped care for the Jung clan children, at least Hoseok’s mother had actually been there to watch over and raise them too.

If Yoongi thought of her as his surrogate mother, then Miyoung was a little like a surrogate auntie to him.

“Good morning, Master Jung and Prince Min,” she said with a warm note in her voice. “Come in, come in, I was just about to start preparing breakfast.”

Hoseok entered the home first and Yoongi followed him inside, the woman closing the door shut behind them.

The first section of the mansion was a sweeping foyer that stretched all the way back to show a dining-area at the far end of the ground-floor, to the side of which there was a high counter and the kitchen behind it. To the left, there was a curved staircase, and to the right, there was a large leisure-area that was currently empty.

Yoongi watched Miyoung moving in the direction of the kitchen for a moment, and then he turned his attention back to studying the interior of the manor.

It hadn’t changed that much at all since the last time that Yoongi had visited, save for obvious things like the floral arrangements in the vases and the house plants in all of the corners, the art on the walls and the decorative antiques placed here and there. The flooring was still a lacquered dark wood that was beautiful and matched the occasional exposed beams around the walls and ceiling, and it was also what the stairs were made of. The stair rail was glass and metal, not decorative at all but rather
modern, just like the lighting on the walls. There were either rectangle bulbs placed on the white walls, or protruding globe bulbs coming out of the ceiling. The only chandelier present was hanging over the dining table, and it was purely for aesthetic purposes rather than practical use. The furniture inside was all white and dark brown to match the interior, just like the massive floral rug that was placed by the door to welcome guests.

The Jung clan home was bright, clean, and spacious, and being inside of it made Yoongi almost feel like he was home again.

Yoongi was in the act of unknotting his first shoe when his ears detected the softest sound of movement, and when he glanced up, he saw that a certain lady was making her way down the staircase.

Hoseok didn’t even bother getting out of his shoes yet, rather he just let out a dramatic sound and he moved to get to the bottom of the staircase, holding a hand out to his mother as if she were a princess or maybe his prom date.

“And here comes the queen herself,” his friend exclaimed, making her laugh at his childish antics as she reached over to take his hand and she went down the last couple of steps.

Dohee moved to get up onto her tiptoes, slipping her arms around her son’s neck so that she could embrace him and then plant a kiss on his cheek. As Yoongi got out of his Oxfords, he heard her speaking to him, doing so in a soft voice so that he could only catch hints of what she was saying. He straightened up and he glanced around to locate the small shelf that he could place his shoes on and retrieve his pair of guest slippers from. He had just slipped the shoes onto the shelf, and he was about to hunker down and grab the slippers, when he felt her gaze shifting onto him.

“Let me have a good look at you, sweetheart,” Dohee said, as she came to a stop right in front of him, which forced him to straighten up again and turn to look at her.

Yoongi was only slightly taller than her even when she was wearing flat house slippers, but that slight difference still meant that he had to look down at her. Though it had been a couple of years since they had last seen each other, those years had been very kind to Dohee.

Yes, Yoongi could see that she had aged incredibly well, for she almost looked the exact same if not for a haircut, a vague hint of wrinkles at the corners of her eyes, and a slight amount of weight gain on her hips. She still had her slim waist but full curves, her hair was free from any grey strands, and she looked just as beautiful as always dressed in a fitted black dress with a high neckline and short sleeves.
Yoongi smiled down at Dohee fondly, reaching over to place his hands on her upper arms as she reached up to cup his cheeks and then turned his head this way and that way ever so slightly. Her arms were so soft, so smooth and warm to the touch like a mother’s arms should be.

“You’ve lost more weight,” she remarked before letting go of him, her lips turning down at the corner disapprovingly. “You didn’t have much to lose in the first place, Yoongi.”

“I know, I know,” he said quietly, before laughing softly under his breath.

“It’s because you’re working too much, isn’t it?” Dohee asked, showcasing that preternatural maternal instinct of hers. “Honey, I thought that you promised to keep an eye on him?”

“I did,” Hoseok argued, as he stepped out of his other shoe. “But Gigi’s stubborn as hell, mother, believe me. I can’t keep an eye on him, I need to keep both.”

“Very funny,” his mother said in a flat tone. “Gigi? That’s new, where did that come from?”

“Gigi and Seokseok,” Hoseok said, moving to draw closer to them and grabbing hold of his upper arm to lean in close. “What a cute pair we are; hmm?”

Judging from the fact that Dohee laughed, his expression was as sour as Yoongi had been hoping it would be.

Hoseok simply ignored it and beamed right back at him, and after a few seconds, he found it incredibly hard to keep his lips neutral at the corners.

“Are you here to see your father?” Dohee asked, as Yoongi pulled his arm free to retrieve his house slippers. “He’s outside right now, out on the patio. But you know how he is, honey. Soon enough, he’ll be right back to working, so, you should try and sort out everything out today if you can.”

“That’s the plan,” Yoongi replied, as he turned back to the shoe stand.
Hoseok beat him to it, and after slipping into his house slippers, he quickly crossed the ground-floor in the direction of the dining-area to exit the house through the glass patio doors.

Rather than follow after him, Yoongi decided to linger in the foyer, just in case the man wanted to escort them into his study, or perhaps address the matter with them in the leisure-area instead. He could sense that Dohee was looking at him, and so after a moment, he decided to turn his head and hold her gaze.

“How’s, uh, how’s everything going for you right now?” he asked, wondering if the question was as stupid and awkward-sounding as it had felt as he had asked it.

“Everything is going fine, Yoongi,” she replied, before giving him a soft smile. “I was going to ask you the same thing. How’s your mother?”

“Your guess’ is good as mine,” Yoongi replied, aiming to sound witty. “I, uh, I dunno, I ain’t seen her for a long time now; longer than when we last saw each other, actually. I’ll assume she’s well, ‘cos I’d like to hope that my father would tell me if she wasn’t. Y’know?”

“I understand.”

“He’s doing well though, uh, he seems to be doing fine,” Yoongi mumbled, as he looked down at his slippers. “I saw him a couple of days ago over a business…issue. That’s why I’m here today, I’m hoping to fix the issue properly.”

“Well, you know that Hajoon will be sure to help you in any way that he can, sweetheart,” Dohee said. “You know that you’re practically family to us, a second son that we never had, but treasure like we do.”

Yoongi made a quiet noise at this, his eyes still staring down at his slippers because he didn’t want to look at her right now.

Yes, he knew that the family appreciated him, that they appreciated him a hell of a lot more than his own parents did, and the knowledge was bittersweet. It made him feel so relieved to hear her saying those words to him, to let him know that his own love for his best friend’s family was reciprocated, but it also stung a little knowing that he might never get to hear his parents say something like that.
“It’s been awhile though,” Dohee remarked suddenly. “I was wondering something, but I’m not sure if I should ask it.”

“Y’know you can ask me anything,” he replied without a hint of hesitation. “And y’know that I’d do pretty much anything for you too, not that I need to tell you that. You already know.”

“I was wondering if you might just have met someone special, because it’s been so long since we last spoke,” Dohee said, as she glanced across the foyer. “I know that Hoseok hasn’t. That boy is trying his very hardest to break my heart by refusing to even entertain the notion of entering a serious relationship. I doubt that he ever will.”

“I’m sure that he’ll settle down at some point, he’s just…living the high life right now.”

“You just always seem so lonely, Yoongi. You were such a lonely child, so quiet and reserved that…” Dohee sighed heavily and then she moved closer to him, her hand lifting to settle on his upper back. “Such a lonely person, and yet I know just how fascinating you are when you start talking, how wonderful your laugh is when something gets you just right and you can’t control yourself. Why are you so always so lonely, hmm? Do you like the distance, is it easier for you to have that distance sometimes?”

“No…no, I hate the loneliness,” he admitted, as he finally looked up and ran his eyes across the foyer. “I hate it, it’s like a-a sickness that you catch and can’t get rid of. I don’t like being alone, Dohee, but tryna fight it ain’t that easy. Not when you’re so used to it.”

“Living in that big mansion of yours, up on that hill, that can’t help,” she stated, slowly moving her hand to stroke at his back. “Homes are supposed to be shared, sweetheart, it’s where families are made and grow, after all.”

Yoongi could see that Hoseok was standing on the patio porch by the door, but upon glancing inside the home and seeing that his mother was talking to him, he decided to move away for a moment and grant them both some peace. He was grateful for it, but he almost wished that he had interrupted their conversation too.

“I guess that I met someone recently though? I mean, technically I met three new people, two of ’em that I think could become friends. But there’s one that I…uh, I’d like to get to know him better.”

I’m sure that they would want to be your friend too, you just need to try and talk to them more. Yes? Talk to them, visit them, don’t become a stranger. Especially not towards the one you want to… know better.”

“I’m hoping to meet him again as soon as I can,” Yoongi explained, before letting his breath out in a soft laugh. “I still ain’t even sorted that out and I’m nervous and shaking at the thought. I’ve seen some bad things, I’ve done some bad things myself, and yet I’m so fucking nervous over something like that.”

“Oh, sweetheart,” she almost cooed, as she moved to grab hold of one of his hands. She held it between both of hers and her grip was just right: both tender and firm. “There’s nothing wrong with being nervous. I’ll bet that he must be a beautiful young man to have you shaking in your boots like this.”

Yoongi really didn’t know what to say in reply to this, and so he just held his tongue instead.

“I think that a certain man of the house is waiting for you,” Dohee remarked. “So, I should let you go and see him. But, Yoongi, you know that this door is always open for you. You just need to knock. Yes?”

“I know.”

Before she left to go back upstairs, Dohee shifted to get onto tiptoe and she pressed a kiss against his cheek, the contact quick and soft.

Yoongi gave her hand a squeeze and then he let go, watching her departing for a moment before crossing the room to get to the glass door. He was a few feet away when Hoseok shifted and caught sight of him, and so his friend pushed the door open for him and then he gestured that he should follow him out onto the porch.

“Playing Twenty Questions?” Hoseok joked.

“Seokseok, I’m still convinced that I’m love with your mother,” he retorted.

“I didn’t need to know that, Gigi.”
When Yoongi stepped out onto the porch, he felt the heat hitting him instantly, for he had been completely unaware of how strong that the air-conditioning in the home had been. He was thankful that he still had his baseball cap on to block the sunlight, but he was going to have to remove it when he finally sat down with his friend’s father to be respectful.

A quick glance across the garden showed him the same sight as always: a massive patch of perfectly manicured bright green grass and hedges that lined the land along with a lot of trees. There was a pool across the garden, but it was quite the distance away and currently out of view because it was blocked by the patio. Said patio was a stretch of wooden decking that was connected to the house by way of a paved path, with low walls and a large table on it with a parasol set into the centre to offer shade to all sitting underneath it. Yoongi knew that there was a large barbeque set close to the table because he had shared enough evening barbeques at the home as a child, but his nose detected no wonderful smokey scents this morning.

As expected, Hajoon was sitting at the table with a stack of various newspapers to one side and a file to the other. He was in the act of reading one, lounged back in his chair with one leg crossed over the other, looking rather relaxed today. Unlike his father, who had the air of being wound up tight as a coil even when he was doing nothing, Hajoon had been blessed to always look at ease even during great moments of stress. Yoongi knew that Hoseok had inherited that trait from him, just like he had inherited his lean frame and rather large smile. On the older man, it was professional but still maintained an honest feeling, and on his best friend, it was quite simply just dazzling and pleasing to see. A quick study of him showed that he was currently dressed in a shirt with the sleeves rolled up along with a pair of tan slacks, rather than his usual loose suits of choice that he worked in, which were usually deep blues or various shades of grey.

Hoseok reached the table first and he proceeded to draw his chair out for him.

At the slight scraping sound, Hajoon glanced over the top of the newspaper to look at them both.

“Ah, we meet again,” the man said, as he folded the paper up and he placed it aside. “How have you been, son?”

It was strange that Yoongi knew that Hajoon was speaking to him and not Hoseok, for the term ‘son’ had been addressed towards him for as long as he could remember.

“Not eating, not sleeping, working too hard just like always,” Yoongi retorted, as he sat down in the chair and he pulled his cap off to place it down on the table.
This made Hajoon’s lips lift wryly at the corners.

“What ‘bout you, Uncle Jung?”

“I think you know the answer to that question, Yoongi.”

Yoongi ran his hand through his still slightly damp hair at this, hoping that it didn’t look as messy as it felt.

Hoseok shifted to sit down beside him, lounging in the chair and folding one leg over the other in a mirror image of his father.

For a moment, the air fell silent, and Yoongi played his words over carefully, wondering if he was talking about what he thought he was. Considering the fact that he had arranged to see him today, that seemed to be the case. Sacramento Snow, of course, the talk of the town, and yet still not important enough to warrant his father’s attention for more than five minutes.

“How bad we talking here?” Yoongi finally asked, as he dropped his hand onto the table.

“Well, it depends on your definition of bad,” Hajoon said, shifting to sit up in his seat and placing his hands down on the table. “I’m not a man on the streets, Yoongi, that’s you. You see the effect, I just calculate it. My current calculations are leading me to see losses of profit in several regions, one of which wasn’t your jurisdiction.”

“Of course not, I make sure to clean up my messes,” Yoongi retorted. “As Seunghyun Choi can testify.”

“Yes, I’m more than aware of Choi’s rather…unexpected demise,” Hajoon said, as he placed his chin down on the backs of his folded fingers. “That’s why I wanted to speak to you out here, not in front of the wife. You understand. I’d rather not expose her to such things.”

Yoongi knew that Dohee was more than aware of what was going on all around her, for she was an incredibly intelligent woman, and intuitive too. He knew that she was aware of Hoseok’s penchant for partying and sleeping around, and she was likely aware of his rather subtle drug addiction too but had decided to not mention it to him. He had no doubts that she knew about Choi being murdered, perhaps not by his own two hands, but maybe on his demand. But he just made a soft noise to let the
man know that he understood.

“My predictions right now? I think we’re looking at a drop of 1.8 percent of total monthly profits if
the current issue continues,” Hajoon said, as he cocked his head and he looked between the both of
them. “That’s just calculating the exact effect on profit losses on freebase cocaine and heroine, I
should add, and not any possible side-effects that might result from it. Something like speedball
floating around the streets? There will be side-effects, that I can guarantee. You remember what
happened when China White started circulating a couple of years back, hmm?”

“I like to pretend that that never happened,” Yoongi retorted, earning himself an amused sound from
the older man. “1.8 percent, huh? 0.8 percent is too fucking high to me. That’s 18,000 dollars off a
million right there. That’s enough cash to keep a family fed for a year in this city. We ain’t making a
business in feeding families are we, huh?” he asked in a sarcastic tone. “Last time I checked, nah, we
ain’t.”

“The drug, what’s the street name again?”

“Sacramento Snow,” Hoseok explained on his behalf. “It’s been floating around several
neighbourhoods for a couple of weeks now. Some of my darlings have come across it in dens, out on
the streets. Always Asian, that’s what they said to me. Asian dealers, Asian dens. What does that
mean?”

“It means it’s an inside job,” Yoongi continued. “Ain’t 14K, they get supplies from us, they rely on
us in this country. Choi was supplying, he poached from us, and I know for a fact that two other
dens are peddling that shit out to buyers through both Hoseok and my man, Kim. It’s a cloak and
fucking dagger plot.”

“Do you happen to know the men that are peddling it?” Hajoon asked, reaching over to start lightly
twisting his wedding band around his finger.

“Dukwon Lee in Bernal Heights, Seungho Kwon in Mission,” Hoseok replied before quickly
adding. “That’s what our sources are leading us to believe, daddy. But there’s a rather large problem,
and it’s because it-”

“Ain’t my jurisdiction,” Yoongi finished for him. “I asked for permission to sort out the issue, I was
denied. I couldn’t even get permission for Bernal Heights. The issue might not be in my jurisdiction
right now, ’cos I stamped it out myself like a businessman should, but I know what’s gonna happen
if it ain’t corrected. It’s gonna spill over into my jurisdiction and start making itself an issue again.”
Yoongi paused for a moment to let that sink in, glancing between the two Jung men as he did. He could see that Hajoon was listening to them both intently, like his father should have been listening to him that day on the golf greens. The amount of interest and respect that Yoongi saw in his eyes let him know that he was doing the right thing, that he understood what needed to be done and could rule just as well as those aging fossils that still had more power than he did.

“I don’t like cleaning up other men’s messes, I like to keep my streets as clean as I keep my home. I clean mine up, like the missing key of blow; that was on me. 40,000 dollar key, I made that 53 and a half when I got it back. Cold hard profit. I clean up good. But some men can’t make even and shit all over the place trying to do so. Right now, this empire seems to be in need of a clean-up, and I ain’t just talking ‘bout Sacramento Snow. I’m talking everything. This’ been a long time coming, as I’m sure you’ll agree, Uncle Jung.”

“I do agree…”

“Moon Tiger Mob’s standing on a cusp right now, and one side rolls down in my favour, the other doesn’t. I wanna know who’s standing on my side when the future finally comes ‘round. Yeah?”

“I would say that you’re your father’s son, Yoongi, but these days, I feel a little more like you’re becoming your grandfather instead,” Hajoon remarked in a quiet voice, his eyes flickering over the patio for a second.

Yoongi turned his head to see that Miyoung was stepping through the open doorway, carrying a tray with various glasses on to serve drinks whilst the breakfast was still being prepared. So he held his tongue and he allowed her to do so, eyeing the glasses of fruit juice and small cups of espresso as she placed them down on the tabletop and then left them alone again.

“Now, son, I think that we should discuss the potentials for minimising profit loss first and foremost,” Hajoon said, as he lifted his own coffee and he took a deep inhale of the roasted scent. “There’s one way that I’m thinking of currently.”

“Absorbing the brand? I’ve discussed it with Seokseok, I still require assistance to do something like that,” Yoongi said, placing his elbows up on the table and folding his fingers under his chin. “Truthfully speaking, Uncle Jung, you’d be the best man for the job. Y’know numbers, y’know men, y’know business detached away from…emotion and all of that shit. If there was any man that I could trust with brokering a deal, it’d be you. But the trouble is that we ain’t figured out the source of Sacramento Snow, just suppliers. That’s what I wanted Lee and Kwon for, to lead me right to him. But father ain’t letting me touch either of ‘em.”
“Oh, don’t worry,” Hajoon said, lowering his cup to place it down on the table. “I’m most certainly going to be chasing up connections in regards to the possibility. I’m a numbers man, as you put it. If the numbers don’t add up, I’m not doing my job. I like my numbers to add up, just like you like streets to stay clean, son.”

“Would you look at that, daddy?” Hoseok remarked with a grin. “Your first day off in months and you’re already itching to get working again.”

“Well, you know what they say,” Hajoon said, as he looked between them both and then smiled. “No rest for the wicked.”

28th August, 1984, 9:07pm: Kowloon City, Kowloon, Hong Kong

When Jimin finally exited the airport, he was so overjoyed that he could have started cheering, but considering the fact that he was also so very tired, he knew that he wouldn’t give into the urge. He didn’t exactly have the energy to jump up and down and start cheering, and his body was most certainly not going to allow him to do so because his muscles were still repairing from the original smuggling trip to be of much use to him now.

Repairing, only to be once again be stretched to hell and back in a couple of days when yet another lube-slick condom parcel was shoved right up his ass for more than twelve hours.

Great.

For the last four hours, Jimin had been getting processed at airports, waiting in airports, riding on a goddamn plane; but now he was finally free from the stress and hassle of it all. No more queues to stand in, no more constant squawking intercom systems and screaming children to have to listen to - just him and Taehyung, and the dark but busy streets of Kowloon City to blend into for a little while. The dark and thankfully rather cool streets, for at least the evening temperature was at a much more pleasing level of heat. The occasional breeze hitting him made a nice little shiver of delight run down his spine.
“I hate these stupid evening flights,” Jimin muttered, as he shrugged his bag up onto his shoulder and he tried to keep up with Taehyung.

But of course, his friend had longer legs and thigh and stomach muscles that didn’t get an intense workout session every few weeks from gripping a parcel of cocaine up his goddamn ass. Therefore, catching up with him was a mighty challenge.

“I think I prefer evenin’ flights,” Taehyung replied, twisting to look back over his shoulder at him.

Because they were standing so close to the airport, the fluorescent lights of the building meant that Jimin could see him as clear as day.

Taehyung had since removed his student protest hair scarf (likely because it might make the security personnel at the airports suspicious of them) and so his dark hair was messier than usual. The lengths were still tugged up into that tiny ponytail of his, but because the scarf was absent, several curling dark locks were lying across his brow instead. They didn’t obscure his eyes or even his strong eyebrows, for they were too short for that. Taehyung was wearing a fitted white tee-shirt under a rather battered denim jacket, paired with a pair of loose and wide-legged black trousers, and on his feet were a pair of sandals. He still had an eye mask hanging around his neck from the flight, but he reached up to tug it free and shove it into his pocket.

Jimin saw that he looked pretty fresh right now, in neat clothing that matched his messy hair pretty well, and he felt the complete opposite even when he knew that he probably looked fine. He was currently dressed in a pair of tight jeans and one of Namjoon’s shirts that he had managed to snatch before leaving - the chambray one, of course. It was loose and comfortable on his frame, but after spending all of that time cramped on the plane, it was probably covered in creases. At least he had managed to get a brief nap to attempt to refresh himself, because the flight had been so hot and uncomfortable.

“How come?” Jimin asked, seeing that the other man had at least slowed down to allow him to catch up to him.

“I ain’t gotta get up early, for one thing,” Taehyung retorted with a grin. “Plus, when you get here in the evenin’, you can either get drunk and go to sleep right away, or maybe spend some time out on the streets. You get here in the mornin’ and the flow feels all weird, hard to figure out what to do for the day; yeah?”
“Um, yeah, I kinda understand what you mean,” he replied, as he reached up to brush his hair back off his brow. “But maybe I just heard the words “get drunk” and “sleep” and ignored the rest?”

“Sounds about right for you, Jiminie,” his partner agreed, before reaching down with his free hand to take hold of his wrist. His own holdall was dangling from his other hand as if it was as light as a feather. “You hungry, huh? You wanna go to that street market for a lil while ‘fore headin’ to the apartment?”

“Holy shit, yes,” Jimin breathed out dramatically.

Taehyung grinned at him, and then he proceeded to guide him across the last of the tarmac outside of the airport to get onto the main road.

Rather than take of hold of his hand, Taehyung just held onto his wrist instead, his palm smooth but slightly dry against his skin. His grip was so completely different to what Namjoon’s hand felt like around his wrist or against his hands, for his palm was usually a little cooler than his own. It was also different to Yoongi’s hand, which had been warm and so soft than the contact had been rather jarring at first.

Such soft hands didn’t seem to fit a man like Yoongi, one that worked in his line of business. They seemed to hint at a great deal of care. Well, considering how he had looked that night, Jimin guessed that Yoongi might just care about his physical appearance a lot. Clear skin, cologne, soft hands with perfectly blunt nails. Yes, he seemed to put a lot of effort into how he looked, but not in a vain way. It seemed more…innate than that.

Jimin was suddenly aware of the fact that he was thinking about the other man again, and he tried to push the thoughts away. It was rather pointless, he knew that it was pointless, because soon enough another fleeting thought about Yoongi would cross his mind again.

Most of the time, Jimin and Taehyung ended up landing in Hong Kong in the late morning or early afternoon, and so they had struggled to find things to do pass the hours until the evening in the past. The recent trip to Kowloon Walled City was just one particular wandering day trip that they had undertaken, for they often ended up hitting the streets and hoping to find little spots just like the street market. During the daytime hours, it wasn’t that populated, but of an evening and a night it was most certainly popular with tourists and locals, as they had discovered after several visits to it. But there was just something so magnetic about the place, for it just seemed to draw people in.

Jimin had never been to a street market before in his life growing up, they had been as foreign to him as restaurant tables with open grills in Seoul had once been. But after almost a year of travelling, he
had started to grow rather attached to them in a way that he didn’t really understand. They just felt *right* to him, and his sudden liking was just one of those strange fascinations that seemed to occur for no reason at all. Like his want for perfect record cases, like Namjoon’s childhood collection of comic books.

Maybe, it because there was a sense of community coming from the market stalls, a sense that was stripped free from fast food joints back home in America? Fresh food out in the open, haggling and browsing and really absorbing the experience in a way that sitting at a polished counter with a box of food just didn’t seem to generate.

Maybe, it was just because there was a lot of interesting and exciting food to sample? It was probably that, Jimin was aware of that fact that anything that involved food was suddenly fascinating to him.

“How much film have you got in your camera, huh?” Jimin asked, breaking the momentary silence between them. “You gonna snap some shots of the market? Any cool signs that we see?”

“Right now? Got a full pack in the the machine, but I’m gonna need to buy some more,” his friend explained. “You see a store of any kind, lemme know. I can’t read the English signs too good.”

“Sure thing. Are they for your friend?”

“My friend? You remember his name, right?”

“Um, yeah, Jungkook. Right? Something Jungkook, began with a J, I think, maybe…Jeon?”

Jimin glanced over at Taehyung and he gave him a nod to let him know that he was right. Good, he had only been told it a couple of days ago, and it would be pretty funny if he had forgotten it already. Jungkook Jeon, the friend that had once helped him with student protest rallies until he had given it a shot; the one that was now halfway across the world in no other city but San Francisco itself.

Talk about a beautiful coincidence.

“I guess I could add a few for him, yeah. I used to show him ‘em in the past and maybe tell him things, but not too much.”
“Did he know about you working for the mob?”

Jimin glanced around them to check the street, his eyes searching for any kind of glowing neon signs that might tell him that there was a store nearby.

What was Taehyung looking for exactly? A convenience store? A camera store? All of the signs were either in Chinese characters, English letters, or a mixture of the two; and they glowed in various colours from red, yellow, green to blue. They took a turn at the end of the street to go onto another one, this one packed with a crowd of people, and it forced him to have to move that little bit closer to Taehyung to avoid getting separated from him.

“He knew, yeah, just not everythin’,” Taehyung explained. “It ain’t that easy tellin’ people that you help smuggle drugs across the world, yeah? So, I just told him I worked underground for a gang, until he told me that Moon Tiger Mob were gonna get him and his family outta the country. Then I told him a little more, felt like I could trust him with that kinda info.”

“How did he react?”

“He thought it was kinda cool, I guess? I think a lot of guys hear it and think it’s cool, ‘cos they don’t understand it. Over here ‘specially. A lot of people think of us and they think “oh, they’re anti-Japanese”, or “they wanna fight the government”, but they dunno the rest. They dunno ‘bout the labour camps and jail, they dunno ‘bout the smugglin’. The history might seem grand and romantic, but it ain’t what’s happenin’ now. Yeah?”

“Tae, what exactly is the history? I mean, I know about Moon Tiger Mob, about how it started in America. Prince Min told me about it, but I was wondering about how it started in Korea.” Jimin dragged his eyes away from the street to look over at his friend. “Do you know?”

“Um, so far as I know, gangs have been there for awhile. I think maybe since the Joseon Dynasty? I know modern ones started to fight against the imperial devils, and a lot of ‘em actually did it in Japan. Back then, no one was safe: businesses were plundered, women were raped and kidnapped, Japanese thugs were protected by local officials just ‘cos they were Japanese. So, young men started rebellin’. They wanted to protect businesses, keep their people safe. They disappeared for awhile after the war, but then they came back ‘gain. They’re takin’ over a lot of businesses now, gettin’ pretty powerful.”

“So, it was kinda like a protest movement?” Jimin remarked, finding this information highly surprising because it was so very different to what he knew about the gang history in America. “No wonder you ended up working for the mob, huh?”
“It’s in my blood,” Taehyung agreed, before giving him a wide grin. “I just love causin’ trouble. So, what’s the history over in America? Is it kinda like that, fightin’ back against oppression?”

“Moon Tiger Mob’s origins started, um…Prince Min told me that it started through deals with Chinese smugglers. He said that his grandfather made connections, started getting drugs like heroin out on the streets of the city for some nice cash. Then he started contacting immigrants and finding ways to start smuggling things over to Korea too, like more drugs and people. I guess that you could say it started from some kinda oppression, the typical poor immigrant in a new and alien country kinda oppression story. That’s all he told me, I dunno anything else about it, but the mob started with his grandfather.”

At the end of the street, Jimin could see a building that looked like a convenience store, with bright glowing interior lights and many posters in the window advertising products. He didn’t know if it would sell camera film, but he guessed it would be a smart idea to stock it for the tourists, and so he pointed it out to his friend. Sure enough, Taehyung steered him in the direction of the building, and he assumed that it must sell what they needed because the younger man pulled him inside.

“Uh, you see somethin’ you want, just grab it,” Taehyung muttered, as he crossed the store to presumably go looking for camera film.

Jimin watched him go for a moment before glancing over the store again. He saw quite a lot of aisles, but they looked to be organised pretty well to help him figure out where everything was. Talk about convenient. He snorted to himself at the witticism before moving to go over to the wall that had a refrigerated section filled with drinks, because the thought of a freezing cold beverage right now was overpowering. Upon entering the aisle, he found himself coming to a slow stop to stare at the selection of products, because he didn’t have a clue what they were.

Jimin could see the usual brands like Pepsi, Coca Cola and more, with new labels that were still identifiable to his eyes thanks to the wonderful power of consumerism. But there were other drinks too, things that looked like creamy bottles of teas and coffees, fruit juices and sodas that were shocking shades of blues, greens and reds.

When he picked a few up, he saw English printed on them in tiny characters, not perfect but good enough for him to understand if he squinted at the text. Okay, he didn’t need to guess the ingredients at least, but he had a funny feeling that he was just going to go straight for a Pepsi anyway.

Like he had thought, after a quick browse, Jimin grabbed the familiar drink and then he moved along the aisle to eye the snacks just for the sake of it. He wanted to see the kind of things that they sold here and if he knew any of the brands, for it was a rather strange game to play until Taehyung called
him over to the till. Like ‘I Spy’ minus the annoying descriptions and guesses. He was running his eyes along colourful packets when he happened to notice something, something that made him actually start laughing.

There was a box of brown sugar cinnamon *Pop Tarts* sitting right there on the shelf, almost as if it had been left there just for him.

Jimin had been storing away a mental note to try and find them for Taehyung at some point, because he was convinced that the other man would love them. For once, the note hadn’t slipped out of his mind, and so he reached over to pick up the box and he eyed it, seeing that it was covered in English with a sticker on the side in Chinese characters.

Before leaving the aisle, he also grabbed a packet of *Oreos*, and then he went off across the store to find his friend. He found him in the furthest aisle from him, standing in a section of the store that was filled with a variety of miscellaneous objects: umbrellas, batteries, light bulbs and more. But he also saw Polaroid film and blank VHS tapes too, which Taehyung happened to standing right in front of.

“Hey, brother?” Jimin called, as he crossed the aisle to get closer to the younger man. “You ready?”

“Uhuh,” Taehyung said, grabbing a couple of packets of film off the shelf.

Jimin saw that it wasn’t all that he had grabbed in the store, however, for in his other hand and rolled up into a tube to hide the cover was a magazine that was most certainly not for hobbies like fly fishing or cars. No, it was definitely a skin magazine, quite possibly an imported copy of *Playboy* judging from the popularity.

How very funny the contrast between the products they were holding were: *Pop Tarts* and pornographic magazines. Jimin’s first thought was ‘how American’, and he couldn’t help but smirk to himself as they crossed the aisle to go to the till beside the door. He dropped his stuff on the counter first and then his friend did so too, the magazine unrolling as it did and showing him the cover.

Some blonde woman adorned the cover, maybe a model or an actress, Jimin was clueless. Her hair was a bleached tangle of curls around her face, her expression caught between something that was meant to look like arousal and maybe sleepiness, and she had perfectly tanned skin and a toned body. He saw that she was lounged in bed titillatingly with her arms up behind her head and her body curved over a stack of white pillows and covers. She was wearing grey and white sleepwear that consisted of a knickers set up high on her hips with a curving plunge to the front that just about skirted her pubic hair line (assuming that she had any, of course) and a vest. The vest was pulled up
high to expose her stomach and ribs, the soft swell of her breasts visible but not enough to expose her nipples. He supposed that hiding the nipples away was meant to be exciting for some reason that he didn’t quite understand.

Why did heterosexual guys care so much about naked nipples? Why show off almost her entire breasts like that but hide those two tiny parts away? He understood the clever style of knickers to show off just enough of her lower body to be enticing, but he didn’t understand the vest.

Heterosexual people were weird, he decided in that moment. They were so incredibly weird.

Jimin eyed a section of text beside the woman to see something about cocaine, for it seemed to be an article about the dangers of the drug. How ironic. Then he looked away and he watched the old man behind the till starting to scan the products for them and then load them into a plastic bag.

Taehyung pulled out a small bundle of notes, held together with a silver clip, and he saw a mixture of highly decorated red and green bills that he then rifled through. Jimin studied the bundle, and he wondered how much exactly he was carrying on him, before Taehyung dropped several notes down on the counter and then he shoved the clip back inside of his front trouser pocket. After being given a handful of coins in change, he transferred his holdall up onto his shoulder so that he could grab the plastic bag, and then he once again reached over to take hold of his wrist to steer him out of the store.

“Honestly, Jiminie, we’re going to the market and you still bought snacks from that store,” Taehyung remarked, as they started walking down the sidewalk again.

“Hey, I bought them so you could try them!” Jimin argued. “I think that you’d like them and I know you probably can’t get them in Seoul, so, I grabbed them whilst we were here instead.”

“Then let’s try ‘em,” his partner said, holding the bag up to him and silently telling him to root around inside it because he still had a free hand unlike him.

“You gotta toast one of the snacks, like heat them up first. You can try these ones though,” Jimin explained, as he pulled out the packet of Oreos instead of the box of Pop Tarts. “They’re biscuits, you don’t need to toast them. Called ‘Oreos’.”

“Orleo,” Taehyung attempted, getting pretty close all things considered.
Jimin tore the packet open to pull one of the black and white biscuits free, holding it out to him in offering, and so Taehyung leaned forward to grab it from his fingers with his mouth. He managed to fit the whole thing inside of his mouth, crunching it with a curious expression on his face. Jimin pulled his own biscuit free, taking a bite of it and waiting for his verdict.

“They taste kinda…salty,” Taehyung said, as he eyed the biscuit in his fingers. “Are they supposed to be salty? Ain’t biscuits supposed to be sweet?”

“It’s like peanut butter, it’s a little salty, but it tastes sweet when you put it on stuff,” Jimin explained. “Sweet and salty go together good.”

“Fuck’s peanut butter, Jiminnie?”

Jimin cheeked a bite of the snack to stare at him for a moment, in absolute awe that he had no clue what peanut butter was. It seemed like he had yet another thing to add onto the list of food that he needed to get Taehyung to sample. It was never-ending apparently. Then he shoved the second bite of biscuit into his mouth and he finished eating it.

“How I kinda like ‘em,” Taehyung said after a moment of thought. “American snacks are weird, but tasty.”

Jimin took that as a hint to give him another biscuit, and he had no doubts that by the end of the evening, they would have finished the whole packet together. After eating several of them, he shoved the packet away to grab the Pepsi instead, sharing that with his friend too. It seemed that they were going to share everything, save for the Playboy magazine.

By the time that they had reached the market, Jimin had tossed the empty bottle in a bin and Taehyung had helped himself to a couple more of the Oreos, but he doubted that that had ruined their appetite. Not when there was fried meats, herb and curried batters, and even more sweet things to sample.

Kowloon City street market was little more than a block of narrow streets filled with stalls that mostly sold food instead of other items. Sometimes, he saw trinket, fabric, and art stalls, but they were smaller and harder to spot nestled between the larger stalls with hissing vats of fat, smoking grills, and steaming pots. Like he had expected, the area was packed with bodies - people of all races and ages filling the streets and taking in the sights, tastes and culture of the city. It meant that he had to stick close to his friend because he relied on him to do the talking and paying, and so there were sadly no chances for solo wandering tonight.
Jimin collected the Polaroid camera from Taehyung’s bag before they entered the market, just because the second that they stepped inside of it it would be too crowded to do so. He checked the film, slung the lanyard around his neck, and then he followed after his friend.

Just like usual, Taehyung had to attempt a lot of the talking, for most of the stall owners didn’t speak English being quite old. He seemed to only have a fractured grasp on what he was saying, but that was good enough for the men and women on the stalls. What Jimin could do was rather limited, for he could either stare at the food and people during the bartering and point like a child, or he could take photographs and let Taehyung take full control. Since taking shots for him during the protest rally, Jimin had taken a bit of a liking to trying to take photographs, and though he thought they were probably pretty bad, it was still fun playing around with the device.

So whilst Taehyung tried to speak to a woman that looked about a century old, he decided to turn around and look down the viewfinder to spot something attractive. He moved a few feet around his friend as he did so, finally managing to get a nice view of several bright stalls in front of him. He hit the button, pulled the film free from the shutter to lightly shake it, and then he resumed eyeing their surroundings.

Jimin had just shoved the piece of film into Namjoon’s shirt pocket when Taehyung turned to face him, holding two skewers in his hands on which there were ball-shaped chunks of something covered in a golden batter speckled with black pepper and herbs. He had no clue what it was and so he asked his friend what he had bought, twisting to look at the stall sign. He couldn’t read it, but he saw several grills covered in similar skewers and lots of beers too.

“Fish balls,” Taehyung explained, as he took a bite of his own snack; cheeking it and then making a series of noises as he huffed at the heat and blew out a little cloud of hot air. “Hot, ah, they’re hot!”

“Just came off the grill, that’s why,” Jimin joked, as he fixed his holdall up onto his shoulder and he accepted the skewer off him.

“I meant they’re hot spicy too; curry batter. But they’re good, really good, Jiminie.”

Jimin was to find that there was a good reason for the stall selling beer too, for after just several bites of the fish balls, the curry batter started to make his tongue feel like it was being roasted. They had to purchase two bottles of Tsingtao beer to combat this fact before continuing their wandering through the market at a nice leisurely pace.
It actually felt pretty nice to just be out like this, a beer in hand on some crowded street with Taehyung in the late evening. It was relaxing even when the packed market should have been a little stressful, and he just hoped that any other snacks that they purchased tasted as good as the fish balls did. There were so many stalls to check out, and so he had no doubt that they would manage to find something equally delicious, if not more so.

Jimin had just finished eating his serving and he was in the act of tossing the skewer in a rubbish bin when a strange and rather unpleasant scent hit him. It seemed to be coming from a stall a few feet away, one that had trays of what looked like tofu blocks on display to him. Why was that scent coming from the stall and why was no one standing around it reacting to the scent like he was?

“Tae, why does that smell so weird?” he asked, not even sure if his friend would know what he was talking about. “I mean, what is it?”

“Stinky tofu,” Taehyung replied without a hint of hesitation.

“Are you being serious, or is the stinky part a joke? Because if it is, that’s actually a great joke.”

“I’m bein’ serious. Wanna try some?”

“Oh no, I’m not touching that,” Jimin said, as he turned his face away from the stall and tried to not gag. “It’s disgusting, Tae.”

“It’s just tofu,” the younger man stated. “Just smells bad, is all, but I bet that it tastes really good.”

“No, if it smells that bad it’s gotta taste bad,” Jimin argued, reaching over with his free hand to grab hold of his elbow and steering him away from the stall. “Let’s stick to the usual, yeah? Meat, meat and more meat. The fish balls were nice and they smelled nice.”

The next stall to catch their eyes happened to be one that sold a great variety of grilled and fried meats. Jimin didn’t know what all of them were, but he could identify a lot of them by eyesight alone: beef, pork, and chicken being the more obvious ones. They sold meat and organs on the stall, marinated in sticky sauces and gravy that made him almost salivate at the sight. Whilst Taehyung ordered a little pot of beef offal, Jimin settled on a marinated chicken skewer, knowing that nothing could ever go wrong with chicken regardless of what it was cooked in. It turned out to be a sweet and sour sauce, which was just what he had been hoping for.
“You gotta try this,” he said around a mouthful. “Seriously, brother, take a bite.”

Taehyung did indeed sample the chicken, and he also offered him some offal in return, which Jimin tried. He had been expecting it to be weird, but it was actually nice, a little chewy but nice. Sure, the chicken was better, but that was because it was chicken.

“I wish that we had things like this back in San Francisco,” Jimin said, as he wiped a blob of sauce out of the corner of his mouth with his thumb. “I mean, we have markets that sell stuff, but it’s mostly fruits and vegetables and raw meats, not stuff like this. You buy the stuff yourself and prepare it, rather than buy the prepared food.”

“You can get it either way back in Seoul,” Taehyung said around a massive chunk of offal. “Stalls sell you raw, but they also cook some stuff that you can sample and buy too, so y’know you’ll like the shit.”

“Sadly in America, you gotta buy it to try it…”

Over the next half hour or so, Jimin found himself stopping every now and again to snap photographs on Taehyung’s behalf. He liked getting angled shots of the stall goods mostly, especially the ones that sold wooden crates filled with fruits so bright and fresh-looking, displayed like a very rainbow in front of buyers. Taehyung ended up purchasing a couple of things, mangoes mostly - which Jimin wasn’t too fond of, but also some massive oranges and peaches.

Jemin was sure to snap shot or two of Taehyung whilst he was too busy browsing and bartering to be aware of the fact that he was being focused on; the lights from the stalls playing off his face just right and emphasising his strong profile to perfection.

Taehyung did take the camera from him once or twice to get his own shots, because he had spotted something that he hadn’t. Sometimes, this was the market, sometimes, it happened to be him looking at something too. Whatever it was that happened to catch his eye, Jimin didn’t find out, for the snapshots went right into Taehyung’s denim jacket pocket before he could even look at them.

“You wanna hit up a bar or something, huh?” Jimin asked, eyeing his watch quickly to see that it was 9:47pm, which meant that they had been wandering for quite some time.

“Uh, sure,” Taehyung said, turning on the spot to look around them. “Gonna take a couple of minutes to get outta here. If you see any more snacks, this’ your last chance to try it, Jiminie.”
Taehyung was indeed correct, because they were so far into the market that it took several minutes of constant walking, weaving around stalls and pedestrians, to even get close to leaving the area. It was rather funny how easy it was to wander inside of it and get lost within the thin streets and atmosphere, juxtaposed against how hard it was to get back out again and not walk around in circles. They were close to the nearest street to leave when a stall caught Jimin’s eye and he couldn’t help himself.

“Leggo my eggo!” Jimin declared, as he pointed at the stall.

When he glanced back at his partner, he couldn’t help but laugh to himself at the look of confusion on Taehyung’s face at the popular slogan.

Yes, the stall in question happened to be selling massive egg waffles, made fresh in front of them in hot presses and a lovely golden yellow in shade. Just like his love of Pop Tarts, Jimin had a soft spot for waffles, especially when they were soft and fluffy, and he just knew that he needed to sample these ones because they looked so good. So he waited impatiently for Taehyung to buy him one of them, using some of the coin change that they had created to cover the costs rather than pull out a bill because they seemed pretty cheap.

When Jimin was handed the hot waffle, wrapped in a napkin to save him from burning his fingers, he felt like he was five years old all over again.

“I think I died and went to heaven,” he joked, before taking a large bite of the waffle. “Mmm, oh yeah, this is heaven, brother.”

Soft, fluffy, and tasty heaven.

“Enjoy it whilst you can, y’know what’s comin’ soon enough…”

“Uhuh, fucking laxatives,” Jimin muttered around the mouthful, tearing a hot chunk free to offer it to his friend. “Can’t wait, there’s nothing I love more than shitting my insides out, Tae.”

The younger man accepted the waffle from him, running his eyes over the sight of the street in front of them. He was likely looking for a bar, or maybe a sign of some kind to find one. Jimin didn’t really know, but he did know that he loved this egg waffle and he was going to have to eat one every single time that he came to Kowloon City from now on.
“Hey, Jiminie,” Taehyung said, as he slowed down to stop on the curb, the pair of them standing outside of the market at last. “I bet there’s tons of bars in this place and all, but what’d you think about Kowloon Walled City? Huh?”

“What? Like…now?” Jimin asked, as he also stopped eating and stared at him. “You wanna go there now?”

“Gotta be a bar in there, right? Even if there’s only one,” his partner suggested, whilst he reached up to brush waffle crumbs out of the corner of his mouth.

“I didn’t see one last time, but we didn’t really check that place out,” he remarked, quickly glancing over the street in front of them.

Jimin could see so many glowing neon signs in the building windows, along with the constant flow of traffic and bodies creating the usual white noise of rumbling engines, beeping horns, and faded conversation. The entirety of Kowloon City was lying out in front of them and yet, now that his friend had mentioned that fascinating enclave to him, he found that his eyes didn’t really focus on any of the potential bars in front of them. No, just like Taehyung, he had found himself enchanted by Kowloon Walled City, and the idea of visiting it again was too powerful to ignore.

“…Sure thing,” Jimin said after a moment of thought. “Let’s go and find out.”

Just like the first time that they had visited Kowloon Walled City, they had to dump their bags in their apartment room, taking just Taehyung’s Polaroid camera, film, and bundle of cash with them. That was all that they were going to need after all, for it wasn’t like they had maps and translation books to try and help them out. No, they had little other than their brains and money to get them from A to B, and Jimin actually found this rather…exciting in a way. It seemed risky, and he personally thought that everything was suddenly a lot more fun if there were risks involved.

They had to jump another tram to get close to the outskirts of the city, and this one was packed because of the current hour, meaning that they had to stand up. Holding onto the overhead railing, Jimin just watched the views out of the carriage passing them by until Taehyung was tugging him off the vehicle and back onto the streets again. Cutting through the slum area during the daytime had been no trouble at all, but now that it was the late evening and incredibly dark, Jimin was aware of the fact that it was a lot more dangerous. Luckily, they managed to get to the enclave again without any trouble, slipping through a damp and dripping alley to enter the heart of Kowloon Walled City.
The first thing that hit Jimin was once more the damp scent, followed by sudden noises: blaring music and loud voices all mingling together. He stepped out of the alley after Taehyung to run his eyes over the sights in front of them, feeling a wave of awe at the sight.

Oh, the thin ground-level passageways were now filled with prostitutes, dealers, and more. They had no choice but to go up onto the first level of walkways at least, just to avoid the crush and potential chances of being accosted by anyone. Despite the presence of the vices out on the streets, Jimin could see children racing around in little groups, occasionally getting affectionate head pats from the women. They could have been mothers, sisters, complete strangers and he had no way of telling, he just happened to see the children getting head pats from them. It was almost as if the enclave embraced the seediness of the night in a way that other places didn’t, as if it understood the more illicit and darker side of human nature.

Up on the higher levels, the buildings had the glowing signs turned on like last time to keep the place illuminated, and Jimin was now incredibly aware of the fact there looked to be drug dens, brothels, or stores everywhere. It seemed that the homes might be built higher up for various reasons he had yet to figure out. He couldn’t help but once more hold onto the back of Taehyung’s denim jacket, wanting that little connection between them both as they investigated the settlement. There had to be a bar somewhere inside of here, and yet no window that they glanced through seemed to reveal one.

They had just reached a set of stairs to once more resume their upward trek when they were finally approached in the form of a man stopping on the steps to block them. He started talking to them in rapid Chinese, but upon clearly seeing that they didn’t understand him, he changed to English, pretty damn good English in Jimin’s opinion.

“Looking for a good time? I got stuff, got whatever you Yankees are looking for, yes?” he said, giving them a welcoming smile.

The guy looked like he was only young, maybe a little older than them, and here he was pedalling drugs for one of the Triads.

“Uh, not drugs,” Jimin replied, before laughing awkwardly. “We were looking for a bar. Do you know where we can find one?”

“Bar? Yes, I know a bar. My friend runs a bar, it’s clean; good.” The man shifted to lift his arm and he gestured above them. “Go up, up to the roof. It’s an open bar, stays nice in the heat.”

Jimin didn’t know about that, but he supposed that it made sense having a bar on the roof of this place. It just sounded so strange that they had to go all of the way up to find it, but if they wanted to
find a bar, following his directions would be for the best. So he thanked the man for his assistance, and then he gestured at Taehyung to go up onto the next walkway.

Jimin had to follow him up a sprawling outside walkway to get to the roof, on which there was apparently a bar of some kind. He was desperately hoping that to be the case, and when they finally reached the top, he was relieved to see that it was. The dealer had been telling the truth, there was indeed a bar built on the rooftop that a lot of people were currently finding entertainment in.

The bar had a counter at one far side, but it mostly consisted of a lot of tables and stools placed across the area at which people were sitting or standing. The music that was playing was coming from a large radio set at the far end of the bar, tuned to a station that was blasting pop music at a rather loud volume. Across the rooftop, there was a small gaggle of young women dancing to the music in sparkly dresses, tube and halter tops, and tiny shorts and miniskirts. They might have been patrons, hired entertainers, or prostitutes and he had no way of telling. Jimin could see that the sight of them brought a smile to Taehyung’s face, however, for he clearly found them entertaining.

Overall, the bar was small and crowded, but it was lively and fun, and he wanted to find out what they stocked here.

Unlike at the market, Jimin could actually talk to the bartender, for the man had enough English skills to be able to talk to him and list their stock. It felt so great being able to talk to another person other than Taehyung and it most certainly made him like the bar that much more.

Taehyung went straight for some brand of rice wine to wet his tongue, and Jimin was overjoyed to find that they had Guinness.

Guinness Draught, at that!

“That beer’d be a lot more fun with a splash of this in it,” his friend remarked, lifting the small glass bottle up and shaking it invitingly.

“I’m sticking to beer,” Jimin said, as he grabbed the pint glass. “I’m gonna get drunk on beer and wake up with no hangover. Have fun hitting the hard liquor, I’m keeping it light.”

“No hangover? Pft,” Taehyung blew air out the corner of his mouth hard, disturbing his loose hair as he filled his shot glass up. “Let’s see what tomorrow brings, Jiminie.”
In the time that it took Jimin to finish his first pint and Taehyung to knock back a couple of shots of rice wine, the songs on the radio switched several times and had a moment of talking from the host. He had no clue what the woman was saying and so her voice just became more white noise to add onto what he was already blocking out. Jimin wanted to break out the camera and maybe take a few shots of the place, and so he did so; spinning on the stool and eyeing the rooftop intently.

One of the women from the dance floor had wandered off to linger by the bar, one that was wearing a glittery tube top and a floral sarong around her wide hips. Her hair was permed and bouncy, her earrings massive hoops that glinted in the mass of black locks. She was wearing heavy eye makeup and hot pink lipstick, along with towering heels that he thought looked like torture devices for her poor feet.

Jimin was pretty certain that the woman was a prostitute. He would have felt bad assuming, but he had glanced upon enough in San Francisco to identify the signs. It wasn’t about the clothing or the makeup, it was spotting little details that gave it away. Like the single garter on her thigh, placed there like a calling card and not a fashion accessory; like the burn on the back of her hand between her thumb and forefinger that was undoubtedly a pimp brand. He knew that she was a prostitute and that he shouldn’t stare too much because she might think that he was wanting her services, but he was unable to help himself.

When Jimin looked at her, he saw an embodiment of the more darker side of the fortress, the side that belonged to the Triads. The Triads that he technically helped make money through his smuggling. It might have been guilt that made him stare at her, it might just have been because she was a beautiful woman and he wanted to take a photograph of her to remind him of this rooftop bar; like how Taehyung had photographed that shopkeeper and her kids. But just like he had known, his gaze didn’t go unnoticed, for she made her way across the rooftop right towards them.

“700 Hong Kong dollars, whatever you want,” she explained, as she gestured at her body.

Jimin worked that out to be quite less than $100 roughly in his mind, trying to not wince at this fact.

“I just wanted a photo,” Jimin explained to his friend, not even feeling a ripple of embarrassment at the mistaken intention because there was nothing to be embarrassed about. “Tell her, Tae, just a photo.”

So Taehyung leaned around him and he said a few things before gesturing at the camera and miming the act of taking a photograph of her. The woman listened intently as she glanced between them both, and then she made a soft noise.
“Breasts? You want breasts?” she asked, reaching up to grab at the front of her tube top.

“Ah, not sexy. Not sexy, I meant like a portrait,” Jimin said, lifting his hand to shake it at her. “Tae, a little help here; please?”

Taehyung guffawed at this before resuming his act of broken Chinese and mime acts, his eyes quickly glancing up and down the woman as he did in what he likely thought was a discreet act. It wasn’t, Jimin could see it a mile away, and the woman likely could too.

After letting Taehyung speak for a moment, he decided to add his own attempt at an explanation, holding a hand up to gesture at his face.

“Face? Yeah, a photo of your face?”

The prostitute seemed to understand him at this, and then she let out a rather coy laugh as she fixed her tube top back up before she ended up revealing a little too much.

Jimin lifted the camera and he let her fluff at her hair and fiddle with her clothing for a moment, and then she gave him a rather sweet smile. So he hit the button, pulled out the film and he thanked her. The woman said something at this and his friend had to try and translate for him.

“I think she said, uh, no guy ever wants to take her photo or somethin’,” Taehyung said after a few seconds of thought. “Dunno why, she just said somethin’ like that.”

Jimin thought this over for a moment before glancing down at the piece of film. Well, that was hardly a surprise to him. Guys most certainly didn’t go to her when they wanted photographs, that much was clear, even when she looked like she could be quite the model to him. So he shoved the photograph into his shirt pocket and he turned back to her.

“Another? Another one, for you?” Jimin said, holding the camera up again.

“For me, ah,” she repeated, as she reached up to fiddle with her hair again, wanting to look good.

The prostitute, whom he didn’t even know the name of, struck a rather funny pose for her own
photograph; turning ever so slightly and looking back over her shoulder at them almost like she was on the cover of a magazine. It made Taehyung laugh and brought a slight smile to his face as Jimin snapped her with the camera and he grabbed the piece of film.

“Tell her she’s beautiful or something,” Jimin remarked, as he carried on shaking the film to develop it for her. “Buy her a drink for the photos, be a gentleman.”

“Oh, I’ll tell her more than that,” Taehyung said, shifting on the bar stool and gesturing at the bartender.

It was a very surreal experience, Jimin found. Sitting on a rooftop in an enclave halfway across the world, Taehyung on a stool beside him and a prostitute keeping them company. But it was a pleasantly surreal experience even when he was unable to fully immerse himself in the conversation. It was just that same lull that Kowloon Walled City seemed to have on him, that wonderful hazy and seedy atmosphere that he hated to love this much.

Taehyung must have said something wrong in his attempts at conversation, for the prostitute laughed and then seemed to correct him, making him stop and guffaw himself before repeating her word a few times. Jimin could only listen to the melodic sound of her words clashing against Taehyung’s drunken slurring and bumbling attempts and smile to himself. Trust his friend to decide to play Casanova with a prostitute, but at least the woman seemed to rather appreciate the attention. Or that was what he was sensing anyway. He guessed that it must be nice for her to get a free drink and compliments without a guy then wanting to slap her around and call her filth.

But after sharing some light conversation and a cocktail as payment for the photographs, she sadly needed to move on in search of actual business. Jimin couldn’t help but notice how she looked at the photograph as she got off the stool and she walked away, a soft smile at the corners of her lips that made him feel a little bit depressed for some reason.

“There she goes, goddamn…” Taehyung sighed, twisting on the stool to watch her go over to more men across the rooftop.

“You could have hired her services,” Jimin said, as he grabbed his fresh beer and he glanced at his friend.

“Nah, I don’t pay for sex, Jiminnie,” he retorted, moving to grab his own shot glass. “Ain’t no fun knowin’ you’re slippin’ cash into a chick like a vendin’ machine and she ain’t even gonna get that cash. It goes to a pimp or whatever, she gets next to nothin’. She deserves better, but payin’ her ain’t gonna help. I’d rather not pay for some fucker’s new Rolex or whatever, that he ain’t even earned. I
ain’t against the chicks, I’m against the bastards that own ‘em. Fuckin’ imperialism under a new name, yeah?”

“Huh, I like that, Tae,” Jimin said, as he swallowed a swig of beer. “Mature, I didn’t know you could be mature.”

“I can be a…a lot of things, Jiminie. But right now, I’m drunk,” Taehyung said, before snorting. “You ever, uh, you ever paid for sex?”

“No, I’d rather not pay to fund pimps and poor drug-addicted slaves either, Tae,” he replied.

Jimin felt no need to tell him that he had in fact been paid in beer, cigarettes, and cash in the past for his own teenage services, because that was something that his friend most certainly didn’t need to know about him.

“So, let’s fund this bar instead, huh?” Taehyung suggested, as he lifted up another shot and he grinned at him.

“Amen, brother,” Jimin said, lifting his pint glass in return and smiling at him.

After six pints of beer, Jimin started to feel like he was crossing the point of being tipsy and instead becoming pretty drunk. He had no clue what Taehyung had even knocked back because he didn’t know how many shots there were in those small bottles he had bought, but judging from the sight of three present, it might just have been a lot. He knew that the younger man could handle his strong alcohol better than him because of several reasons, and just imagining drinking that much made his liver almost quiver in horror. Taehyung was going to regret that in the morning, he knew that he was, but he was also starting to regret ordering a seventh pint too.

Fund the bar indeed.

They didn’t drink fast, but rather took it slow, for Jimin saw the time on his watch starting to drag out until he completely lost track of checking because he was too busy trying to teach Taehyung more English in the form of terrible slang and obnoxious accents. Taehyung could do a pretty good Californian accent if he tried hard enough, got nasally enough, but that was likely because he was so used to copying his accent when he learnt new words. But other accents?
“You know, you gotta…like this, yeah? Like this,” Jimin emphasised to try and make his accent sound right. “See, now I’m from Boston.”


“Mr. Kennedy, is that you? I thought you were dead!” Jimin retorted, before laughing at his own joke.

Taehyung had no clue what he was even saying, and yet he was also laughing like a loon.

The first thing that hit Jimin when they finally emerged from the enclave was a strange brightness on the horizon that he had not been expecting to see at all. Why was it so bright right now? It was nighttime, nighttime was dark and…that was not dark. No, that was wrong. It was all wrong. He stared at the skyline to see the still glowing sight of Kowloon City, set on the backdrop of a pink-tinged sky with some light clouds scattered across it. It looked like dawn to his eyes, even when his brain was still refusing to accept what he was seeing. So he twisted to look at Taehyung for a few seconds before lifting his wrist up in front of him.

“Shit, Tae,” Jimin said, as he looked at his watch. “It’s 5…5am, I think? I can’t-” he lifted his watch closer to squint at the fingers, “5:30am or something, uh…”

“Huh?”

“When’s the deal when…did we miss it?”

“Tomorrow,” Taehyung said, as he rubbed at his eyes roughly. “You go home, uh, then. I think. Tomorrow? Uh…”

Jimin stopped walking for a moment so that he could slump against a building wall and drop his head to stare at his shoes. His head was spinning and he knew that he just needed to take a moment to fight the sensation. From the sudden change in scenery to the fact that he didn’t seem to know what day it was right now, it made perfect sense that he was a little disoriented. So he took a few deep breaths as his drunken mind tried to figure out what was going on right now.

They had landed in Hong Kong on the 28th, in the evening around 9pm. They had left Kowloon Walled City at 5:30am…on the 29th? Surely, it was the 29th? They hadn’t been drinking for more
than a few hours, and so there was no way that it was the 30th. No, it had to be the 29th, and that meant that they were alright. They had plenty of time until the transaction, and so they just needed to get back to the apartment right now. Sleep would come, and then they would wake up and everything would be fine.

“Tomorrow, yeah, tomorrow,” he agreed, as he rolled his head back against the brick wall. It was cold against his back and scalp. “Business tomorrow, sleep now.”

“Where’s the bed?” Taehyung asked, looking around them. “Where’s the-”

Jimin had to move to grab hold of him before he ended up dropping to his knees on the pavement, searching for the elusive mattress that was still across the city and sadly not in front of them both. Taehyung was so wasted that he knew that there was no chance that they were going to be able to get back to the apartment with his assistance. It was all his responsibility now, and though he knew that he was drunk, Jimin was certain that he was going to be able to handle it.

If not, well, it looked like they would be spending the night sleeping in the gutters.

“Apartment, gotta go,” he muttered, as he snagged Taehyung’s elbow tightly within the crook of his own. “Sleep now, gotta sleep.”

Jimin had no clue how exactly he managed to get them back to the block and inside of the actual room, for it had been quite the struggle just getting the room key off Taehyung. The younger man had checked his pockets to no avail, had even checked his goddamn sandals as if he might have shoved it inside them somehow. He had had to shove his hands inside his trousers even when Taehyung had made quite the fuss over the fact he was ‘touching his ass’, and he had finally located it inside one of his front pockets, even though his friend had insisted it hadn’t been there. He had unlocked and locked the apartment room door, had staggered into the bathroom to empty his rather aching bladder, and then he had found himself lying in bed.

Jimin hadn’t showered, hadn’t cleaned up, hadn’t even really gotten undressed save for his jeans and shoes, for he was still wearing Namjoon’s chambray shirt and his briefs. Yet, he didn’t want to move to do anything else because he was so comfortable right now. He could just fall asleep like this, could just roll onto his stomach, bury his face into his pillow and sleep. So he moved to do so with a series of satisfied noises as he listened to the sound of Taehyung moving around the apartment room…

and he woke up to the sound of soft and breathy moans.
Jimin realised that Taehyung was probably looking at that stupid magazine right now because he most certainly knew that he was masturbating. He was struck by the thought that he and Namjoon would get along so well, with their shared love of terrible jokes and cheap dirty magazines. It should have been funny, but Jimin didn’t want to be lying in bed with another man that was wanking off and not doing so because of him, or on him…like Yoongi had. He especially didn’t want to be lying beside Taehyung when he did it, considering the fact that he had pondered on the chances of messing around with him regularly in the past when they had been drunk and just that little bit too close together in bed.

“Tae, trying to…to sleep,” he moaned into the pillow, too tired and drunk to even lift his head to look at him. “Stop that.”

“Shit, why ain’t you asleep? Thought you were…sleep, go to sleep, Jiminie,” his friend muttered in surprise.

“Trying to sleep, you woke me up,” Jimin explained, as he shifted to free one arm from under himself and he reached over to push at his side. “Go to the bathroom or something, let me sleep, wanna sleep. Stop it.”

“Don’t wanna, I’m comfortable. You go in the bathroom.”

“Not gonna sleep in the bathroom, Tae!” Jimin argued, as he punched out at him and he hoped to force him to get out of the bed. “Beds are for sleeping in not wanking in, ah!”

“Fine! Fine! Goin’ to the fuckin’ bathroom,” Taehyung muttered as he rolled away from him. “Supposed to have been asleep, Jiminie.”

“I’m not asleep, stop saying that.”

“Could’ve shared the…the magazine if you wanna, just sayin’.”

“Don’t wanna share, wanna sleep,” he retorted, as he settled back down in bed and he wrenching the covers over himself. “I’m not even into that shit.”
Jimin opened his eyes just in time to catch Taehyung getting to his feet, teetering to the side as he did so because he was wasted. He was still wearing his tee-shirt but nothing else, for he had clearly slipped out of his underwear whilst he had been drifting in sleep. The early morning glow from the window cast over him, revealing his messy hair, wrinkled white tee-shirt, and the surprisingly wonderful sight of his bare behind.

Because Taehyung tended to live in loose jeans, trousers and dungarees, Jimin often didn’t get to catch sight of his body underneath it all. But it seemed that Taehyung was hiding away quite the body from what he could see: a full behind, nice thighs that might be firm, might be soft. Only touching them would reveal the truth.

Ordinarily, that would have been a mental image that Jimin would have tried his hardest to burn into his mind, maybe just because it was a rare sight to witness, maybe to recall at some point in the future for private use. But he was just too drunk to really feel any responses to the sight, not even a slight hint of excitement stirring through him when he caught a quick glance at his testicles between his thighs as he walked.

Jimin wriggled on the bed to try and get more comfortable, annoyed about the fact that he had been disturbed when he had been so comfortable and light just a moment ago. But after a little wriggling and stretching, he was comfortable again, and so he dropped his head back onto the pillow and he sighed heavily as he settled down to sleep. He closed his eyes and he tried to find the best breathing rhythm, which would have been a simple task if not for stupid Taehyung.

Why were drunk guys always so loud?

Jimin groaned loudly just to let Taehyung know that he could still hear him, and then he grabbed hold of his pillow. He folded it over his head in an attempt to block the sound out, finding that it actually worked and it wasn’t actually that uncomfortable at all. So he just closed his eyes and he waited for his friend to finish wanking off in the bathroom like a fourteen-year old.

Jimin was almost convinced that he wasn’t going to come back into the room, that he might just fall asleep in bathroom, which might just be for the best considering how annoyed that he was at him right now. But a short while after finishing, Taehyung moved to get back into bed beside him, which meant that he could stop clamping his head between his pillow at least.

Jimin rolled back onto his stomach to get comfortable, feeling Taehyung’s cool and bare lower legs brushing against his and he did so, and this time he hoped that he was going to fall asleep and remain asleep.
“You asleep now, Jiminie?” Taehyung asked in a quiet voice, the rustling sound of him shifting to look at him unmistakable.

“Fuck off, Tae,” he mumbled into the pillow, hearing the younger man snorting laughter in response.

30th August, 1984, 8:32pm: Kowloon City, Kowloon, Hong Kong

Jimin was sitting on the edge of the table, his holdall placed by the door packed and ready to go, and he had spread the variety of Polaroids that they had taken over the last couple of days across the surface to study them intently.

There was little else to do in this new apartment room, for unlike the one upstairs that they had been staying in, it was bare of everything save for the table, a chair, and a phone across the room. The kitchen counter had been stripped of everything, the sink was missing, and there wasn’t even any carpet present. It was a typical drop-off location, just like the ones that he was used to being inside of in San Francisco and Seoul.

Just a few feet away, sitting on the chair and rocking back on the legs, was Taehyung. His partner was playing with his flick knife, flicking the blade free and then popping it back, dancing the plastic handle across his knuckles and catching it over and over again. At least Jimin had the Polaroids to look at to pass the last few minutes of waiting, so he shifted on the table to lean his weight onto one wrist as he ran his eyes over them.

At the top of the spread, he had placed the original photographs, the ones that had been taken in Seoul at the protest rally. He had checked the backs of a few of them to see that Taehyung had jotted down messages in black marker for his friend to read, his characters a messy scrawl that he had struggled to discern, and that was a sign that they were exclusively for Jungkook.

Jimin observed his snapshots of the crowd, the banners, the fountain and the street, and then he focused on the one that he had taken of Taehyung on the soapbox with the megaphone in hand. The red object was unmissable in the shot, obscuring most of his face, but he thought that it was a good shot.
Jimin moved to pick up the one of them, the one that Taehyung had taken of them together after the rally, and when he turned it over he saw a message that he could just about read.

_This’ Jiminnie, my partner in crime (keke)!!!_

Jimin assumed that was meant to be a onomatopoeia for laughter, like ‘haha’. He ran his thumb over the black characters before turning it back around and looking at the photograph, smiling softly at the shot. It was nice, he liked it a lot, and he placed it back down on the table before looking at the rest of the spread.

Underneath the snapshots from the student rally, he had spread out the various photographs from Hong Kong - from Kowloon City to the enchanting enclave hidden within. The Polaroids had a great variety of subjects, like the colourful photographs of the market stalls and goods, to that of the bar in Kowloon Walled City. Jimin had to forcibly look away from the photographs of food and beer to instead focus on the one of the prostitute. He picked it up to study it intently, wondering why it hadn’t even crossed his name to ask the woman her name.

Jimin placed it down again with a soft sigh, giving the spread another quick glance. Taehyung had tasked him with the challenge of finding his friend back home in San Francisco, but until then, he at least had the photographs to look at. He could show Namjoon them too, tell him more stories like he had last time to help pass the hours in the early morning before his best friend fell asleep and left him wide awake and struggling to readjust to his new cycle. He might just never find this Jungkook and be left with all of the Polaroids, until he completely forgot about them and they ended up in a drawer somewhere.

Jimin was about to pick up another Polaroid to study it when his stomach gave a familiar dull pang that made him stop and press his hand against it instead.

After an entire day spent eating _Pop Tarts, Oreos_ and fast food junk whilst Taehyung had lain in bed and had complained about his aching head and stomach, Jimin had sadly had to undergo the purging process this morning. He had stayed in their apartment room all day long to not only avoid the temptation to eat, but because he had been on the goddamn toilet constantly for a couple of hours. No matter how many showers that he took afterwards, how hot the water was, he always felt disgusting after the ordeal.

How could he not feel disgusting after shitting liquid for two hours whilst he had cried from the goddamn contractions in his gut?

So whilst his friend had been able to go out this morning to stuff his face with Burger King burgers,
hang around the streets and take in the atmosphere of the city, he had been locked up in the tiny
apartment room upstairs that was now vacant again. Jimin had forced himself to stay as hydrated as
possible up until the afternoon hours even when he wasn’t allowed to touch any food, because he
wanted to land in San Francisco minus another head-splitting migraine. That had meant coffee, lots
of coffee, and two large bottles of water, and he was still feeling hopped up from the caffeine even
now.

Hopefully, he would still be able to sleep on the plane.

“The fuck is he?” Taehyung muttered suddenly, breaking the silence and catching his attention.

Jimin looked up at his friend for a moment before dropping his gaze down to the Polaroids again, not
really looking at them now.

“When’s the transaction?”

“You’re booked for a 10pm flight,” Taehyung explained, as he carried on playing with his flick
knife. “He should be here any second from now, he better hurry his ass up.”

Jimin looked down at his watch to see that it was past 8:30pm currently and they really would need
to complete the transaction soon, because he had to be prepared with the heroin, get transported to
Kai Tak Airport, and then get processed for his flight. Any later than 9pm was pushing it way too
close, and he didn’t want to be rushing into security checks with parcels of drugs taped to his body
and shoved up his ass, that much he was certain of. All that he could do was shift to settle back
against the table and wait for the door across the room to suddenly open.

They were so distracted waiting on the door to swing open that when the telephone across the room
sounded shrilly, they were both caught by complete surprise.

Jimin dragged his eyes away from the door to stare at the device, pretty sure that this was the first
time that he had ever heard it ringing before. They used it to phone one of two people: Namjoon, in
case of issues with the transaction, or a guy that worked for their supplier to confirm that it was fine
and ready to be finalised. No one called them first because no one had the landline number.

So who the fuck was phoning them?
Jimin studied it for a moment before glancing at Taehyung, raising his eyebrows at him to silently ask which one of them should answer it. His friend lifted his flick knife to point the blade at himself, seemingly suggesting that he answer it, and he nodded at him. So his partner popped the blade back into the handle, dropped it onto the table, and then he reached over to grab the receiver.

“Yeah, hello?” Taehyung said, as he held the receiver loosely in his fist and cocked his head.

Jimin folded his arms across his chest, cocking his own head in mirror image of him and studying his face.

For a few seconds, the younger man was silent, clearly listening to whoever was on the other end of the line, and then he furrowed his brow severely.

“What’d you mean we gotta go?” Taehyung asked in a surprised voice. “Go where exactly? Is someone onto…no? So, why’ve we gotta go?”

Jimin reached up to start fiddling with his earring as he listened to Taehyung talking, a funny sensation starting to appear in the pit of his stomach that felt a little bit like anxiety.

They were supposed to be getting supplied in this apartment room just like always by a certain someone, a certain 14K dealer by the name of Chow Lai-Chuen. Yet, Taehyung was on the phone right now with an associate that was telling them that they needed to get their asses out of here and get to another drop-off point instead, and to him that meant one thing. It meant that they were being supplied by another dealer from the gang because Chow was suddenly unable to make the transaction.

The thought made Jimin feel cold all over, and he stuck his tongue out to wet his lips only to find that it was equally as dry.

“Uhuh, uhuh, uh…” Taehyung shifted in the chair to get to his feet, grabbing the telephone so that he could move closer to the window and glance out of it. “The one with the banner outside it? What’s it say? I can’t read what it says, I ain’t Chinese! Big banner, brick buildin’, directly facing a karaoke bar and…OK. OK, go ‘round the back and through the alley. Where’re you sendin’ us, huh?”

Jimin moved to grab the Polaroids, transferring them into his wallet for safekeeping even when it made the leather stretch slightly. Then he shoved the wallet back into his trousers and he waited to
see what his partner did.

“Si. Got it.”

Taehyung dropped the receiver in the cradle, and then he carried the device over to dump it on the table.

“Tae?”

“C’mon, Jiminnie, we gotta blast right now,” Taehyung said, hunkering down and snatching up their bags before nodding at the door. “Gotta get to a new drop-off location.”

“A new drop-off location? Where?”

“Uh, a few blocks down,” he explained, as he shrugged his own bag up his shoulder. “An opium den, I think? I dunno, but we gotta blast.”

Jimin had no choice but to leave the apartment room, hearing Taehyung following along behind him and then shoving past him to go down the stairs first. Great, not only were they running late, they were also having to race across the block to another building to even get the drugs. This was not good, it had been quite some time since he had had a hitch in his schedule like this, and Jimin didn’t like it.

When they got out onto the street, Taehyung didn’t even hesitate, he just started jogging down the sidewalk to get across the block. Jimin hated the fact that people glanced at them as they shoved their way down the street, having to mumble half-assed apologies that they might not even understand. His friend had a building in his sights, one that was made of brick with a banner hanging outside of it, and apparently they needed to go around it and down an alleyway to find the place. It was close to them, why hadn’t their supplier been brought to them instead? Why were they the ones running across a packed block to them?

“Fuckin’ 14K,” Taehyung cursed, as he slowed down and studied the stretch of street around the building. “Come over to Seoul one day, let us fuck you over with deals too, huh?”

“I’ll try and rip them off in San…San Francisco,” Jimin breathed out, also stopping and twisting to try and spot the so-called alleyway. “There, Tae.”
Taehyung moved to enter the alley first to lead him around the back of the building. It was dark, smelled like rotting trash and vomit, and Jimin desperately hoped that there wasn’t anyone blacked out in the darkness for him to trip over and die of shock. The alley turned into a little alcove, and sure enough, he saw that there was a building hidden within it: the apparent opium den.

His friend rapped his fist on the door hard several times, which was nothing more than a thin board of wood. Jimin saw it rattling in its frame, and after a moment, it proceeded to slide open, an incredibly tall and thin woman appearing in the doorway. She was dressed in a silken red robe that had slipped down on one shoulder and also had a slit up the side that showed a lot of leg.

“Yes?” she said in English, looking between them both from under her heavily lidded eyes.

“Madame Si? We’re here to see Madame Si, for a business transaction,” Jimin explained, taking over for Taehyung.

“…Come in.”

The woman moved aside and she gestured for them to follow her into a rather shadowy entrance-area. Jimin was pretty certain that she was stoned and that meant that she wasn’t who they were looking for, but hopefully she would guide them through the den to the lady in question.

Taehyung shoved the door shut behind them just for the sake of it, and then they followed her deeper into the building.

It was dark and foul-smelling inside of the den, Jimin quickly discerned. A quick glance around them as they walked along a narrow hallway revealed doors that were either made from cloth or beads, allowing him to look inside with ease to see rather unusual sights.

Quite a lot of the rooms contained mattresses on which people were lying around. He saw that they had long pipes in hand that they were smoking, and there looked to be attendants inside dressed in orderly uniforms with masks that were tending to them by lighting pipes, changing the substance, or massaging their lax bodies for them. He saw a lot of presumably Hong Kongese people in these rooms, but in other rooms, he saw more foreigners instead: rich-looking businessmen in suits or various states of undress. They were in the rooms with entertainers that were playing music or dancing for them, because there was no sexual entertainment to be found inside of an opium den. The drug kind of deadened the mood.
They reached the end of the hallway and their guide pushed another door open, cocking her head to tell them to go inside.

“Madame Si will see you now,” she slurred.

They both entered the backroom to see that it was small and bare of any furnishings. Jimin had no clue what it was used for, but he didn’t care. He just wanted to be out of the den as fast as he could so that they could get him prepared for the flight. It smelled weird in here and he didn’t want to breathe too much of the smoke in lest it have an effect on him. He was in the act of studying the single naked light bulb dangling from the ceiling when he noticed someone moving to enter the room.

“You can call me Madame Si,” the woman said, as she closed the door shut ever so slightly, a briefcase in her hand that presumably held the heroin in. “This is just a temporary measure, you’ll have proper dealer supplying for the next visit. But for now, let’s do business? Yes, boys?”

Jimin looked at her to see a curvaceous woman that was also wearing a silken robe, her one a deep blue with floral patterns on it. Her hair was pulled up into a tight bun and she was wearing little makeup, revealing herself to perhaps be in her thirties. She spoke with a clipped accent, vaguely British to his ears, and he had an idea that she might just run this establishment.

“Where’s Chow?” Taehyung asked in Korean, moving closer to him and almost whispering the question down his ear as if he didn’t want the woman hearing him. “Ask her where he’s at, Jiminie.”

Jimin had a very strong idea that he knew where Chow was and he really wasn’t certain what he was supposed to say.

“Um, Chow?” he asked, hoping to look as confused as Taehyung was to the woman.

“Chow Lai-Chuen is unable to continue working with you due to sudden circumstances,” Madame Si said with a wide smile. “Due to the unforeseen nature of this event, I’m to supply you for this transaction. I’ve been told that the deal is for 125,000 Hong Kong dollars. Yes?”

“I know this isn’t your fault, Madame Si,” Jimin said in his most cordial tone. “But the last time that we did business here, our previous supplier ripped us off. He made me agree to 135,000 for what was 125,000 dollars worth and he threatened me with a gun. I happened to strike lucky back in
America and make up for the loss, but I’d rather not repeat that experience this evening with you, hmm?”

“I understand,” she said in a quiet voice, listening to him intently.

“115,000 dollars on this transaction and I’ll be happy to shake your hand and get this done with,” he finished rather boldly.

Jimin knew that they were running on a tight schedule and that haggling on a standard price deal was probably not a great idea, but he couldn’t help himself. Sure, Chow might just be dead or crippled now and that should be fair enough retaliation for him having a gun shoved in his face, but Jimin didn’t care about that. He wanted to make up the lost profits for himself because he never dropped below profit if he could help it. If it took him a couple of deals to make the loss back, he would do it, no hesitation.

Yoongi liked him making him profit like a good boy, after all.

“120,000,” Madame Si replied curtly, lifting her head to look down at him unwaveringly and letting him know that she was going to be a challenge. “I know my drugs, 115,000 is robbery, and you know it too, dear.”

“117,” Jimin quipped, folding his arms over his chest and refusing to back down. “I know mine too, and I know 14K are fond of cutting before it even hits the streets with a little talc to make it look whiter than Hollywood.”

That was a joke that would have cracked Namjoon up, and he made a mental note to remember it for the future.

Jimin saw the woman thinking this over carefully, her eyes shifting to look down at the briefcase. For all he knew, it might have been cut with talc, he knew that it happened…but he didn’t actually know if 14K actually did it.

“118,000 dollars is the lowest I’ll go,” she said after a minute of silence.

That was $7,000 off his loss of $10,000.
“…Deal,” he said, as he held his hand out to her. “Tae, time to blow and go back to the apartment.”

Madame Si accepted his hand and she shook it hard, her grip tight

“I like you, I hope you’re not temporary,” Jimin remarked, as he let go of her hand and he accepted the briefcase from her.

“For the sake of profits, I hope that I am,” the woman retorted wittily, giving him a quick smile before turning on her heel to exit the backroom.

Jimin watched her go and then turned back to Taehyung, lifting up the briefcase for emphasis. They had been unable to call in the transaction here, nor had they been able to check the weight, but they were in such a rush that they would have to hope that it was right when they got to the apartment.

Taehyung moved to leave first again, guiding him back out of the foul-smelling den and back onto the streets so that they could get back to the original drop-off location.

Whilst he set up the scales on the table, Taehyung grabbed the phone and he phoned the deal in for him, doing so with his usual speed and efficiency. As soon as he was done, his friend grabbed the chair and he pulled it over to the table, settling down to start weighing and repacking the heroin into baggies.

Jimin had no choice but to sit on the edge of the table again and watch him do so.

“That Madame Si, she was a bit of a looker, huh?” his partner man asked him, grabbing his gloves from the briefcase. “Those hips, boy oh boy.”

“She was your type?” Jimin asked in surprise, thinking about the woman’s rather mature features and full frame. “That’s…surprising.”

“Surprisin’?” his friend asked, raising his eyebrows. “How so?”
“I just never pictured your type before, I guess. I didn’t know you liked mature women, Tae.”

“Me? I like ‘em in all ways,” Taehyung said with a wide smile. “Short? No problem, it’s cute to kiss her on the head. Tall? That means legs that go on for miles. Skinny? Always nice to have a skinny girl on your arm, but, y’know, big girls are great.”

“Oh, yeah?” Jimin asked with a smirk, finding this conversation both fascinating and rather worrying because he knew what was coming soon enough.

The dreaded question.

“Yeah, they got curves, they’re soft and sweet,” Taehyung continued with that same smile. “Sure, there’s a chance she’s a total momma and she’ll feed and coddle you to death like a baby, but I ain’t complainin’. I’d love the attention. What, you don’t like ‘em big, huh?” he asked, as he shifted to sit back in the rickety chair. “What’d you like ‘em like?”

“Have you ever had a girlfriend before?” Jimin asked, expertly changing the subject whilst Taehyung slowly snapped the latex glove onto his hand. When the younger man confirmed that he had, he quickly added. “Like, a proper girlfriend, I don’t mean hand-holding in middle school and tongue kissing. I mean a sexual partner, Tae.”

“Yeah,” Taehyung repeated with a nod, as he grabbed the second glove. “I’ve had serious girlfriends before, but the sex thing’s a bit tricky. I mean, sure you can fuck, but unless you wanna risk bein’ coerced into marriage by her dad, you’d avoid it.”

“Wait, can’t you get condoms in Seoul?” Jimin asked in a shocked tone.

“Up in Seoul, yeah, you can get hands on a box but down in Daegu? Pft, that ain’t so easy, believe me,” Taehyung snapped the second glove on and he gave him a smirk. “It’s just you and your hand, bro. Unless you can talk her into the idea of…y’know…”

The younger man stuck his tongue against his inner cheek hard, distending it cheekily in one of the many ways that Jimin had seen teenage boys imitating blowjobs over the years.

Taehyung snorted laughter and then he turned his attention back to the briefcase in front of him, deciding that they had dilly-dallied long enough and that he needed to check the weight and start
“So yeah, mostly it was just touchin’,” he finished, as he unravelled the tinfoil brick of heroin and he hit it hard, spilling the slightly brown powder into the bowl. “One time, I ended up with my head between a girl’s thighs and that was crazy; gonna remember that shit for the rest of my life. But you didn’t answer my question: what’re you into, huh?”

“…Tae,” Jimin said in a soft voice, reaching up to start fiddling with his earring. “I, um, I’m gonna tell you something real important about me, something I didn’t really wanna tell you about because I was scared that it might fuck up everything: the deals, our friendship.”

“A secret, huh?” Taehyung remarked, as he finished emptying the first brick and grabbed the second. “Well, I kept the whole identity thing from you too and that turned out alright when you found out.”

“Yeah, but that’s different, brother,” he said, not meaning to look and sound so anxious, but unable to control his nerves. “I’ve only ever known you as Kim Taehyung and not Jang Jeongmin, I knew the real you, OK? So now, now I think that it’s time that you knew the real me.”

Jimin glanced across the apartment room for a moment, taking a deep breath and holding it to try and steel himself.

Taehyung emptied the second brick to check the weight, leaning close and studying the scale. The weight must have been exact, for he grabbed the baggie and condom strip to dump them onto the table in front of him.

“I’m into guys, Tae,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, dropping his gaze to stare at the bowl on the table. “That’s what I like. I’m not into women, skinny, big, tall, short - nothing. I like guys, I like small guys, preferably thin, but I’ve hooked-up with a few chubby guys before and it was fine, I just prefer-”

Jimin stopped talking with a heavy sigh, getting off the table and going over to the window instead. He stared at it, but not so he could look out onto the street. He was using the glass to watch Taehyung instead, to see what he reacted like now that he had turned away from him. He saw that his friend stared at his back for a moment, his expression impossible to read, and then he turned back to the briefcase in front of him to grab the spoon and he started shovelling the heroin into the baggies.

“You’re a homo,” Taehyung said before shrugging nonchalantly, and Jimin noted that he said it in
“So what? You ain’t hurtin’ me none, why should I care? Homos ain’t the ones ruinin’ the country and fuckin’ my life up, therefore, I don’t give a shit.”

“Tae,” Jimin breathed out slowly, finding that he was incapable of saying anything more than that as he twisted to look back at him.

“Jiminnie, we’ve see each other a couple of days a month for practically a year now,” Taehyung continued, as he stopped packing the heroin and held his gaze intently. “We’ve done countless business deals, we’ve shared drinks and meals, we’ve flew across the world together so many times. If you think findin’ out you like guys is gonna make me forget all of those days and nights we’ve shared together, then you’re wrong. Shit, we share the same bed and, yeah, it might feel different for awhile now I know that, but nothin’s gonna change between us, so, it don’t matter none.”

“You’re just saying that, Tae, they all say that and-”

Before Jimin could finish this, he found that his eyes were suddenly stinging and he had to stop himself for a moment.

Taehyung was looking him in the eyes and telling him that he didn’t care about his sexuality, but Jimin couldn’t help but shake the thought that he really did and he was just pretending not to for the sake of not causing trouble.

How could he not care, considering the fact that quite a lot of people Jimin had known had cared: his parents, his classmates and more? Sure, Namjoon didn’t care, but Namjoon was the kind of person that one was lucky to come across in their lifetime: a true friend and open-minded soul. There was no way in hell that he had managed to meet another guy like him, therefore, Taehyung must be lying to him.

But why did his expression look so genuine to his eyes?

Jimin let his breath out in a sigh and he reached up to rub at his eyes roughly, hoping that they didn’t look too wet. His friend stayed still for a moment longer and then he resumed packing the heroin.

“I dunno any homos,” Taehyung continued, as he sealed the first parcel up and he placed it aside. “Maybe, people say it’s wrong, maybe, people think it’s fucked up, but who am I to think like that, huh? I’m helpin’ smuggle drugs and workin’ for a mob. I got a police record for burnin’ down buildings in Daegu and more. If you’re wrong for wantin’ somethin’, Jiminnie, then I guess that I’m
wrong for wantin’ somethin’ too. Even if they’re different things, people are gonna tell us we’re wrong for bein’ different. Let’s just be wrong together, yeah? Two’s company, ain’t it?”

“Tae, you…I can’t believe you,” Jimin managed to say in a quiet voice.

“Well, ain’t it?” Taehyung repeated, as he grabbed the next baggie and he opened it up. “Like I said, I don’t care if you’re a homo.”

“Um, actually, it’d be better if you didn’t call me that and maybe said ‘homosexual’, ” Jimin said in a quiet voice, still edging around the situation as carefully as he could. “The other word’s a little-”

“Is it a bad word?” the younger man asked, as he stopped in the act of shovelling heroin into the baggie. “Shit, I didn’t know, I’ve only ever heard that word said here and-”

“Just say ‘gay’, ” Jimin suggested with a wide smile. “That’s a nice word instead, and it has two meanings. It also means ‘happy’.”

“Gay…” Taehyung repeated slowly, enunciating the word perfectly. “Huh, that’s a funny word. It sounds nicer to me. I’ll use that word instead.”

“Taehyung?”

“Uhuh?” he hummed, glancing back up at him.

“Thank you,” Jimin said in a voice barely above a whisper. “Thank you so much.”

“For what?” his friend asked, his expression shifting to one of sheer puzzlement.

“For being a true friend; and for not hating me too, I guess?”

“Jiminnie, never thank someone for not hatin’ you, that’s like thankin’ ‘em for not spitting on you,” Taehyung remarked, before snorting hard. “Ain’t no need to thank someone for actin’ like a decent human, yeah?”
“I know, but when you’ve got a history of being spat on and beaten, Tae, you learn to appreciate
decency more than most people do,” Jimin explained in a quiet voice, shifting to stand beside the
table again.

“Y’know, I was wonderin’ why you weren’t checkin’ out those girls at the bar,” his friend said with
a soft head shake. “Didn’t even cross my mind, how funny’s that? So, what’s your type?”

“My type?” Jimin asked, before laughing softly because it was pretty funny that he had asked him
something like that. “Um, I like small guys.”

“Small guys, huh?” Taehyung asked, before smirking at him. “Plenty of small guys here, if y’know
what I’m sayin’…”

“I don’t mean dicks,” Jimin retorted, finding it unbelievable that both Taehyung and Namjoon had
made that exact same joke. “I mean height, a decent-sized guy, not a giant or a shrimp.”

“You want a cute guy as short as you, got it,” Taehyung declared with a nod, filling up the second
baggie of heroin.

“Tae…” he intoned, as he gave him a glare.

“I just realised that that means I ain’t your type,” his partner said, sealing up the baggie to move it
aside and glancing up at him as he grabbed the condom strip.

“You’re cute,” Jimin replied without thinking, the words just flowing off his tongue casually. “Um,
you know, I think you’re cute but not like that.”

“I always thought you were single, but you might actually have a guy,” Taehyung said, tearing the
condom free and stretching it with a hard tug. “D’you? Were you keepin’ him secret, just in case?”

“No, I’m single, but I, um, I’m actually pretty keen on Prince Min,” Jimin explained, as he cocked
his elbows up onto the table and he cupped his head in his hands to watch him, bent forward
comfortably. “Like I told you, I met him back in San Francisco. He’s…a bit of everything, really.
But I’ve been thinking about him a lot and I don’t think about people ever unless they’re important to
“D’you think about me, huh?”

“Yeah, I think about you a lot when I see or do certain things,” Jimin admitted. “Whenever I see a Burger King, I think of you, and whenever I eat certain foods, I always try and remember to find them here for you to try too.”

This made Taehyung’s lips curl up into a smile, clearly pleased that he thought of him fondly enough to have him cross his mind at random hours of the day like that.

“So, if I’m thinking about him like that I must like him a little,” Jimin continued in a quiet voice. “That’s how it works, right?”

“Yeah, I mean that’s how I thought it works,” Taehyung said, as he finished transferring the heroin into the condom and he knotted it tightly. Then he grabbed the lube and prepared to feed the parcel into the second condom. “I ain’t exactly an expert, but if you’re thinkin’ about him… I’d say you like him. Does he, uh, does he like you though?”

Jimin stared at the condom parcel for a few seconds, playing his words over as he did so and trying to think of something to say in reply. Yet, after a moment, he found that all that he could do was shrug at the question.

30th August, 1984, 11:53pm: Pacific Heights, San Francisco, United States of America

It was like déjà-vu all over again.

The scene was almost the exact same, if not for the fact that his bedroom was now lit up from the ceiling lights and the view out of the far windows and ceiling panel revealed it to be night instead of day. Yoongi was even wearing the same amount of clothing right now, nothing more than his shirt
currently mostly buttoned up as he sat and stared at the phone on his side table. Placed beside it was an empty glass of bourbon, nothing more than a melted trickle of ice cubes and a tiny hint of liquor left in the bottom of the square glass. His fingers were fiddling with his Rolex impatiently, just begging him to pick up the receiver and call, but he just needed to wait a couple more minutes.

Namjoon had told him to phone between 11pm to 12am, because that was when Jimin would return to his home from the flight and subsequent transaction. For all that Yoongi knew, the other man might already be back and in the house, he might still be in the passenger-seat of the travelling car, but until he picked up the receiver and he dialled the number, he wasn’t going to find out. Why he forcing himself to wait that little bit longer he didn’t really know, but here he was.

Was it because he didn’t want to look eager? That phoning too soon might make him look desperate and needy and all kinds of things that would make Jimin lose interest in him?

Or was it really just because Yoongi was stalling because he was terrified of the idea of finally being able to speak to him again?

Yoongi shifted his gaze to stare at the clock, seeing that the glowing green characters now said 11:54pm. Then he moved to grab the phone, pulling it off the side table and placing it down onto his mattress. He shifted to lounge back against the pillows as he shoved the receiver into the crook between his ear and shoulder, and then he grabbed his black book. After locating Namjoon’s number, he slowly hit the buttons with his thumb again, and then he closed his eyes as he listened to the dialling tone.

Oh, fuck it: now or never, baby.

Yoongi took several slow and deep breaths as he opened his eyes again to look across his bedroom and stare at the dead television screen. Time to wait and see if anyone would pick up, or if he would need to end the call and try again in a few minutes. He was hoping so much that his call would be answered because he didn’t know if he had the courage to try again. He was already feeling that same nervousness that he had felt when he had first phoned Namjoon, except now it was much stronger because he knew that he might get to speak to Jimin any second from now.

“C’mon, pick up,” Yoongi muttered under his breath. “Just pick up and-”

There was a sudden burst of static down the line followed by the other man’s voice.
“Hey?”

“Uh, Namjoon? It’s me, Prince Min.”

“Ah, Prince Min, yeah, I remember. I told you to call back tonight. Jimin’s in the bathroom right now, so-”

Even with the static of the line, Yoongi heard the sound of Jimin squeaking in shock, for it seemed that he was in fact present and accounted for right now. Clearly, Namjoon was attempting to play a prank on him and it was going to fall at the first hurdle.

“he can’t answer just yet. He’s gotta shave a lot of his body for muling and-”

Yoongi heard something that sounded like a scuffle down the line that was undoubtedly Jimin now trying to grab the receiver out of his hand so that he could take the call. He listened to the sudden series of sharp crackles and then he detected the younger man speaking.

“…to God, Namo, you fucker, I’m gonna punch you in the dick. Just you wait, baby, I’ll wait until you’re asleep and I’ll hit you harder than Ali, I-”

“Actually, Prince Min, Jimin just finished in the bathroom,” Namjoon said suddenly. “I’m putting him on now.”

Yoongi had roughly two seconds to prepare himself and then he heard it, the sound of Jimin’s voice being directed right at him.

“Hello?”

That perfectly constructed conversation of his that Yoongi had planned for two entire days now, just to ensure that he was going to be able to do this and not fuck it up, had quite simply been ruined before he had even been able to enact it. All because Jimin had said ‘hello’ to him and had caused him to freeze up instantly.

Oh, that slight hint of breathlessness in his voice from wrestling with his friend for the receiver, so
that he had said it in such a soft way. Almost like whisper against his neck that caused his entire body to break out into goosebumps. Yoongi could see them raising on his thighs, could feel the sensation of his breath catching in his throat as he tightened his grip around the receiver.

It was almost as if the word had been shot at him from a gun rather than his lips, his soft and plush lips. Yoongi felt it slamming into him hard enough to make him reel and he was aware of the fact that he had yet to reply to him.

“Uh, huh-hey,” Yoongi managed to say in reply, painfully aware of how much that he was stuttering and knowing that it likely sounded even worse to Jimin. “You just, uh, you just got back, right?”

“Oh, I landed a little while ago, but the drive here’s pretty long, so… Excuse me for just a minute, I just gotta-”

Yoongi heard a static crackle down the phone line followed by Jimin calling something. The sound was muffled, for he seemed to have covered the mouthpiece with his hand, but he heard a hint of what he had said because he hadn’t covered it properly. It sounded like he was telling Namjoon to get out of the room, presumably because his friend was lingering around and listening to their conversation. It wouldn’t surprise him if he was, and judging from the quick series of muffled calls, Namjoon was still very much hanging around in a way that Jimin didn’t like because he wanted to eavesdrop.

If Yoongi hadn’t already decided to let Namjoon call him by his given name, just knowing that he was lingering around like a teenage girl wanting to get all of the gossip just helped solidify his decision.

“Sorry about that, Yoongi.”

“Don’t, uh- it’s ‘k, you don’t need to say sorry,” he mumbled, as he reached up to start playing with the kinked cord with his forefinger.

“Are you OK, baby boy? You sound a little nervous, I-”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m fine,” Yoongi interjected, trying his very hardest to get himself under control even when he had just called him ‘baby boy’ again. “I’m good, Jimin.”
His insides were twisting up under his ribs, and Yoongi could feel his fingers shaking around the receiver as he reached down with his free hand to press it against his stomach.

But he was fine.

Perfectly fine.

“You, uh, you were talking about the flight?”

“The flight? Oh yeah, it was a long flight. About twelve hours actually, I think I slept for most of it. But enough about that, it’s boring, and-”

“Nah, it ain’t boring,” Yoongi breathed out, closing his eyes. “It ain’t, just…”

“Just what, Yoongi?”

“Just talk, just speak, I dunno,” he muttered, his hand pressing against his stomach that little bit harder. “I’m sorry, I can’t- I feel a lil weird right now, I-”

“Whoa hey, baby boy, it’s OK,” Jimin cooed at him, his voice once again taking on that soft and breathy sound. “It’s OK, just relax. It’s just me, you don’t need to worry.”

“I know, I know I don’t, but I can’t-”

Yoongi took a deep breath and he held it in his lungs for a few seconds, letting it out in an uneven sigh.

Why was this happening to him right now? He had been waiting and preparing for two whole days so why was his heart pounding hard enough in his chest to make him feel it almost punching against his ribs? Why wouldn’t his tongue work and let him talk to him like he so desperately wanted? It wasn’t fair, this wasn’t fair, and he wanted to kick himself for acting like this.

“Juh-just tell me a story,” Yoongi managed to force out. “I’ll listen, just tell me and…and I promise,
I’ll listen.”

“A story, hmm? Oh, I got plenty of those,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, his tone still sounding so very patient and soothing to him. “You should close your eyes, I find that helps when I listen to stories.”

“K, tell me something that—that happened in Hong Kong,” he suggested, as he settled back down against the pillows and he closed his eyes tightly. “Just to—”

“Chase the nerves away,” Jimin finished for him, before making a soft noise. “Well, I like Hong Kong a lot. I go to Kowloon City for transactions, and it’s nice. It’s a busy city, but I feel like it’s more like America than Seoul is. Have you ever been to Hong Kong before?”

“Uh, once when I was a kid,” Yoongi replied. “I went and, uh, we were on a boat and I ‘member thinking that the country looked so nice on the skyline. But I was scared of the boat so much that it kinda ruined it.”

“Oh, baby boy,” the younger man laughed, and Yoongi felt his insides doing that funny squirming thing again. “Are you scared of a lot of things?”

“Nuh-no, just don’t like boats too much…”

Yoongi didn’t really want to tell Jimin that: yes, he was afraid of a lot of things. Like disappointing his ancestors, like his father. He felt no need to mention his terror of contracting AIDS, which just added to his preexisting fears of intimacy.

“It’s so beautiful though, right? At night, it looks so nice, all lit up in neon. Me and my partner, we went to Kowloon Walled City together and got really drunk in a bar. You’d probably hate that place, it’s so dark and dirty, but I like it a lot. It feels like home in a way that I can’t really understand. Have you ever had that feeling of being home in a strange place?”

Yoongi made a noise in agreement at this, his eyes still closed shut tightly.

He knew that he was supposed to be imagining Hong Kong whilst he was talking to him, but Yoongi couldn’t help but imagine the other man instead. He had never seen Namjooon’s home before, and so in his mind he really saw nothing more than plain white walls behind a rather beaten-up plain dark sofa, which he imagined that Jimin was lying on. Was he on his back, staring up at the ceiling
and twirling the cord around aimlessly as he spoke? Or was he maybe lying on his side or stomach, his head against the cushions and the phone clutched in his hands instead?

“I made you some profit today. 7,000 dollars cut from a heroin deal. That’s good, right?”

“That’s really good, you’re, uh, you’re a good boy, Jimin.”

“Hmm,” Jimin almost purred down the line, the sound making him gulp. “I promised that I’d make you profits, because I’m so good.”

The line fell silent between them both for a moment, and Yoongi felt like he was the one that had to break the quiet. Jimin had put so much effort into their conversation already and he had barely done anything at all save for stuttering, humming, and breathing heavily down the line like a freak. But Jimin had so many stories that he could tell and he had nothing at all. His days were spent ordering around men, driving around the city, and staying at home in silence for most of the time. What could he possibly tell him?

Other than the fact that he had been waiting for two whole days and had been losing sleep over the thought of speaking to him again?

“I, uh, I should probably go, Jimin. I can’t talk for too long and— you need to rest. Keep up the good work, yeah?”

“Oh, um, OK,” Jimin replied in a soft voice, something that sounded like disappointment audible in his tone. “Can I see you again, Yoongi? Like, I dunno, sometime this week?”

“I, uh, I’m busy, but I’ll try phoning you again, yeah? Uh, goodnight, Jimin.”

Yoongi moved to drop the receiver in the cradle without even waiting to hear if Jimin said anything in reply. He stared at the telephone in a mixture of disgust, anger and sadness, knowing that he had just made a fool of himself. He had heard the excitement in Jimin’s voice from the very first word that he had said to him, he had known that the younger man was as desperate to talk to him again as he had been for days now, and yet he had ruined the moment by freezing up.

Maybe, Jimin would call him back on the number? All that he had to do was dial the service and find out the last number that had called their phone, a simple enough thing. So he should just wait for him
to call him back…right? He was probably going to do that, so he should just wait for him.

Yet, after several minutes had passed and the phone stayed silent, Yoongi realised that Jimin wasn’t going to phone him back.

Yoongi shifted in bed to sit up slowly, a sudden sensation washing over him that he couldn’t control. He grabbed the receiver and he was in the act of dialling the number when he stopped and he dropped the receiver into the cradle again. No, no he wasn’t going to call again. He had fucked up the first attempt and the second attempt would be just as bad. It was just the phone, the stupid phone. He knew that if he were to see him face to face that he would be able to talk better, that his words would come out right. It was just…hard to talk to Jimin on the phone when he wanted to see him so much that he felt like he was going mad.

Maybe, he should go to Namjoon’s house instead? He knew where he lived, he remembered the address. He could drive there right now, go inside, maybe take Jimin out to his car to talk to him instead?

But what if Yoongi went there and Jimin phoned his landline whilst he was gone? If he didn’t answer, then the younger man might leave to go out for the night, leaving him out to dry on the curb outside of Namjoon’s house as punishment for his stupidity. If Jimin went out then he might just meet another guy, maybe for casual fucking around that he wasn’t going to get from him. Or maybe, he might meet a nice guy that he would want to go out with because he didn’t act like an asshole like him?

The thought that Jimin might simply decide that he wasn’t worth the effort made Yoongi start gnawing on his lower lip anxiously.

What was he supposed to do?

“Uh…” Yoongi hummed, looking between the phone and his bedroom door in turn and practically wriggling on his bed as he did so.

Tomorrow - Yoongi would sort this out tomorrow. As soon as he was finished sorting out deals and had had breakfast, he would go straight to the house and talk to Jimin. He knew that he would have a short break before he left the country again, and he would be resting from the flight. Therefore, it was better to wait until then rather than run off into the night in a moment of madness. Jimin wasn’t going to go out to bars after a twelve hour flight across the world, he just needed to calm down and be logical about the entire situation.
Yoongi shifted to lie back down, hearing his breath escaping him in a rather pitiful whine. He knew that waiting was the smarter option, but he didn’t want to wait. He wriggled around on the bed for a moment in frustration before rolling onto his side and staring at his phone. It was still on his bed rather than the side table, just begging him to pick up the receiver again.

Hoseok had told him that he should hope for something good for once, rather than worrying and being pessimistic. But maybe, instead of hoping for something good, he should think about the goodness that Jimin had made him feel instead? He should think about how warm and content he had felt that night driving home after he had first met him, how…free he had been for the first time in such a long time.

Sure, Yoongi felt bad right now. But tomorrow, when he went to see Jimin, he would feel that warm and content feeling as soon as he got to look him in the eyes and tell him that he was so glad that he was back in America so that he could see him again.

Yoongi closed his eyes with a heavy sigh, reaching up to clasp at the front of his shirt tightly to twist at the buttons. He knew that he wasn’t going to sleep tonight, and across the city, Jimin might just be lying awake like him, staring up at his ceiling and thinking about him too.

31st August, 1984, 7:48am: Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco, United States of America

Jimin stared down at the mixture of soapy water that was spreading out around his feet before it was sucked down the drain, having been washed free from his skin and hair by the hard stream of hot water. He had to blink to not only keep it from getting into his eyes, but to also keep them open because he was struggling to stay awake right now.

The shower was so warm, so comforting, that he wouldn’t be surprised at all if he just sank to his knees in the tub and decided to resume his rather fractured attempt at a nap. But he really couldn’t do that right now, no matter how great the temptation was. Not if he wanted to stick to his rather spontaneous plans, that was.

He reached up to brush his hair back for a moment, letting the stream wash it forward over his eyes
again to clean more of the shampoo free. He closed his eyes to keep the foam from blinding him, wiping at his face roughly and then running his fingers through the lengths to massage at his scalp for a moment. Then he reached down to start wiping away the faintest remains of shower gel from his skin, before turning off the stream.

Jimin got out of the tub, grabbing the towel to sling it around his waist and then moving over to the sink to resume getting cleaned up. Despite having only napped for an hour or so, he didn’t actually look rough because he had slept for most of the plane flight. That meant that he didn’t need to worry about having black bags under his eyes or a puffiness to his face. No, he still looked pretty good.

Jimin brushed his teeth, splashed cold water onto his face and patted it dry, before wiping condensation off the mirror to study himself more intently. His wet hair was a glistening mess of spikes and locks around his face, so he pulled the towel free from his hips to start roughly drying it and then he started patting his skin dry.

The house was silent, way too silent, and Jimin wanted to break it in some way. But considering the fact that his best friend was still asleep, it might be for the best that he just stay quiet and get ready. That meant not putting any records on the player across the bedroom to flood the house with music, which he usually liked doing whilst he got dressed.

Jimin yawned loudly and he tossed the towel onto the rim of the bathtub, going back into the bedroom a moment later. He hunkered down beside his holdall, emptying the clothing out of the bag and onto the flooring to check what was clean and what was in dire need of being washed. He had a single white tee-shirt that was still clean, but he had to find a pair of jeans in a dresser to slip into, tucking the lengths inside of them. Then he grabbed his sneakers and he dropped to sit on the edge of the mattress, slipping into his shoes so that he could knot the laces loosely. He reached up to rake his damp hair back off his face with a sigh when he was done, glancing across the bedroom to try and locate his skateboard. He spotted it in the far corner of the room, placed against the wall, and so he got up to grab it.

Namjoon was still very much asleep in bed, lying on his stomach with his face pressed into the pillow, and so Jimin shifted to go over to him and he ruffled his hair softly. Then he left the bedroom, skipped down the stairs, and he unlocked the front door to leave the house. He pulled the door shut hard behind him, hoping that the thud didn’t disturb Namjoon, and then he jumped onto his board to start rolling down the sidewalk.

Jimin knew one place that he would find Yoongi today so that he would be able to speak to him, for the other man had told him that night on the curb when they had been admiring his car. There was that food joint over in Lower Pacific Heights that he visited most mornings for breakfast and to probably do business transactions in or something. He didn’t really know, but he did know that Yoongi had told him he went there most days, and so he was going to go there too.
Jimin was going to crash his breakfast and force Yoongi to speak to him properly.

He had already thought over the possibilities of appearing desperate to the other man, but Jimin had decided to take the risk. He had said something to Yoongi that night in the bathhouse that still rang true for him, and it was the fact that he was sick and tired of being teased and left hanging. If he had to appear desperate for the sake of putting his mind and heart at ease, then he would do so.

Jimin just wanted to know if there was a chance that he might actually get something out of this that was more than a one-night fling at a bathhouse and hopeless dreams of intimacy and romance. It wasn’t a huge demand at all, he just needed Yoongi to be honest with him and tell him today: yes, there was a chance, but he just needed to be patient with him; or no, they were done and he needed to give up and move on.

It might just be blind hope, or maybe just him refusing to accept the truth, but Jimin was almost certain that Yoongi hadn’t meant to act so strange towards him last night. He had detected something in his voice, something that the occasional burst of static had been unable to hide from his ears.

Nerves, or maybe even fear, as crazy as that might seem.

Jimin knew just how repressed that Yoongi was when it came to most things involving his sexuality, because he had told him quite a lot, and what he hadn’t told him his body language had. Yoongi didn’t hook-up with people that weren’t hired sex workers that he didn’t have to look at or even speak to if he didn’t want to. He didn’t drink socially, he didn’t seem to go out much at all if it wasn’t related to business from what he had discerned.

It was entirely believable to Jimin that the thought of speaking to him on the phone had frightened Yoongi. It might have stirred up doubt, fear, and other negative emotions deep within him, and so the phone call last night had been a bit difficult for him. The fact that Yoongi had contacted Namjoon whilst he had been in Hong Kong was a sign that the other man had wanted to speak to him, but he had most likely fucked it up because his panic and bad thoughts had taken over.

After all, it wasn’t like Yoongi had told him that he never wanted to see him again and that he was disgusted to have touched him in the first place. No, he had just simply tried his hardest the talk to him before swiftly ending the call from his discomfort without saying that they could meet each other again. Jimin knew that it wasn’t that bad and that Yoongi might just call him again in a day or two like he had vaguely promised to do so. But he didn’t want to be left hanging for that long. Even if he looked pretty desperate, he just needed to do this.
Jimin sighed heavily under his breath as he glanced at the upcoming road, seeing no traffic so that he could skate across it and jump onto the next curb. He carried on along the sidewalk before taking the next corner, heading off across Haight-Ashbury in the direction of Western Addition so that he could enter Lower Pacific Heights and find that diner again.

Unsurprisingly, in the time that it took to reach the other neighbourhood, Jimin couldn’t stop thinking about the other man and the phone conversation that they had had.

Even when it had been so brief, he still found that his memories of it were fond and somewhat sweet. Yoongi had been so nervous that he had struggled to talk to him, and so he had asked him to talk instead, to tell him a story about Hong Kong. The other man had listened intently, had told him about that childhood trip and his fear of the boat that he had been on, and it had been a rather beautiful moment between them. There had been a sense of something like… innocence coming from the entire conversation, which was pretty amusing considering what had happened when they had first met.

Yoongi, he had imagined him sitting there with his phone in hand, probably curled up on a chair in a tight ball to just block everything else out, or maybe in his bedroom should he have a phone in that room too. The thought of Yoongi, lying in bed talking to him, made him feel funny, made him feel weak in a way that he should have hated, but he actually loved. He had imagined him clutching onto the receiver every single time that he had stuttered his words out. The fact that talking to him had made Yoongi feel so nervous was probably a good sign, because weren’t nerves and getting tongue-tied all signs of having an infatuation with someone?

That was what was leaving Jimin hoping that there was still a chance to get closer to Yoongi, that chance of him being jittery with infatuation instead of filled with regret because of the night at the bathhouse.

By the time that he finally reached Lower Pacific Heights and he drew closer to the diner, Jimin saw no sight of the red BMW M1 or Ferrari Testarossa parked on the curb outside. That didn’t mean that a certain someone was absent, however, for his car hadn’t been parked there the first time that he had caught sight of him sitting inside of the diner. So he jumped off the board and he caught it, walking along the sidewalk and bracing himself as he turned his head to look inside of the building.

Jimin could see that Yoongi was sitting at the exact same table as last time, and he was staring right back out of the window at him in complete shock.

That night in the restaurant, Jimin had found it pretty tricky reading his face, but there was no mistaking the slack surprise on his features right now. The wide and rounded eyes, the parted lips, the way that he had frozen in the act of looking back down at a newspaper in his hands when he had recognised him.
Jimin briefly wondered what his own expression looked like as he moved to get to the door and he shoved it open to enter. He heard a bell ringing and he saw that the joint was empty save for him and Yoongi, the waitress behind the counter and presumably some staff back in the kitchen. The waitress was a young and pretty black woman, dressed in a soft yellow dress with an apron pulled around her hips, and upon seeing him entering, she gave him a wide and friendly smile.

“Welcome to Mickey’s Joint, honey. Are you a new face? I don’t recognise you, but I wish I did.”

“Good morning,” he greeted in return, before looking right at Yoongi.

The other man was almost still frozen in the same position from a moment ago, if not for the fact that he had turned his head to track his movement into the diner. His mouth was still so slack that Jimin was surprised that he hadn’t drooled all down his chin by now.

“Good morning to you too, Yoongi,” Jimin said, as he crossed the interior to stop by his table. “Did you sleep well, hmm?”

Judging from the rather unmistakable black bags that circled his eyes and his gnawed-on lower lip, the answer was most certainly: no. Jimin saw his tongue darting out to wet his lips as he dropped the newspaper down onto the table, clearly trying to think of something to say in response to the question. After almost a minute, he finally looked up at him and he broke the silence.

“No.”

Well, there was some more of that blunt honesty.

“You…you look like you haven’t been sleeping too good at all,” Jimin confided in a quiet voice, looking him up and down to see that he was wearing a loose grey tee-shirt tucked into black trousers with a belt pulled taut around his slight hips. “Are you OK?”

“‘K? Yeah, yeah,” Yoongi said with a series of unconvincing nods. “I’m ‘k, Jimin. Did, uh, did you sleep well after the flight, huh?”

“No, just a nap,” he replied. “My body still hasn’t figured out that it’s daytime right now, it’ll take a
few days to adjust.”

“Sounds rough,” the other man mumbled, making him laugh in agreement.

The look of startled surprise on Yoongi’s face because he had managed to make him laugh just made Jimin laugh that much harder. But the second that he was finished laughing, he realised that the diner was so quiet, too quiet in fact, and he knew that the responsibility lay with him to break it because Yoongi wouldn’t be able to do so right now.

“I was hoping that my story might send you to sleep,” Jimin remarked in a quiet voice. “It was a pretty boring story, I’m surprised that you didn’t fall asleep listening to it.”

“It wasn’t boring, Jimin,” Yoongi disagreed, his eyes glued to the window. “It was a nice story, I wish I could’ve listened to more, but…I kinda had a freakout, as you might’ve figured out.”

“I did,” he agreed, as he also looked out of the window, wondering if he was waiting on someone or if he was just avoiding eye-contact with him. “Yeah, you were having a pretty big freakout last night, Yoongi. Were you really that frightened to speak to me again?”

“Terrified,” Yoongi breathed out, before turning to look at him again. “But it ain’t ‘cos of you, Jimin. It’s ‘cos of…y’know?”

Crippling insecurity.

Toxic self-hatred.

Self-denial.

“I know, I know, Yoongi,” he said in a soft voice.

“Listen, I’m waiting on a guy, alright, a business partner and he dunno ‘bout…”

Yoongi didn’t need to finish this because it was obvious what he was hinting at. His business partner
didn’t know that he was gay, and being seen in his company might just arouse suspicions that he would prefer remained dormant. Maybe, it was because Yoongi thought that his associate would take a single look at him and just know that he was gay. Or maybe, it was in a way a strange form of compliment; that Yoongi was worried that being seen in the company of an attractive young man like him might be what aroused suspicions?

Well, Jimin could always hope for the latter rather than the former options.

“I don’t wanna be seen with you, in case he gets any ideas, that’s all. It ain’t ‘cos I don’t wanna see you now or that I don’t, uh, don’t want you, it’s just-”

“OK, it’s OK, I understand, Yoongi,” Jimin interjected, as he looked down at him. “But I just needed you to know that I was thinking about you this whole time, like, I really wanted to see you again.”

“I know,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice, sticking his tongue out to wet his lips like usual. “I know, Jimin, you ain’t the only one.”

“It was rude of me to show up like this today, but…damn, baby boy,” Jimin said, before laughing softly. “I can’t seem to get you outta my mind; been chasing you around in there for so long my legs are sore.”

When Yoongi guffawed at this rather lame joke, Jimin knew that he had been right all along. He really did have a chance at this, if he played his cards right and he tried to be patient.

“Shit, Jimin,” the other man sighed out, as he dropped his eyes to stare down at the newspaper. “I’d been planning on going to see you today. I was waiting to finish off sorting out business, was gonna drive down to The Haight and knock on Kim’s front door and everything.”

“You…you were?” Jimin asked in complete shock, unable to stop his eyes from widening.

Yoongi had been planning on coming to see him today? If he hadn’t shown up here first, then the other man might just have knocked on Namjoon’s front door and caught him by complete surprise. Jimin struggled to process this fact because he had been so convinced that Yoongi might not call him again, that he really didn’t know how to feel right now.
“Mmm, I knew you’d be in the house after the flight resting, I thought I might be able to catch you and talk to you,” Yoongi continued, as he cocked his elbow on the table to rest his cheek against his curled-up fingers. “I was gonna call you back last night, but I fucked it up so badly that—”

“You didn’t fuck it up. You were nervous, we all get nervous, Yoongi,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, shifting to hover his hand over his. “There’s nothing wrong with being nervous.”

“I thought ‘bout coming to see you last night too, driving down and just knocking on the door until someone answered, but again…the nerves…”

When he placed his hand on top of his, Jimin felt his fingers twitching underneath his, as if the contact had made a jolt of frisson jump between them.

Yoongi fell silent at his touch, staring down at their hands. After a moment of silence, he moved to grab a napkin from the dispenser, shoving his hand into his trousers pocket to pull an expensive-looking pen free.

“Here’s my number, yeah?” he explained, jotting it down onto the napkin quickly and being careful enough to write the digits large in case the ink bled and obscured it all. “But don’t call me tonight. Just stay at Namjoon’s house, promise me you’ll stay there for the night?”

“Why?” he asked curiously, wondering what he was hinting at.

“Just trust me,” Yoongi said, as he held the napkin out to him in offering. “I promise I’ll make up for last night, yeah? Just stay home tonight and don’t call me.”

Jimin moved to take the napkin out of his hand in a rather dazed state, still trying to process the fact that Yoongi had not only told him about how much he had wanted to see him, but because he had just given him his private number too.

“Jimin?”

“Yeah?” Jimin asked, shoving the napkin into his front jeans pocket.
Yoongi gestured at him to lean closer, lifting his hand and twitching his fingers at him. So he shifted to do so, leaning forward and aiming to draw close enough for him to whisper, should he want to do so. Yoongi glanced out of the window for a moment before turning back to him, and that was when he lifted his hands to cup his cheeks.

Jimin had enough time to take a sharp intake of breath before Yoongi pressed his lips against his in a chaste and completely unexpected kiss.

The contact was so brief and yet so…perfect. Oh, Jimin could smell the coffee on his breath and feel the softest puff of it against his cheek when Yoongi breathed out, and he could also feel his fingers trembling before he let go of him. The other man had actually closed his eyes during the kiss, and so when he moved away, Jimin saw his eyelids fluttering before he opened them again to look at him.

“Stay home, wait for me,” Yoongi said, as he shifted to sit back in his seat.

“Did you just give me orders, baby boy?” Jimin asked, recalling the fact he had made the exact same joke in the bathhouse.

“Mmm, I did,” the other man confirmed. “So, be a good boy and follow ‘em.”

“Oh, don’t worry, I’ll stay home all night,” Jimin promised, as he crossed the aisle to get to the door. He was even walking backward so that he could look at him the entire time. “In fact, I’ll stay home all afternoon!”

When Jimin stepped out onto the sidewalk, he moved to stop by the window again, looking in at Yoongi. He wanted to do something, to maybe wave goodbye or place his hand on the glass before he left. Maybe, blow him another kiss like he had that first night?

But before he could make his mind up on what to do, Yoongi lifted his own hand to press it against his lips, blowing him the most softest hint of a kiss. He could see how flushed that his cheeks were, how his fingers weren’t exactly still but seemed to be trembling as he lowered his hand again.

Jimin pretended to catch it with his fingers just like his mother had taught him, pressing them against his mouth to complete the kiss. The way that Yoongi’s lips twitched upwards at the corners made the
childish act worth it as he jumped back onto his board to go back home again.
Chapter 7

31st August, 1984, 7:22pm: Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco, United States of America

The sight of a rather thick cobweb dangling down from the ceiling fan had been the focus of his intense scrutiny for quite some time now.

Jimin really didn’t know how long that he had been staring at it for, for it could have been as little as ten minutes or as long as an hour. All that he knew was that he had been transfixed by the dancing clump of dust for way longer than he should have been, and that he should maybe look at something more interesting. But the problem was that there was really nothing interesting to look at in Namjoon’s bedroom.

Jimin had considered moving to look out of the open window, because it would also mean getting a nice cool breeze hitting his warm skin to cool him down. But he knew that the sight out of the window was boring, and so he didn’t want to do that. His view consisted of a road and a row of Painted Ladies opposite the home, the most boring sight imaginable right now. He couldn’t even people-watch for fun to pass the time because it was a residential area, meaning that the only people out on the streets at this hour were wandering addicts or the homeless.

Jimin had thought about getting up and maybe playing a record on Namjoon’s record player, but he really didn’t want to move to do so. He would have to find one to listen to out of the stack of records that they had amassed together in a plastic box, would have to set the device up too, and that was just too much work to do. He also didn’t want to make too much noise, because he was waiting on a phone call.

So for the past hour or two, Jimin had really been doing nothing more than stare up at the ceiling fan in a daze, waiting for the phone to finally sound and rescue him from this hellish spiral of boredom.

The ceiling fan had been bust for as long as he could recall, for neither of them had had the knowledge to fix it, or the bravery. He had made many lofty claims that he was going to be the one to do it just to chase away the obnoxious summer heat, but he had yet to do so. Lying on the bed right now, staring up at the cobwebs hanging from the dead blades, Jimin once again found himself wondering why he hadn’t fixed the goddamn fan yet. At least he would have been a lot cooler whilst he waited. But even if the fan had been working, he knew that he would have just found something else to feel uncomfortable about instead.
The heat was a convenient excuse to cover up the fact that Jimin felt uncomfortable because he was anxious that he was still waiting on Yoongi to phone him again.

Jimin wasn’t stupid. Yoongi had told him to wait at home for the night and technically it was still the early evening hours. He had no need to worry about the fact that he had yet to phone him because there were still several hours of the night left, but he hated waiting on things. He had gotten rather used to quick schedules and never really getting to stay still for too long that, now that he was finally waiting on something, time seemed to have stopped moving completely just to irritate him.

What time was it right now? He didn’t know, and so he lifted his head up off the pillow to study the alarm clock on the side table.

7:22pm, great, just great.

Jimin was so very certain that the last time that he had looked at the clock an hour ago it had said 7:15pm.

“…Goddammit,” he muttered under his breath, dropping his head back down on the stack of pillows.

Jimin found his gaze going straight back to the ceiling fan again, and so he forced himself to try and focus on something else instead. Anything, in fact. He was in the act of running his eyes over the mess on the floor when he heard the door opening from across the room, for the sound of the hinges creaking dryly caught his attention. It might just have been a draught coming in from the open window that had disturbed it, but he knew that to not be the case.

No, Jimin could sense that Namjoon was on the other side of the door, and a moment later he decided to just step right into the bedroom uninvited. It was his bedroom after all, and so it wasn’t like he needed to ask permission. But he was pretty certain that his friend had business to see to right now, like hitting the streets to deal.

Jimin turned his head ever so slightly to eye him, seeing that he was wearing a loose striped tee-shirt and a pair of denim shorts, his feet bare. Yes, judging from his clothing, it seemed that his friend was planning on staying in the house for the time being, and that he was going to make camp in this very bedroom just to get on his nerves.

“Hey, what’re you doing, Jimmy?” he asked curiously, pushing the door shut behind him as he did
“Waiting on a phone call,” he replied, blinking languidly as he stared up at the ceiling.

“There’s a phone downstairs too, you know,” Namjoon remarked, as he crossed the bedroom.

“I know, but I’m comfortable here,” he lied, not feeling the need to tell him that he had actually been hiding away in the bedroom in the hopes of getting a little privacy.

“Are you gonna stay here all night long, huh? You’ve been waiting for hours for that phone call, Jimmy.”

“He told me to stay home until he phones,” Jimin explained, his eyes still glued to the ceiling. “So, I’m gonna stay home and wait. I’ve been here all afternoon, Namo, I’m not moving until that phone rings.”

“Why don’t you call him first? I saw his number stuck on the fridge,” his friend said, as he moved to drop on the bottom of his bed. “Why’re you waiting?”

“He also told me to not phone him, so, I’m not gonna phone him,” he replied. “Just gonna wait for him, Daddy-o. It’s called being patient, and I know that it’s something I don’t achieve often, but I’m attempting to achieve it right now.”

“Uhuh, well, there’s more of that chicken and pasta salad in the kitchen with your name all over it,” Namjoon remarked, folding his long legs up onto the mattress and then dumping a baggie filled with marijuana and papers down on it. “Just thought you should know this fact.”

“…After he calls, I’ll eat it,” Jimin mumbled. “But until then, I’m staying put.”

“Christ, you must really wanna talk to him,” his friend said, as he grabbed two rolling papers. He wet the edges of one to stick it to the other and make the optimum surface to roll a joint from. “I thought you went to see him today?”

“I did, but we didn’t talk much,” Jimin said, shifting on the bed to get more comfortable. He propped
the pillows up and then he dropped his head on them. “He had to see an associate, so, he gave me his number and he told me to stay at home tonight. Namo, didn’t I tell you this earlier?”

“Did you?”

“Yeah, when you woke up this afternoon and…you weren’t listening to a single word that I was saying,” he finished, before sighing wearily.

Namjoon snorted at this as he finished rolling the first joint. Then he put it aside to move onto another, once more making the surface from two rolling papers and leaving Jimin to watch him doing so because he had little else to do.

“If Prince Min asked you to jump through hoops, would you do that too?” his friend asked him in a serious tone.

“Go get some hoops, let’s test this theory,” he retorted, watching him rolling up the second joint.

When the phone rang suddenly, Jimin actually jumped in surprise, twisting to look at the device. He had been expecting that he was going to have to wait for quite some time longer before the phone call, but apparently that was not the case. Then he glanced over at Namjoon, seeing him pausing in the act of sealing up the joint. His friend looked up at him at the sound, his eyebrows slowly raising as the next ring sounded.

Jimin cocked his legs up and he proceeded to start shoving at his side with his feet, aiming to knock him off the bed so that he would leave the bedroom and him in peace. He didn’t want a repeat of the last incident, and Namjoon was most certainly going to make himself a nuisance like usual.

“Whoa, hey!” Namjoon cried out in surprise. “What the actual-”

“Go to the bathroom and shave, huh?” Jimin suggested, as he gave him another hard shove.

“fuck, Jimmy? I thought you were a pacifist? You lying son of a-”

Jimin succeeded in getting him to get off the bed and to his feet by the fourth ring, but that wasn’t
enough for him. No, he got upright too and he proceeded to plant his hands on his lower back, pushing him across the room to the sound of his rather indignant complaints. He managed to get him out onto the slight landing after a few seconds, and then he made a victorious noise.

“Ha! Namo, I’m locking it just so you can’t come in, and-”

Jimin had forgotten about the fact that the lock had been bust for quite some time now, just like the ceiling fan. So, when he shut the door, it just slowly opened up again with a soft creaking sound.

All that they could do was stare at the door for a moment as this rather obvious fact set in, and then Jimin lifted his gaze up from the handle to look up at his friend.

Namjoon stared right back, his expression surprisingly blank rather than amused, and then he realised that the phone was still ringing across the room.

Jimin bolted over to the side table before Namjoon could even think to try and prank him again. He snatched up the receiver and he pressed it against his ear, going as far as to grab the actual device and move it onto the bed just to stop his friend from causing him more unneeded trouble.

“Hey?” he said, as he dropped onto the mattress, the springs creaking loudly. “Is that you, Yoongi?”

“Yeah, it’s me,” Yoongi said in a soft voice, his breath escaping him in what sounded like a sigh of relief because he had picked up. “I-I promised to call, I ain’t the type to break promises.”

“Sorry about not answering right away, I had to see to something,” Jimin said, twisting to look over his shoulder at the other man.

Namjoon was in the act of retrieving the joints from off the carpet. They must have been knocked to the floor when he had shoved him off the bed, and luckily neither of them had stood on them and crushed them into nothing more than torn rolling paper and ground-up marijuana. His friend checked them over before lifting his gaze to look at him, attempting to look disgruntled.

“Kim?” Yoongi asked, somehow managing to make it sound more like a statement than a question.
“Uhuh, great guess,” Jimin said with a smirk.

When Namjoon moved to sit back down on the bed, like what had just happened a moment ago had never even happened, Jimin could only stare at him dumbly. The temptation to lift his leg up and try and kick at him again was so powerful, but he managed to suppress the urge just because he didn’t want to get into yet another wrestling match with his friend whilst on the phone with Yoongi.

“So, uh, how’re you?” Yoongi asked suddenly, dragging him away from any thoughts revolving around kicking his friend in the stomach. “You said you didn’t really sleep, that you were still fuh-fucked up ‘cos of the flight?”

Jimin could still hear a little hint of his nerves shining through, but Yoongi had managed to curb quite a lot of the fear in for him. Maybe, now that they had finally gotten to meet again and they had looked each other in the eyes rather than just hoping for another chance encounter, it had made him feel braver? Whatever the case, he was most certainly stuttering and stammering less, and that was a relief for the both of them.

“I’m doing great,” Jimin replied, his lips curling up at the corners as he got more comfortable on the bed by settling down on his stomach and cocking his weight onto one elbow. “I took a long nap earlier, so, I’m wide awake now, sadly. Or maybe it’s a good thing, hmm?”

“It’s a good thing,” Yoongi confirmed, something in his voice seeming to tell him that he was smiling just like he was right now.

“What about you, Yoongi? Was today a good day for you?”

“I, uh, I can tell you all ‘bout that later. I’m guh-gonna pick you up, yeah? ‘Bout an hour from now, roughly. That should give you enough time to get ready, right?”

Jumin stared at the window across the bedroom for a moment as he thought this question over, trying to think of what he had meant by that statement. He could see the evening darkness first and foremost out of the window, then the lights of the opposite row of houses glowing just like the streetlights.

Enough time to get ready for what, exactly?
Was Yoongi going to...take him out right now? Was he making plans for some kind of evening out together in the city? He had said nothing to him in the diner earlier about this, had just told him to stay at home and not go out tonight so that he could be there to answer his call.

But he had also said something about making up for the first disastrous phone call too. Was that what he was talking about right now? Had Yoongi made plans of some sort to apologise for the way that he had acted, even when he had no need to do so?

“Um, yeah,” Jimin said in a quiet voice. “Yeah, that’s plenty of time, Yoongi.”

“Good, I know it’s sudden, but I can’t help it. The plans were a lil, uh, spontaneous. By that, I mean I literally just finished making ‘em, ha. I ain’t usually so spontaneous, it’s a new habit of mine, I think.”

“Spontaneity can be pretty fun sometimes,” Jimin remarked with a soft smile. “Like…the bar.”

“Like the bar, yeah, the bar,” Yoongi muttered, before letting out an awkward laugh. “And, uh, what followed it too.”

The line fell silent for a moment, and Jimin could sense that the other man’s nerves were starting to come back again. It would be for the best that they end the phone call soon, just to avoid repeating what had happened last time, and at least he now knew that he was coming to pick him up so that he could see him in person again soon enough. But he didn’t want to end the call just yet because he wanted to hear him talking, even if just for a little bit longer. The silence didn’t even feel that bad right now, which was even more of a relief.

“What am I getting ready for, baby boy?” Jimin asked him, more than aware of the fact that Namjoon had just heard the nickname but not at all caring right now. “Or is it a surprise? Can I get a hint, just one little hint?”

“You, uh, you got a dinner jacket? Any kinda jacket to wear with smart trousers?”

“Do I have a jacket? Yoongi, I don’t own a single suit,” Jimin replied, before turning to look back over his shoulder at Namjoon again, unable to keep the smirk off his face.

This was just like the original dinner all over again, the one that he had went to dressed in his leather
jacket and ass-hugging jeans. Maybe, Yoongi had thought he had done that that night to try and create an image, to make himself look cool in front of him? That was a little bit true, but it was also because he had really had little else to wear that hadn’t looked even more informal.

“Then I’ll bring you one, you’re gonna need it,” Yoongi explained. “That’s your hint, Jimin, so, wear…black trousers.”

“That’s my hint? OK, I guess I’ll go and get cleaned up then,” Jimin said, as he rolled onto his other side. “I can’t wait to see you again, baby boy.”

“And I can’t wait to see you all cleaned up. Good…goodbye, Jimin.”

“Bye.”

Jimin dropped the receiver back into the cradle, hearing the plastic clattering loudly, and then he shifted to sit up and looked at his friend.

Namjoon glanced between the joints and his face for a moment, clearly wanting to say something but stopping himself at the last second. After almost an entire minute of silence, he decided to just go for it.

“Baby boy…?”

“Namo, whatever you heard just then, pretend that you didn’t. OK?” Jimin said in his most stern tone. “Seriously, Prince Min’s really…closeted, and he doesn’t need anyone else knowing about his private issues. I trust you to keep it secret, because if I didn’t, I’d have seriously kicked you outta this bedroom.”

“I’ll keep it secret,” Namjoon promised. “I mean, you already told me a lot that night when you were drunk without saying anything in particular. I guessed the rest.”

“Why’d you keep eavesdropping on me so much, huh? First yesterday, now tonight. You’re acting like my mum used to when I was in middle school and a girl would phone me. She had been hoping to hear me flirting with them or arranging dates instead of helping with maths homework and listening to them crying over the dicks they were dating that treated them bad. I’m just curious as to why you keep hanging around like that too.”
“I just wanna know what’s going on,” Namjoon replied honestly. “What can I say, you’re the only business partner I actually think of as a friend, Jimmy. If you’re gonna start banging Prince Min, I wanna know first.”

“No, I mean, I was just saying…”

Banging really wasn’t accurate after all, all things considered. Making out with, sure. Engaging in heavy petting with, highly likely. Banging…not so much.

“Something like that could affect me in the future, just saying,” his friend added. “So, I’d like to know in advance if said banging is gonna occur. Also, I might just be turning into the protective older brother too, so…”

Jimin couldn’t help but laugh softly at this, even when his words actually made a little hint of warmth start spreading in his chest. It was pretty funny that Namjoon was only just now referring to himself as the protective older brother, when Jimin was pretty certain that he had been that role in his life for quite some time now.

Who had been the guy to teach him about condoms? Not his father, not his middle school friends, but Namjoon. Who had educated him on how to take care of himself, had bombarded him with pretty much every leaflet about general health, safety, and sex possible? Namjoon, of course, who had also been the guy to bring him to a clinic shortly after meeting him to get himself checked for them to have found out that he had been one lucky kid and had been completely AIDS and STD-free, despite all of the troubles that he had gotten himself into.

Namjoon had taken care of him in a way that he had never even known that he had needed back then and, looking back on it all, Jimin was surprised that he had managed to get this far in life. He had been ignorant, hopeless, and lacking so many skills, but Namjoon had had both the patience and the smarts to help him fix himself up back then.

If his friend wanted to eavesdrop on him because he wanted to make sure that he was behaving, then Jimin really couldn’t argue against this.

“You can trust Prince Min. You met him that night, so, believe me when I say that I’m in safe and smart hands. I’m not gonna mess around and regret it, I promise. He’s much more…mature than the guys I used to mess around with, and he’s all about taking it slow and safe right now,” Jimin said, as he wriggled on the mattress impatiently. “I’ll be a well-behaved little brother. OK?”
“OK, shake on it.”

Namjoon held his hand out to him, and so Jimin reached over to take hold and he shook it hard thrice: sealing the deal.

There, a promise made during a handshake was one that Jimin was never allowed to break, and he had yet to come even close to breaking a promise that he had made to his best friend.

“Baby boy, though, I can’t get that outta my mind,” Namjoon said, as he released his hold on his hand. “I mean, he had a baby face, sure. Is that why you call him it, huh?”

“I called him ‘baby’, then he asked me to call him ‘baby boy’, so, I did. I didn’t ask why.”

“What’d you like being called, huh?” his friend asked with a smirk. “What’d you tell him to call you? Can I guess?”

“Namo, you can see me buck-ass naked and shove your entire fist up my ass for business, but you’re not finding out what I like,” Jimin retorted, turning his head to look at the clock on the side table.

The white squares had black numbers printed on them, and as he studied the device, the minute one flipped down with a soft clicking sound to read 07:34pm. He had until 8:30pm or so to get ready, an entire hour in which to shower, dress, and prepare himself for Yoongi’s arrival. He had technically been waiting all day for this, but an hour didn’t seem like long enough at all to him now.

“Why were you talking about a jacket? Did he ask you to wear a suit or something?”

“He said that I need a dinner jacket,” Jimin explained. “Then he told me to wear black trousers and that he’d bring me one because I don’t have a suit. What’d you need a dinner jacket for, Daddy-o? What kinda places demand that you wear them?”

“I can literally only think of restaurants,” Namjoon said, as he placed the two joints into the baggie and then he shoved it into his shorts pocket.
“Another restaurant? You think he’s taking me to a restaurant?”

“Where’d you think he’s gonna take you? It’s a date, he’s hardly gonna take you to the cinema or arcade, Jimmy.”

“A…a date?” Jimin repeated, unable to keep the surprise off his face. “Do you think it’s a date, Namo?”

Namjoon rolled his eyes to look at him, his expression telling him that he really couldn’t believe that he had just asked him that question.

“Shit, I gotta find some clothes, I gotta find some clothes,” Jimin muttered, wriggling off the bed to get to his feet. “This is just like last time, except now I need to look fancy.”

“I thought that you’d never wear a suit, fuck the establishment and all that?” his friend remarked sarcastically.

“Listen, that was before I tasted high-class food and wine,” Jimin argued, as he hunkered down in front of his holdall and started pulling things free from the bag. “Also, it was before I met Prince Min and…you know? Now, wearing suits and acting fancy is totally my thing.”

“Jimmy, you’re the biggest hypocrite this side of California and guess what? I love you for it.”

“Help me find something, Daddy-o? I gotta shower, I gotta prepare myself. I can’t sit here all night pulling out socks and goddamn dirty underwear,” Jimin muttered, as he abandoned his bag and he went over to the dresser instead.

Why Jimin had been hoping to find something in the bag when it was filled with used items, he didn’t know. He had nothing more than dirty underwear, tee-shirts, the occasional silken shirt and a pair of jeans and trousers inside of it. At least in the dresser he might be able to find something that was of a better quality and clean. He wrenched the top drawer open and he started rifling through that too. He heard Namjoon getting to his feet behind him, his footsteps shuffling on the carpet as he moved closer to him.

“Really?” Namjoon asked, pulling his chambray shirt out of the mess of clothing still tangled up and spilling free from his holdall. “You took this one too?”
“It’s a nice shirt, Daddy-o,” Jimin explained, as his friend looked at it. “It’s real comfortable, maybe too comfortable. I slept in it.”

“Is anything I own safe from you, Jimmy?”

“Uhuh, those cheap dirty magazines you read,” Jimin retorted without missing a beat. “I won’t touch them, they’re safe.”

“Oh, that’s good to know,” Namjoon said, before lifting the shirt to sniff at it. “Smells like booze and cigarettes. What were you doing in Hong Kong, huh?”

“Drinking in a bar in Kowloon Walled City with Taehyung,” he explained, as he hunkered down to pull open another drawer and he started emptying that one too. “I’ve got Polaroids, I’ll show you them tomorrow and tell you some stories and- a-ha!”

Jimin pulled a pair of trousers free from the drawer, holding them up in front of himself so that they unfolded to show smooth black cotton. He could see that they were free from wear, which was of no surprise to him because he had never worn these ones before, or at least not properly.

“Remember these? I tried wearing them once to mule in, but they didn’t conceal the parcels because they were so tight, so, we had to drive back here and grab some pants and really cut it close to the flight?” Jimin started laughing at the memory whilst his friend just grimaced. “What a great morning that was.”

“Aren’t they a little…tight?” Namjoon asked, intently eyeing the trousers. “I mean, loose suits are in right now and they’re probably gonna stay in forever, sadly.”

“I don’t do loose,” Jimin argued, as he placed the trousers on the top of the dresser. “I’m not tall enough, or old enough, for that look.”

“Oh yeah, you like everyone to see the outline of your dick; right?” Namjoon retorted, the joke actually making him snort laughter in agreement.

“What can I say? I’m all about displaying merchandise with deals. Why not display my own? Oh,
but hey, Namo? Sell me those joints from before,” he said, as he felt his fingers brushing against something silken inside of the drawer that meant that he had finally located his nicer items of clothing. “The two ones you just rolled.”

“The two joints?”

“Uhuh.”

“No one buys two joints, Jimmy,” Namjoon stated bluntly. “I don’t sell by the goddamn joint, I sell in grams and ounces.”

“I want two, two,” he emphasised, as he lifted his hand and he made the peace sign at his friend, “joints. How much?”

“The smallest deal I offer is 20 dollars for an eighth, which you can get maybe three or four from.”

“You’re gonna charge me full price? For pot? Me?” Jimin asked in an indignant tone. “Your partner in crime, your best buddy? The guy that made you 7,000 dollars back on that deal with Chow?”

“I’ll cut it a little,” his friend mumbled, as he reached up to rub at the back of his neck. “15 dollars.”

“Two joints? 15 dollars for two joints? Are we running burnt pot now too, huh?” he remarked, before shaking his head. “7 dollars.”

“Goddamn, someone made a little profit and won’t shut up about it,” Namjoon declared. “For 7 dollars, I might as well be giving it away for free.”

“Then give me it for free, Daddy-o,” he joked with a grin.

“…Seriously, Jimmy, you get this one free deal of pusher merch and that’s it. No more free pot for you, I’ve got a business to run.”

“You’ve got my eternal gratitude and love,” Jimin said, as he moved to slip his arm around his elbow
and he squeezed against his side affectionately. “Also, I’ll clean this place up and go to the laundromat for you and pay for the wash.”

“Deal,” Namjoon said, slipping the baggie out of his shorts and holding it out to him. “What’d you want it for anyway? Does Prince Min have a habit for green or something?”

“I dunno, I just wanted some, but he might dig it; I guess?” Jimin replied with a shrug, before grabbing the baggie off him. “Most rich guys have a nose for white, not green, Namo. I thought you were a dealer?”

“Yeah, well, I didn’t get a feel for any of those things from him,” his friend replied. “We know he drinks, maybe light, maybe heavy; don’t about smoking or anything else.”

“He wasn’t carrying anything when I was with him,” Jimin explained. “No cigarettes, no cigarillos. I didn’t taste a ghost of tobacco on his breath when I kissed him either. I think he’s clean.”

“And yet he seems to be into you: beer-drinking, pot and cigarette-smoking. You’re a bad influence, Jimmy.”

“Don’t forget explicitly homosexual,” Jimin retorted, as he dropped the baggie down on top of the folded trousers on the dresser. “That might just be my worst influence on him.”

“You can’t really influence the willing…”

Jimin turned back to the dresser so that he could pull out several shirts and look at them. Two of them were silk, the other two were cotton, and all of them were varying patterns and colours. The silken shirts consisted of a solid black one with a white collar and piping around the hemline, pocket and buttons, and another black one covered in blue butterfly print. The cotton ones consisted of a plain white one, and a red one covered in black stars. All four of the shirts had wide collars with lapels and short sleeves, which could be hidden away beneath the suit jacket.

Jimin was starting to notice a worrying trend with his wardrobe, and it was the fact that he seemed to buy the same styles over and over again. If it wasn’t plain tee-shirts and tight jeans, it was these shirts and whatever he could ‘borrow’ from Namjoon for the day.

“Um…which one do you think?” Jimin asked, as he glanced back at his friend. “I need a little help
here, Daddy-o.”

Namjoon stopped collecting the clothing from the flooring and he moved to stand beside him instead. He studied the four shirts for a moment, actually thinking it over before giving him an answer. The options were either muted, subtle, classic or loud, and Jimin had no clue what one to go for.

“Black trousers, black jacket? Might as well add a little colour,” Namjoon said, before retrieving the black silken shirt emblazoned with blue butterflies and holding it up. “I mean, it’s only a little hint but it’s subtle. The red might be too loud, especially if he’s not wearing anything bold. The white is too meek and boring for you, but the print on this one’s just right.”

“Don’t you think it’s a little…feminine?” Jimin asked in a quiet voice, reaching up to start fiddling with his cross earring just like usual.

“Do you think it’s feminine?” his friend asked him in return, turning to look at him. When he didn’t reply, he added, “You bought it for a reason, right? Clearly you didn’t care about that then, so, why’d you care now?”

“Good point.”

“I think that’s the best choice, but if you wanna pick another one go for it,” Namjoon said, before moving to resume collecting the clothing from the flooring. “Meanwhile, I’m gonna start packing up the dirty clothes for you. Have fun cleaning this place up, Jimmy.”

“I can’t wait,” he declared, moving to grab the pair of trousers too.

Jimin left the bedroom to go along the landing to the bathroom, all worries about waiting for a phone call completely evaporated and all thoughts about Namjoon’s chicken pasta salad no longer important to him. No, not when there seemed to be a high chance that Yoongi could be taking him to a restaurant tonight for a ‘date’.

As he twisted the shower valve to turn it on, a soft spray of lukewarm water bouncing off the bottom of the tub, Jimin found himself smiling at the mere thought.

When the water was at a wonderfully high level of heat, he climbed into the bathtub and he stepped under it. He had only showered this morning, but he wanted to freshen up for the evening, especially
since he had napped during the sweltering heat of the afternoon. So Jimin went between his hair and his skin, lathering shampoo and soap and taking his time because there was no rush right now. He didn’t want to be ready too quickly and left waiting almost anxiously on the other man to arrive. That meant that he got to take his time and relax under the scorching hot stream.

But sadly, even Jimin struggled to make this shower last longer than twenty minutes before he forced himself to climb out of the tub, slinging a towel around his hips. Water beaded on his hairline to run down his face, trickling like warm fingers down the back of his neck, and he reached up to brush it free roughly. He blinked away the water and then he turned to look at the sink for a moment, his eyes settling on the fogged-up mirror. He moved over to the sink to open the medical cabinet, rooting around inside of it to retrieve his tube of lotion and several cosmetic items.

As Jimin slowly moisturised his skin, he wondered if Yoongi was grooming himself like this right now too; if he was showering, moisturising, and more. He assumed that he was going to freshen up before collecting him, considering the fact he had been wearing just a tee-shirt and trousers earlier rather than a suit. Did he put as much care into his bathing routine as he seemed to put into his appearance? The answer was likely: yes, for his skin had felt so very supple against his hands that night. Soft and clean, all signs that Yoongi had an excellent level of hygiene, and that he might just like pampering himself.

What did the bathrooms in mansions in Pacific Heights look like, he wondered? Was his bathtub the size of this entire bathroom? The thought made him snort laughter to himself as he added a quick spray of deodorant and then started getting dressed. Maybe, if he was lucky, he might just get to find out the answer to that in the future.

Jimin grabbed his eyeliner pencil, wetting the tip with his tongue ever so slightly so that he could add a hint of black around his lash line. He never went for anything too dramatic, too shocking, but he did like to add a little just to make his eyes look more rounder and to combat his rather droopy eyelids. Yoongi might just have noticed it that night, he might not have. As soon as that was done, he finished his look with a smear of lip balm, just to keep his lips soft and glossy enough to look enticing, and he shoved the little pot into his trouser pocket should he need it again later.

When Jimin went back into the bedroom, he saw that Namjoon had indeed filled a black rubbish bag with dirty clothing, which he had dumped by the dresser just for him. He went over to the dresser and he rooted around a small cut glass bowl that was filled with random items of jewellery for a moment. Pretty much everything inside of it belonged to him, though that was still only a couple of items rather than a lot.

After running away from home, Jimin had pawned off the pieces of jewellery that he had possessed - most of them having been items that had apparently belonged to his grandmother. What was in the bowl now were just several rings and sets of earrings that he had ended up buying to try and forget about the fact that he had grabbed the jewellery and had ran off in the middle of the night like a thief.
For fear of the items being stolen from the communal home, his friend had kept hold of them for him here. He guessed that he should probably collect the last of his belongings from that place, on account of the fact that he now seemed to live with Namjoon.

Not that there was much to collect…

Jimin decided to replace his cross earrings with a pair of plain silver hoops, just because they were something less obvious to fiddle with. They suited the look better too, looked a little more mature considering that that was the look that he was going for tonight. A dinner jacket, that was about as mature as he was ever going to get. After putting the earrings in, he slipped a filigree band on the thumb of his left hand, and a plain band and ring set with a small sapphire on the middle and index finger of his right hand: all silver. There, plenty of rings for him to play with that were more discreet than his earrings, should he get a little nervous.

Finally, Jimin was ready. All that he needed to do was slip into his leather loafers before leaving, and then he was all dressed for the evening.

A quick glance at the bedside clock showed him that it 8:22pm. He had maybe ten minutes to wait for Yoongi, should the other man arrive at the time that he had estimated and not be delayed. He was about to leave the bedroom when a sudden thought crossed his mind and made him freeze in the act of stepping through the doorway.

Cologne! How could he forget?!

Jimin had to go back into the bathroom one last time, opening the medical cabinet again so that he could retrieve his cologne. He didn’t wear it often, on account of the fact that he was always travelling and he didn’t want to bring it with him lest the bottle get shattered by accident. Whenever he was hanging around the streets to pass the time, it just simply escaped his mind to spray some on.

*Jules* by Christian Dior was too good to waste, after all.

Jimin pulled the bottle free; a shapely deep olive green glass container with a rounded black top that he removed to spray a liberal amount against his throat and left wrist, which he then dabbed against the right to spread the spray. He breathed in the first hints of the woody scent, knowing that it would soon take on a more spicier note that would linger for quite some time. Then he put the bottle away and he finally went downstairs, stepping into the living-room to see that his friend was in the act of once again attempting to break his record on *Space Invaders* - sitting cross-legged on the sofa with a bowl of popcorn placed on his usual spot on the cushion beside him.
“Having fun?” Jimin asked, settling on the arm of the sofa to watch the graphics flashing around the screen.

“We can’t all go on expensive dates with mob heirs now; can we?” Namjoon retorted, hitting the buttons furiously. “Don’t judge.”

Jimin moved to grab a handful of the popcorn, tossing a kernel at his friend. Upon it bouncing off the side of his head, Namjoon decided to turn his head ever so slightly to try and catch them with his mouth and play the video game at the same time. After managing to catch only one of them, he decided to just pause the console and he turned to look at him.

“You look good, Jimmy,” Namjoon said, grabbing several of the missed kernels from his lap and shoving them into his mouth. “Are you nervous, huh?”

“Nervous? Pft, why would I be nervous?” Jimin asked, brushing the slightest hints of popcorn and salt off his hands.

“It’s a proper date,” his friend remarked around the mouthful of food. “Your first proper date. Anybody would be nervous about that.”

“Were you nervous on your first date?”

“I think I choked on water and stood on one of her feet at some point, so, yeah. I think I was pretty nervous,” Namjoon said, as he retrieved more popcorn. “If you are, there’s no need to lie, Jimmy.”

“…OK, maybe I’m a little nervous,” Jimin admitted in a quiet voice. “But, you know, not because it’s a date or anything. Just because I need to behave myself tonight.”

“Oh, so he likes it when you behave, huh?” Namjoon asked, before giving him a mischievous eyebrow wriggle. “That’s not exactly exciting, is it?”

“I didn’t mean it like that, I meant like…like, I might end up in a fancy restaurant and I’ve got behave and act like I belong there, so-”
The softest sound of something thumping came through the open window, something that sounded just like a car door being slammed shut to Jimin’s ears. It was enough to make him stop talking suddenly, his eyes shifting to stare at the bay window curtains across the room.

Even Namjoon decided to stop taunting him, glancing between him and the bowl of popcorn as they both waited for the familiar sound of the doorbell to ring out.

Except, after almost an entire minute of waiting, there came a series of knocks instead.

It seemed that Yoongi had arrived a little earlier than he had anticipated.

Jimin almost jumped off the sofa arm at the sound, unable to suppress the reaction. For some reason, he found himself patting at his trouser pockets, as if he was trying to check for his keys and wallet when he had neither of these objects shoved inside of them.

Namjoon gestured at him rapidly to open the door, waving his wrist at him, and yet for several seconds, Jimin seemed almost…frozen in place. But then it finally hit him, and he moved to leave the living-room to get to the door. He made sure to slip into his leather loafers first and then he pulled the chain lock aside to open the door.

The sight that he was greeted by was that of Yoongi standing on the top step, caught in the act of nibbling at his thumb nail almost nervously. He dropped his hand instinctively upon seeing him, shoving it into his trouser pocket instead, and Jimin saw that he had a suit jacket folded over his other forearm.

For a second or two, neither one of them said a single word in greeting, but then Yoongi managed to force something out.

“Huh-hey,” he stuttered, wincing ever so slightly before laughing to himself. “Great, I stood on the fucking step for a whole minute preparing that and it just, uh…”

“Huh-hey to you too,” he replied with a grin. “Yoongi, you look…”

Jimin shifted to reach over and touch the lapel of his suit jacket, running his fingers over the silken
strip of contrast material. He dropped his gaze to look at the rest of his clothing, seeing loose suit trousers that skirted his ankles and were pleat-less, along with patent leather Oxfords. The suit and shoes were nice and all, but Jimin was transfixed by the sight of the shirt that he was wearing underneath it. Or, more precisely, the blouse. There was no mistaking it for anything else, and Jimin saw that it was white with a v-neck collar that was open a single button, and it was covered in little red seashells. The blouse looked to have full sleeves, which were likely rather voluminous but were currently hidden out of sight under his jacket.

Yoongi was standing on Namjoon’s top step, dressed in a designer suit and blouse, and he was here to take him out on a ‘date’.

“I look…?” Yoongi repeated, trying his hardest to not grimace. “Bad? Ugly? Stupid?”

“You look good, you look really good- I mean, handsome,” Jimin finally managed to get out, feeling his cheeks starting to redden from a sudden flush of embarrassment. “Gosh, I got a bit tongue-tied there too, right? It suits you. It’s a lot more you than that plain shirt and bolo tie, for sure.”

“Yeah?” Yoongi asked in a quiet voice, clearly uncertain if he was being honest with him. “You, uh, you think so?”

“I do,” Jimin said with a soft smile.

Yoongi let out a soft laugh at this, reaching up to rub at the back of his neck as he dropped his gaze to study their shoes. Jimin could see that his hair was still that slightly unruly mass of kinked black locks, but it was actually neater than when he had last seen it; less corkscrewed curls and points present from his tugging fingers and nervous fidgeting.

“The, um, the jacket,” he said, before moving to hold it out to him.

Jimin saw that he was holding it by the neck and one arm, offering to assist him in slipping it on. It was plain black cotton that would match perfectly well with his trousers, and it had a shawl lapel instead of a notched one. So he moved to slip his hand through the arm first, turning and letting Yoongi fix it up onto his shoulder. Getting closer to him allowed him to breathe in his scent, a wonderfully masculine cologne coming from him that he inhaled and held in his lungs for a moment before exhaling. Woody and fresh, yet also warm like leather.

That was the kind of scent that Jimin could imagine waking up to on his pillow, that he wanted to
taste on his tongue and figure out every single note of.

“Does it fit alright?” Yoongi asked, after helping him with the second arm. “It don’t have to fit, you can take it off inside so long as you enter wearing it. But, uh, it’d be nice if it fitted; yeah?”

“It fits pretty nicely,” he confirmed, as he reached up to fix the lapel, still lingering close to him to breathe in his scent.

When he turned back to face him, smoothing his hands down the lapel and then checking the cuffs, Jimin noted that Yoongi was observing him intently. He might have been checking out his clothing, or just checking that the jacket did indeed fit. Whatever the case, when he glanced up and gave him a smile, Yoongi returned it.

“You look nice,” Yoongi remarked, awkwardly gesturing at his body before dropping his hand. “Y’know, you’d look real nice in a suit of your own.”

“What? Don’t you like the jeans? I think they show off some of my best…features.”

“They do, but a suit’d look-” Yoongi paused for a moment, slowly figuring out that he had just agreed with his statement. “I mean, I think you’ve got better features, not just your, uh…”

“My uh?” Jimin asked, finding the way that he was making the other man get all flustered and watching him shifting from foot to foot highly entertaining. “Am I gonna need my wallet this evening, Yoongi? If so, just give me a second to get it and then we can-”

“You ain’t gonna need your wallet,” he interjected. “Don’t worry ‘bout that.”

“OK, then…I’m ready,” Jimin said, as he shifted to step out onto the step; pulling the door shut behind him.

Jimin was more than aware of how close that they were, for Yoongi hadn’t moved down a step. He had expected that he might have been surprised by their close proximity, might just have stumbled back and almost tripped down the front steps, yet Yoongi hadn’t done so. No, as he let go of the slight handle and he turned his head to look at him, Jimin saw that their faces were just inches apart. Practically at a kissing distance. The temptation to lean over and do so was so great, but before he could possibly attempt it, Yoongi moved to press a hand against his lower back, urging that he go
down the front steps first.

The BMW M1 was parked on the curb right in front of the house, standing out dramatically in this neighbourhood. Every other car was either muted in colour or older models, most certainly not a luxury sports car like the one that the older man possessed. The streetlights played off its sharp hood and boot, and this made the body look much more attractive under the vaguely orange-cast illumination.

Yoongi opened the passenger-seat door for him, almost like a gentleman.

Jimin ducked to climb inside of the car, breathing in even more faded hints of Yoongi’s cologne and leather from the seats. Yoongi slammed the door shut and then he went around the front to climb into the driver-seat. He noticed that the other man dragged his seatbelt in place this time, and so he decided to copy his actions.

“You look very handsome tonight, baby boy,” Jimin reiterated, settling back in his seat and reaching over to place his hand on his knee without much thought. “Where’s a handsome guy like you taking me, huh?”

“First? I’m taking you to a restaurant,” Yoongi replied with a smile, pulling away from the curb at last and letting him keep his hand in place on his knee.

“A restaurant? Like a date?” Jimin asked, unable to stop his own smile from appearing on his face at the mere thought. “If this is a date, does that mean that I can call you my boyfriend?”

“Boy…boyfriend?” Yoongi repeated, as he dragged his gaze away from the road to look at him. His expression looked amused to his eyes, but also a little skittish. “Don’t say that, don’t…it sounds-”

“Gay?” Jimin finished for him, hearing him making a series of noises under his breath at the word.

“Childish,” he corrected. “It sounds childish, sounds like something high school kids say; yeah? Don’t call me your ‘boyfriend’.”

“Then…what am I supposed to call you?” Jimin asked in a quiet voice. “I wanted to call you that, even if it’s not serious. I thought it…it was funny, a little bit cute. Am I supposed to just call you ‘my friend’ instead, on account of that sounding heterosexual?”
The car fell silent for a minute at this, and Jimin wondered if he might just have been a little too blunt with him too soon. All things considered, he knew that Yoongi might find the term a little daunting or weird at first, but just saying it aloud a moment ago had made him feel a surge of excitement in his chest. It had made him feel happy to be able to say something like that to him. Was he being selfish by imposing the affection on Yoongi just because he liked it? If the other man was happy to let him continue calling him ‘baby boy’, then what was it about ‘boyfriend’ that freaked him out?

Fear of commitment to another man?

Fear of mutual feelings of affection?

Fear of feeling a shred of normalcy within himself for the first time in a very long time?

Or did Yoongi just not like him enough to let him call him his ‘boyfriend’?

“Sorry,” Jimin muttered to break the silence between them. “That was rude, Yoongi. I wasn’t thinking straight, I got a little excited and said it without much thought, so, I understand if you don’t-”

“You can call me it, Jimin,” Yoongi interrupted. “But, it’s just between us; yeah? Until I…get comfortable with it, it’s just between us. I know that probably feels like I’m hiding everything ‘bout us away, that I’m turning you into a dirty secret. I know, and I know that probably feels shitty, but until then, you get me. Right?”

“…Sure thing,” Jimin said, as he gave his knee a tight squeeze. “Yoongi, I’m honestly just happy to be able to call someone ‘my boyfriend’ for the first time. I don’t care about secrets, about hiding. I had to hide myself away from my parents for so long too, I know how it feels to keep dirty secrets. Being open with them doesn’t feel that much better. But at least I’m me now. One day, you’ll feel like you too; I just know it.”

“Yeah? You think so?” Yoongi asked, sparing a quick glance over at him as he did.

Jimin could both see and hear the hope in his tone. He didn’t know whether to be relieved to hear it, or depressed by the knowledge that Yoongi had already tried so hard in the past to understand and accept himself and had gotten nowhere.
“So, until then you’re my secret boyfriend,” Jimin said with a pleased smile.

“Secret boy…boyfriend,” Yoongi repeated, before chuckling. “That’s pretty funny, Jimin.”

“I can be pretty funny when I want to be,” he declared, studying him for a few seconds and then turning his attention back to the front window. “So, are we gonna talk about how our days went now? As a way to pass the time? I should warn you, all that I did was nap and that’s the absolute truth.”

“Oh yeah? Well, all I did was business,” Yoongi replied, as he slowed the car down to a stop at a set of traffic lights. “I think I’d prefer napping for the whole day, it’s much more enjoyable than the shit I’ve gotta sort out every single day.”

“Did something else happen?” Jimin asked curiously, before quickly clarifying. “Something other than the stolen coke, I mean.”

“Oh, Jimin,” Yoongi sighed wearily, letting go of the steering-wheel to rub at his eyelids roughly. “The stolen blow’s the least of our troubles right now. Trust me. We sorted that shit out in less than a week, but not everything’s that easy to solve.”

“…Do you wanna talk about it, Yoongi?” Jimin offered in a quiet voice. “I, um, back in the bathhouse, I told you that I’d be here for you. To talk, if you wanted to. I meant about feelings mostly, but the offer still stands. If you wanna talk to me, I’ll listen. It doesn’t matter what you say, I’m all ears. Just for you.”

“Mmm,” Yoongi hummed, before sticking his tongue out to wet his lips. “Y’know how the hierarchy works, yeah?”

“I do,” he confirmed with a nod. “It starts at the bottom with the little brothers. That’s me and Namo: dealers, runners, mules, pimps. Then it’s the enforcers, or thugs or goons or whatever. Next, comes the legal advisors and leftenants, a couple in each neighbourhood to watch over us on you and your father’s behalf. Then there’s your father’s favoured man of choice, whoever that is, then there’s you, Prince Min, and then…Father Min himself is at the top.”

“My father’s favoured man of choice’s a man I like to call my uncle,” Yoongi explained, as he started rolling the car through the lights again. “His wife’s a legal advisor, his son’s one of my
leftenants and my best friend. Both he, your supplier, Kim, and me have found shit floating ‘round the city ever since the issue with the stolen blow came to light.’

“Oh?”

“Jimin, have you heard of a lil drug floating ‘round these days that calls itself ‘Sacramento Snow’?” Yoongi asked, sparing a quick glance over at him as he did so.

“‘Sacramento Snow’? I’ve never heard of it before, but then again, I’ve never heard of branded drugs that aren’t ours,” Jimin said, as he slowly stroked his thumb over the other man’s kneecap. “Snow, that sounds like coke to me.”

“Close, it’s speedball.”

“Speedball? Shit, that’s still floating around? I thought those crazy mixes died out with-”

“China White, right?”

“Exactly.”

“Well, it ain’t died out, and there’s branded speedball making its way ‘round my jurisdiction and the rest of the city as we speak. That’s why I was wondering if you might’ve heard of it.”

“I mean, I’m not on the streets as much as I used to be these days,” Jimin admitted honestly. “But sometimes, I’ve gotta do a little running to make target with Namo at the end of the month. I know the streets, I know the hot spots. I could ask around, if you want me to?”

“I’d prefer you not do that, Jimin,” Yoongi said in a firm tone, twisting the steering-wheel to steer them onto another street. “I’d prefer you stay outta trouble and protect that pretty face of yours.”

Jimin stared at him dumbly for a moment, his mind slowly processing what he had just said to him.

Yoongi wanted him to steer clear of this branded street drug because he was either concerned that it
was dangerous to sniff around it, or he knew that to be the case. The other man had just told him that he didn’t want him getting involved because he didn’t want him getting hurt, in other words. Like he genuinely cared for his well-being. It was enough to leave Jimin rather dumbstruck, and he didn’t really know what to say to him in response to this.

Perhaps sensing his gaze on his face, Yoongi gave him a quick and rather shy smile before turning back to the wheel again. It seemed like he felt no need to say anything else on the matter. Yet, Jimin felt like he needed to say something because it didn’t feel right leaving such a statement hanging in the air like that. Maybe, he just really wanted to hear Yoongi admit to the fact that he didn’t want him getting hurt aloud because it would make him feel good.

“I could seriously ask around for you, Yoongi,” Jimin reiterated, just wanting to see how he responded to his persistence. “I’ll bet that someone I know knows something on the matter.”

“Nah, I just told you, you don’t need to do that,” Yoongi stated. “I’ve got my men on it, men I don’t need to worry ‘bout getting hurt asking the wrong questions. Not like you.”

“You’re worried that I’ll get hurt?”

“Of course I am,” Yoongi agreed with a series of nods. “What’s going on right now ain’t playing ‘round. It’s serious business, it’s dangerous, and I probably shouldn’t have asked you ‘bout it. But I know y’know the streets, Jimin, and that you might know a lil something. So, I asked you without thinking too much. But now, I want you to promise me something. Promise me you ain’t gonna start asking questions.”

“I promise.”

“Seriously, leave that shit to me. I’ll sort it out, I always do.”

“Hmm, I bet you do, baby boy,” Jimin almost purred, kneading at his knee. “Let’s stop talking about that shit. Let’s talk about something else instead.”

“Uh, tell me more ‘bout Hong Kong,” Yoongi suggested, slowing the car down again and reaching down to touch his hand.

Jimin expected that he was going to move it off his knee perhaps, because he had placed it there
earlier without invitation, but he didn’t. No, Yoongi just gently stroked the back of his hand with his fingertips before shifting to place his hand back on the steering-wheel again.

“Hong Kong?” Jimin repeated curiously, hearing him making a soft noise in agreement under his breath. “There’s so many things to talk about in that country, seriously, so many things. I guess the best story that I can tell you about happened during my last trip was when I was in Seoul, though.”

“Then tell me what happened there instead. Tell me ‘bout whatever you want, Jimin.”

“Um, OK. So, have you heard about all of the protests going on over in Seoul right now? Well, all over the country actually,” he explained, shifting in his seat to look at him as he did so.

Yoongi made a noise at this and he nodded slowly, his eyes still on the road but clearly listening to him intently.

“I took part in one of those student protests, Yoongi.”

“You did?” he asked in surprise.

“I did, I took part with my partner over in Seoul one morning. He asked me to give a little speech and, um, I think that I probably gave the worst speech in history, but—” Yoongi laughed at this and Jimin found himself grinning widely, “but I gave one and I felt so good afterwards. I’ve taken part in demonstrations here before, joined protests marches and stuff, but that was something else. I dunno, it felt so powerful to stand on that little soapbox and talk like that. I got to attack Reagan in front of a crowd of students who probably had no clue who the president of America even is, and I felt so fucking good doing it.”

“Everyone’d feel fucking good attacking Reagan,” Yoongi remarked with a smile, once more steering the car around a corner.

“It just felt so good taking part in something like that, fighting for change for people in a country that I don’t even live in. I do that here, and getting to make my voice heard over there too just made me feel special, I guess. Usually, we don’t get to do that much in Seoul with the police on the streets, so, I think that’s why it felt so special to me. It’s a lot more fun in Kowloon City for sure, especially Kowloon Walled City. I told you about going to the bar there, right?”
“Yeah, you mentioned it on the phone. I think you said I’d probably hate it there. You don’t do deals
in that place, right? You do it in Kowloon City?”

“We deal in Kowloon City, yeah. The enclave is a little too dangerous to do shit like that in, Yoongi. Both 14K and Sun Yee On run that place like one big casino. It’s way safer in the city. This time
around, it was really stressful though,” Jimin said, before quickly explaining. “We usually do deals in
an apartment block, but right before the scheduled drop-off, we got a phone call telling us to race
across the block to some opium den instead. We had…we had a new supplier. She told me that
Chow was unable to work with us because of sudden circumstances. You’d know all about that,
right?”

Yoongi slowly turned his head to hold his gaze, his expression rather hard to read.

Should Jimin have maybe not mentioned anything about Chow and their new supplier? He knew
what had happened to the man because Yoongi had told him right to his face that night that he was
going to have him killed for his insolence. But he had been unable to stop himself from broaching the
subject. He just wanted the other man to confirm his suspicions about it all, he supposed.

It was pretty funny, Jimin thought, how quickly his mind had erased the fact that they had initially
clashed heads at the restaurant over serious gang matters before becoming much more better
acquainted with each other. After sharing beer, deep conversation and intimacy with Yoongi, it was
as if he had completely forgotten about the fact that he was a businessman first and foremost, one that
was all about protecting his investments and earnings.

Yoongi had told him that he was going to have a man murdered for him as if it was nothing at all, as
if it was nothing more than ‘a contract extermination’, as he had put it that night. Jimin supposed that
ordering a man’s death rather than killing him with his own bare hands might just feel like nothing if
he did it enough times, and on the trail of that thought, he found himself wondering just how many
contracts Yoongi had set alight over his years.

It was hard looking at Yoongi right now and thinking about the fact that Chow was dead because of
him. Especially when he had his hand on his knee and he had called him his ‘secret boyfriend’ a
moment ago, and he had made him laugh so sweetly.

“It’s just business, Jimin,” Yoongi said to break his momentary silence. “Think of it this way, those
14K bastards don’t care what happens to you either. You piss ‘em off badly, you end up in a ditch or
river too. It don’t matter how much business you’ve done with ‘em in the past. That’s life, that’s how
this works. I hate to be the one to, uh, to take off those rose-tinted glasses of yours, but I think you
really need to know how fucked up the world is.”
“I know, I know it’s pretty fucked up.”

“You could’ve been the one taking a bullet to the face that night, but you were lucky. Chow bit the bullet for you instead. You ain’t always gonna be that lucky, so, appreciate the fact you were and don’t feel bad for not dying,” Yoongi finished.

Jimin really didn’t know if he was supposed to feel guilty about something that he had had no control over. He hadn’t asked Chow to shove a gun in his face that evening. No, he had just gotten tangled up in the situation and had been given little choice in the matter.

“I, um, I acted like he didn’t frighten me that night, but deep down…deep down, Yoongi, I was terrified,” Jimin admitted in a quiet voice, fiddling with his hoop earring restlessly. “I’m used to getting into scrapes and being scared of getting the shit beat outta me. But a gun? Christ, that really did make me think that I might just die. I mean, Chow was just trying to scare me, I know that he was because the safety was on. But you don’t draw guns on people like that, you just don’t. I don’t think that he deserved to…you know? But, I’m not exactly sad about the fact he’s dead. Does that make me a bad person, huh?”

“People die every day, Jimin,” Yoongi stated. “Just look ‘round us, look at the fucking papers. People die for no reason at all, I told you - the world’s fucked up.”

Jimin wondered if by this statement Yoongi might just be referring to the current rising death toll from the AIDS crisis, but he couldn’t be too certain. It seemed to be the case, however, because that was what was printed all over the papers every single day without rest in this city.

“Chow didn’t deserve to die, but what’d he do to deserve to live more than you, huh?”

“…Nothing,” Jimin replied after a moment of thought.

Yoongi just gave him a look that seemed to say “exactly” before turning back to the wheel.

Technically, he was telling the truth. Jimin had done nothing wrong that night. He had not pulled a gun on Chow. He had not tried to rip a man off. If there had been any shred of innocence in that deal, it had been him and Taehyung that had been innocent and had deserved the right to not take a bullet. If Chow hadn’t wanted to die then he should have kept his gun holstered and acted like a businessman and not a coward. Sure, it felt weird thinking of what had happened in such a way, but there was really no other way to look at it.
No point in feeling sad over it now. Time to move on and keep business flowing like usual.

Jimin found himself falling silent at this, but the quiet in the car didn’t feel uncomfortable at all. It was kind of like what it felt like when he was riding across the city with Namjoon, the journeys to and from the airport. The quiet could be broken at any second, but until it was, it felt completely natural and light. He just looked between the front window and Yoongi’s profile over the duration of the ride, his hand on his knee sometimes giving him a gentle squeeze or stroke with his thumb.

The fact that Yoongi also seemed rather calm certainly added to the comfort, for the other man didn’t seem nervous at all in his company right now.

It quickly became apparent that they were going to Hayes Valley, an area that Jimin knew happened to contain a great many restaurants and entertainment clubs. The ride to the restaurant was very pleasant, though he supposed that it might have been nicer to have talked with him a little bit more during it. There would be plenty enough time for that inside of the place, however.

The sight of the restaurant coming up at the end of the street made Jimin shift in his seat, studying the exterior curiously. He saw an eye-catching brick building with glowing lights on it that looked pretty damn big to his eyes, and the sign over the door declared ‘The Valley Vineyard’ in a fancy scrolling hand. There was a long stretch of glass windows that served as one of the exterior walls, but the interior lighting was dim enough to not showcase too much to the street and let the patrons dine in peace. The entrance doors were also glass, and there was a valet boy wearing a waistcoat and red bow-tie standing outside them on the front step beside a tall and fancy potted plant.

A valet boy.

Jimin had seen plenty of those standing outside of restaurants and hotels on his nights out on the streets, but he had never once entered a joint that actually used them. The first restaurant that he had been in with Yoongi hadn’t had one, and he had thought that that place had been pretty swanky. He could only imagine what this restaurant must be like inside if they had a goddamn valet boy on the front step.

Jimin was so busy staring at the front of the restaurant that he hadn’t even realised the fact that Yoongi had killed the engine and he had removed his seatbelt. Rather than climb out of the vehicle, he popped the glove box open to pull something free, something that happened to be a spare key. He got a quick glance inside of the compartment, but he saw little more than a box that looked to be a VHS tape of some kind before he locked the box again with his own set of keys.
Yoongi climbed out first, shifting to go around the front of the car to get to his door for him whilst he removed his own seatbelt.

Jimin could only let out a shocked laugh at this because it was so completely different to what had happened the night that they had went to the bathhouse. Yoongi had left him sitting in the passenger-seat, his jeans unzipped and his cock throbbing desperately, and yet, here he was: opening his door for him like he was his prom date.

“Oh, baby boy,” Jimin exclaimed, as he shifted to get out of the car. “I didn’t know that you were a gentleman?”

Yoongi grinned at this, actually holding his arm out to him in offering for a moment before he seemed to realise what he was doing. Before Jimin could hope to slip his arm through his and hold onto him, Yoongi shoved his hand into his trouser pocket instead, quickly looking away from him in that usual flighty habit of his and gnawing at his lower lip.

Okay, so no arm holding for tonight, but that was fine. It was nothing really, Jimin had much preferred holding onto his knee during the car ride anyway.

Yoongi moved to get onto the sidewalk first, fiddling with the spare key for a few seconds before he tossed it at the valet boy. Jimin saw him catching it expertly and then he moved to get to the car and he climbed in behind the wheel. He stopped to watch him pulling it away from the curb again, a sudden thought coming to mind that he couldn’t help but ask aloud.

“Aren’t you scared that he might check the glove box, Yoongi? That he might steal anything you left inside the car?”

“That’s what valet keys are for,” Yoongi explained. “They only let you access the ignition and driver-seat door, nothing else.”

Jimin had been completely unaware of the fact that a valet key even existed, and he just stared at the car until it disappeared out of sight at the end of the street. Then he turned back to look at Yoongi blankly, wondering what else he was going to learn about rich culture by the end of the evening.

Yoongi held his gaze for a moment before reaching over to place a hand on his lower back to steer him in the direction of the entrance doors. So Jimin allowed him to escort him through the revolving doors, and he ran his eyes over the interior to take in the sights.
The first thing that he noticed was the dim lighting, as there was a fancy chandelier hanging close to the centre of the dining-area and ornate light fixtures styled to look like candles placed on the walls. The interior design was rather opulent, for the walls were plain white but covered in fancy designs. There were stripes of dusky pink running along the very tops and down the walls to create frames in which mirror displays and light fixtures were placed. This caused a neat trick that made the space look larger than it actually was. He saw gilded faces placed above the mirrors that added a strangely classical feel to the restaurant. The ceiling was also that dusky pink shade which was covered in frieze-like patterns, and to combat the rather grand ceiling, the flooring was plain white and polished to a gleaming level that reflected the lights back at their eyes. He even caught sight of several thick marble columns threaded with grey that just added to the classical aesthetic.

The dining-area was filled with round tables covered in white tablecloths, paired with chairs that had dusky pink padding and rounded backs. Placed here and there between the ground-floor tables were tall potted plants with frond leaves, alongside displays on which glass vases filled with massive bouquets were placed. It added a strange sense of freshness to the restaurant, certainly brightened up the rather dim interior, and Jimin dragged his eyes away from a tall palm tree-like plant to look at the other man.

“Wow,” he managed to say. “This place looks pretty fancy…”

Whilst Jimin resumed running his eyes across the interior, he let Yoongi guide him over to a reservation desk beside the entrance. He saw a series of doors at the far end of one of the walls that might just be the kitchen, but he was unable to look at it for more than a few seconds before something else caught his eye and made him look away. The restaurant was pretty full, most of the dining-area tables filled up with couples that were dining on all kinds of dishes and being tended to by several waiters and waitresses.

Jimin spared a quick glance at the desk to see a maître d’ standing behind it, a tall and thin man with carefully styled hair and an impeccably fitted uniform. He heard Yoongi addressing him before he turned back to look at the diners again, for they were much more interesting.

All of the women were dressed so fancily, in dresses made from all kinds of materials that he had no chance in hell at identifying. He saw sparkling rings and necklaces, dangling earrings and perfectly styled hair, and equally dazzling white teeth. All of the men were dressed in suits, be they plain two piece suits with shirts that weren’t that grand at all, or three piece ones that looked to cost a lot of cash. Yoongi was wearing a suit and blouse that were probably designer too. Yet, Jimin was in a borrowed dinner jacket and clothing that likely cost less than a single set of heels that he could see on display.

“Right this way, gentlemen,” the maître d’ announced, as he moved out from behind the desk with
menus in the crook of his arm.

Jimin heard a hint of an accent in his voice, but he had no clue what it could possibly be. The man started crossing the restaurant to presumably guide them to their table for the evening, and so they both followed after him. Just like the last restaurant, they had a private table set up on a balcony rather than on the ground-floor with the rest of the diners. He could see that there were several tables on the balcony, all of them set a nice distance apart so that no one was forced to sit too close together, and there were no potted plants or bouquets present to crowd the area.

Before the maître d’ could do so, Yoongi moved to pull his chair out for him, catching him by surprise because the act was so small yet so very sweet. Jimin noticed that the act didn’t go completely unnoticed, for a few other diners glanced in their direction, but they seemed to be doing so purely because they were new arrivals.

“Jacket?” Yoongi asked him, just as he was about to sit down.

“Oh, um-”

Jimin stopped in the act of sitting down, straightening up again and then moving to remove his borrowed jacket. He handed it to Yoongi and he placed it down on the back of his chair for him. When he sat down, he even pushed it in for him, leaving him feeling a strange mixture of embarrassment and excitement at the extra attention.

Was this what a date was supposed to be like? Was Yoongi going to do everything for him? Fill up his glasses, cut up his food, and feed him personally? The thought made him laugh under his breath as the other man finished pushing his chair in and he moved over to his own.

Yoongi slipped his suit jacket off to place it over the back of his chair, revealing more of the blouse that he was wearing at last. Jimin saw that it did indeed have voluminous sleeves that strangely complimented his svelte frame rather than swamped it. It was a beautiful blouse, that much he knew, and he wondered what designer it might just be as he watched him sitting down in his own seat.

“Enjoy your meal, gentlemen,” the maître d’ announced with a cordial smile. “If you require my assistance, if you are dissatisfied with your service, do not hesitate to summon me. But I am sure you will have a pleasant evening, yes?”

“I’m sure we will,” Yoongi agreed, as he accepted the menus from him.
The maître d’ then left to go back to his usual post by the door welcoming and seating patrons, leaving them alone together.

Jimin glanced over at the other diners for a moment and then he accepted his own menu, opening up the black leather wallet and glancing at the paper inside. Unlike the previous restaurant, this one was most certainly not Korean. He had no clue if it was Italian, French, Greek, Spanish: he was completely clueless. All that he knew was that it served a great variety of meals that were seemingly European judging from the names, and that it was expensive.

Very expensive.

“This seems like a nice place, mmm?” Yoongi remarked in a quiet voice, as if their last conversation hadn’t been about a man that he had had murdered.

“Have you ever been here before, Yoongi?” he asked, looking up from the menu and seeing that the other man was studying his own.

“Personally? No, I ain’t been here before, but I know people that have. They said it’s a nice place: great food, great service, and a fantastic wine menu.”

A wine menu? They had menus for wine?

“D’you like it?” Yoongi asked, as he looked up from his menu, his expression showing a flicker of uncertainty.

“It’s a really nice place, really nice,” Jimin replied honestly. “Just stepping inside of this place tells you that it’s a really great restaurant. You don’t even need to try the food to know that.”

“Good,” he almost sighed, clearly relieved that he had picked a good restaurant for the evening.

“But, um, Yoongi? I dunno what any of this means,” Jimin confided, before laughing under his breath. “I’ve never felt more like Bayview trash in my whole entire life, I’”
“This place has the best seafood options in the entire city,” Yoongi spoke over him, stopping him from babbling on even more about being poor and stupid and making a fool of himself. “I’d advise picking seafood to get the best of the best.”

“OK, but, um, the names are weird, and the prices-”

“Don’t worry about the prices,” he interjected, his lips curving up at the corners. “D’you think I’d bring you here if I cared about the prices, Jimin? You made 7,000 dollars back on that deal in Hong Kong. That’s money that’s making up for losses other men are making. You deserve this. What’d you want, right now? The first thing to come to mind? Close your eyes if it helps you imagine that much; yeah?”

Jimin couldn’t help but grin at this remark before he actually closed his eyes. The last thing that he saw was Yoongi smiling softly at him from over the top of his menu, for then he delved into the blackness behind his eyelids in the hope that something, anything, would come to mind.

“Just tell me what you want, Jimin,” Yoongi said in a soft voice, his words making a little shiver run down his spine as his fingers tightened around the menu.

“…Lobster,” Jimin said, as he opened his eyes again slowly. “I want lobster.”

“Allright, there’s several options for the lobster. Y’know that, right?” Yoongi asked with a quick smirk. “Or d’you imagine the option you wanted just then too?”

“Um, you pick for me, baby boy,” Jimin said after a moment of studying the menu, still seeing nonsense in front of his eyes that he was never going to figure out even if he had all night to do so.

“What if I pick something you don’t like?” Yoongi asked, turning his attention back to the menu to examine the choices for him.

“At the prices that they’re charging here, everything better taste great,” Jimin retorted brusquely, unable to help himself.

But judging from the way that Yoongi’s eyes crinkled deeply at the corners, he liked that little ‘rough around the edges’ aspect of his personality.
“…Lobster in Hollandaise sauce with gratin sounds like the best option,” Yoongi remarked. “That’s a rich white sauce, very creamy, and gratin’s usually a layer of browned and seasoned breadcrumbs. It’s less…adventurous than some of the other choices, but that means you might like it.”

“That sounds divine,” Jimin said, as he closed his menu and placed it down on the table.

“Jimin? You didn’t even look at the appetisers,” the other man said, lowering his menu to look over at him.

“Appetisers?” he repeated in a quiet voice, lifting his eyebrows at him. “What?”

“You eat ‘em whilst waiting for the entrée and-” Yoongi paused for a few seconds, looking between him and the menu before lifting his hand to gesture at a waiter across the balcony. “How ‘bout I just pick those, mmm?”

“God, I feel so stupid,” Jimin said, as he fiddled with one of his earrings just like usual. “I’m surrounded by all of these rich people and I dunno anything. I don’t even know what ‘appetisers’ are.”

“Don’t feel stupid,” Yoongi said, as the waiter crossed the balcony to come to their table. “You ain’t ever been to a place like this. How’re you meant to know, huh? Just a few weeks ago, I’d never been in a bar before, Jimin. How’s that for stupid?”

Jimin just made a noise at this, watching the waiter drawing closer to their table.

Sure, he probably shouldn’t feel stupid because the other man knew about his upbringing; about him being born in The Bayview to immigrant parents like the lowest of the low. Finding out that fact about him hadn’t put Yoongi off in any way that he had been able to tell, so there was very little point in feeling shame over his ignorance. Jimin didn’t need to prove himself to any of the diners present because the only one that mattered was Yoongi. But he still wished that he had known a little bit more about restaurants to seem more mature.

“Are you ready to order, gentlemen?”
“We’re ready. For the appetisers, we’ll have the peppered salmon and prawn in rémoulade and pastis sauce, one each. Followed by the lobster in Hollandaise sauce with gratin; and the halibut with cockle risotto; please.”

Jimin stared at Yoongi from across the table at this, finding it so strange that this was the exact same man from the phone last night.

Yoongi, who had struggled with talking to him for a few minutes, stuttering, stammering and damn near wheezing, was now ordering food without a single mistake or problem. The words flowed off his tongue as smooth as honey, and it was almost as if he was listening to another man speaking.

“Excellent choices. Would you like to see the wine menu, sir?”

“No, just bring us the best vintage Chardonnay you have,” Yoongi finished, before closing his menu and handing them both to the waiter. “Thanks.”

“Thanks?” Jimin repeated, as soon as the waiter was out of sight. “You thank the waiting staff, Yoongi?”

“Why’s that so shocking?” the other man asked, looking back over at him. “If someone does a job, you thank ‘em. If it’s a shit job, then you complain. But until then, thank ‘em.”

“Not a lot of guys with cash say things like that,” he replied, as he folded his elbow on the table to rest his head in his hand. “Usually, they don’t like thanking people below them.”

“Well, I ain’t like those guys then; am I?” Yoongi said with a quick smile.

“Oh, baby boy, isn’t that the truth?”

“I thanked you for running the blow for me that night, on account of you doing a good job. A fantastic job. Don’t you get thanks off your superiors, huh?”

“I’ve never been told thank-you once by a superior, save from Namo and you, Yoongi,” Jimin explained. “I’m a mule, I was a runner, I’m the lowest of the low. I don’t get thank-yous, I just get
Yoongi thought this over for a moment, holding his gaze as he did so, and then he turned his head to look across the balcony and down at the other diners.

Jimin took a moment to study him, noting that he seemed rather comfortable in a way that he hadn’t seen much of when they had been together. At the bar, when he had been drunk, he had certainly been looser with his tongue, but otherwise he had sensed a reserved attitude from the other man that seemed to be his usual and sober behaviour. But reserved or not, Yoongi seemed to be a little antisocial to him. Not in a purposefully negative way, but just a quiet and shy one.

Yoongi seemed like more of a listener than a talker, for he had certainly showcased his love of listening to him tell him pointless stories.

“Yoongi,” Jimin said to break the silence. “I know that this question’s a little weird, but…why aren’t you nervous right now?”

Yoongi stared off across the restaurant for a few seconds, his face blank of expression, and then he turned his head to look at him. He furrowed his brow in a way that showed him that he didn’t quite understand what he had just said.

Jimin was aware of the fact that the question didn’t seem to make much sense, but he couldn’t seem to find a better way of getting his thoughts into words.

“What’d you mean?”

“I thought that—well, you always seem to be a little nervous around me,” he explained, as he shifted in his chair. “On the phone mostly, but also every now and again when we’re talking to each other like this. I was starting to get used to it, to the stuttering and lack of eye-contact, but tonight you seem like a completely different person. So, that’s I was wondering why you aren’t nervous right now.”

“…Look ‘round you; what’d you see?”

Jimin also furrowed his brow at this, not really understanding how this was going to answer his question. But he did what he had requested, turning his head ever so slightly to first check out the balcony and then running his eyes over the dining-area of the restaurant. He saw tables, many tables,
“People,” he said aloud, his thought unconsciously slipping free.

“Exactly, you see people. You see complete strangers filling up the massive space ‘round us, so that it ain’t just me and you,” Yoongi explained slowly. “I get a lot more nervous when it’s just me and you, like on the phone. In moments like that, I feel like, uh, like the space around us’ too big and I’m gonna just…float away into it. Or maybe, you’ll float away from me and I ain’t gonna be able to grab a hold of you and pull you back. Does that make sense?”

“I think understand what you mean.”

“It’s so silly that I think of it like that, but I don’t like that sense of openness. It should feel more closer, more in…intimate, but right now it feels a bit scary,” Yoongi continued, finally starting to fiddle with his cutlery as he avoided eye-contact with him. “So, I like that space being full. Yeah?”

“OK,” Jimin said with a soft nod. “I’m glad that you feel at ease right now, Yoongi.”

“That night, in the restaurant, the bar, the, uh, bathhouse - I was interested in you, of course. But it was a kinda different interest.”

“A solely sexual interest?”

“Nah, not solely sexual,” he disagreed with a head shake. “It’s hard to explain exactly, but I didn’t feel that nervous for some reason. I was probably just a lil too drunk on champagne and telling myself that I just wanted to ‘know’ you better, when I really knew the truth - that I was interested in you more intimately than that. That, uh, that night, you probably thought I was a lot more confident than I am, huh?”

“Hmm, confident? I guess you were a little confident, I can’t really remember,” Jimin admitted with a sheepish smile. “I remember you being a teasing little shit though.”

At this, Yoongi dropped the knife that he had been fiddling with, the metal hitting the table with a soft clattering sound. Oh, his cheeks flushed so red at this that Jimin found himself grinning at the sight, and he watched him quickly looking at the other tables for fear that they had been overheard.
“I like it though, I like that quiet and shy side, baby boy,” Jimin added, as he watched him placing the knife back with the rest of his cutlery. “One of us has to be shy, right? It’s certainly not gonna be me.”

“You, uh, you like it?”

“Uhuh.”

“Why?”

“It means that I’ve gotta work harder to get you to open up to me, or, if that fails, just get you drunk.”

This joke made Yoongi guffaw again, that funny wheezy laugh of his that he found so strangely endearing. It was probably because it made his face scrunch up when he laughed like that, made his eyes disappear into the folds of his eyelids and showed those nice teeth of his.

Jimin was so distracted looking at him that it took him a moment to notice that the waiter was approaching their table again with a tray in hand. Placed on it, he could see a bottle of wine, two glasses and quite possibly their appetisers too, but he wasn’t at all certain. He was starving, so he hoped that to be the case.

“Montrachet, vintage 1983,” the waiter announced, as he placed down the two glasses down for them. There was just a tiny splash in them that seemed to hint that they might have to sample it. “The house’s finest vintage Chardonnay, sir.”

Yoongi picked up his glass and sniffed at it before taking a sip, and so Jimin grabbed his own glass and he nursed it for a few seconds. Was he supposed to sample it too? He didn’t have a clue what exactly fine vintage Chardonnay was supposed to taste like because he had never tasted ordinary Chardonnay before this evening. It seemed like everyone was obsessed with Chardonnay these days though, so it must be good.

Jimin decided to copy his actions because it seemed like the smartest thing to do, scenting the wine and then taking a deep sip of it and letting it settle on his tongue.
Vanilla was his first thought, followed by sweet but subtle hints of apricot, and after he had swallowed and let the taste settle, he could sense oak too. It was the nicest wine that he had tasted in a long time, and from across the table, he saw Yoongi lowering his own glass.

“Mmm, a great choice,” he remarked, the waiter moving to place the bottle down for them.

Jimin eyed the bottle to see that it was light green in shade, filled with white wine that had darkened the interior considerably. There was a white label on it around the neck declaring the year, and another one on the body declaring the producer in fancy black letters: *Montrachet 1983*, ‘Domaine Ramonet’ set below the blue and silver company crest. What he had just sampled seemed to tell him that this really had to be the finest selection on the menu, because he doubted a white wine could taste better than that.

“The appetisers will be with you momentarily, gentlemen,” the waiter said, before moving away again.

“D’you like it?” Yoongi asked curiously. “I assumed you did ‘cos you didn’t say otherwise.”

“It’s the best wine that I’ve ever tasted, Yoongi. How much does a bottle of that cost exactly?” Jimin asked, as he eyed the bottle. He was unable to check the price tag himself because Yoongi hadn’t requested a wine menu.

“Uh, a couple of hundred dollars a glass so…probably ‘bout 5,000 dollars?” he suggested with a slight shrug.

“5,000 dollars for-”

Jimin dropped his gaze to study his glass before looking back up at him again. Had he heard that right? Had he said $5,000, or had he said $500 and he had misunderstood him?

“Why would you spend that much money on a single date? I’m…oh, I’m just a little bit confused right now. 5,000 dollars? Seriously? You just…”

Jimin stopped talking for a few seconds to try and collect his thoughts, more than aware of the fact that Yoongi was smirking at him because he clearly found this amusing.
“I said I’d buy you a wine cellar,” Yoongi retorted with that same amused smirk.

“I know, I know, but I thought that a joke,” Jimin said, before laughing to himself. “Oh, Yoongi, you really shouldn’t spend that much on a date with me. I wouldn’t know the difference between the finest vintage and the cheapest shit on the menu.”

“Honestly, I don’t spend cash that often,” Yoongi admitted, as he looked down at his own glass. “Some guys, they eat out like this every week, buy expensive wine just for the sake of it rather than actually enjoy it. I much prefer the occasional treat, mmm? It makes spending a high amount actually feel worth it, ‘specially if it’s an occasion like this.”

“I probably don’t even spend 5,000 dollars a year feeding myself, never mind on a single bottle of wine, Yoongi,” Jimin said in a quiet voice. “I’m sorry for making a big deal outta it, I’m just… shocked that someone would spend that much cash on wine for me to share.”

“Share? I gotta drive,” Yoongi said, as he picked up the bottle, a waft of chill air escaping to unfurl in the air like smoke. “Sadly, that means I gotta limit myself to a single glass, maybe two.”

“Just a single glass?” Jimin asked, holding his glass out to him. “Then who’s gonna drink all of that bottle, baby boy?”

“You, of course,” Yoongi remarked, tipping the bottle and spilling the white wine into his glass.

Jimin dragged his eyes away from his face to look at the glass, watching the deep bowl filling up with golden wine that lapped against the thin sides.

When Yoongi was finished with his glass, he started filling up his own, pouring more of the golden liquid out but decidedly less than what had had given him. It was practically just a splash in comparison, but considering the fact that he was indeed driving them around the city for the evening, it would make sense to avoid repeating the same mistake that they had made last time.

Like Yoongi almost driving into the wrong lane of traffic so that he could spit on his hand and resume vigorously wanking him off.
“Oh, don’t worry,” he said, lifting his glass to his face to take another sniff of it. “I’ll drink the whole thing, just to make sure it’s not wasted.”

“Mmm,” Yoongi said, as he gave him a quick smile and he placed the bottle down on the table again. “I’m sure you will.”

“No bar beer for me tonight, not after this stuff.”

“That’s fine, I ain’t gonna take you to a bar,” he replied, as he swirled his glass slowly and let the liquid lap at the sides of the glass.

“Oh?” Jimin asked after a deep swallow of the wine, raising his eyebrows as he did so. “What does that mean? Are we playing a game of Twenty Questions? Am I allowed to make guesses?”

“Be a good boy and wait for the surprise, mmm?” Yoongi suggested, sticking his tongue out to wet his lips as he did so and making him drop his gaze to watch.

“…OK,” Jimin said, before giving him a flirtatious smile. “I’ll be a good boy.”

In the time that it took him to drain his first glass of wine, and for Yoongi to swirl his around but not sample it, their appetisers were finally brought to their table. Jimin had actually forgotten what had even been ordered because the other man had spoken so quickly. So when the plates were placed down, he finally got to see what he had been waiting on.

The appetiser consisted of pieces of peppered salmon and prawn with rémoulade and pastis sauce, delicately placed onto black rectangle-shaped plates. Jimin could only stare at them in wonder, finding the tiny bite-sized morsels both enticing and amusing. Knowing that they had likely cost an incredible amount of cash and yet were so small was probably what amused him so much. Well, they were just to tide them over whilst their actual main courses were prepared after all.

As soon as the waiter was gone, he retrieved his fork and he went straight for one of the creamy pink pieces of salmon. He was more than aware of the fact that Yoongi was watching him as he speared it and he lifted it to his mouth, his own serving of lesser importance than his reaction. The salmon was cured to perfection, so soft that it almost melted on his tongue and made him make a soft noise under his breath. The rémoulade was sweet and contrasted against the pastis in a strangely pleasing way: creamy apple and tangy vinegar on his tongue.
“Oh my god,” he said after swallowing it. “Yoongi, that’s…wow.”

“Wow?” Yoongi repeated, before laughing softly and retrieving his own fork whilst Jimin decided to sample the prawn too.

“Oh! Wait, the prawn is…hmm, yes. Shit, which one do I prefer?”

After finishing the appetisers and having their plates taken away again, they had to wait a while longer for their actual meals, but Jimin didn’t mind at all. It gave him more time to savour another glass of wine, and also go to the restroom to relieve himself. He had amused himself greatly standing at one of the urinals and thinking about what it would be like to fuck in such a high-class cubicle, considering the fact that he had been used to cramped and filthy ones in the past when there had been no car present to use instead. The bathroom was spotless, actually smelled clean and pleasant, and the cubicles looked wide enough for all kinds of fun.

The sight of the condom machine on the bathroom wall actually made Jimin pause in the act of drying his hands, his eyes sliding over to look at it intently.

Sure, Yoongi hadn’t wanted to engage in penetrative sex that night in the bathhouse, protection or not. If anything was going to happen tonight, it was probably going to be non-penetrative again too, because it was clearly going to take a long time to get Yoongi comfortable enough with the idea to overcome his fear - or dislike - of anal sex. Jimin really didn’t care, for any sexual activity was better than nothing at all. But looking at the machine still made him feel like carrying one would be a good idea, just in case.

Better safe than sorry.

But Jimin had left his wallet back in Namjoon’s bedroom, and that meant that he had to leave the bathroom empty-handed.

Getting back to their table again proved to be a challenge because he couldn’t seem to recall where they were sitting. But after a minute of wandering, he spotted Yoongi and he made his way over.

Yoongi was just sitting there at their table, nursing his wine glass and studying the contents with a soft smile on his face: a happy smile.
For some reason, Jimin found himself slowing down, a funny sensation wriggling its way up into his chest at the sight of Yoongi sitting there. Waiting for him to come back, smiling to himself for no reason at all other than because he was happy right now. He swallowed hard and he found that the sensation just increased and made him take a series of quick breaths. Why did he feel…weak all of a sudden? Was it all of that wine? Or was it actually Yoongi that was making it hard to breathe right now?

Jimin paused for a moment before continuing on his way to the table. Yoongi finally noticed that he was present for he glanced up from his wine to look right at him, his smile twitching at the corners before turning rather bashful. Rather than sit down at his chair, Jimin found himself walking right up to him before stopping, reaching down to grab hold of his chin and tilting his face upwards so that he could lean forward and press a chaste kiss in the corner of his mouth.

“How?” Yoongi mumbled out, his eyes widening in surprise.

Jimin just moved to sit down in his chair again, feeling no need to explain why he had kissed him like that. He had just simply felt like he had to do it, and so he had given him a quick kiss on the corner of his mouth just for the hell of it. Seeing the way that Yoongi reached up to almost cover his flushed cheek with one hand made it more than worth it.

Eventually, the waiter brought them their main dishes and Jimin could have cried in happiness. The appetisers had just made his rumbling stomach hungry for more rather than sate him, and so he was rather looking forward to finding out if the rest of their seafood was as good as the salmon and prawns had been.

“One lobster in Hollandaise sauce with gratin,” the waiter announced, as he placed the plate down for him.

Jimin was rather surprised to find that there was an entire lobster on his plate. It had been lain across the square of porcelain so that it was placed down in front of him like a diamond, the red head and beady black eyes at the top staring at him and the fanned tail at the bottom. The rest of the lobster had been freed from its shell for him already, plaited artfully with a variety of vegetables like spinach, Espelette pepper and plum tomatoes. Lastly, there were slivers of baby potato floating in the creamy sauce, completing the rather decorative dish.

It looked so good that Jimin almost didn’t want to eat it, because then he would ruin the artful display.

“And one halibut with cockle risotto,” the waiter added, as he placed the second dish down on the
Jimin glanced at the other plate to see a large fillet of fish, pan-fried to turn a lovely golden shade on the exterior, placed on top of a serving of risotto. He could see little chunks of light pink meat that was presumably cockles mixed in with the rice, along with slivers of vegetables like carrot and onion.

The contrast between the two dishes was actually pretty amusing, for his meal was loud and bright and Yoongi’s meal was more simple and muted. It was almost like their dishes were reflective of them.

“How is the evening going, gentlemen?” the waiter asked, moving to grab the bottle of wine and filling up their glasses again on their behalf.

Yoongi looked like he was almost tempted to tell him to not fill his up, on account of him wanting to drink only a single glass. But he allowed him to add another small splash in it. Jimin was sure that he had yet to even drink a full glass, and so he could have a little more.

“Very well,” Yoongi replied, as they watched the waiter filling the glasses up. “The Chardonnay’s the finest I’ve ever tasted. My compliments to the maître d’ for selecting it.”

“The appetisers were delicious,” Jimin stated, unable to help himself from blurting it out. “My, um, my compliments to the chef.”

“Would you like to order anything else?”

“Not until dessert, no,” Yoongi replied, and as soon as the waiter had moved away again, he looked at him. “Compliments to the chef? See, you’re getting the hang of this already.”

“Yoongi, do they usually turn your food into displays like this at restaurants?” Jimin asked, as he retrieved his fork and he studied his plate again.

“Mmm, they do. Be thankful you actually got that much food. Usually, they put a lot of effort into the displays and forget to add the actual food.”
Jimin forced himself to eat slowly and to try and savour every single mouthful, because that was what people were supposed to do in restaurants. It was hard not devouring the entire serving in seconds, but he managed to look like he wasn’t starving and desperate to eat. He had never had lobster prepared like this before, had been lucky enough to have sampled small bites of it over in Seoul that had made him eager to have lobster this evening. He had made the right decision by getting Yoongi to choose his dish, for he had picked a great one. Between the gratin, which had a hint of mustard to it to give it a nice kick, to the creamy sauce and tender meat, Jimin was in heaven.

As he ate, Jimin couldn’t help but glance at Yoongi, hoping that he was enjoying his meal as much as he was. Like he had observed last time, the other man seemed to eat a slower pace and with smaller mouthfuls than him. It seemed that he was enjoying his dinner, judging from the fact that he was eating silently and savouring each bite.

Yoongi gathered up some of the risotto onto the fork before spearing a small chunk of the halibut, and then he held the fork out in offering to him, his other hand underneath it to save any falling off and landing on the table. Clearly, he had noticed him looking and he had thought that he had wanted to sample some (which he had actually been hoping to do at some point).

So Jimin leaned forward to accept a bite from the tines of his fork happily. In the act of doing so, he accidentally dribbled some of the risotto down his chin. Yoongi hastily wiped at it with his thumb, knocking his lower lip as he did so. He sat back in his seat as he chewed the mouthful, finding that the fish was just as tender as the appetisers had been and that it added just enough flavour to the risotto rather than overpower it.

“It’s nice,” Jimin said, before turning back to his own plate to get some for him to sample too. “Here, you’ve gotta try this.”

Yoongi also tried a mouthful of his meal, having to open his mouth rather wide because he had gathered up a bit of everything onto the fork: lobster, pepper, potato and a hint of the fine golden gratin. Jimin couldn’t help but smirk at the sight of him doing so, and at least he didn’t dribble anything down his chin in the process.

“Mmm, that’s rich,” Yoongi said, after swallowing the mouthful.

“Just like you, baby boy,” he joked whip-crack quick, making the other man chuckle again.

Yoongi hadn’t even seemed to have noticed the occasional distasteful glance over at their table because he was too busy eating and looking at him instead. Jimin was thankful for it, because he didn’t want such a thing to ruin what was turning out to be a rather wonderful evening so far.
So what if they stared at them? Let them stare. Maybe they were jealous of the fact that they were having so much fun whilst they all sat there, mincing words and faking smiles?

Jimin was drinking Chardonnay that had probably cost $5,000 for a single bottle, eating lobster, and receiving another man’s undivided attention for the evening that made him feel things he didn’t quite understand, but he liked regardless.

Let them fucking stare.

It was when they had finished quite an amount of their meal that they finally broke the silence that had been hanging in the air. Jimin had reached a content level of full, but he knew that he would easily be able to finish the rest, he just needed to take a break and let it all settle first. After all, hadn’t Yoongi mentioned dessert earlier?

“You know, Yoongi? You always call me by my name, all the time,” Jimin said, as he retrieved his wine glass to take a quick sip. “Why don’t you use a nickname instead?”

“I, uh, I dunno if calling you ‘good boy’ is the best nickname, it…” Yoongi paused to wet his lips, before laughing. “It ain’t the kinda nickname you should say—”

“Outside of the bedroom?” Jimin suggested with a quick smirk, seeing the other man looking up sharply at him in the act of spearing more halibut on his fork. “What? It’s true. You could say the same for ‘baby boy’ too. It’s pretty…sexually charged, Yoongi.”

“I know, but I like it,” Yoongi said with a head shake, his eyes shifting to look around them as if he wanted to be sure that no one was glancing over at them. “I like that nickname, don’t think of a new one.”

“You like it that much?” Jimin asked curiously, hovering his glass in front of his face. “How come?”

“I, uh, I just feel special when you say it,” the other man explained in a soft voice, placing his fork down for a moment so that he could place his fingers on the bottom of his glass. He didn’t pick it up to drink, rather just touched it. “I dunno, I don’t think I could explain it even if I tried.”
“So, try,” Jimin suggested, after swallowing a sip of wine and placing the glass down again. “Just for me, hmm, baby boy?”

“I’ll…I’ll try,” Yoongi said, as he stared down at his serving of seafood.

True to his word, he took a moment to think of a reply and Jimin just sat there patiently and waited. He had no need to rush him, they had the entire evening to waste.

“I ain’t ever felt like…like anyone was paying attention to me,” Yoongi said in a voice barely above a whisper. “It’s like I ain’t ever got to feel special, loved, like I mattered. That’s stupid, I know. I got a best friend, and his family took care of me growing up, but it’s not the same, it’s-”

“It’s not your dad’s attention,” Jimin suggested.

“It’s different,” Yoongi finished, before wetting his lips again. “Yeah, I guess it was that. That lack of affection and attention from him. I dunno why, but when you call me that, ‘baby boy’, I feel…I feel like I deserve attention, affection, love - whatever. I feel like I deserve it all and I know that you’ll give it to me. I guess? I feel like…like you’ll take care of me, Jimin.”

“…When you call me ‘a good boy’ I actually feel like I’m not a useless piece of shit,” Jimin explained, as he shifted in his chair. “Growing up being hit and constantly told how bad you are by your dad, being used by guys and thrown away like trash, it, um, it really messes you up in here-” he tapped at his temple for emphasis. “I don’t really know why hearing you call me that excites me, why it makes me feel good, it just does. It’s not about being taken care of, of receiving affection, it’s more like…I feel like you trust me?”

“I do trust you,” Yoongi agreed in a quiet voice.

“I feel like you trust me and that you actually like me, I guess? I feel like I don’t have to cause trouble to get attention now, that I can be ‘a good boy’, and I also feel like you won’t hurt me like that,” Jimin said, as he looked down at his own plate. “Oh boy, look at us discussing our daddy issues again.”

“I trust you,” Yoongi reiterated, as he shifted in his seat to lean closer to him. “I know that I ain’t too open, that I’m still getting used to all of this, but I do trust you. If I didn’t, then we wouldn’t be here right now, Jimin, having this conversation. I trust you to understand a part of me that I don’t even fucking understand that much, and to accept it too. I trust you to-to take care of me. Y’know, in
“Oh, I’ll take care of you,” Jimin said, running his eyes down his body teasingly. “In every way you want me to, baby boy.”

“I-I said I was gonna give you a nickname, but then I got distracted…” Yoongi stammered out, once again almost trying to hide his flushed cheek behind his fingers because he had made him get flustered.

“Distractions can be pretty fun,” he remarked with a soft smile. “Especially when you’ve got nowhere to be and time disappears for a little while. But what nicknames were you thinking of? Wanna run them by me, baby boy?”

“I dunno, nicknames are weird sometimes. Like, ain’t nicknames always something to do with food? You hear girls saying shit like: cupcake, apple pie, sausage, whatever.”

Jimin snorted at this, thinking back to some of the rather dire nicknames that he had heard in high school. Sweet cheeks, champ, and hot stuff all paled in comparison to hubba bubba, doll face and sugarplum.

“How d’you come up with a nickname, huh?”

“Well, sometimes, you just play around with a person’s name to make it. Namo calls me ‘Jimmy’, my partner in Seoul calls me ‘Jiminie’.”

“Jiminie, that’s nice, it’s cute,” Yoongi remarked. “But if someone else already calls you it, it ain’t that special. What else can you make a nickname from?”

“Something a person likes? Something that reminds you of them? I could call you ‘tiger’, on account of that tattoo of yours,” he joked. “It could be a simple affection or something funny. Nicknames just happen, Yoongi, you don’t usually put a lot of thought into them.”

“D’you like butterflies?” Yoongi asked out of the blue, his eyes dropping to study his silk shirt.
“Hmm, I think they’re pretty,” Jimin said with a slight hint of embarrassment. “You can bet that my dad hated the fact that I had a pink backpack covered in butterflies as a kid, but I did. I tried keeping a few in jars, but that didn’t pan out. They live for so short a time and keeping them inside a jar, that’s just cruel.”

“D’you like ‘em ‘cos they’re pretty, or ‘cos they’re so…fragile?”

“Both, I guess? I guess I like knowing how fragile they are, how easy to catch.” Jimin paused for a moment, and then he laughed. “That sounded creepy; didn’t it?”

“What’s your favourite butterfly?”

“Oh, Yoongi, I like them but not that much. I didn’t have a favourite back then, I just liked how colourful they were, especially the ones with the spots and patterns on their wings.”

“There’s a butterfly I’m thinking of right now,” Yoongi said, as he shifted in his seat. “It looks just like the ones all over your shirt, or the males do anyway. The Adonis Blue.”

“Adonis Blue sounds like a gay bar,” Jimin remarked without missing a beat, making the other man chuckle softly.

“D’you know where the name comes from?”

“The butterfly name? No, I’ll guess that the ‘blue’ part refers to the colour?” Jimin joked, retrieving his glass and hovering it just below his lips.

“Mmm, the males are a beautiful blue shade, but I meant the ‘Adonis’ part. D’you know who Adonis is?” Yoongi asked, as he balanced his head on his curled-up fingers, the position now familiar to him for it seemed like his favoured way to sit.

“I dunno much about my heritage culture, baby boy, why’d you think I’d know about something like that?” Jimin asked with a soft smile. “He’s Greek, isn’t he? A Greek god or hero or something? I dunno much about the Greeks, but they seemed fond of beautiful naked boys and homosexuality, just like me, hmm? Tell me a story, let me know all about Adonis.”
“Adonis was a beautiful youth, or at least that’s what people say of him now. He was an icon of cult worship, brought women to grief by his death and even had goddesses fighting over him.” Yoongi paused for a moment to let him sip at his wine, and after retrieving his own glass, he added. “The butterflies made me think of him, I think. Or maybe it was just you.”

“I made you think of him? Why?”

“I think you’re beautiful, Jimin,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice, his gaze burning into his wine glass rather than hold his eyes. “I don’t see the point in pretending otherwise. You’re beautiful. Girls probably see you and feel their hearts skipping a beat, men probably look at you and find ‘emselves feeling all funny.’”

“Do I make you feel all funny?” Jimin asked in a soft voice, his fingers tightening around his glass involuntarily.

“You make me feel things I can’t even put into words,” the other man replied, before laughing. “I, uh, I feel it all over. It starts in my chest at first, makes it go all tight and start aching. Then it spreads down to my stomach and causes an eddy in my gut, then it spreads up to my brain, and next thing I know…I’m stuttering like a freak and I can’t get myself under control.”

Jimin laughed softly, as he watched him swirling his wine glass so that the golden liquid sloshed against the sides.

“I feel like there’s something wrong with me when that happens,” Yoongi said in the most softest voice. “I feel wrong even when it feels right, Jimin.”

“If…if it feels wrong then it’s because you’re frightened, Yoongi. That’s all. You’re frightened because you’ve been frightened your entire life, but now I’m gonna take care of that; yeah? I’m gonna take care of all of those feelings, so, when I tell you it’s not wrong at all - trust me.”

“Does it feel wrong for you too, sometimes?”

“No, it feels right always,” Jimin said with a smile, neglecting to tell him that looking at him earlier had made him struggle to breathe for a moment.

After this rather impromptu conversation about Greek legends and loveless fathers, Jimin found
himself turning back to the remains of his meal. It was still hot and demanding that he eat it, and so he decided to do so. He was more than aware of the fact that Yoongi spent another minute or two watching him, possibly mulling over words to say or just simply observing him. But then the other man also turned back to his food to finish it.

As soon as they were done, Yoongi signalled to the same waiter that had been serving them all night, for he seemed to stay on the balcony for most of the time.

“D’you have a dessert menu?” Yoongi asked, as the man collected his dish and he placed it onto his serving tray.

“Certainly, sir,” he said, producing a much smaller menu off the tray before collecting his plate too.

Yoongi accepted it and then he held it out to him, catching him by surprise.

Jimin stared at the menu before taking it out of his hands, wondering why he had given it to him.

“Whatever you want, order it,” Yoongi said, as he looked between him and the menu. “Want one of everything? Order it.”

“Oh, um, just give me a minute to look,” Jimin said, before laughing awkwardly. “I’m sorry, I won’t be long.”

“Take all of the time that you need, sir,” the waiter said in that same friendly tone.

“Um…” he hummed under his breath, before his eyes located something very interesting. “The chocolate fondant with salted butter caramel sauce…?”

When Jimin looked up from the menu, he glanced between Yoongi and the waiter for a moment, feeling rather childish as he did so.

“That’s what you want?” Yoongi asked, seemingly surprised that he hadn’t decided to order the entire menu like he had joked (or maybe suggested).
“Uhuh.”

“One chocolate fondant with caramel sauce, please,” Yoongi said, as he collected the menu off him and he gave it back to the waiter.

After several minutes of waiting, their dessert was brought to them, the final course for the evening. The small dish had a generous dollop of chilled chocolate fondant set in the middle, beside which there was a drizzle of salted caramel that came up off the plate like a 3D sculpture. Jimin retrieved his smaller dessert spoon and he was about to sample some when he noticed that Yoongi had made no move to get his own spoon.

“Come on, you’ve gotta try some,” Jimin said, grabbing the second spoon off the table and holding it out to him. “Even just a bite, just to try it.”

“I think I’d rather watch you enjoy it, Adonis…”

Jimin paused in the act of gathering some of the sticky sauce onto his spoon first, glancing up at the other man in surprise. The affection had just slipped out of Yoongi’s mouth without much thought at all, and he could see that it took him a moment to realise that he had said it aloud. He made a soft noise under his breath before laughing to himself, turning to look out over the balcony again.

“That’s gonna take some getting used to,” Jimin remarked, as he added a generous blob of fondant onto his spoon. “But I could get used to being called it, baby boy.”

“Oh yeah?” Yoongi asked, glancing back at him again just in time to see him sampling the dessert.

“Yeah and- oh, Yoongi, that’s better than sex!” Jimin exclaimed, reaching up to clap a hand over his mouth just a little too late to muffle himself.

No, Jimin was pretty certain that the whole balcony had just heard his exclamation, for he could both see and feel eyes on their table. Some of the other diners even turned in their chairs to look at him, leaving him sitting there rather stupidly with the dessert spoon hovering in front of his lips.

“…If that’s the case then I gotta try it,” Yoongi remarked, moving to take his spoon out of his hand.
and getting some of the dessert onto it.

Jimin watched him sucking the fondant off the spoon a moment later, feeling a sudden urge to lick at his lips as he did so. He tasted a hint of caramel that he had accidentally smeared on them, and then the other man made a series of appreciative noises.

“Maybe, not better than sex, but still amazing,” Yoongi said, as he licked a smear of chocolate out of the corner of his mouth.

“How good was what you were getting back then if it was better than that?” he joked, making Yoongi snort as he gathered more fondant on his spoon.

“Not that great, actually…”

“Well, I’ll take care of that too,” Jimin declared, getting a little caramel onto the spoon and holding it out in offering to him.

Yoongi accepted the spoonful from him, moving to get another generous blob on his own spoon. Just like earlier, he offered him the mouthful and so Jimin leaned over the table to suck it off the spoon, making sure to look him right in the eyes as did so. The other man almost gulped as he dropped his gaze to look down at their plate. There was just a tiny blob of fondant left and he gathered it up onto his spoon to hold out to him again, clearly wanting him to finish the dessert.

“Mmm, I can say, without even a hint of hesitation, that that was the best meal that I’ve ever eaten, baby boy,” Jimin said, as he grabbed his napkin and he wiped at his mouth to clean away any hints of dessert.

“I’m glad that you enjoyed it,” Yoongi replied, placing his spoon down and shifting to retrieve his wallet from his suit jacket.

“But all of that wine, I think I need to use the toilet again, ha~”

“You go the bathroom, I’ll pay at the front,” Yoongi said, as he finished tipping for the waiter and he slipped an American Express card out of his wallet.
Jimin crossed the restaurant once more to go into the restrooms. He wasn’t sure whether or not to regret drinking all of that wine just yet because it had yet to fully hit him. It would soon enough, of course, and likely render him pretty tipsy.

When he exited the restroom a few minutes later, Jimin went to the front of the restaurant to see that Yoongi was waiting by the door for him, his own suit jacket back on and his borrowed one folded over his elbow.

“Ready?”

Yoongi once again helped him get into his suit jacket, letting him lean in close and breathe in his cologne scent as he fixed the jacket up onto his shoulders. Just like earlier, he placed his hand on his lower back, steering him out of the restaurant. When they stepped out onto the sidewalk, the valet boy moved to stand beside them, reaching inside of his waistcoat as he did so.

“The red BMW M1 yes, sir?” he asked, as he looked between them both. When Yoongi made a noise in agreement, he pulled out the spare key. “Just a moment.”

The valet boy hastily crossed the sidewalk and then he disappeared around the corner at the end of the street, presumably to go and retrieve their car from a lot not too far away.

They were left standing on the curb for a couple of minutes awaiting his return, and whilst they were, Jimin felt Yoongi moving his hand from his lower back to instead brush his fingers against the back of his hand. He must have wanted to take hold of it, but he was uncertain, so Jimin slowly turned his hand outwards to offer him his palm without a single word. The other man took hold, gently entwining their fingers together but not squeezing too tightly. Sadly, when the red BMW appeared on the street again, having circled the block to pull up on the curb in front of them, he let go of his hand.

“That's a wicked car, sir,” the valet boy said, hastily climbing out of the vehicle. “Certainly the best one I've collected in a long time. Drives so smoothly.”

Yoongi tipped the valet boy in exchange for his spare key and then he went around the front of the car to open the door for him again.

Jimin moved to climb inside, but he didn’t do his seatbelt up just yet, rather he waited for Yoongi to slam the door shut and move to get behind the wheel.
That was when Jimin leaned over the gear stick panel to cup his face in his hands and kiss him again, this time right on his mouth rather than just in the corner.

Yoongi made a surprised noise at this, freezing up for a few seconds before he returned the kiss by pouting his lips out.

Jimin broke the contact and he pressed several chaste kisses against his mouth, feeling his lower lip catching between the both of his. He snagged it between his teeth to give it a soft suck, hearing the other man almost sighing at the contact, and he was about to move away again when Yoongi took control and he started kissing him instead.

“This is just for the appetisers,” Jimin said between his quick kisses. “I’ve got plenty more kisses for…for the rest, and the wine?”

“Mmm?” Yoongi breathed out against his lips, clearly incapable of producing actual words.

“Well, you can decide how I pay you back for the wine,” Jimin teased, before moving to press his lips against the side of his neck.

When he sucked a kiss in place just above the collar of his blouse, Yoongi almost squirmed on the seat.

Jimin let go of his face with one hand to trail his fingers down the side of his neck, running them over his shoulder and then down his arm. He could sense that he had tensed up, but Yoongi made no move to push him away, to let him know that he was uncomfortable. He could feel the rush of heat spreading up to his face against his other hand, his cheeks heating up so that they had probably went a rather deep shade of pink.

Jimin bit down lightly on his neck, shifting his hand down to his thigh so that he could knead at it hard.

Yoongi took a sharp intake of breath at this and then he placed his own hand on the back of his head, his fingers snagging in his hair. His slowly stroking fingers almost encouraged him, and so Jimin stopped biting him and he ran his tongue out to lick a broad stripe up to his jawline instead.
“Oh,” Yoongi man almost gasped, his fingers tugging at his hair in a way that made him plant another kiss on his throat.

Jimin bit down harder than earlier, his kneading fingers moving upwards until he had settled his hand against his crotch. He could feel the heat and stirring of his slowly growing erection through his trousers, almost begging that he feel him through the layers of clothing and bring him to full hardness. So he moved to place his hand over it and he pressed the heel of his palm down against it.

Yoongi almost whimpered at the contact, grabbing at his wrist almost as if he was going to move his hand away. But he didn’t do that, and rather just added pressure on top of his hand to make him grind his palm down that little bit harder as he sucked and nibbled little bites into his neck.

“Start driving,” Jimin moaned against his throat, the heel of his palm still grinding down against his crotch in hard little rotations. “Unzip those trousers, let me take care of you, hmm? Like I promised in the bathhouse. I’ll go down on you and-”

“Jimin-”

“I’ll pace it just right. You’ll be cruising around in circles just to get me to suck you off that little bit more, baby boy.”

“shit, Jimin, not in the car, not in the-”

Yoongi sadly knocked his head free and he turned back to the wheel, slipping his keys into the ignition and twisting them hard.

Jimin shifted to sit back in his seat whilst Yoongi started the car and he pulled away from the curb, rolling into the road to come to a stop at a set of traffic lights just several seconds later.

“Everyone could-see us through the windows,” Yoongi said with an awkward and breathless laugh, reaching down to try and fix his trousers and hide his still growing erection.

“It’s not the first time I’ve messed around in a car in public,” Jimin retorted with a smirk. “And it wouldn’t be the first time that someone watched either.”
“Oh, yeah? Well, uh, it would be for me,” Yoongi said, wetting at his lips with his tongue. “Though I gotta say, it’s kinda exciting. Yeah? Kinda like in the sauna. D’you like being watched that much?”

“It’s a fun little kick,” Jimin agreed, as he reached over to drop his hand back on top of his thigh again.

“You, uh, you like watching a lot, right?” the other man asked him, unlocking the glove box to presumably to put the valet key inside it for safekeeping.

Jimin noted that there was indeed a VHS tape in the glove box, and this time he got to study it more intently. He saw funny-looking characters printed on it that might have been Chinese or Japanese, he couldn’t really tell, along with various company logos and something that looked like a rating symbol. It was bright red and instantly made him think of adult videos, even when he didn’t know why the thought came to mind.

“I love watching,” Jimin explained with a series of nods. “Sometimes, guys in the bathhouses used to ask me to join in if they caught me watching, but I just liked being an observer instead. Sometimes, you just really wanna watch a guy get pounded against a wall, you know?

Yoongi tossed the key inside and he proceeded to pull the VHS tape out of the glove box, holding it out to him in offering.

Jimin moved to accept it from him and he studied the case for a moment before making a surprised noise under his breath.

“Wait, is this a porno? Yoongi, do you seriously own Jap porno?”

“I do,” he admitted with a rather sheepish expression.

“Oh my god! They have the best kinda porno! I remember reading about in a magazine once! You can get everything there, like, um, gangbangs, bondage, guys on guys, girls on girls. I can’t believe you’ve got Jap porno, I’ve been dying to get my hands on some just to see what it’s like!”

Jimin let out a laugh before looking back at the VHS tape box, staring at the front cover to see two men on it.
One was more muscular than the other and he looked to be holding the smaller man against his body by way of an arm around his lower ribs and one on his throat, and the entire pose seemed to be one of unbridled passion. They were wearing jockey straps to cover their modesty, but they didn’t leave much to the imagination. He didn’t even have to turn it over to know which one was the giver and receiver in this pairing, because it was so very obvious.

“D’you wanna watch it with me? I’m taking us to a hotel,” Yoongi explained, as rolled the car through the set of lights. “It ain’t, uh, it ain’t fancy, but ain’t why I’m taking you there. I’m taking you there ‘cos this’ the only hotel I know for sure my parents don’t go to for galas and shit, and the only one I know that is for guh…gay guys.”

“Wait, that’s where you’re taking me? A hotel?” Jimin asked, stopping in the act of studying the photographs on the back of the case to glance up at him.

Yoongi made a noise at this, not looking away from the road as he did so, and to Jimin, that meant one thing, and one thing only.

“So, you wanna…”

Jimin paused for a moment before smirking at him.

“Are you acting coy on purpose?” Yoongi asked, as he also glanced over at him. “Y’know I find that ridiculously cute, right?”

“OK, fine. Tonight’s gonna be another fun night. A night for making each other feel good again. Is that better?” he asked, giving his thigh another knead. “Or do you like it more when I’m coy, baby boy?”

“I like both,” he replied honestly. “But tonight? Let’s not be so coy, yeah?”

The hotel that he was taking him to also happened to be in Hayes Valley, for it was just several blocks down from the restaurant. Jimin saw that it was a brick box with three upper storeys, a ground-floor and possible basement levels judging from the sloping lean of the exterior and the hilly sidewalk that it was built on. The building looked clean and pleasant to him, as did the surrounding neighbourhood. He didn’t see any dealers hanging around, no prostitutes lingering under streetlights, and not a single addict was present this evening.
Wow, talk about a nice area.

Yoongi killed his car in a half-empty lot that was facing the building, shoving the VHS tape inside of his inner suit jacket pocket before climbing out of the vehicle. Jimin copied his actions, the pair of them hastily crossing the street to enter the hotel.

The reception-area was rather small, but it looked very welcoming. The flooring was covered in dark carpeting, the walls were a coffee-cream shade, and there were plenty of candles and vases filled with typical green and leafy plants. His first impression of the hotel was a good one, and he hoped that the rest of the building was as clean and warm as the reception.

“Ooh, good evening, boys,” the receptionist behind the check-in desk declared, when he laid eyes on them both. “Welcome to Fair Oaks Hotel.”

Jimin saw that there was a young black man behind the desk, but because he was wearing quite the amount of flamboyant makeup, he had that initially thought that he might just have been a queen. Upon a quick study of his clothing, a low cut velvet shirt paired with fitted jeans, he realised that he was actually just very loud with his makeup. A quick look over at Yoongi showed him that he was trying to not stare at the other man’s glimmering blue eyeshadow too much.

Ah, yes. Yoongi was still so new to most of the homosexual lifestyle and scene that it was no wonder that he looked mildly confused by such a proud display of sexuality. How would the other man react to queens? Hopefully, he wouldn’t be too freaked out by it all. Jimin absolutely loved it when the queens came out in full force at marches, for they really lifted up the spirits immensely.

Jimin could hear a variety of sounds coming up from the basement level: soft music playing, conversation, and the dull clicking noises of what seemed to be pool balls to his ears. There must be a common-area down there for guests to use to relax, mingle and likely hook-up in, but that was of no interest to them this evening.

“I reserved a room here earlier today,” Yoongi said, as he guided him over to the counter and he feigned an interest in the various fliers placed on the wood just to save him from staring too much at the other man.

“Oh, yes? You reserved a room on the phone?” the man said, moving to check something under the counter and then grabbing keys off the board on the wall. “I remember you. Room 10, for a single evening?”
“A single night, yeah,” he agreed, pulling out his wallet and sliding cash over in exchange for the key. “When’s check-out time, huh?”

“Up until 10am, so, don’t worry about sleeping in,” he said with a rather mischievous smile. “I hope you have fun, boys, but remember! Safe sex is the best kinda sex, mmm?”

Jimin smiled and said something in agreement to this as he followed Yoongi over to the stairwell, all the while thinking that there was no need to remind them of this fact.

Room 10 happened to be on the second-floor, for there were just several rooms on each floor that seemed to hint that they were decent-sized rather than cramped cubicles. When they got to the door, Yoongi unlocked it, pushing it open and gesturing that he enter it first.

Their room wasn’t the largest, but it was cosy and Jimin liked it a lot. Unlike the bathhouses or the seedy ‘hotels’ that he had been taken to in the past, this one actually felt like a bedroom that they could have sex in, sleep in, just simply spend time together in.

There was a nice amount of furniture: in the form of a decent-sized bed with a proper mattress, pillows and covers, a small television box set up on a table at the bottom of the bed, and a series of beanbags across the room. There was also a side table beside the bed on which a complimentary bottle of lube had been placed, a rather large bottle with a pump head. The flooring was carpeted, but it was clean and still rather plush, and though the walls were covered in out of fashion seventies wallpaper, it was free from stains or wear.

But the best part? The ceiling fan was slowly rotating to keep the room at a decent temperature.

Jimin stepped out of his loafers and he crossed the room to sit down on the bed. He found that it was very soft and bouncy underneath him, and he dropped to lie down on it for a few seconds before sitting up again.

“Hmm, come here, baby boy,” Jimin instructed, as he patted at the bed thrice, the covers rustling softly. “Let’s get some of those clothes off you, yeah?”

“Already?” Yoongi asked, tossing the VHS tape down onto the mattress and then placing their jackets down on one of the beanbags.
“Hmm, it’s hot,” Jimin declared, reaching up to grab at his silken shirt collar and fanning it dramatically. “Help me cool down.”

“Cool down?”

“Sometimes, you have to get hotter to cool down,” he stated pedantically.

Yoongi moved to get on the end of the bed, his weight balanced on his knees, and he just gave him a smirk at this witticism. Jimin spread his thighs open and he held his arms out to him, signalling that he could get closer. The other man scooted closer, inch by inch, until he was able to sling his arms around his waist and hold him in place.

Jimin planted his chin against his chest and he looked up at him, the overhead lights casting Yoongi’s face mostly into shadow so that he could only really see his eyes glinting back at him.

“Yoongi?”

“Mmm?” Yoongi hummed, slipping his own arms around his neck to complete the loose semi-embrace.

“That dinner was the greatest dinner that I’ve ever had, was way better than the abalones. I had an amazing time this evening. I just wanted you to know that. Sharing food with you, talking and laughing, and all of that shit. But now, I really just wanna help you outta those trousers and-”

“Jimin,” Yoongi sighed, an amused smile appearing on his face.

“And that’s just another part of the evening that I’m gonna enjoy too, hmm?” Jimin finished, feeling the other man moving to press his cheek against his affectionately, just deepening the embrace. “I’ve been looking forward to it, I’m not gonna lie. But I just thought that you should know that I’m having the time of my life tonight, because I’m spending it all with you.”

“…Jimin, that was-”
“Pretty fucking gay, right?” he joked, making Yoongi snort laughter, his breath hot against his ear.

“I was gonna say that it was beautiful, but if you wanna call it, uh, gay - go ahead.”

“Hmm, it was beautiful and gay. Just like—”

“You,” they both said in unison, before they burst out laughing at the childish jinx.

“God, I had two glasses of Chardonnay and yet I’m cracking jokes like I’m a whole bottle down,” Yoongi remarked in a quiet voice, his fingers slowly playing with the back of the collar of his shirt.

“It’s nice, I like it when you make jokes, Yoongi,” Jimin replied, his own fingers stroking at the back of his blouse. “That way, I know that you’re comfortable, that you’re feeling good. Even if they’re terrible, I like hearing them.”

After several minutes of close contact: fingers stroking silk and cotton, cheeks pressed against cheeks and breath slightly disturbing hair, Yoongi decided to initiate the first kiss. He moved to press a chaste one in the corner of his mouth before turning his face into a proper kiss. Jimin ran his fingers down his back to his trouser waistband, playfully tugging at it during their kisses until the other man shifted to get off the bed and he moved his hands to the front of his trousers in silent invitation.

Jimin started undoing his trousers for him, his fingers teasingly pulling at the buckle of his belt so that the leather rasped as he slipped it free. Then he popped the top button open and he wrenched the zipper down. He tugged at the flaps of material before pulling at them, the loose trousers dropping to his ankles with ease. It was only when he ran his hands up his outer thighs to snag hold of his underwear that he realised that he wasn’t even wearing any.

“Oh,” Jimin exclaimed, before looking up at him in surprise. “I didn’t know that you went commando?”

“I usually don’t,” Yoongi explained, tugging the blouse ends down to try and cover his thighs and awkwardly stepping out of his trousers as he did so. “You’re teaching me bad habits.”

Jimin couldn’t help but laugh at this, because of all of the things that he and Namjoon had listed as bad influences earlier, not wearing underwear had not been one of them.
Yoongi placed a hand against his chest, gently pushing him back so that Jimin was propped up on his elbows. Then he started undoing his trousers for him too, making him lift his hips up off the mattress so that he could tug them free and dump them on the floor. Jimin didn’t move to cover his exposed genitals, for it seemed pretty pointless, rather he just sat back up again and he patted at the bed invitingly.

So Yoongi once more crawled across the bed on his knees, settling down between his open thighs and sitting on his heels in a way that he loved because it was so coquettish.

Jimin slowly popped open the buttons of his blouse between kisses, finding it hard until he recalled that they were in reverse to what he was used to. After getting to the very bottom and popping the last one free, he slipped his hands inside his open blouse to grab hold of his waist firmly and he tugged him closer. Yoongi had such a slight waist and he couldn’t believe how pleasing it was to dimple his fingers into the soft skin of his sides.

Yoongi moaned softly into the kiss, also tugging at his shirt buttons to try and remove it. He was able to work them much faster than him, slipping his hands under the silk to run them along his shoulder blades. Then he grabbed at the shirt and he wrenched it down off his shoulders, making Jimin shrug it off completely and then grab hold of his waist again.

There was almost a desperation to Yoongi’s actions: the roughness of his pulling hands and the force of his kisses as he sank his fingers into his soft skin. But he suddenly broke their kisses to take a quick intake of breath, turning his face away when he tried to press their lips together again.

“Mmm, wait,” Yoongi said breathlessly, resting his chin against his brow. “Wait, I need a moment.”

“Sure thing,” Jimin replied in his own breathless voice, as he soothingly stroked at his lower back. “You’re in control, Yoongi.”

“I ain’t drunk enough for this,” Yoongi confided in a soft voice. “I think that’s what’s making me feel…funny. I ain’t never sober for this. Even tipsy’s good enough, but right now, I’m completely sober, Jimin.”

“That’s a good thing, baby boy. It means that you’re in control, you can start and stop when you want, and you won’t end up doing something that you’ll regret either. You’ll remember this tomorrow morning too.”
“Huh?”

“Sober is better,” he reiterated, as he moved to lean back and looked up at him.

“Sober’s better,” Yoongi repeated like a mantra.

Jimin smiled at him, and after a few seconds, he managed to return the affection. Yoongi pressed a soft kiss against his hairline, and so he let go of his waist to reach over and grab the VHS tape off the mattress.

“Put it on, let’s see what it is,” Jimin remarked, as he looked up from the box to hold his gaze.

“You…you want me to put it on?”

“Uhuh, put it on, take a moment to collect yourself,” he said, opening the box and pulling out the tape.

Yoongi accepted the tape from him and he shifted to crawl down the bed to shove it inside of the VCR box placed underneath the television. Jimin dragged his gaze away from the white and black hissing speckles on the screen to observe the way that his blouse lifted to showcase the rounded bottoms of his buttocks. The other man hit a few buttons and then retrieved the remote, settling back in bed beside him under the covers. Before hitting play, he decided to shrug his blouse free and he dumped it down on the floor.

Jimin was now aware of the fact that he was completely naked underneath the covers, just like him.

Yoongi had to use the remote to slowly skip through the scenes that he explained were there to ‘create a story’. Jimin knew enough about heterosexual adult films to know exactly what that meant. It meant cheap acting, cheap lines, and cheap sets that would make them crack up with laughter. As fun as the idea of watching said scenes together could be, he really just wanted him to get to the actual sex because he was incredibly eager to see what it was like.

“Uh…” Yoongi mumbled, hitting play suddenly and starting the tape right in the middle of what could only be described as a heavy petting scene. “Should I skip forward more, or?”
“No, leave it on,” Jimin said, far too curious by what was actually going to happen next in the video.

The two actors on the screen engaged in some rough making-out first, a lot of focus on the fact they were grinding against each other and that the one that he was thinking of as ‘giver guy’ in his head had his hand down the smaller guy’s work suit trousers. Jimin was pretty certain that this scene was supposed to be taking part in an office closet, if their clothing and the props in the background were in any way hints.

But as soon as that scene had suddenly occurred, he was surprised to see that it quickly progressed into complete full frontal nudity.

Well, if not for the pixels that was.

There was no clever angling, no attempts at covering the nudity, for ‘receiver guy’ just bent himself over a copier machine and eagerly presented his ass to the camera.

“How come they don’t censor that?” Jimin asked, as they both stared at the sight on the screen; the actor parting his buttocks and almost wriggling his ass at the zoomed-in camera.

“They, uh, they censor cocks and pussy but not assholes,” Yoongi explained, his voice sounding a little strained to his ears. “They only censor ‘em if something’s being inserted like- oh.”

As sudden as the bare entrance had been wantonly showed to the camera, it quickly became pixelated, for the other actor’s slick fingers appeared and proceeded to almost force themselves inside of him.

Pixelated or not, Jimin still heard the wet sounds coming from the television speakers, the squelching of the saliva and the clenching of the actor’s entrance as the other guy slipped his fingers back and forth. There was something so very jarring about hearing the sounds of sex and yet not really seeing the act. It seemed strangely erotic in a way that he didn’t really understand. Considering the fact that he was used to seeing real sex up close and personal in the bathhouse, it should have been boring, yet he couldn’t seem to look away from the screen.

When the other actor moved to get into position, he saw a blurred mess of pixels that didn’t exactly disguise the fact it was an erection. It might just be censored, but it was still incredibly explicit regardless, because Jimin didn’t really need to see the guy’s cock when it was buried several inches
inside of the other actor anyway. He watched him sliding himself inside to the near mewling sounds that the receiver made, and after a minute of experimental thrusting, he spared a quick glance over at Yoongi.

Jimin could see that he was aroused, but he was trying his very hardest to appear otherwise. Every now and again, Yoongi would move his hand discretely under the covers, to no doubt give his stiff cock a knead or tug when he didn’t think that he was paying attention to him. It was rather funny that Yoongi had brought the VHS tape with him tonight so that they could ‘watch’ it together, and yet he was trying to secretly masturbate under the covers. It was so funny that he decided to have his own fun just to see how the other man would react.

So Jimin shifted to push the covers down ever so slightly, slipping his hand under them to take himself in hand too. After a series of shameless strokes to bring himself to full hardness, he could see that Yoongi was looking over at him or, more specifically, at the rising and falling covers still lying over his hips. He was staring at this display rather dumbly, so Jimin pumped his fist hard enough for the slapping sound to be heard over those coming from the television, and for a grunt to escape his lips.

Yoongi watched him for a few more seconds before plucking up the courage to be bolder too. Jimin saw him wetting his lips, just like always, as he finally kept his hand in place to really start masturbating.

The video was still playing and yet neither of them were even looking at the screen. Jimin was far too busy watching him instead, watching him so intently in fact that he actually slowed his own fist down to a near stop. Yoongi had decided to focus on staring at his lower body, at the covers pulled down just far enough to reveal his navel and a slight hint of what was hidden underneath. When a series of whimpering moans sounded from the speakers, Yoongi closed his eyes briefly and he took a sharp intake of breath.

Was he maybe closing his eyes to help him maintain his current fantasy; the one that he was masturbating to? If so, Jimin hoped that he was in it.

As exciting as it participating in mutual masturbation was, he really wanted to get more intimate with the other man this evening. So Jimin leaned closer to him and he planted his chin down against his shoulder, his gaze staring down at his crotch.

“Do you want me to do it under the covers for you?” Jimin asked in a quiet voice, making him laugh under his breath for some reason. “Just until you feel more comfortable letting me see you naked. Being fully naked can make you feel more vulnerable, Yoongi.”
“You’ve already seen me fully naked, it seems a lil, *uh*, redundant. Right?” the other man remarked. “Don’t do it *under* the covers, just…”

Yoongi pushed the covers down past his thighs and close to his knees, revealing his naked lower half to him. There was a hint of discomfort coming from him as he did so, because it was rather embarrassing revealing his stiff cock so brazenly to him.

Jimin couldn’t help his study his erection for a moment, lying flushed over the soft curve of his stomach and rising from his light thatch of pubic hair. It didn’t even trail close to his navel, left his lower stomach as smooth as his thighs. Then he reached down to take hold of his cock, glancing back at the television screen just in time to catch sight of the actor getting spanked hard.

Yoongi’s breath left his nose in a hard huff and he saw him snagging hold of the edge of the covers to clench them between his fists as he gave him an experimental stroke. Rather than watch the porno, he squeezed his eyes shut and he pulled his lower lip in to gnaw on it.

From the speakers came a sudden series of high-pitched moans, the sound actually turning Jimin off slightly because he wanted to hear Yoongi’s sighs of pleasure instead. But the other man had muted any possible sounds from escaping by biting down on his lower lip like that, meaning that he sadly had to listen to the actor instead.

“Duh-d’you want me to touch you too?” Yoongi stammered out suddenly.

“Shush, let me take care of you first.”

Jimin shifted to lie on his stomach between his thighs and he hovered his head over his crotch, his weight balanced on his left elbow so that he could reach over with his right hand and grip his base in his fist tight. When he wrapped his fingers around him and he gave him a soft squeeze, Yoongi hiccuped on an intake of breath and then laughed almost nervously.

“Your rings are cold,” he mumbled under his breath.

“Hmm, they are,” he agreed, as he gently kneaded his thumb along the underside of his length. “You know what’s hot, baby boy?”

Jimin lowered his head to press his mouth against his cock, pouting his lips out against his swollen
head in a kiss. That made Yoongi do much more than hiccup, for he almost choked in surprise, and when he opened his mouth and he breathed out against his cock, he squirmed on the bed.

“Do you like that?” Jimin asked, giving him another quick kiss and watching him wriggling from under his half-lidded eyes.

“Yuh-yeah, I like it, but-”

Jimin parted his lips and he flicked his tongue out, licking at the head of his cock teasingly. He managed just several rapid licks before he felt his fingers tangling in his hair.

“No, don’t,” Yoongi said, as he pushed his head away. “Don’t do that, Jimin.”

Jimin let him knock his head away from his crotch, having already known that Yoongi would have disliked the act but still wanting to try it just in case. Just a little kiss, a quick lick here or there, might make him decide to risk it and take things a little further. But then he recalled the fact that he had promised Namjoon that he would behave, so it really was for the best that Yoongi had stopped him at kittenish licks before things had gotten more serious.

“OK, just touching,” he said in a soft voice. “Just touching, baby boy.”

Jimin let saliva pool in his mouth for a few seconds before parting his lips and drooling it down onto his cock. It wasn’t ideal, for lube would be much better, but he didn’t want to move and retrieve the complimentary bottle. Besides, there was something much more exciting to him about using his own saliva, because it almost felt like a blowjob even when it wasn’t. Saliva was instantly hot in a way that lube never was, even if it dried up much too quickly.

“Huh,” Yoongi breathed out, his stomach jerking slightly as his saliva first pooled onto his head, and then ran down his length.

Jimin gathered up more saliva in his mouth even as he started pumping his fist to spread the makeshift lubricant all over his length, because he knew that he was going to need it. When he had spread it as well as he could and he had dribbled more onto his cock, he shifted to lean back slightly, steadily jerking his wrist up his length and then back down to his base again. After every few pumps of his fist, he added a little flourish, either twisting his fingers around his base or palming at his head before continuing his fluid rhythm.
For a minute or two, Yoongi was tense, clearly still waiting to reach that level of comfort that he had managed to achieve in the bathhouse. He was breathing a little too quickly to relax, in through his slack lips and out through his nose in little huffs. Jimin watched his expression intently as he built up the pleasure, seeing every little brow twitch and his tongue slipping free to wet his lips constantly, and he slowly started to relax from his touch and soft words.

“This last week or so, I’ve been thinking about you a lot, Yoongi,” Jimin said, as he saw Yoongi’s fingers lightly twitching against his stomach.

“Me too, Juh-Jimin,” he sighed out, before swallowing hard.

“Not sexually, I’ve been too busy for that, but now…now, I think I might find myself struggling to sleep at night,” he continued. “Might just end up touching myself whilst I think about how soft that your thighs are.”

“Yuh-you will?”

“Uuh,” Jimin confirmed. “I’ll think about how soft they are and how I wanna bite them. Can I? Can I bite them, baby boy?”

“You can buh-bite me all over.”

Jimin shifted to lie down on his stomach again, dropping his head between his thighs and pressing a series of kisses against his knees and inner thighs. He had his weight balanced on his left elbow, and he reached over to slip his hand under his thigh to hold it in place for a moment. It was hard trying to wank him off and do this at the same time, especially when he really just wanted to take his cock into his mouth and suck it against his cheek instead. But Jimin managed to stop himself from doing so, and he just ran his lips along his inner thigh until he located the best spot to sink his teeth into.

“Oh, um…” Yoongi sighed, as he lifted his hand up off his stomach and he reached down to place it on the top of his head just as he snagged his skin between his teeth and bit down hard.

Jimin held on for a moment, before releasing his hold and sucking another kiss against the spot. He saw a faint mark left behind by his teeth that might just bruise if he carried on biting at the area. He nuzzled against his thigh as a series of needy whines sounded from television at the bottom of the bed. Yoongi wasn’t even looking at the screen, rather he was staring down at him instead from his propped-up position on the pillows.
So Jimin peppered several kisses along his thighs, nibbling with his teeth and taking far too much enjoyment out of every slight hair tug that the other man gave him. He wanted to see pink blemishes contrasting against his lightly tanned skin when he was done, little reminders of every single kiss.

“So fucking soft,” Jimin whispered, as he shifted to lie beside him again. “You’re the best baby boy, the most softest.”

When he rubbed his thumb over his head, Yoongi finally leaked in his excitement. He let it gather for a moment before kneading at it rapidly, smearing the beaded hints of precum over his skin and making a little more dribble free from his slit to run down his length and fingers.

“Fuh-fuck,” Yoongi hiccuped, struggling to not buck his hips upwards into his fist.

Jimin didn’t rub at his head so much as massage it roughly, stimulating it enough to have Yoongi almost keening between his teeth. His spread open thighs trembled weakly until he reached down to grab at his wrist and he snagged his fingers around it. He tightened his hold, pinning his hand in place for a moment as he rolled his head back on the pillows and he took a series of quick breaths. Jimin could sense that he was edging closer to his climax, could see and feel his cock twitching hard in his fist for a moment, but then he seemed to get himself under control again.

Yoongi released his wrist from his hold, dropping his own hand onto his stomach with a soft sigh. Then he wriggled on the bed, lifting his head up off the pillows and dropping it down again before looking down at him.

Jimin could see that a light sheen of sweat had broken out on his brow and chest, glistening in the flashing lights of the television and dull ceiling light.

“We don’t have to edge around like that, baby boy,” Jimin offered, as he resumed pumping his fist in a more slower rhythm. “We can go as many times as you want, no need to slow it down.”

“I know, I know, I just- nnn, I like edging ‘round sometimes,” Yoongi explained breathlessly. “It’s nice guh-getting close and then making it last awhile. Getting tuh-trapped in that moment.”

“Getting trapped, huh?” he asked, before smirking at him. “You just gave me an idea.”
Jimin released his hold on his cock for just a moment, to allow him to move positions again. But even that mere moment made Yoongi whine under his breath and make it very clear that he wanted him to carry on pumping his fist and tease him back to his orgasm.

“OK, baby boy, I’ll take care of you in a minute,” he joked. “Just let me have a little fun too, yeah?”

Jimin shifted on the mattress again, his weight still propped onto his elbow to keep him elevated slightly above the other man. He moved to grab Yoongi’s thigh and he lifted it up, sliding one of his own thighs underneath to support it and then placing his other thigh on top to keep it trapped in place. He saw Yoongi staring at him curiously as he did this, no doubt wondering why he was doing this. But when he pressed himself up against his thigh and he rubbed his erection against him, he seemed to realise.

“Now, where were we, hmm?” Jimin declared with a wide smirk.

Yoongi held his gaze unblinkingly for a few seconds, and then he lifted his head up off the pillow to kiss him again.

Jimin felt him slipping his arms around his neck as he did so, holding his upper body in place steady so that he could slowly start humping against his thigh. Yoongi’s thigh was so thin between his, so thin and soft and just begging that he squeeze it tight within his own thighs. From a mixture of the current heat and the bed covers, his skin was hot, and Jimin felt a hint of sweat also forming against his inner thigh as he found the perfect position to ride against him.

Yoongi’s tongue slipped out to brush against his in a series of rapid prods and licks, almost encouraging him to speed up his pumping fist. Jimin did so, feeling the other man moaning into his mouth.

Jimin wasn’t too fond of dry-humping, because it was hard to get the right angle against thighs, asses, crotches, or faces that would create the perfect amount of friction for him. Maybe, it was just because he was so excited, or maybe, he had in fact managed to find the perfect angle, but when he started rocking against Yoongi’s thigh at a quick rhythm, he found a pressure rapidly starting to build up in his stomach. When he rubbed against him quick and hard, he seemed to create enough friction to make tingles of pleasure shoot up his cock, and when he ground his hips down slowly in rotations, it made throbs radiate outward into his stomach and thighs.

Yoongi tried to kiss him properly, but he was struggling to do so. Between his pumping fist and the rough riding of his thigh, the other man quickly got tangled up in the intense mixture of sensations and he lost his control. Jimin felt his tongue darting out to lick at his mouth, to try and find his own,
drooling messily as he did so. Whenever he caught his lower lip between his own lips, he either sucked or bit at it, snagging it so hard at one point that Jimin almost felt his teeth breaking the skin to make him bleed.

“Careful, careful,” Jimin breathed out, as Yoongi released his lip. “Don’t bite too hard, baby boy. You don’t want my blood, remember?”

“Mmm, ‘k,” Yoongi breathed out, as he stopped kissing him and he started nuzzling at his hair instead.

The shift in angle made him try and move his leg, but his thigh was still trapped between his tightly. All that Yoongi did was grind it right up into his crotch and make Jimin take a sharp intake of breath.

“D’you like that, huh?” Yoongi asked, once more trying to move so that he could bring his thigh right up just as he ground his hips down hard.

“Nngh, baby boy,” Jimin whimpered, as he buried his face against his throat. “Do it again.”

Jimin knew that he was bringing Yoongi close to his orgasm again, because he could feel his body reacting to his touch and kisses against his neck. The other man was thrumming against him, his body hot and shaking weakly from a mixture of pleasure and shyness. His cock was so slick from saliva and precum that his fist kept slipping around it, making his pumping rhythm uneven and rather messy. Even his own hips were moving in a frantic and sloppy motion as he tried to catch up with him. Jimin could feel sweat coating Yoongi’s thighs, and it just created another slick surface for him to hump and grind against.

Yoongi had told him that he liked edging around his orgasm, but he knew that he was going to give into it now at last because he was falling apart in his very hold. Every inhale escaped his mouth in a weak moan of pleasure, his breath hot against his hair. Yoongi was hanging on by a mere thread, and even that was fraying and threatening to snap at any second.

“Are you gonna cum, baby boy?” Jimin asked teasingly, his own voice ragged from his rapid breathing and the spiking pleasure in his gut.

“Yuh-yeah, oh, oh, mmm-”
“I’ve been wanting to make you cum all night,” he moaned, a corkscrew of pleasure coursing through him and making him grind against his thigh. “I’ve been wanting to make you feel so good, so good and—”

“Shit, it feels like-like—”

“What does it feel like, baby boy?”

“Huh, so guh-good!” Yoongi almost whined, rolling his head back on the pillows again to try and arch his back only to struggle to do so under his weight.

“Good, huh?” Jimin asked, before laughing breathlessly, feeling his own climax fast approaching because his hands and feet had suddenly started tingling.

Yoongi dug one of his heels into the mattress for momentum, arching his lower back on an angle to thrust up weakly into fist. In the act of doing so, his trapped thigh rubbed against his cock hard and just right enough to drive him over the edge.

Jimin saw Yoongi bucking his hips hard, his sweat-soaked stomach clenching from every single movement, and then his vision flooded with pulsing flashes of colour and light until he had to squeeze his eyes shut tightly. Oh, that heat in his belly exploded with a pressure hard enough to make him moan weakly, flooding his system with a searing pleasure as his hips sloppily rocked against his thigh desperately. He could hear Yoongi crying out nonsense breathlessly over and over until he finally reached his long-awaited climax.

“Oh! Oh my god!” Yoongi moaned deeply, as his body hardened against his. “Jimin!”

Jimin felt him ejaculating in his fist, semen spilling free to run down his fingers and splash down onto his stomach. Yoongi first hardened his body as he clenched in anticipation of his orgasm, and then he started shivering as jolts of pleasure presumably coursed through him like a current of electricity. He squeezed his arms around his neck tightly as he rode out his orgasm, gasping for breath and burying his face into his hair.

Jimin could only lie there in his hold, feeling his uneven breath ruffling his hair and tasting sweat against his slack lips because he was hugged against his chest so tightly. Yoongi’s pulse was racing so fast that he could feel it through his thin chest, and he was vaguely aware of his own racing heartbeat. He could barely manage more than a little gasp of breath for air because of the tightness of
his arms around his neck, but right now that really didn’t seem to matter.

“Oh…fuh…” Yoongi breathed out weakly, his hold around his neck weakening as he slumped down onto the mattress in post-coital bliss.

As soon as he had released him, Jimin dropped his head onto the pillows too, his own breath escaping his lungs in a sigh of pleasure. He could feel sweat and semen trapped between their entangled bodies, but he didn’t want to move to try and clean himself up because he was far too tired for that.

“Did…did the dessert taste as good as that felt, huh?” Yoongi asked, his slick chest rising and falling rapidly with every breath.

It took a few seconds for his question to fully sink in, and then Jimin burst out laughing and he couldn’t seem to find a way to stop as he shifted to press his face into the pillow.

1st September, 1984, 12:03am: Fair Oaks Hotel, Hayes Valley, San Francisco, United States of America

The sound of the younger man’s laughter, that frothy burst of giggles, seemed to echo around Yoongi’s rather fuzzy head. He was more than certain that the corners of his lips had curled up in his own version of a grin, but they felt rather numb right now and so he couldn’t really be sure at all. He moved his arm ever so slightly off the mattress so that he could place his hand back on the side of Jimin’s head, his fingers tangling in his hair and still trembling ever so slightly.

Jimin was pressed up against him, his limbs tangled within his and his thighs still squeezing hold of his tightly. The position wasn’t the most comfortable, but he really didn’t want to move right now, even when he was so hot and coated in a mixture of sweat and semen that made him feel sticky and disgusting. The younger man’s breath was gently puffing against his chest and throat in an uneven rhythm, signalling that he was awake and still drifting in his own blissful state.

Did Jimin feel as sluggish as did right now, like his limbs were too heavy to move? Was his heart still
giving the occasional skip in his chest that made him want to take a quick intake of breath to try and regulate it? Deep down, in the pit of his stomach, could he still feel that lingering warmth that was so pleasing, so…perfect?

It crossed Yoongi’s mind that this was the first time in such a very long time that he had lain beside another man in bed like this. Caught up in a heated embrace, soft and uneven breath against skin and hair, fingers and nails dimpling skin. Even that night that they had went to the bathhouse this hadn’t occurred, because they had left the private room far too quickly to do so. This was actually the first time that he had actually let Jimin hold him in his arms in a bed.

Like a lover would.

Staring up at the ceiling, Yoongi could see fuzzy specks dancing around his vision. They were either black specks that bloomed at the edge of his periphery, or quick flashes of white and colours that made him blink rapidly to clear them away. He could see the television screen casting a mixture of flashing lights across the ceiling because it was still playing. His head was so fuzzy that he could just about hear the noises coming from the speakers, seeming to hint that it was actually back to one of those terrible acting scenes again.

With some effort, Yoongi managed to lift his head up off the pillow, locating the remote on the mattress just within reach. He stretched to snag hold of it, pressing several buttons with his thumb until he managed to hit pause and stop the video.

“Let’s…let’s just take a break for a few minutes,” he breathed out heavily, as he dropped his head back down onto the pillow again.

Jimin hummed in agreement at this, but he didn’t say anything else, moving ever so slightly to try and get more comfortable. In the act of doing so, he smeared the semen trapped between their bodies in a way that made Yoongi make a disgusted noise under his breath. The younger man lifted his head up off the pillow at this, clearly wondering why he had done that.

“I feel gross,” Yoongi muttered, as he reached up with his free hand to wipe at his sweat-slick brow. “I feel hot and sticky and gross.”

“Me too,” Jimin agreed, finally relinquishing his hold on his thighs and shifting to roll onto his back.

“I need to get cleaned up or something. Shit, are there any tissues? Surely, they’ve got tissues in this
“Hang on, let me go check out the bathroom,” he said, wriggling to get off the bed and crossing the room to enter the small en-suite bathroom.

Yoongi watched him go and then he attempted to sit upright, letting out a series of soft grunts because it took quite a lot of effort. He had to drop his head for a few seconds because he got a little dizzy, staring at his slick and semen-splattered thighs in a bit of a daze.

After a minute, Jimin re-entered the room, carrying a small white towel.

“There were two, looks like we’ll be sharing the other one, Yoongi,” Jimin joked, as he crawled onto the mattress again and he knelt beside him.

Yoongi was about to lift a hand to accept the towel from him, but before he could do so, Jimin started wiping at his thigh for him. He did so softly, gently wiping away the mess that was coating his skin, and then he moved to clean at his stomach too. All that he could do was sit there and let him do so until Jimin turned his attention to his own body, wiping a thin smear of semen off his stomach and small speckles that were on his upper thighs.

Yoongi couldn’t help but stare at him as he cleaned himself up, eyeing the light sheen of sweat on his chest.

Jimin didn’t seem the least bit self-conscious about his nudity, just like he hadn’t in the bathhouse. He supposed that his muling job had probably made him used to being naked, even in the company of strangers, and he wondered if he could possibly ever reach that level of comfort. The answer was probably: no, but right now, he felt somewhat comfortable. It wouldn’t last for too long, however.

But one thing that he did know was that Jimin was beautiful, both when clothed and naked. He hadn’t lied to him back in the restaurant, he really did think that he was beautiful. As he watched him wiping at his chest with the towel, he couldn’t help but wonder what the hell Jimin even saw in him. He wasn’t beautiful or even a little bit charming; he was messed-up, distant, and prone to bouts of coldness that he barely had any control over.

“Hmm?” Jimin purred, noticing that he was staring at him.
“Uh, nothing,” he mumbled in reply, jolted out of his moment of negative thoughts.

Yoongi still felt rather filthy even after he had wiped all of the semen away, because his body was covered in sweat. A shower really would make him feel clean again, but it would be rather pointless getting a shower now. He was still very much feeling like they were just going to make more of a mess again soon enough.

“Shit, I’m thirsty,” he muttered, licking at his lips and hating the rather parched dryness at the back of his throat.

Yoongi knew that it was because he had had his mouth open the entire time, breathing and gasping so hard and fast, moaning and whining, and as a result he had given his poor throat quite the workout. It was no wonder that it was feeling rather dry and itchy right now.

“Thirsty? I can go and check this place out, if you want?” Jimin offered, as he finished wiping the last hints of sweat off his thighs for him. “They might have a vending machine here. If not, I can run out and hit up a store. There’s gotta be a 7/Eleven somewhere close, right? They build those babies on every street corner.”

“Uh…you sure?”

“Yeah, I’m sure. I might get to run out and get a little fresh air, finally cool myself down.”

Jimin grinned at him at this, before dumping the towel on the covers. Then he shifted to get off the bed again, bending to presumably grab his shirt or trousers from off the floor. The angle allowed Yoongi to get a wonderful eyeful of his behind, and he couldn’t help but stare at the full curve of his buttocks, so firm and perfect to the touch, until Jimin grabbed something and then straightened up again. Rather than his black silken shirt, he saw that he had his blouse in his hand for some reason.

“Valentino?” Jimin remarked, as he eyed the label. “This is designer, wow. I thought it might be, but Valentino?”

“You like?”

“I like it a lot,” Jimin replied, as he proceeded to slip his arm through one of the sleeves and he shrugged it on. Clearly, he liked it enough to borrow it for the time being. “When you wear it you
look like a pretty boy. A pretty baby boy.”

“Pretty?” Yoongi repeated, not at all certain how he felt about this particular description.

Jimin hastily buttoned up the blouse, his fingers fiddling for a few seconds until he figured out the right way to do it, and then he grabbed his trousers and he slipped into them too. Yoongi noted that he actually left the top two buttons undone so that the wide collar went down far enough to flash the soft hint of his still sweat-slick chest, and that he didn’t button up the cuffs, but rather rolled the billowing sleeves up his forearms. It was strange how the same blouse could look so different on the two of them, for when he wore it, it looked casual and cool.

Seeing Jimin wearing his blouse, his tanned skin contrasting against the white so perfectly and the loose cut hanging off his frame, made Yoongi feel that exact same series of sensations that he had told him about earlier. That tightness in his chest, spreading down into his stomach until he could feel it turning all loose and funny under his ribs.

Jimin had told him that that feeling should make him feel good, should make him feel right, and so Yoongi was going to try his hardest to get used to it.

After buttoning his trousers up, Jimin moved over to the beanbags to grab his borrowed suit jacket. He checked the inner pockets, before dropping it again and picking up his one instead. Yoongi watched him pulling his wallet free to open it and check the contents, hearing him making an amused noise under his breath at the sight.

“Don’t you ever carry, like, 5 dollars, Yoongi?” Jimin asked, twisting to glance back over his shoulder at him.

“I never need that amount, just take a 20,” he replied, brushing his sweaty hair off his brow again only for it to fall back a moment later. “Buy whatever you want, a couple of beers or sodas or whatever.”

Jimin pulled a $20 bill out of his wallet before slipping it back inside of his jacket. He shoved the note into his trouser pocket without much care at all for how crumpled it got, and then he moved back over to the bed to lean forward and give him a quick kiss.

“What was that for, mmm?” Yoongi asked, as he broke the contact, his lips still pouted out just in case he wanted to give him another one…or three.
“Does there need to be a reason?” Jimin asked with a quick smile, reaching down to squeeze at his cheek before moving away again. “I’ll be right back, baby boy. Don’t you go falling asleep on me!”

“I won’t!” he replied, finding a smile appearing on his lips for some reason.

The hotel door closed shut with a soft click, plunging the room into a sudden silence that caught Yoongi by surprise. Save for the faded sounds of conversation and music down below them, the hotel was so very quiet. It made him wonder if their rather frantic lovemaking had been audible to other people staying in the rooms on their floor. The answer was probably: yes, and it made him snort embarrassed laughter to himself as he shifted to get up off the bed too.

On the television screen, he had paused the video on a scene of one of the actors, seemingly in the middle of talking from what he could tell. The guy was shoving a pair of ridiculous large glasses up his nose, because clearly his character was the hard-working new office intern that had been seduced by his charismatic boss…or something. Yoongi just glanced at the screen, before moving over to the windows to study them curiously.

The windows were heavy as hell and in the bay style, meaning that he had to shove his full weight against one of them to open it up a crack and let some cool night air in. The area was rather quiet, all things considered, and so nothing more than the faded sound of traffic bled into the hotel room even with the window open. That was good, for he didn’t want to have a cool breeze at the cost of listening to blaring horns, rumbling engines, and shouting people out on the streets.

Yoongi stood in front of the window for a minute, just enjoying the cool breeze hitting his face and cooling him down, his eyes on the slow roll of traffic rolling down the streets outside.

It was strange how…at ease that he felt right now. How comfortable, in fact. Usually, it took a considerable amount of alcohol to make him feel this way, which could end up backfiring and rapidly spiralling into rather manic mood swings that sometimes frightened him.

Tonight, all that it had taken was a meal at a high-class restaurant and a quick round of passionate sexual intimacy to make him feel so light and comfortable. It was probably because the orgasm had taken the edge off, had released a little of his pent-up stress from the past week, but he had a feeling that that might not be the case. Usually, masturbation filled with him shame and disgust before he ended up falling asleep, not relief.

No, it just seemed like he was feeling so good right now because Jimin made him feel that way.
Jimin listened to him and participated in all kinds of conversation for fun, whether it be discussing business or quite simply musing about old memories over wine and telephone lines. He held his gaze and he really seemed to see him in a way that very few other people did, because he wasn’t afraid to be open with him about his thoughts and feelings. Whenever Jimin was so open with him, Yoongi felt like he could open up a little too, could tell him things that he usually just kept hidden inside of his mind.

Jimin gave him chaste kisses just because he wanted to, because he liked doing so. He did it in private and in restaurants, even if people might look at them, because he wanted him to know that he liked him in a way that words sometimes struggled to convey. He understood that such affections made him nervous often, made him feel frightened, but he didn’t get angry with him and he maintained a sense of patience that was admirable. For every uncomfortable touch or kiss, there were more sweeter ones to be shared, and Jimin was willing to be the one to gently nudge him forward whenever he needed that little push; whether it be getting him to organise a ‘first date’, or to turn kisses into touches.

Jimin made him feel good sexually and emotionally, and that was why he was standing in front of a window in some hotel he had never been in before, smiling to himself because it felt so much better than frowning like always.

Yoongi had only just sat down on the bed again when the door swung open and Jimin entered the hotel room. He saw that he was carrying two brown beer bottles in hand minus their caps, and he closed the door with his hip. He must have been gone for a minute or two at most, certainly not long enough to have left the hotel and hit up a store, but he also doubted that they stocked beer in vending machines in a hotel.

“That was fast. The fuck’d you find those, huh?”

“There were a couple of guys down in the basement playing pool. They had food and beers. They were asking for ass or grass, I had grass,” Jimin explained with a smirk, as he crossed the room to get to the bed. “I gave them a joint and Namo’s details and got two ice cold beers in return. That’s good business.”

Yoongi accepted the bottle from him, finding that it was ice cold and beaded with condensation. Rather than drink it, he decided to press it against his cheeks and brow in turn, sighing at the sensation of the cold glass on his skin. He reached up to brush his sweat-clumped hair back off his face again and he held the beer in place for a moment, before doing the exact same to the back of his neck.
Jimin watched him doing so for a moment as he got undressed again, and as soon as he was naked, he climbed onto the mattress beside him. He retrieved his own bottle of beer off the side table and he placed it in the space right between his shoulder blades.

“Mmm, that feels good, Jimin,” Yoongi sighed out, dropping his head and closing his eyes as he did so that he could track the cold press of the bottle against his spine.

Jimin rolled the bottle down his spine slowly and then he moved to press kisses against the spots where the beads of water had smeared against his skin.

Yoongi purred in contentment at this, reaching down to grab at his wrist so that he could slip his arm around his stomach and pull him closer.

Jimin allowed him to settle back against him, the position very similar to one that they had ended up in in the sauna. It was incredibly comfortable being able to rest his back against his chest and stomach, to drop his head on his shoulder and just relax for a few minutes.

Yoongi got comfortable, and then he finally lifted his beer to eye the label before lifting it to take a sip.

“Another night with me, another beer,” Jimin joked, as he swallowed the grainy mouthful hard. “What’s your verdict on this one, huh?”

“The one in the bar tasted nicer,” Yoongi remarked with a sniff. “This tastes like a cheap and foreign version.”

“Funny, this is actually American beer. The one in the bar was foreign, was Irish,” Jimin explained with an amused tone in his voice. “It tastes different because it’s a light beer rather than a draught, which is dark beer. It’s like the difference between Chardonnay and…I dunno, the white wine you’d buy in a store or whatever.”

“Look at you, teaching me ‘bout beer like I was teaching you ‘bout restaurants,” he joked, before taking another sip.

Really, Yoongi was glad that the beer was cold enough to soothe his throat because it really tasted disgusting to his tongue and he would have stopped drinking it otherwise. He ended up draining the
contents for the hell of it, before pressing the bottle against his cheeks again. He felt a lot cooler now at least, and that was a relief.

“Wait, you said you had pot…” he said after a moment of silence, opening his eyes to stare at their legs before turning to look back over his shoulder at him. “Why’d you have pot, Jimin?”

“I bummed two joints off Namo,” he explained, as he sadly relinquished his hold around his ribs and he shifted to reach down and grab his trousers off the floor. “I like to smoke it occasionally. After a week of flying around the world muling, it really makes you feel so much better than a few beers can. I know, I know, pot’s bad. Pot gets people hooked on the serious shit. Namo’s already lectured me about all of that, but I only do it every now and again, so, it’s cool.”

Yoongi watched him pulling a baggie free to dump it down onto the mattress, and a quick check inside the single side table drawer revealed a couple of condoms and a matchbook that he retrieved. Jimin stuck the fat joint between his lips and then he flipped the book open to pull out a match. When he dragged the matchstick across the board, it made a rough sound, the strong scent of sulphur hitting them both.

“Smoking’s a dirty habit,” Yoongi said, as he eyed the joint bobbing between his lips, the match flame flickering as he held it in front of it.

“So’s watching porno, baby boy,” he joked, before sticking the flame to the end.

Yoongi saw the way that he took a few inhales to get the joint to smoulder, breathing a hint of smoke out his nose until he had set it alight. He took a deep toke on it and he held it in his lungs for a few seconds, and then he shifted forward to breathe it in his face in a lazy ball of white smoke.

Yoongi blinked rapidly in surprise at this, inhaling quite the amount before coughing it out again hard. He lifted a hand to waft it away, scrunching his face up in displeasure at the strong scent. It smelled so disgusting to his nose and he couldn’t believe that someone would willingly inhale that scent for fun.

Jimin grinned at the sight as he took another toke, holding it in his lungs for a few seconds and then breathing it out again. He wet his lips with his tongue and he reached up to massage at the back of his neck with a soft groan of pleasure.

“It reminds me of my dad…” Yoongi remarked in a quiet voice, his brow twitching as he did so
because he could still taste it on his tongue.

“Watching porno reminds you of your dad?” Jimin asked, as he raised an eyebrow at him mischievously. “Oh, Yoongi. We’ve gotta talk about those daddy issues right now.”

Yoongi rolled his eyes at this, pretending that he didn’t find the joke amusing.

Jimin sucked another deep lungful of smoke into his lungs and he breathed it out again rather than say anything else, coughing softly as he did so. The younger man had only taken a couple of pulls on it and yet he seemed to be much more relaxed than he had been a moment ago; his eyes half-lidded and his expressions more slack than usual.

“What does pot feel like, huh?” Yoongi asked curiously. “I’ve never done it, I dunno anyone that uses it. My friend, he likes popping Valium instead.”

“It feels good. Wanna try it?” Jimin asked, as he held the joint out to him in offering. “You only need a couple of tokes before you feel good, and it lasts a little while before fading. You, um, you might see funny things though. Like the walls might kinda move or the carpet might change colour or whatever, but that’s normal. Nothing to worry about. It’ll make your head feel as light as a cloud, Yoongi.”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment before slowly lifting his hand to accept the joint and taking it from him.

He had no need to do so, to try the drug, but he also had no other real reason to say no. Hoseok had given him Valium in the past to calm his nerves, which could feel pretty good with a glass of whisky. Why not sample this too? Sure, he had to smoke it, but it wasn’t a cigar like what his father smoked. Maybe, seeing shit might be a little weird, but it might feel pretty nice. He only had to take a toke or two to see if he liked it, and if he didn’t then he could stop.

“It’s funny that you’ve never tried pot before though, baby boy. I thought that everyone had tried it at least once.”

“I’ve tried blow before, once or twice,” Yoongi said, eyeing the joint by slowly turning it over in his fingers and studying the smouldering end.
“Oh yeah? How?” Jimin asked curiously. “You better not have snorted it, it’ll ruin your nose.”

“Nah, not snorting or smoking it. That’s too addictive. I’ve rubbed it on my gums before for a lil hit when I really needed it, but like I said, I ain’t using it. But, uh, the best way I’ve taken it was…”

“Was?” Jimin asked with an eyebrow raise.

“One time, my friend he, uh, he gave me it up the ass,” Yoongi said, before snorting hard. “You mix it with a little water, make it soluble, and then you get it into one of those medical syringes, slip it inside, and squirt it up there.”

“What does it feel like? Does it feel nice?”

“The squirting or the blow?”

“Both?”

“It feels weird having it squirited inside you like that. It’s kinda cold, so, for a minute or two it feels gross. But then, uh, then your body starts absorbing it, I guess? Then it hits you. Uh, you ever had a really strong burst of adrenaline before? The kind that makes your heart start pumping so hard that you get sudden hot and cold flushes, and you can feel it skipping and making you gasp for breath? It feels like that. I guess some people like feeling that rush, but, uh, I didn’t like it that much.” Yoongi paused for a moment before quietly adding. “The kinda people that like that feeling ain’t really been scared before. Not properly.”

“I think it sounds horrible,” Jimin agreed. “That feeling makes you feel alive, yeah, but only because your body thinks that you’re actually gonna die. I’ve been in one too many fear moments to find that sensation remotely enjoyable.”

“I know what you mean,” he said in a quiet voice. “Plus, you can’t really feel your teeth and your head feels big, so, I hated that too.”

Yoongi lifted the joint up to his lips, sticking his tongue out to wet them, and then he decided to take a toke.
At first, he sucked the smoke into his mouth rather than actually inhale it properly, so he huffed it out and he tried again. This time, when he pulled smoke in, it went straight to his lungs, acrid, hot, and itching so much that he coughed it out hard and he almost choked. Yoongi reached up to touch his throat instinctively, rubbing at it as he felt tears welling in the corners of his eyes that he quickly blinked away.

“Christ!” he coughed out, before thumping his fist against his chest. “That’s disgusting, Jimin!”

“It tastes bad, but it feels good,” Jimin stated with a lazy smile. “Give it another shot, everyone chokes on the first toke.”

Yoongi considered pointing out the fact that he was going to choke on every toke, but it seemed rather pointless. He just lifted the joint and he took another pull on it, managing to hold the smoke for maybe two seconds before he started coughing violently and he expelled it again. It was during this coughing fit that he felt the first hints of something washing over him, something that vaguely made him feel woozy.

Jimin moved to take the joint from his fingers again, taking a toke whilst he moved to grab his still almost-full bottle of beer and take a sip. First, his throat had been parched from moaning and now it was itchy from marijuana smoke. He didn’t even like the beer, but it was better than nothing.

“Can you do tricks, huh?” Yoongi asked, as he watched twin plumes of smoke huffing out of the younger man’s nose. “Blow rings or whatever?”

“No, no tricks,” Jimin replied, before moving to get closer to him and breathing more smoke into his face.

When Yoongi breathed it in again, this time he didn’t choke because it was only a thin hint of smoke. The smoke just added to that wooziness that he was feeling, made him close his eyes from the sensation.

Jimin gave him another kiss, pouting his lips out against his softly. Yoongi slowly prodded his tongue out against his lower lip, and when he brushed it against his tongue, he could taste beer and marijuana on it and his breath.

After several quick kisses, Jimin took another toke on the joint, pressing his mouth against his and blowing it out against his slack lips.
Yoongi tried to breathe the smoke in from his kisses, but it was hard. He mostly ended up getting a small hint in his lungs from his mouth and nose because the rest escaped between their lips and floated up to the ceiling fan. But it felt so nice in a way that he couldn’t understand, the hot smoke and Jimin’s equally hot tongue slipping into his mouth.

Before he knew it, Yoongi had breathed in a considerable amount of smoke, and the wooziness had transformed into an almost sedated effect that made his body feel light and numb. The areas that Jimin touched seemed to be the only parts of his body that he could feel, for his arms were numb until the younger man’s fingers gripped hold and squeezed softly. He could trace every single skip of his fingertips down his spine, and yet his body felt like it was little more solid than the smoke lazily floating up between their lips.

“See? It feels nice right, baby boy?” Jimin asked, as he stopped kissing him to take another toke on the joint.

“Mmm, shit,” Yoongi laughed, before coughing and covering his mouth with his fist. “It feels funny, I dunno. I kinda like it? Kiss me again.”

When Yoongi ran his fingers through Jimin’s hair during their kisses, he was almost certain that the locks would morph in his very hold like tendrils of smoke. He thought that he might find his palms becoming black, as if he was plunging his hands into an oil slick, but they didn’t. No, that was just his imagination, enjoying this hallucinogenic rush far too much, and he wondered if Jimin was thinking the same wacky things as him.

Oh, the heat of Jimin’s mouth against his felt strong enough to burn him. He was suddenly more sensitive to touch, for his senses seemed to have gotten affected by the drug. Even the soft rustles of the covers sounded so much louder to his ears, as did Jimin’s quick inhales for breath.

Yoongi rolled his head back with a soft sigh, exposing his neck to Jimin in offering. He had felt the softest stirrings of arousal in the pit of his stomach for quite some time now, and he felt like he might just be ready to let Jimin take care of him again, or to even take care of him instead. Soft and slow, the sensations so much more stronger and the heat between their skin enough to burn.

Jimin squeezed the last inch or so of the joint out and then he dropped it on the mattress without a care. When he moved his head to press open kisses against his throat, Yoongi felt his hot lips pressing into his skin in a way he had never felt before. It was as if he had never kissed his neck, and it made a shiver run through him and plummet deep into his belly.
“That feels funny!” Yoongi exclaimed breathlessly, unable to help himself. “It, mmm, it tickles!”

“It tickles, huh?” Jimin asked, his voice slightly muffled. “You know what that means, right?”

“Huh? What does it-”

Before he could finish this, Jimin pressed another series of rapid kisses against his throat that made him gasp in surprise. When Yoongi tried to knock his head free with his shoulder, Jimin’s hands found that perfect spot right above his hip bones on his sides that made him squirm, his fingers tickling and squeezing just right. He let out a gasp of surprise before twisting in his hold.

“No, don’t! I hate that, I-”

“I hated it in the bathhouse and you still tickled me too!” Jimin argued, as he carried on attacking him.

“That was different! It was different, Jimin!”

Jimin pulled him down onto the bed and he felt his neck settling on his upper arm, supporting his head as good as any pillow. Yoongi was still trying to free himself from his hold, because he was holding on so tightly with one hand and yet still managing to tickle him. He was left with no choice but to slip his own hand down between their two bodies to try and stroke at his stomach too, in the hopes of tickling him and making him stop. But it didn’t work.

“Be a-a good boy and stop!” Yoongi stammered out, kicking his legs around as he did so.

At this sudden exclamation, Jimin froze up, his body hardening against his until he pulled his head away from his neck and he looked down at him.

For a few seconds, Yoongi could only stare up at him dumbly, and then he found himself laughing. Before he knew it, his laughter started to get out of control, made him struggle to breathe so that he actually wheezed for breath. He didn’t know why he was laughing, but he couldn’t seem to stop even when he wanted to.
Yoongi managed to catch his breath between his sudden burst of guffaws, reaching up to wipe at his wet eyes roughly as he did so.

Jimin shifted to lie back and stare up at the ceiling, a lazy and sweet grin on his face, and so he shifted to roll onto his back too.

Yoongi just stared up at the ceiling for a while, watching those fuzzy colours dancing around his vision just like they had during his orgasm. He could feel Jimin’s fingers playing with his hair lovingly, sinking into it and stroking softly. He was so comfortable lying beside him like this, his head supported on his upper arm and their legs still loosely tangled together, that he just wanted to lie like this for a little longer.

“Hmm, are you excited, baby boy?” Jimin asked out of the blue.

Yoongi lifted his head to look down at his crotch, seeing that his cock had hardened slightly from arousal. It had given a good attempt, but hadn’t quite reached full stiffness yet, signalling that he might just need a little assistance.

“Yeah, I must be.”

“Or maybe you get a kick outta being tickled?” he joked, as he shifted to collect the remote.

Jimin hit the play button before dropping it onto the mattress, making the video start playing again.

Yoongi shifted to prop his head up against the pillows and against his, the younger man’s hair against his cheek and lips.

Watching pornography whilst high, Yoongi found, was a rather unusual experience. Sometimes, he could hear the actors talking, but their lips didn’t seem to move at the right moment, and sometimes, their voices even sounded funny. Sure, they sounded funny anyway because he couldn’t understand them, but at least their voices had been normal rather than gelatinous-sounding and slow.

Every now and again, Jimin moved to press a kiss against the side of his head, to maybe cup cheek or chin and give it a soft stroke with his fingers. Yoongi liked it when he did that because he still felt every little touch that much stronger.
But eventually, the video started to edge towards explicit scenes again, for it started with a scene that involved the receiver actor being choked with his tie by accident and strangely finding the experience sexually gratifying. Yoongi could only stare at the screen unblinkingly as yet another unrealistic sex scene unfolded before his eyes, feeling his mouth turning dry at the sight of the man being fucked up against a toilet cubicle wall, his ankles crossed over the other actor’s lower back to keep him in place.

“Yoongi, can…can we maybe…”

Jimin didn’t finish this question because he didn’t really seem to know what he wanted to ask. Yoongi thought that he was trying to ask if they could have sex again, or at least as close to sex as they could, that was. But that might not be the case.

After a moment of silence, Jimin shifted to sit upright and he slipped his arm free from under his neck. He settled back against the pillows and the wall, spreading his thighs wide and once again patting at the mattress as if he wanted him to sit in the space.

Yoongi moved to do so, settling between his thighs still facing the television rather than looking at him.

Jimin reached over to slip his hands under his knees, lifting them up and almost hooking them over his own legs so that his thighs were spread open wide. He saw him moving to collect the bottle of complimentary lube off the side table and he got a liberal amount onto his fingers. Then he shifted to slip his arm around his ribs to hold him in place and he moved his other hand down between his thighs.

“Can I…can I slip my fingers in?” Jimin asked him, trailing them around his entrance as he did so and smearing lube over the ring of his muscles. “Can I, baby boy? You like that, right?”

Yoongi swallowed hard and he made a noise in agreement at this, so Jimin angled his fingers in place before applying a hint of pressure to slowly slide his middle and ring finger inside. Though it didn’t hurt that much, Yoongi still felt the stretch and burn, taking a sharp intake of breath and holding it whilst Jimin sank them inside to the knuckle. He tried to not clench too hard around them, feeling the cold wetness of the lube and something that might just have been one of those silver bands that he wore inside of him.

“Oh, you’re tight.” Jimin breathed out in a whisper, his chin digging into his shoulder. “I’m not hurting you, am I?”
“Nuh-no, I just need a lil stretching,” Yoongi explained, staring at the television screen to see the actors still very much in the act of having sex. “It don’t hurt, Jimin.”

Jimin kept his fingers in place for a moment, before slipping them out an inch or two and then sinking them in again to the knuckle. Though he was still trying to stretch and loosen him, his fingertips prodded against his prostate and made his thighs shudder in response.

Shit, it had been quite some time since he had felt that particular sensation.

Jimin stroked at his prostate several times in the clear hopes of maybe loosening him up to let him add another finger, and after a minute or two, Yoongi felt that stretching burn increasing as his index finger slid inside of him too.

“I wonder how good you’d feel around my cock, baby boy?” Jimin remarked, his fingers sliding in deep and making him swallow a weak moan.

“Can I touch you?” Yoongi asked breathlessly, reaching backwards to touch his thigh and then squeezing at it with his fingers. “Lemme touch yuh-fuck, lemme touch you.”

Yoongi struggled to touch him because of the angle that they were sitting in, could really only place his hand down and press his palm against his crotch to knead at him. It wasn’t ideal but it seemed good enough for Jimin, for he let out a breathless noise of pleasure right down his ear.

Rather than watch the porno, Yoongi just closed his eyes and he tried his very hardest to imagine that Jimin was inside of him right now. It wasn’t that hard to do so, but he knew that the sensation would feel so much more intense. To be stretched around his cock, to have his thighs squeezed around his waist or even slung over his shoulders to almost fold him in half whilst Jimin held him down and rocked into him…

Just imagining it was enough to make him weakly lift his hips upward against his hand, encouraging him silently. Jimin reached down with his other hand to take hold of his cock, starting to pump it in rhythm with his prodding fingers.

Oh, what Yoongi wouldn’t give to just feel something like that again. Real sex, intimate and maybe a little frightening, but also so very good. He deserved this. Hadn’t Jimin told him that earlier? He deserved affection, attention and love, and that meant that he deserved to experience that too.
But, the worryingly high risks of contracting AIDS…

and that ugly little voice in the back of his mind that told him he was disgusting, that he was dirty and shameful…

and his father’s knowing gaze every single time that they saw each other, of course.

“Baby boy, if you could have me in any way, any way at all,” Jimin asked, as he twisted his grip around the base of his cock and made him groan at the friction. “How would you have me?”

“I’d have you, mmm, uh-”

Yoongi squeezed his eyes shut tightly as he tried to think of something to say, anything at all. It was hard visualising the best way to take Jimin right now when the younger man was the one with his fingers deep inside of him. But after a moment of thought, he managed to fantasise about something that felt just right.

“Bath,” Yoongi breathed out raggedly. “I’d have you in the-the tub. You cuh-could bend your legs over the sides and face me. Cuh-candles, wine, the whole- nnn, the whole thing’d be romantic.”

“Oh, baby boy, that sounds so good. We’d slosh water everywhere. I want you to take me…oh, there’s too many options. You know? Fucking on a tropical beach or a bed covered with cash, that could be pretty amazing.”

“Cash? How muh-much?” Yoongi asked breathlessly, squirting precum at this point as he tried his very hardest to hold onto that pleasure but not give in.

“…A million dollars.”

“Then I’d fuh-fuck you on two million,” Yoongi moaned, hearing Jimin taking him a sharp intake of breath at this and then trying to lift his own hips up to rub against his palm.
“How would you want me to take you? What are you thinking about right now?”

“I wuh…wanna ride-”

“Riding? Seriously?”

“wanna ride you, Jimin,” he almost whined. “I wanna sit in your lap, so you can hold onto me tight and-and, uh, I can run my fingers through your hair. Suh-slow at first, but then faster and faster until-mmm, I’m bouncing on your cock. I want it so much, fuck, I want you inside of me!”

“I know, I know you want it bad,” Jimin remarked. “Do you wanna know what I want? I wanna take you in your own bed, baby boy. I bet that it’s massive and so soft. Hmm, I’d hold you down, so you couldn’t touch yourself, and I’d take my sweet time. I’d bring up right to the cusp and drag you back down again just to hear you moaning and whimpering for more-”

“Jimin-”

“because I want you to feel that moment forever, baby boy. When I’ve had my fun, I’d finally get to suck you off and let you finish in my mouth. I swallow, like a good boy should, and-”

Before Yoongi could hope to achieve orgasm, Jimin pulled his fingers free fast and he released his hold on his cock. He felt himself clenching tightly in surprise, sadly clenching around nothing at all, and he twisted to try and look back at Jimin.

“Juh-Jimin, just a lil more, just a lil-”

“Shower,” he said, as he moved on the mattress and he practically dragged him across it.

“Shower?”

“Shower,” Jimin repeated, pulling him off the bed and in the direction of the bathroom.
1st September, 1984, 2:56am: Fair Oaks Hotel, Hayes Valley, San Francisco, United States of America

Yoongi’s back slammed against the outside glass of the cubicle hard enough to make it rattle in its frame, cold water spraying against the inside at a high pressure. He heard him making a noise at this, caught between surprise and pain, but it was almost lost under the hissing sound of the shower.

When Jimin grabbed hold of his face, he closed his eyes and he pouted his lips out in anticipation of a kiss, the sight bringing a smile to Jimin’s face even as he leaned closer to grant him his wish.

Yoongi snaked his arms around his neck to drag him closer, pressing their bodies together as he did so. He opened his legs wide to anchor himself and allow him grind his hips forward against his, trapping their cocks in place and providing ample friction. Jimin could feel Yoongi actually arching his back against the glass partition to bring his hips out, to grind against him in return, because he was desperate for contact. So he seized hold of his buttocks to help him do so.

“Huh,” Yoongi breathed out hard against his mouth, his brow twitching as his fingers snaked into his hair.

Jemin ground down against his crotch teasingly slow, feeling Yoongi’s body almost thrumming in his hold as he rubbed against him in return in a fast and hard rhythm. He was almost bucking, a franticness to his movements that told him that Yoongi was trying to reach the orgasm that he had temporarily denied.

Why did showers take so goddamn long to heat up?

Jemin ended up dragging him inside of the cubicle even when it was still warm, the stream hitting them both and making Yoongi cry out in surprise before his mouth pressed against his again to cut the sound off. He pulled him closer again, clearly hoping to grind against him some more, but he had different plans.

“Turn around,” Jimin instructed, tugging at his hips as he did so. “Turn around, keep your thighs together nice and tight for me, baby boy.”
Yoongi seemed a little confused by this, but he did what he said, turning around so that he could place his hands against the cubicle wall and drop his head.

Jimin tracked the stream of water running down his back as he moved to grab a tiny cake of soap that had been left on the shelf. Water ran down the sharp juts of his shoulder blades and the valley of his spine, washing over his tattoo as it did so. He lathered the soap in his hands before hunkering down behind him and stroking them against his thighs.

Yoongi reacted to the contact by tightening his muscles, pulling them taut and making his thin thighs harden for a moment before he relaxed again.

Jimin dropped the soap back onto the shelf again without a care, moving to stand behind him and taking his cock in hand. He prodded it forward right into that slight gap between Yoongi’s inner thighs, feeling sudsy and slick skin that let him glide right into the space without any dry friction.

Yoongi dropped his head to stare down at his thighs, watching intently as Jimin slowly rocked his hips back and forth experimentally, trying to find the perfect pace and rhythm. He had just started moving more fluidly when the other man ground back against him, his buttocks softly slapping against him and making the shower water splash loudly.

Jimin pinned one of his wrists against the cubicle wall to hold onto him in some way. He couldn’t hold onto his hips because it would stop Yoongi from being able to move backwards against him, and the way that he grinded back against his crotch was maddening. It felt so good that Jimin reached around with his free hand to take hold of his cock again, his grip firm around his base.

“Yuh-yes, Jimin,” Yoongi moaned. “Touch me, please. I’m so close, so-”

“Keep it nice and tight,” Jimin instructed, placing his face in the crook of his neck and letting the shower stream hit him too. “I wanna feel those sweet thighs of yours squeezing around me, baby boy.”

Jimin couldn’t help but press his upper body against the cubicle in his desperation, frantically pumping between Yoongi’s tightly squeezed together thighs. He ran his tongue up his neck, tasting water and mingled sweat and cologne, and when he found that sensitive spot behind his ear, he sucked a kiss against it.
Yoongi whined at the contact, his hand tightening around his and trying to make him wank him off faster.

Shower water and soapy suds weren’t exactly ideal lubrication, but the heat that built up inside the cubicle, combined with the hint of slickness, made Jimin feel almost dizzy with pleasure. The stream was spraying down on them both hard, making his hair slip forward over his eyes in a curtain so that he had to close his eyes. But that just heightened the intensity of the sensation, made him leak precum in excitement that just added to the sudsy mess between their bodies to lubricate his cock that much more.

“Tell me a little more about what you want, baby boy,” Jimin groaned, water running into his mouth as he did.

“Wuh-huh? What I want?”

“The bathtub, the riding.”

“The-tub,” Yoongi explained breathlessly, his ass grinding backwards into him. “It’d be filled with fuh-foam ‘cos we were sharing it at first. You, huh, you lemme wash your skin, washed my skin too-”

“So, it starts off sweet and then tuh-turns hot?”

“drinking wine or something,” the other man sighed. “I dunno, it’s romantic at first. That’s the important part. You, uh, you’ve got your legs over the sides, your back on the slope so I can just get between your thighs and slid inside-”

“Slow? Fast? Huh-hard?” Jimin asked, trying his very hardest to picture the scenario in his head.

“Deep, so deep and slow. Yuh-you’d beg for a lil more: a lil faster, a lil harder, and I’d give it to you-”

“Oh, give it to me.”
“until your nails are scratching into my back and I can fuh-feel you shaking and- oh! Nnn, I’m cuh-cumming!” Yoongi moaned brokenly, still tugging at his hand as if he could get him to jerk his wrist any faster. “Jimin, I think I’m- oh!”

Yoongi’s soft cries of pleasure echoed inside of the cubicle, inside of Jimin’s very skull, and he scratched at the wall and the back of his hand hard as he orgasmed.

Jimin opened his eyes to watch, rapidly blinking away water to see semen spurting out to hit the wall and then weakly dribbling out of his twitching head. He released his cock to actually try and catch it on his palms before the stream of water washed it away. Jimin smeared the semen against his thighs before squeezing hold of one of them tightly, pumping his hips forward as fast as he could.

Because of his orgasm, Yoongi had stopped squeezing his thighs together tightly, but Jimin was so close to his own climax that he only needed that little bit more. He buried his face against his neck again, breathing fast and hard as the waves of pleasure in his stomach washed over him hard, left a tingling in their wake strong enough to burn.

“Huh, Yoongi,” Jimin moaned against his throat, pounding his hips forward and then freezing as his orgasm finally flooded his system.

They stayed in place for a minute or two underneath the stream, Yoongi pinned against the wall from his weight and the stream coursing down to hit them but not washing away the lingering soap suds and semen. Then Jimin moved to release him from his hold, doing so slowly because his legs felt rather weak, and that allowed Yoongi to retrieve the soap so that he could finally clean himself.

Jimin leaned against the cubicle wall, brushing his hair back off his face and blinking water out of his eyes. He watched Yoongi lathering soap all over his arms and chest slowly, bending forward to try and clean his thighs and lower legs too. He decided to help him clean his back, kneading and massaging at it for him in a way that made Yoongi hum in pleasure before he got under the stream fully to wash the lathered suds free. There was sadly no shampoo present to wash their sweat-clumped hair with, so Yoongi used the soap just for the sake of it.

Jimin watched him showering in a hazy fascination, tracking the water down his thin and supple limbs, seeing the way that it beaded in his hair. Yoongi had to brush it back off his brow, revealing his strong eyebrows and square forehead to him. He wiped at his face for a moment to get water out of his eyes before opening them to look at him. Yoongi’s face was flushed from the heat just like it had been at the sauna, his cheeks pink and rounded so sweetly.

Yoongi held his eyes for a moment and then he held the soap out to him in offering.
Whilst Jimin started lathering soap on his body and in his hair, the other man exited the cubicle, hastily drying off with the towel before placing it on the closed toilet and going back into the bedroom. Jimin quickly finished getting cleaned up so that he could join him, his head still wonderfully empty and his limbs heavy. He turned the shower off after a couple of minutes, stepping out of the cubicle and roughly drying his damp hair. He patted at his skin and then dropped the towel on the floor without a single care.

The sight that greeted him when he went into the bedroom was a little unexpected.

Yoongi was lying on his side, turned away from him with the covers pulled up to his lower ribs. Though his lower body was mostly hidden under the covers, he was pretty certain that he had his legs curled up in front of him, to make himself that little bit smaller in the already small bed. The television was switched off and the tape box was on top, the empty beer bottles on the floor because he must have placed them there.

Jimin crossed the room to lock the door and switch off the light, a hint of orange-tinged streetlights casting in through the open window. In his attempts at reaching the bed and joining him, he accidentally kicked the bottles over, cursing softly under his breath in surprise until his knees connected with the mattress.

Jimin lifted the covers up and he proceeded to slip under them, tugging them up as he also settled onto his side and he stared at the back of his head. There was space between their bodies, just several inches if that, but to him it felt like a valley of white cotton and cold air that he longed to fill.

Was Yoongi lying away from him like that because he wanted to keep that small distance between them, or was he just assuming? Did Yoongi actually want him to lie close and be the one to initiate contact? He had been the one to do it all night long, saving him from having to be brave enough to do so.

Jimin reached across the space between them slowly, his finger settling on the back of Yoongi’s neck. He kept it in place for a second before slowly tracing it down the curve of his spine, hearing the other man breathing out a sigh at the contact. He moved his hand away and he was just in the act of moving closer to him when Yoongi rolled over and damn nearly collided with him.

“Oh,” he gasped, before letting out an awkward laugh. “I, uh…”

Jimin moved to slip his arm over his waist, pulling him into another semi-embrace so that they could
settle down at last and sleep. It would feel so good lying close to him, sharing his heat and feeling the
gentle puffs of his breath against his face as he stroked his elbow or maybe his back in concentric
circles.

But when he glanced at his face, he saw that Yoongi's expression was wrong, was all wrong. He
didn’t look relaxed or content, he looked mildly distressed for some reason that he couldn’t figure
out.

“Yoongi? Are you OK?” Jimin asked in surprise, lifting his head up off the pillow as he did so.
“What’s wrong?”

“I don’t like this,” Yoongi replied in a rather strangled voice. “Sharing a bed. It-it feels weird, Jimin,
it feels-”

“No, it doesn’t feel weird,” Jimin spoke over him, feeling the older man almost squirming in his hold,
but refusing to let go just yet. “It doesn’t feel weird, Yoongi, it feels new. That’s all.”

“Huh?” Yoongi breathed out unevenly.

“It feels new,” he reiterated, as he started lightly stroking his fingertips over the bump of his bare
shoulder blade, “and you’re frightened by it, baby boy, that’s what it is. Don’t deny it, don’t tell me
you’re not scared. I can feel you shaking right now. But it’s OK.”

Jimin felt Yoongi wriggling against him for a few seconds longer before he fell still, breathing much
too fast and heavy for his liking. Christ, he was having a freakout right in front of him, and a part of
him was almost tempted to just let him wriggle free even when he didn’t want to.

Why? So Yoongi could roll onto his side again, facing away from him and curled up in a tight ball:
looking so cold and desperate for affection? So he could put his defences right back up again despite
everything that had happened between them tonight?

All because he was frightened to fall asleep in another man’s arms and reach that full level of
vulnerability and intimacy.

No, Jimin was going to hold on tightly until Yoongi finally realised that he was safe, that he was safe
and warm in his arms and that there was no need for him to be frightened. He just wanted to cradle
him in his arms and fall asleep to tender touches; not lie in bed staring at the back of his head whilst Yoongi stayed awake all night long with his toxic thoughts eating away at his brain.

Yoongi closed his eyes for a moment, his lips quivering as he tried to get himself under control. He was still so stiff in his arms, his fists pressed against his own chest to almost create a barricade between their bodies, but Jimin knew that he would relax in a minute or two. He just needed to be patient and let him feel the sensation for himself, to show him that this felt nice and was normal and natural. Eventually, his muscles started to relax, and Jimin heard him breathing out heavily.

“See, baby boy?” Jimin said in a whisper-soft voice, as he pressed his face into his damp hair. “This isn’t scary, is it? It’s nice, it feels nice. We were this close earlier and you weren’t frightened, hmm?”

“It was…was different earlier,” Yoongi confided in a quiet voice, lowering his fists and finally breaking down that physical wall between them. “This’ different, I dunno. This makes me feel like-”

“Do you feel like you’re vulnerable?”

“Mmm, I think so?”

“That’s because you are vulnerable right now, Yoongi. But that’s not a bad thing,” Jimin explained, moving his head away from his hair to look at his face again. “I’m vulnerable right now too, if that makes you feel a little better. I…I think, Yoongi, that you’ve gotten used to sex being some kinda business transaction instead of something natural. Yeah? You’ve never had that intimacy afterwards, because it scares you. You’re so scared of being taken care of afterwards, when it really matters: sharing beds, lying close like this, being vulnerable with another person.”

Yoongi made a noise at this, slipping one arm under his pillow and placing his other hand on his chest. His fingers were trembling just like his legs were under the covers.

“I know that that’s what you really want the most,” Jimin continued, moving his own hand from his back to cup his face. “You told me that at the restaurant. You said that you want affection and care, that you want someone to treat you carefully and love you. That’s what I’m doing, and I know that you’ve never felt it before and so you’re a little frightened, but…what does this feel like right now?”

“…Feels good,” Yoongi replied in a whisper.
“It does feel good, right?” Jimin agreed in a soft voice, stroking his thumb delicately across his cheekbone. “Yoongi, what happens between us isn’t just another business transaction. OK? It’s an exchange of trust and…and emotions. But I can’t do it all on my own. You need to give me that too, even just a little bit.”

“I know, I know, Jimin,” he sighed, as he closed his eyes. “I’m trying to give it to you. It’s hard and it’s—it’s scary, but, fuck, I’m trying.”

“I know you are, baby boy,” Jimin said, shifting to get closer to him. “I wanna help you learn to love yourself, to accept yourself, but right now, I really just wanna fall asleep in your arms. Is that OK? Can I do that, Yoongi?”

“Only if I, uh, if I can fall asleep in yours,” Yoongi stuttered, before laughing under his breath.

Jimin released his hold on his cheek to slip his arm around his waist again instead, finally turning the semi-embrace into a full one. Yoongi let his breath out in a sigh, tangling their legs together and settling down for sleep. He gently stroked his fingers across his skin as he watched the other man’s face, seeing the dim streetlight glow reflecting in his eyes as his blinks grew more and more languid until his eyelids closed for good.

As soon as he knew that Yoongi was fully asleep, he moved to press a chaste kiss against his slack lips.

Jimin didn’t know if he was going to sleep at all tonight, but he did know that studying Yoongi’s sleeping face and gently stroking his fingers over his spine and upper arms to feel his soft skin was the best way to pass his time until he finally succumbed to slumber.
When Yoongi opened his eyes slowly, the first thing that he saw happened to be skin; golden skin, just mere inches from his face.

After a second or two, he found his eyes drifting shut again because they were heavy and somewhat itchy, and he struggled to keep them open. Oh, he just wanted to close them and fall back into that peaceful slumber, that beautiful darkness, and yet he found that he couldn’t seem to do so.

From somewhere in the room, he could hear the faded sounds of traffic and street life bleeding in through the open window: rumbling engines, honking horns, and loud voices. Though the mixture of noises stayed at a reasonable volume, it was one of several things that seemed to be stopping him from falling asleep again.

The second reason happened to be because his mouth was too dry and it felt weird, as did his throat. It was itchy, and he longed to swallow something cold and refreshing to get rid of the disgusting sensation. But to do so required the ability to get out of bed, and that seemed a bit too difficult right now.

As Yoongi’s eyelids fluttered open weakly again, he became aware of the third and final reason. He was disoriented and he didn’t really know where he was right now. This didn’t feel or smell like his bed, and he was certain that it wasn’t. If it was his bed, not only would it smell differently, he also wouldn’t be lying beside someone like he was doing so right now. No, he would be curled up in a nice tight ball underneath his covers if he was in his bedroom. But he was tangled up against another body, naked skin against skin, the light covers loosely shrugged in place, and he didn’t know where he was or who he was even lying beside.

Yoongi took a deep breath and he held it for a moment, attempting to keep his eyes open for long enough to see properly. His vision was still blurry with sleep, and so he had to move one of his hands to rub at his eyelids roughly. It had been lying on the mattress in the small gap between their bodies, for his other arm was currently trapped under his pillow.

After some rigorous rubbing, Yoongi blinked his eyes open and he stared at the sight of tanned skin
once more as he tried to figure out who he was looking at. All that he could currently see was a chest and neck, for he seemed to have fallen asleep pressed up against said chest. It was bare of anything: scars, tattoos, hair, and therefore it was hard to figure out who it belonged to.

As Yoongi tried to wet his dry lips with his even drier tongue, he lifted his gaze to catch sight of a little more. He saw the gentlest slope of a neck, on which there were several tiny freckles, a curve of jawline, an ear and a hint of black hair falling across it. Though the loosely tousled hair covered most of his ear, it didn’t cover the unrecognisable flash of a silver hoop earring.

That was when Yoongi figured out who it was.

Jimin was lying in bed beside him: one arm hugged over his body, his legs tangled within his, and his chin lightly digging into the crown of his head.

Yoongi shifted ever so slightly to lift his head up off the pillow, seeing the way that Jimin wriggled on the mattress and then fell still again. All that he could do was stare at the younger man in a mixture of confusion and wonder, because he couldn’t believe that he was actually lying in bed with him right now. His brain was still foggy with sleep and something else that he couldn’t seem to figure out. It wasn’t alcohol, wasn’t a hangover, but it was something that made his head feel a little strange.

Despite the fact that the hotel room was silent and still, as calm as could be, Yoongi could feel something stirring in his chest that made his heartbeat go a little bit faster. His first initial thought was panic, was anxiety of some kind upon waking up in another man’s arms like this, but after a few seconds, he really couldn’t figure out what it was. Sure, he could feel his fingers twitching under the covers and his tongue wanted to slip out to wet his lips so badly, but he was still lying in bed beside Jimin currently.

Had he really been scared of this intimacy, Yoongi knew that he would have dived out of bed, gotten dressed, and left without a word. He had done it before, with Hoseok, and he always knew that there was a chance that he would do it again when he woke up after a night of intimacy with another man.

But right now, Yoongi didn’t feel like running away, even when he felt nervous as hell. He felt like he might just be able to lie back down against Jimin for a little while longer, until the moment passed and his pulse slowed down again; until Jimin woke up and said whatever it was that he just seemed to know to say to him that always made that nervous ache in his belly fade away again.

Yoongi ran his tongue around his mouth slowly, unable to stop a grimace from appearing on his face because it was so dry right now. It was as if his mouth was packed with cotton-wool, not a hint of
saliva present, and he didn’t know why it felt so strange. As he rubbed at his nose roughly, he shifted to sit upright for a moment. The covers puddled around his hips messily as he curved his back forward comfortably with a series of low grumbles. When he slowly opened his eyes again, he caught sight of something on the carpet.

There, on the floor right beside two empty and knocked-over bottles of beer, he could see the inch or so remains of a roach.

Well, at least that explained his dry mouth, itchy throat and chest, and sore head.

Yoongi sniffed a few times before closing his eyes. Though there was still a strong fogginess from sleep and the marijuana still lingering in his system, he could pretty much remember everything that had happened yesterday.

The confrontation at Mickey’s Joint that seemed like an eternity ago to him, and the daytime hours of trying to juggle business and reservations whilst struggling to push all thoughts about Jimin out of his mind; the drive across the city to Namjoon’s house and the awkward fidgeting on the top step as he had tried to get himself under control, only for Jimin to have appeared and once more caused him to fuck it all up again. Then there had been the meal at the restaurant, of course, which even Yoongi would admit had actually went very well. Not that he had expected it to go terribly, but the fact that he knew that he had a habit of messing things up unintentionally had just made him anxious over it all.

Yet the meal had went very well, for what had essentially been a first date. Yoongi was pretty certain that it was one of the most enjoyable evenings that he had experienced in a very long time, if not forever, and he wasn’t even thinking about what had happened in the hotel. He was just simply thinking about the meal and the conversations that he and Jimin had shared over the duration.

Jimin, who hadn’t known the appetisers from the entrée and had been absolutely speechless at the price tag of a bottle of Chardonnay; who had been so anxious sitting in a high-class restaurant because he had been so scared that everyone would have known that he had grown up in poverty, yet seemed to not give a shit about people knowing that he was gay.

Yoongi turned to look back over his shoulder at the young mule, instinctively reaching up to massage at the back of his neck as he did so.

Jimin was lying on his back mostly, with his head turned on an angle so that his hair was covering quite a lot of his face. His chest was rising and falling slowly, the gentle rhythm a sign that he was deeply asleep and that he wasn’t planning on waking up anytime soon. Yoongi didn’t even have a
clue what time it was right now, but when he shifted his gaze over to the room window, he saw that
the sky was currently a faded blue with slight hints of lavender still blended into the clouds.

Yoongi shifted to lie back against the stack of pillows, reaching over to run his hand along the side
table until his fingers snagged hold of his Rolex. He retrieved it and he quickly secured it on his
wrist, his fingers working from muscle memory more than anything else. As soon as it was in place,
he twisted his arm around to glance at the face to find out what time it was.

7:15am.

Yoongi lowered his wrist with a weary sigh, placing his hand back down on the mattress. It was so
early, and yet most days he was awake and getting ready to leave his home not too long from now.
He turned his head to look at Jimin again, watching his hair gently shifting from his breath, and that
was when he recalled the fact that he hadn’t contacted Seokjin in regards to business.

The thought was enough to catch him by surprise, a little jolt coursing through his body. He had told
Seokjin that he would always contact him first, and should he fail to do so by a set time, that the
other man should go and retrieve him from his mansion.

“Jimin?” Yoongi said in a quiet voice. “Hey, Jimin?”

When Jimin didn’t respond to this, he realised that he might just have been too quiet, which was why
he hadn’t woken up. So he rolled onto his side and he reached over to place a hand on his shoulder.


“Huh…wuh? What time’s…it?” Jimin mumbled, lifting his face up off the pillow with his eyes still
squeezed shut for all of three seconds, before he dropped his head back down again. “Why…’re you
waking me up, huh?”

“7:15,” he replied. “I gotta go, and I thought I should at least escort you back to Kim’s place rather
than leave you to walk back. C’mon, we need to get dressed and blow.”

“Nnn, do we have to?” Jimin asked in a whiny voice, his face still pressed into the pillow.
“Checkout’s not until 10, remember?”
“I got business to see to,” Yoongi said, as he gently stroked his fingers through his hair and he brushed the tousled locks back off his face for him. “I need to call an associate, check up on business.”

“Phone downstairs, ask to use it,” Jimin mumbled. “Still got some time for sleep…mmm.”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment as he finished brushing his hair back for him.

Jimin wasn’t wrong, there was a phone downstairs and they had both seen it yesterday. He had booked a room in advance using their hotel service, and so there was no doubt about its existence. But just because there was a phone, that didn’t mean that he would be allowed to use it. He was a guest at the hotel, and it might only be reserved for employees to use. However, this was all hypothetical, and the only way that he was going to find out would be to go downstairs and request to use it.

“‘K, I’ll go and check,” Yoongi said, though there was a high chance that Jimin had fallen back asleep again and he hadn’t even heard him.

When Yoongi shifted his weight back onto his elbow, the most pressing urge to lean over and give Jimin a kiss on his brow washed over him. As he looked down at him from his slightly elevated position, he decided to just got for it, to try it out; just to be the one initiating such a small act of intimacy for once.

So Yoongi slowly lowered his head to press a soft kiss on his revealed brow. Jimin’s skin was warm against his lips, warm and smooth, and the contact made his cheeks almost flood with a heat that he hated. Oh, he was so glad that the younger man was asleep so that he wouldn’t catch sight of his ridiculous pink cheeks.

“So nice…” Jimin breathed out, as he shifted to sit upright again. “That was nice, baby…boy.”

Yoongi had to toss the covers aside to get out of bed, swinging his legs over the side of the small mattress as he did so. He saw that their clothing all over the floor: puddled trousers and cast-aside shirts and blouses that would require ironing to rid them of their unsightly creases, suit jackets folded neatly across the room, and shoes by the door. He was in the act of stretching down to grab his trousers when something caught his eye.
Right there, all over his innermost thighs, Yoongi could see the faintest remains of blemishes on his skin.

Jimin’s kisses.

Yoongi froze instinctively, his fingers twitching around thin air as he stared at his thighs. The marks weren’t incredibly obvious, weren’t too dark, rather they were a mixture of shades of pinks from slight to more deeply irritated. They were like bruises, almost…guilty reminders of what had happened still imprinted on his body. Some of them might just become bruises over the following hours.

When Yoongi reached down to stroke his fingers over one of the blemishes, he realised that they were shaped exactly like the ring of Jimin’s teeth. Had he left his own marks on Jimin’s skin too? He couldn’t seem to recall, but he might just have.

Yoongi moved to grab his trousers at last, pulling them closer and then slipping into them. He eyed his blouse for a moment before recalling that Jimin had borrowed it to run down to the common-room to trade for those beers, and then he glanced at the silken shirt on the flooring just by his feet. Black silk, blue butterfly print: a masculine cut and fit yet emblazoned with a softly feminine pattern. It kind of reminded him of his blouse, and so he decided to retrieve it instead and he slipped it on. His fingers moved deftly to button it up, and he made sure to tuck the ends of the shirt into his trousers before fastening them. Rather than grab his jacket, belt, or shoes, he just got to his feet to unlock the door and leave their room.

Yoongi made sure to check the room number, just so he wouldn’t get lost on his way back upstairs trying to find it again. Satisfied that he knew it, he went along the hallway and down the stairs at a moderate pace. His muscles felt a little stiff and he wasn’t that surprised at all, considering what had happened last night. At least his thighs burnt from being overworked without the added stinging deep inside of him that actual sex would have brought: a much more pleasant sensation, for sure.

Upon reaching the ground-floor and exiting the stairwell, Yoongi saw that the receptionist from the previous night was no longer present. No, the young black man with the rather flamboyant blue eyeshadow had been replaced with an older-looking white man with copperish-coloured hair and a rather sunburnt complexion, and who was wearing a bright white vest paired with tight jeans.

“Uh, d’you have a phone in here?” Yoongi asked, as he reached up to mess with his hair roughly. “I need to make a quick call - business. I dunno where any payphones are ‘round here. If I gotta pay, I’ll pay.”
“You don’t need to pay if it’s a local call,” the receptionist replied, moving to grab the telephone from under the counter so that he could dial the number himself. “Business, huh? Calling in sick for a meeting so you can have a little more fun?”

“More like so I can have more sleep,” Yoongi mumbled in reply, as he grabbed the receiver and he dialled Seokjin’s number without much thought at all; more than used to doing so by now.

Yoongi held the receiver against his ear with one hand, placing the other one down on the counter so that he could lean against it and turn away from the receptionist. He was more than aware of the fact that the man would hear every single word that he said, and so he would have to be careful to not say anything too obvious to his friend whilst they were discussing business. He had taken a risk calling his home number rather than his car phone, but after several seconds of listening to the dialling tone, he heard a static crackle down the line.

“Hey, it’s me,” he said, not feeling the need to say his own name because he knew that Seokjin would know that it was him.

“Yoongi? The caller I.D. said that it was an unknown number. I didn’t expect to hear your voice, for sure,” Seokjin replied, once more showcasing his uncanny premonition skills.

“Uh, yeah, I forgot to call before leaving, so, I’d to borrow a phone,” Yoongi explained rapidly. “I told you to call or check on me if I didn’t contact you first, and I thought it was best to do so now. Anything I should know, huh?”

“In summary, the answer is: no, there’s nothing that you need to know about urgently as of this phone call. The deals are either still in-progress or have been completed, and I’m reviewing certain transactions and collecting payments up until the late morning, just like usual.”

“The transactions went through, yeah? No problems…processing ‘em?”

“There was a slight hiccup in regards to a local dealer, but I can assure you that I’ll sort everything out with enforcers on your behalf. I don’t think that you need to show up to remind a little brother that sells pot to not smoke his entire supply now; do you?”

“Nah, I trust you to sort that out, Seokjin,” he agreed. “Anything else?”
“We lost profit on a deal in The Philippines, but I believe that we might break-even regardless of this fact. Still, I’ll be following up on that to get the exact details. The mistake might be on our end, it might be on theirs, I plan on figuring that out by this afternoon.”

“Good, good, I’ll check up on you later, and Hoseok too. He’ll have more shit to tell me, no doubt,” he said, wrapping the call up because he didn’t want to take too long on the line. “Anyway, I gotta go, yeah, but keep up the good work.”

Yoongi moved to drop the receiver back in the cradle, hearing the plastic clunking loudly in the silence of the reception-area. He felt like he should say something to receptionist perhaps, a thank-you for letting him use the device, because he didn’t feel right just walking away to go back upstairs again. But before he could think of doing so, he beat him to it.

“Remember, checkout is at 10. If you want, I can come knock on the door at 9:45, to give you time to get ready?” the man offered, as he placed the phone under the counter again. “What room number are you?”

“You do that?” Yoongi asked in surprise, before quickly adding. “Uh, yeah, that’d be real helpful. Room 10. My boyfriend’s still asleep, and he ain’t gonna wake up without an…an alarm.”

It was only after he had blurted the term out so casually without any thought at all, did Yoongi actually realise what he had just said to the receptionist. He had just called Jimin his boyfriend, had said it aloud to a complete stranger for no real reason at all that he could discern. It was enough to make him almost gulp, a sudden lump appearing in his throat that threatened to choke him, and his fingers involuntarily curled up into tight little fists.

Yet, the receptionist just gave him a brief and almost knowing smile, one that completely disarmed him because he had reacted like that had been a completely natural thing to say.

Yoongi left the reception-area in a bit of a hazy daze, trudging up the staircase and along the hallway with his eyes fixed firmly down on his bare feet. The carpet underneath his soles was soft in parts, a little worn down and rough in others, and for some reason, he found his attention focusing on it because he was still a little shocked by what had just happened to think straight.

When he pushed the door open to enter their room, Yoongi slowly closed it shut behind him as to make as little noise as possible. He didn’t want to disturb Jimin, who he could see was still lying curled up in bed and presumably napping. He slipped the lock in place and he crossed the room to get to the bed, quickly undressing so that he could slip under the covers and join him. He left his clothing in a puddle on the flooring with the rest before climbing into bed again.
Yoongi accidentally bumped his legs against his as he tried to settle down under the covers, causing Jimin to stir with a series of noises. As he placed his head down on the pillow, he saw his eyelids opening a crack to peer at him, his gaze seemingly unfocused.

“Oh, you’re cold,” Jimin sighed, as he once more slipped his arm over his waist and he tugged him closer.

“You sure you just ain’t too hot?” Yoongi asked, letting him entangle their legs and press their bodies that much closer together. Jimin’s skin really did feel hot against his, for it seemed that he was always warm to the touch. “It’s nice, though, I…I like it.”

“You do?”

“Yeah,” he reiterated, his own arm slipping between their bodies so that he could get comfortable. “I’ll be warm soon enough, lying beside you.”

“Oh, I can warm you up, baby boy,” Jimin almost purred, as he lifted his head up off the pillow to look down at his face.

“I thought you wanted to sleep some more?” Yoongi argued teasingly, feeling the younger man’s chest settling on his as he shifted to balance his weight on his elbow. “Thought you wanted to nap?”

Jimin settled down comfortably on his chest and ribs, his lower body still hidden underneath the covers. He was trying his very hardest to keep his eyes open because he was still so very tired. Yoongi looked up at his slightly swollen eyelids and he wondered what he looked like right now too; after a night of drinking beer and smoking pot for the first time. Whatever the case, Jimin managed to make swollen eyelids and mush-mouth attractive in a way he had never seen before, but that might just have been because it was his first time seeing a guy’s face the morning after spending the entire night with him.

“We can still nap,” Jimin replied with a lazy upwards curl of the lips, blinking languidly as he tried to keep his eyes open. “It’s just…so much easier napping after you mess around a little. You know?”

“Jimin, are you still high?” Yoongi asked half-jokingly, half-serious.
“Hmm, ha, I’m just saying,” he declared. “You really drift off to sleep after getting…sucked off under the covers, and a nice reach-around always gets the morning off to a great start.”

Yoongi couldn’t help but snort laughter at this, and even Jimin had a grin on his sleepy face to show that he was joking around with him. After a few seconds, his lips split to show his teeth, and then he started laughing giddily too. Was it an amused laugh, or an embarrassed laugh at his actions? It was hard to tell, but it was sweet to hear and he liked listening to it. His hair was hanging over his face in loose tousled locks, which might still be slightly damp from their late night shower, but he made no move to brush them back off his brow.

So Yoongi did so himself, lifting his hand up off the mattress and gently brushing his fingers through the locks. He found that his hair was dry and silken soft as he ran his fingers through it, trying to get it to stay in place only for it to slip forward again in even messier tangles. He ended up having to try and tuck it behind his ear instead, in the hopes that it would keep it off his face.

“Baby boy?” Jimin said suddenly, his voice a husky whisper.

“Mmm?”

Yoongi shifted his gaze from his hair to his eyes, seeing the early morning sunlight washing over him. There were no blinds or curtains present to block the light coming in through the window, to make stripes of sunlight and shadow to fall over the mattress, and so when it washed over him, it did so fully. Jimin’s tanned complexion seemed to glow in the sunlight in a way that he had never really been able to witness before.

Save for their quick meeting in Mickey’s Joint, they had only ever seen each other in the evenings, or at nighttime. He had gazed upon Jimin’s face illuminated from soft yellow restaurant lights and glaring bar display units; had observed neon glow casting over him to bathe his skin in racy blood red and enticing vibrant pink, but he had never truly gotten to see him like this.

Naked in more ways than just simply minus his clothing: laid bare with just the faintest amount of smudged eyeliner around his eyes and nothing to hide behind at all.

Vulnerable, in other words, just like him.

Yoongi thought that Jimin was quite simply made for the coast, for beaches and pools and tropical island resorts; so golden and warm, so toned and attractive. He would look completely at home
sitting on sand, little white particles clinging to his thighs and palms, beaded water on his hairline and the gentle swell of his chest and dimpled stomach. Jimin was the kind of that guy that thrived off the heat and sun, who peered over the tops of his sunglasses, who knotted his shirts around his slim hips and looked like a new god the entire time. A god of their times, dressed in denim and sneakers, who took tributes in the form of designer watches and cold hard cash.

Yoongi wondered what Jimin might just look like in that sunlight, lying in bed with the covers tangled around his thighs, the full curve of his behind on display and his face pressed into the pillow. Or maybe just lounged on his back with the beginnings of a lazy morning erection and half-lidded dreamy eyes, his fingers stroking along his stomach teasingly as he just bathed in the sunlight.

Unsurprisingly, Yoongi found himself squirming under the covers at such thoughts, thankful that Jimin wasn’t lying on top of him fully and able to feel the fact that he was starting to get mildly aroused. The slight movement caused a lock of hair to fall across his brow annoyingly.

“…Nothing, it was nothing,” Jimin said to break his momentary silence, his gaze shifting to stare down at his bare chest instead and his hand brushing the stray lock of hair back for him.

“It ain’t nothing if you thought of something, yeah?” Yoongi retorted, reaching up to touch Jimin’s wrist, his fingers skittering over the slight bump of bone but not clasping hold tight. “What? You can tell me, y’know you can. I mightn’t be the greatest at talking, at sharing my own thoughts, but I’m a great listener. What’s on your mind, mmm?”

Jimin stared at his chest rather than reply to his gentle prodding, his palm settling on the side of his head. He didn’t play with his hair, rather just kept his hand in place. Was he thinking his words over, because he was going to tell him but he just didn’t know how to say it, or how to talk to him? Yet, Jimin had made it obvious that the one thing he was a master at was talking, and so it made no sense at all that he was struggling to find his words now.

“Be a good boy and tell me, yeah?” Yoongi suggested in his own whisper.

This made Jimin’s lips twitch at the corners, before he bit down on his lower lip. It was slightly swollen, and Yoongi knew that it was as a result of his own teeth, from where he had rather recklessly sank his teeth down and had almost caused him to bleed. It had been in the heat of the moment, and he knew that he was going to have to be more careful from now on. Jimin clearly didn’t have Kaposi’s Sarcoma, on account of his flawless complexion, so he didn’t need to worry about his saliva being cancerous. But his blood…his blood could still be infected, and the last thing that Yoongi needed was to contract AIDS or some other disease from a rough kiss.
“Hmm, I guess I was just thinking about how beautiful that you look right now,” Jimin confided in that same soft voice, lifting his gaze to meet his eyes at last.

Yoongi was taken aback by this sudden statement, considering the fact that he had been thinking such similar thoughts about him just a moment ago. There was one major difference between their thoughts, however - Jimin actually was beautiful, and he was not. He didn’t have a beach-ready complexion and toned body, didn’t have a pretty boy face and a tongue capable of charming and pleasing in equal amounts.

“How would you know, huh?” Jimin spoke over him, his lips curved up at one side in a lopsided smile. “You can never really see yourself like other people can, baby boy.”

“I can see enough,” Yoongi stated, having to avoid his gaze because he felt a flare of embarrassment and something almost bashful coming over him.

“I never really thought about it, when we first met,” Jimin admitted, moving his hand so that he could cup his cheek. “I thought that you had a nice mouth, but now…I dunno, your eyes? You’ve got really pretty eyes and-”

“Jimin,” Yoongi dragged out, feeling his cheeks heating up even when he hated it because it felt so childish, so pathetically naïve.

“What? I’m telling the truth,” Jimin argued, his thumb gently stroking along his cheekbone. “You do have pretty eyes, but if I’m making you uncomfortable, I’ll stop.”

“As he tried to think of a way to describe it all, Yoongi felt the younger man’s thumb still stroking his cheek. Jimin could probably feel the heat of his flushed cheeks against his skin, because whenever he got embarrassed or pretty tipsy, he knew that they had a habit of going a rather bright pink in colour.
“I ain’t used to compliments, I guess?” he finished in a mumble, still staring across the hotel room.

It wasn’t the exact truth, but it was good enough for him. Yoongi really wasn’t used to compliments that meant much, as more often than not they were hollow lies that other men told him to try and make him favour them: sycophantic ass-licking at its finest. Sometimes, Seokjin might compliment his appearance in the form of greetings, usually talking about how he looked like he had slept well or he appeared to be in good health. Hoseok had praises a plenty, as did his family, and his compliments were really the only ones that Yoongi had believed true.

Until now, that was.

Until Jimin had told him that he had pretty eyes with a lazy smile on his lips, just because he had wanted to.

“It’s the truth, baby boy, I promise it is,” Jimin said in a soft voice. “I hesitated in telling you at first, because I thought that you might hate hearing it. You liked being complimented last night, when I told you that I liked your suit, but that’s not the same as being told you have ‘pretty eyes’ or a ‘killer smile’, you know?”

Yoongi made a soft noise at this to let him know that he understood. Truthfully speaking, when Jimin had complimented his suit last night, he had felt waves of embarrassment too. But feeling nervous about a compliment directed at an item of clothing was completely different to feeling nervous about one directed at his physical appearance. The fact that Jimin had hesitated in telling him the compliment was strangely sweet, because the younger man had pondered for a moment to consider his feelings before speaking.

“Besides, if I’m gonna mention your cutest part, it’s most definitely your ass. I mean-”

“Huh?” Yoongi hummed, so caught by surprise that he lifted his head up off the pillow to look at him.

“It’s really something, baby boy,” Jimin continued over him with a wicked smile. “It’s so small, but it’s soft, instead of firm. I’ll bet that if I spanked it, it’d do that thing, you know, that little jiggle-”

Yoongi reached up to place a hand on his shoulder, shoving him off his chest hard.
When he hit the mattress, Jimin let out a frothy burst of giggles and he clapped a hand over his mouth as his head softly bounced off the plush pillow. He didn’t want him to hide his laughter, to block the sight of his wide smile, and so Yoongi grabbed his wrist and he pulled it away from his face. Jimin was laughing giddily, his head rolled back against the pillow and his eyes crinkled at the corners, his chest rising and falling rapidly with every giggled inhale and exhale of breath.

“My ass? Seriously?” Yoongi asked, rolling onto his side and still holding onto his wrist and softly guffawing. “What ass?”

This just made Jimin laugh harder, his body thrumming against his and the sound echoing in the quiet hotel room. He wondered if any of the other guests could hear the sound and he hoped that the answer was: yes. Yoongi imagined that being dragged out of sleep by that sound would make anyone wake up with a smile on their face, because listening to it right now brought one to his lips.

Goddamn, his chest still felt tight and he was on edge for fear of saying or doing something wrong and ruining everything. But until that point, Yoongi was going to smile, even if he was scared.

Yoongi was in the act of thinking of something else to say to him, a witty joke about his ass being flatter than roadkill, when Jimin rolled onto his side to get closer to him. The covers were loosely tangled around their waists and he discreetly pushed them down as he shifted to bury his face in the space between his neck and the pillow, his arm slipping back over his waist almost as if it belonged there.

“Hmm, it’s so soft,” Jimin sighed against his throat, his hand tracing down his spine to cup his buttock so that he could sink his fingers into his skin. “You’re so soft, baby boy, it’s unbelievable.”

“Oh, yeah?” Yoongi asked, moving his face so that he could press his brow against his to feel Jimin’s breath on his lower face instead of his throat. “How soft?”

“What? You want me to recite poetry?” Jimin joked, eyeing his lips almost hungrily, his own lips slack. “I didn’t graduate high school, Yoongi, I dunno a single line of that shit.”

Yoongi would have laughed at this, had Jimin not finally moved to kiss him and cut off the sound. It was the kind of witticism that he was starting to get used to hearing coming from his lips, that sly little dig at himself to make a joke that showed that self-deprecation was something that he did often. It seemed that they had that in common, but maybe in time, they would both be able to figure out how to stop putting themselves down.
Jimin’s fingers kneaded at his buttock hard, his lips opening up to deepen their kiss. Yoongi could taste faded hints of beer on his tongue, along with something that might just have been the marijuana, a sudden reminder of the fact that they had no toothbrushes to rid them of the unpleasant tastes. But he still savoured the kiss regardless, slipping his arm around his neck to tug him that little bit closer to him so that their bodies were pressed together.

Being enveloped in that heat of his, within his strong and warm limbs, Yoongi could feel his heart skipping in his chest. Closing his eyes, he reduced his world down to nothing more than what he could feel: skin on skin, the slickness of his tongue brushing against his, and the plunging heat in his belly; and what he could hear: the soft rustles of the covers and sheets from their movements, the wet sound of their kisses, and the sharp intakes of breath and weak moans that escaped between each one.

There seemed to be nothing more than that. Nothing existed outside of the boundaries of Jimin’s hold, at least for the moment. When the moment had passed, reality would sadly snap back into place, bringing fears and insecurities, anger and hate, back with it.

Yoongi felt his fingers trailing up until they were snaking into Jimin’s hair, until he was able to tangle them within that soft nest of tousles. As he did so, Jimin’s fingers stopped kneading and he let go of his buttock. But the sensation was only temporary, for he quickly swatted it down to lightly spank him.

“Huh,” Yoongi hiccuped, clenching instinctively from the sudden impact and snagging his hair tightly in his grip.

“It did jiggle,” Jimin remarked, his smirk evident in his voice. “Consider that payback for that time that you slapped me.”

“You had that coming,” he argued, his skin tingling from the spank. “What’d I do, huh?”

“Hmm, I couldn’t help myself,” Jimin mumbled, moving to press more kisses against his mouth. “You can…spank me back if you want? I…kinda dig that shit when I’m drunk, baby boy.”

“No, don’t wanna…wanna spank you but, mmm, about that reach-around…” Yoongi sighed against his mouth, slowly opening his eyes to look at him. “Checkout’s at 10,” he explained between kisses. “It’s not even 7:30 yet. Plenty enough time for…for that and a nap, yeah?”
“You sure? Are you comfortable with it? You’re not feeling any bad feelings after…last night; are you?”

Yoongi stopped pouting his lips out for kisses at this, causing the other man to realise and pull his face away.

Jimin studied him intently, his gaze shifting from his eyes to his lips rapidly.

At the end of the day, the guilty feelings and disgust could come at any moment and for any reason at all, like they always did. That was one thing about it that Yoongi knew intimately. It didn’t matter whether he was just simply thinking about calling for a massage boy or watching shitty adult videos, whether he was masturbating or even being touched by another man - they could hit him and leave him feeling cold and nauseous. The feelings weren’t triggered specifically, but rather just washed over him without warning instead. Therefore, it didn’t matter how many times that Jimin touched him, or he touched him in return.

Why not enjoy the temporary moment of bliss; the proverbial calm before the storm?

When Yoongi left Jimin today, it might be another week or so until he found himself plucking up the courage to meet him again. Maybe even longer, if the bad thoughts hit him hard. He wanted this right now, just like how he had wanted it last night. His trembling fingers and uneven breath were just as much the result of nervous excitement as they were fear, and a little part of him had always known this fact, but had decided to ignore it.

“Roll over,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice.

At this, Jimin paused in the act of shifting on the mattress to stare at him in surprise. Clearly, he hadn’t been expecting this, had been thinking that he had been asking him to touch him, when he had in fact been offering to pleasure him.

Yoongi was a little worried that he might get so tangled up in what he was feeling, about him being comfortable and cared for, that he might neglect to give Jimin the attention that he craved and deserved. The younger man had constantly asked him things last night, but he had been too nervous to really do the same in return, save for fumbling touches and stammered words. Jimin had taken care of him so good (and not only in a sexual manner) that he thought that he more than deserved to enjoy this.
Jimin rolled onto his back first, just so that he could shove the covers down that much further and shamelessly reveal his stiff cock to him. Yoongi finally got to see what he looked like lounged on the sheets in the early morning sunlight, and it was a sight that he was trying his very hardest to burn into his mind. Then Jimin rolled onto his side to face away from him, slipping one arm under his pillow to get comfortable. Just like in the bathhouse, he got to observe his toned back as he moved to retrieve the bottle of lube off the side table.

Yoongi pumped the runny liquid onto his hand, leaving it for a moment to warm up, and then he coated his own erection first. He tried to not get too much pleasure from the sensation, even when it felt pretty damn fantastic. Then he got more onto his hand before moving into position behind Jimin, reaching over his hip so that he could take him in hand.

Jimin made a soft sound at the contact, his thighs rubbing together and his feet twitching under the covers. Yoongi lay down behind him and when he nudged forward, he glided smoothly between the fold in Jimin’s buttocks with ease. It was just like what he had done with his thighs in the shower last night, and the sensation made him groan as he settled in place, his groin pressed right up against his buttocks to give him the best angle for rutting.

Yoongi could feel his puckered ring of muscles rubbing against the length of his cock, so hot and almost begging to be stretched taut around his girth. He buried his face in Jimin’s hair as he rocked his hips in a soft upward motion, rubbing against his body whilst he also started pumping his wrist in a steady rhythm around his erection. As he did so, Jimin reached down to hold onto his wrist, his grip tight but not controlling.

“Yoongi?”

“Mmm?” he managed to hum in reply, still experimentally rubbing himself between his buttocks.

“Did you sleep, um, sleep good last night?” Jimin asked in a soft voice, turning his head ever so slightly because he felt the movement against his face.

Yoongi almost paused at this question, caught by surprise that he had asked him something like that. His hips even slowed down their rhythm until the sudden realisation hit him.

This was what ‘normal’ people did, ‘normal’ people in ‘normal’ relationships. They asked each other mundane little questions like “did you sleep good last night?” and “what’s on your mind, baby?”. It was just like that trust that Jimin had spoken about wanting; that sharing of thoughts and emotions.
rather than prolonged silences, fleeting glances, and desperate touches inside cars, shadowy alcoves, and under the darkness of bed covers.

It was such a simple question, and yet Yoongi found that his throat struggled to work for a moment so that he could give him a reply.

“Yeah; did you?” he asked in return, his eyes squeezed shut even when the other man wasn’t able to look at his face.

“I couldn’t - oh, Yoongi,” Jimin gasped, his hand moving to wrap around his and follow his jerking wrist. “I couldn’t fall asleep for awhile. I was too busy looking at your face ah-and-”

“Why?”

“thought you might wake up and leave or something,” he replied in an uneven voice, maybe from the building pleasure in his loins, maybe from something else. “But you didn’t.”

Jimin reached behind himself to grab hold of him again, his fingers sinking into his upper thigh until he shifted them up to his behind. Then he applied pressure to force him to rut against his buttocks harder, encouraging him on with his body. He tried to grind back against him too, even when the angle and position was difficult.

“Shit, Jimin,” he grunted against his hair, his fist thumping down around his base hard enough to elicit a whimper.

“Yoongi, kiss me,” Jimin half-demanded, half-begged. “Kiss my neck, please.”

Yoongi had to shift to do so, propping his weight onto his elbow so that he could bury his face against the gentle slope of his neck instead. The faintest hint of his cologne was still present, and every kiss and teasing lick revealed more of its scents to his tongue. Peppery spiciness, a soft floral note hidden underneath it that just tasted like how Jimin should taste: enticing but also delicate; feisty and yet sweet.

“Yes, like that, baby boy, like that- huh,” Jimin moaned softly, his throat shifting against his lips as he did so and making a shiver run down his spine. “Use those pretty lips of yours.”
“Talk some more,” Yoongi said between kisses, his hips rocking more fluidly now. “Just talk, tell me a story, tell me ‘bout your dreams- fuh-fuck.”

“My-dreams?” Jimin asked, as he slipped his arm free from under his pillow.

“What’d you dream ‘bout? What does my…my Adonis dream of, huh?”

“I-I dream of the bay. In most of my dreams, it’s just water. Waves, over and over that lull me to sleep.”

Yoongi planted kisses along the slope of his neck down to the jut of his clavicle and the rounded ball of his slight shoulder. Jimin had several little freckles on his neck, chest and shoulder, and he found himself tracing the spaces between them with the tip of his tongue as he listened to Jimin’s soft voice; hearing every hitch and whine in his words.

“Whenever my dad used to-to really whale on me and I had to get away, I’d hit the streets. In Bayview Park, you could get this perfect view of the 101 and- Yoongi, that feels so good,” he moaned. “Um, down by the 101, there’s this little stretch of…of land by the bay, and I’d go there to just get away from his fists and-and his shouts.”

“I can see the bay from my bedroom,” Yoongi breathed out against his neck. “I sit by my bay window sometimes and drink coffee just…just looking at it.”

“It’s enchanting, isn’t it?” Jimin sighed. “Just watching the waves until they get into…to your mind and you can’t move. You hear the waves inside your brain like a-a voice whispering in your ear; you feel them in your body until you sway.”

Yoongi was making him sway against him from his rutting, Jimin’s body gently rocking in his hold as steady as one of those waves that he seemed to love.

“When you grow up surrounded by-by water, you can’t stay away from it,” he continued in an uneven voice, reaching down to guide his pumping fist at last. “Nothing else feels right, you know? It’s like-“
Jimin stopped talking for a moment, his buttocks clenching around his cock suddenly. The sensation was highly pleasing, and Yoongi opened his eyes to see precum beading on his swollen head. Jimin took a sharp intake of breath, no doubt trying to force down that heady rush of pleasure to stave off his climax. Yoongi pumped his fist up to head to knead at it, gathering his precum for more lubrication and wanting to tease him with those toe-curling throbs that such rough stimulation always caused.

“Huh, baby boy,” he almost whimpered, turning his face away to bury it in the pillow.

“It’s like what?”

“Hmm?”

“It’s like what? You were talking about the bay,” he explained breathlessly.

Yoongi felt his own toes curling up as the head of his cock slipped into the fold of his buttocks again. He was squeezed between them, the pressure just right and demanding that he rut at this angle to keep his cock trapped in place for maximum friction. Forget about his base getting to enjoy that heat and wet lubrication, he needed Jimin to clench around his head tight enough to cause explosions of pleasure to shoot up into his belly.

“Suh-Seoul, Kowloon City, they don’t mean shit to me wuh-when I see that bay outta the airplane window again, I-I-”

“Oh, Jimin,” Yoongi moaned, his hips pumping faster now, more desperate.

“I’m coming home, the bay’s my home, baby boy, it means ‘home’ to me more than four walls and a roof, those blue waves are in my fuh-fucking soul,” Jimin almost panted, his voice catching in his throat. “It’s inside of me. I need to-to feel you inside of me like that, Yoongi. I need-”

Yoongi could feel the friction between their bodies, that maddening heat radiating from his loins and making him gasp for breath as he tried to find release of some kind. He was so close to that raw pinnacle of pleasure and yet he couldn’t seem to reach it, no matter the angle, no matter his rhythm or the noises of pleasure that Jimin made that should have driven him right over the edge.

Yoongi didn’t even know if he wanted to climax when it felt this good, when he was so close to real
sex and his mind had lost all control in favour of his body taking over. There was no thinking, no feeling, nothing more than every ragged intake of breath and sloppy kiss against Jimin’s throat; nothing more than his frantically bucking hips and pumping fist.

Jimin’s breath escaped him in a throaty moan, his fingers scratching at the skin of his buttock as he climaxed. His cock twitched hard in his grip as he massaged him through his orgasm, semen dribbling down onto the crumpled bed sheets and onto his fist in hard spurts. His body was still rocking from his rutting, making it hard to tell how much of his shaking was orgasmic and how much was the result of his bucking hips.

“Baby boy,” Jimin moaned brokenly against the pillow, his voice muffled.

Yoongi squeezed his eyes shut tight as his hips stuttered forward into him, his climax catching up to his racing heart at last. He couldn’t seem to breathe for a moment, his chest hitching but not drawing air, but when the first electric jolt of pleasure coursed up into his stomach, he was finally able to expel his breath in a deep groan. It danced through his limbs until they were thrumming, his fingers twitching to let go of Jimin’s cock; until the current hit his brain and his orgasm flooded his system.

“Huh-huh, oh-”

Yoongi gasped hard, struggling to swallow the weak noises that escaped his slack lips. He ejaculated messily onto the tops and backs of Jimin’s thighs, his hips still twitching because he couldn’t seem to still them, not when that pulse of pleasure was throbbing through his body and his skull was filled with flashing colours and the roar of his surging blood. For several seconds, he was almost paralysed, but then his muscles turned limp and he sank down onto Jimin with a weak whimper.

Jimin’s breathing was audible underneath his own, and he could just about hear their breaths intermingling underneath his racing pulse. Yoongi’s face was pressed against the younger man’s throat, meaning that he felt every single hard thump of his heart through his damp skin. Despite everything, Jimin’s body was mostly free from sweat, but he could feel a thin film clinging to his chest and stomach, beading on his brow from his exertion. He was so heavy from pleasure that he didn’t want to move, and so he didn’t. No, Yoongi just stayed slumped over his body, his chest on his upper arm and his face buried in the crook between his shoulder and throat.

“Shit, that…that hit the spot,” Jimin sighed breathlessly, before laughing huskily. “Oh, I’ve been wanting to have morning sex for such a long time, baby boy, because I heard that it’s the best kind.”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment, before he recalled the fact that Jimin had vaguely spoken of his lack of previous boyfriends that night when they had visited the bar. He had told him that he had
never had a romantic partner before, and he had been so happy to call him his ‘secret boyfriend’ last night too. Of course, waking up next to a stranger of a morning didn’t necessarily make them a lover, and so he couldn’t help but wonder what this meant exactly.

Had Jimin always woken up first and left his past hook-ups in the lurch rather than stay for the morning, to get to know them a little more over coffee and maybe even breakfast? Had he always woken up to find an empty space in his own bed the morning after, because the guy that he had fallen asleep with had wanted to avoid him? Or had he in fact never stayed the night with a single lover; had just simply fucked them and fled (or had had them run off on him instead)?

“Oh, yeah?”

“Hmm, I guess it’s because it’s more…tender,” Jimin tried to explain, clearly not at all certain. “Lazy fucking, more…kissing and gentle rocking than…than hair-pulling and pounding.”

“You like it tender, huh?” Yoongi asked, lifting his head up at last and balancing his weight back onto his elbow.

“I like a bit of everything, baby boy,” Jimin purred, twisting to look up at him with a blissed-out smile on his lips. “But I’ve, um, I’ve not had it tender before.”

“Jimin?”

Yoongi moved to lower his head again for a moment, his chin brushing against his hair just as Jimin made a noise under his breath to let him know that he was listening to him.

“Our first time,” he whispered down his ear. “I’ll make it so tender, yeah?”

“Yoongi,” Jimin sighed, his body trembling against his and his feet brushing against the covers with a soft rustle.

“I’ll be gentle, I’ll take my time, just for you.”

“It’ll be so nice,” he agreed, his lips curling up into a smile. “You’ll be so comfortable with me, I’ll
be ready for you. For the first time, I’ll have actually waited for someone to…”

Jimin’s lips moved at this and yet no words came out, just those slack twitches until they fell still again.

Yoongi watched his mouth before lifting his gaze to his eyes, imploring him to speak with a soft raise of his eyebrows. But he didn’t do so, for he seemed to not know what to say.

“Jimin?”

“I’ll have actually waited for someone to fuck me,” he finished in a quiet voice. “Instead of fucking me before even asking my name.”

Yoongi saw the way that his lips turned down at the corners at this, like they always did when Jimin said something that he didn’t like; the bitterness of his words almost displeasing on his tongue as he said them.

“And I’ll be so comfortable with myself that I won’t cry until I pass-out from exhaustion,” Yoongi confided. “Like I did the last time that I, uh, I had sex.”

Unsurprisingly, Jimin’s eyes widened in surprise at this, just like he had known that they would.

Truthfully speaking, that wasn’t the first or even last time that he had done that. For even on the nights when he had just gotten drunk to try and force away that dull ache inside of him, the tears had still hit him. The tears and the hair-tugging, the shattered glasses and the dribbling lines of bourbon running down the wall, and the stinging knuckles scraped up from hitting whatever could withstand a flurry of weak punches and break before one of his fingers did. There had been the frustrated masturbation too, as he had tried to blink stinging tears out of his eyes long enough to focus on his television screen, always cumming with a choked sob rather than a grunt of pleasure.

But right now, Jimin didn’t need to know about those things. He had never witnessed one of his complete freakouts before. Not even Hoseok had seen more than the tears and choked words on a couple of occasions, for he had since learnt to create a façade to keep it from happening.

Yoongi joked about ordering massage boys with his friend to distract away from the fact that he couldn’t look them in the eyes as he opened his belt and he said something in Korean or broken
Chinese about how pretty that they were. He rationalised his avoidance of penetrative sex as a legitimate worry for his health because thinking about a cock stretching him wide open until his thighs were trembling was sometimes enough to cause a cold sweat to break out on his skin. He told himself that he didn’t need a lover because he didn’t want one, when he often wondered why the one man that he wanted to love him had emotionally disowned him from childhood.

Sure, Hoseok saw through his fakeness as clear as crystal, but Yoongi just kept on joking because he couldn’t quite seem to stop.

Yoongi was aware of how silent the hotel room had fallen, and so he decided to move to get off the bed. His legs were weak and wobbling as he got to his feet, a faded heat still lingering in his loins that was highly pleasing. He retrieved the towel from the floor a few feet away, the one that was rather filthy by now, and he carried it back over to the bed. He tried to ignore the patches of semen that had since dried hard on the cotton, as he lay back down on the mattress and he cleaned up the mess that he had made between Jimin’s buttocks. Then he cleaned his hand and the slight smears of semen off his own thighs.

Jimin rolled over and he watched him cleaning himself curiously, his gaze focused on the blemishes on his inner thighs.

As soon as he was done, Yoongi tossed the towel aside again and he settled down on the mattress, reaching over to take hold of his hand.

“You left these behind, last night,” he said in a quiet voice, slowly moving Jimin’s hand along his thigh so that he could touch the blemishes on his skin. “Every single kiss, kinda like a bruise. I, uh, I never used to let anyone kiss me like that, not even my friend, ’cos I knew seeing the marks the next morning would disgust me. Y’know?”

“How do you feel right now, looking at them?” Jimin asked in a soft voice, as he ran his thumb over a particularly deep pink bite.


“So soft,” Jimin sighed out, digging his fingers into his thigh. “See; just like I told you. You’re so soft, baby boy. I can’t help but bruise you when your skin’s that soft. If you don’t like them, I’ll go gentle next time. OK?”
“They felt nice, when you were kissing ‘em.”

“They felt nice to kiss,” Jimin joked, flashing him a smile. “But it feels nice kissing all of you, so, it makes sense.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“You’ve got a few right here too,” Jimin said, pulling his wrist free so that he could touch his throat.

Yoongi couldn’t help but close his eyes and shiver at his touch, so soft and yet electric on his skin. For a few seconds, he couldn’t figure out why he had such markings on his neck, but then he recalled how Jimin had sucked kisses against his throat when they had been floating in the hot and hazy cloud of marijuana smoke; his mouth on his skin, as hot as a brand, and his hands gripping onto his waist as he had stared up at the ceiling through his eyelashes.

“Jinnie?”

“Hmm, baby boy?”

“I dunno if I like pot or hate it,” Yoongi mumbled, opening his eyes to look at him again.

This made Jimin snort laughter as he moved on the bed. Just like last night, he wrapped his arm around his ribs to hold him against his body, and so Yoongi lifted his head to let him snake his arm under his neck too. When he settled back down against him, Jimin entangled their legs just to get that little bit closer to him. A quick glance at his watch revealed it to be 7:53am, and he eyed the face for a moment before dropping his hand in the slight space between their chests.

“You wanna nap?” Yoongi asked, the younger man settling down with a series of sighs.

“Not sure,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, his breath warm against his scalp. “I think I just wanna stay like this for awhile. You don’t mind, right? You’re comfortable?”

“Mmm, stay like this,” Yoongi suggested, rolling his eyes up to look at him even when he couldn’t meet his gaze. “I’m comfortable with this position, it’s, uh, it ain’t as scary when we’re awake. I
mean, it ain’t even the position, y’know, it’s the whole-

“Falling asleep in my arms thing, I know,” Jimin finished for him in that same quiet voice. “Believe it or not, I used to hate sharing beds too. When I was a kid, I used to share with my mum a lot. I used to love napping against her chest because she always smelled like this sweet perfume. I was obsessed with that scent. But then dad forced her to stop sharing with me, because I was turning into a ‘spoilt baby’ or something.”

Yoongi listened to him talking intently, feeling his breath gently disturbing his hair. It was just like when they had been in the bar, the car, the restaurant, even on the phone; he just simply liked listening to him talking. It didn’t matter whether it be about Kowloon Walled City, his past, or even his dreams about the ocean, Jimin just had a way of talking that he enjoyed hearing. Maybe it was because he had such a fluid way of talking, his words flowing so smoothly, and the fact that he had a wonderful habit of adding little jokes here and there that just added depth to his stories.

“So, I started getting used to having my own bed. I got tough - and by tough, I mean that I stopped pissing said bed after a couple of weeks. I mean, I get why he wanted me using my own bed. It’s kinda hard having fun with a six-year old kid lying in the middle of the bed. You know?”

Yoongi made a soft noise to let him know that he was listening, closing his eyes so that he could focus on his words that little bit more.

“When I ended up working with Namo though, the first few times that I crashed with him, I slept on his sofa. I hated lying in bed with him. It smelled like him, there were springs here and there that stuck into me so that I couldn’t sleep, it was too cramped and hot. But then…then I started getting used to it again. Now, it feels weird falling asleep in an empty bed. I even share with my partner in Seoul, just because I like it so much.”

“Sounds nice…”

“I take it you never used to share beds, Yoongi?”

“Nah, not with my parents, didn’t have any siblings to share with. Sometimes, I’d share with my friend, but that was a long time ago, back when we were babies. I used to suck my thumb a lot, though.”

“Hmm?”
“When I was a kid, I sucked on my thumb,” he reiterated, shifting so that he could press his face against Jimin’s chest. “I did it a lot: when I was reading in class, when I was drawing or writing or whatever, when I was in the bath, even when I was napping - I had my fucking thumb in my mouth. I know my father hated it, he used to look at me like I was a freak on the rare occasion that we had dinner together. Then, it progressed into biting ‘em when the other kids kept making fun of me. My friend, his mother, she had to get me outta the habit by putting this nasty shit on my fingers. I stopped sucking and biting on ‘em then, but sometimes I, uh, I find myself doing it again.”

“I’ve seen you do it once or twice,” Jimin remarked in a quiet voice. “You nibble on your thumb sometimes. Why’d you do it, huh?”

“I dunno, it used to made me feel better,” Yoongi mumbled, his voice heavy and husky. “When I got anxious - I get that a lot, but when I was anxious as a kid, it was the only way to get that feeling to go away. You got addicted to sharing beds with your mother, I got addicted to sucking my thumb. We were weird fucking kids, huh?”

Jimin made a noise at this, a breathy snort that was almost a laugh but not quite. It seemed that he was tired, and so Yoongi decided to stop talking for a moment to see if he would say something in return.

It was funny how something like that had just simply escaped his mind, that he hadn’t really thought about in such a long time. Nowadays, when he was anxious, Yoongi just usually tugged on his hair or he knocked back liquor rather than suck on his thumb. But he could still recall how he had used to do it, how nice it had made him feel just closing his eyes and sucking and nibbling on his thumb as he had gently swung back and forth on the swing in the family garden. Sure, some of the boys in his public school had made fun of him back then, but it had been his own way of coping with stress as a child. It wasn’t like he could have went to his parents for support and affection after all, and so he had comforted himself.

Yoongi listened to Jimin’s breathing, slow and soft because he seemed to be drifting in a light nap at last. The temptation to do so himself was so great, and considering the fact that the receptionist had promised a wake-up call, he thought that he could give in to it.

Yet, even after he closed his eyes and he tried to drift off into a nap too, Yoongi couldn’t seem to do so. It was probably because of everything: the passionate touches and kisses, their mumbled pillow talk and reminiscing on the past. He couldn’t even move because Jimin was lying with his face pressed against his hair, and so all that he could do was watch the sky through the room window changing colour from that lilac-tinged wash to a more vivid blue, and observe the sunlight growing in intensity until the hotel room was flooded with wonderfully warm rays.
It was a series of hard knocks on the door that brought him out of his musing; a rapid *rat-a-tat* of knuckles against the wood that was undoubtedly the receptionist trying to wake them up.

“Uh, yeah,” Yoongi called out, not at all certain what he was supposed to do. “I’m awake, thanks.”

There was the faintest sound of muffled footsteps coming from the hallway outside and then silence again. So Yoongi shifted to try and sit upright, disturbing Jimin terribly in the process.

“Mmm, c’mon, that means we gotta go. It’s almost 10am, we need to get dressed.”

“*Nnn*, just fell asleep,” Jimin whined, rolling onto his back and folding his forearm over his eyes to block the sunlight.

Yoongi ignored his whining, tossing the covers aside and climbing off the mattress to grab his blouse again. He slipped it on and he hastily buttoned it up, hearing no sound behind him to signal that Jimin was going to move and copy his actions. As he pulled his legs through his trousers, fastening them up and then buckling his belt firmly around his hips, he muttered something about how lazy that the other man was.

“Baby boy, we were partying all night long. I’m not lazy, I need my beauty sleep.”

“Pft, sure you do,” Yoongi agreed, securing his shirt cuffs and then fixing the collar. “C’mon, Jimin, we really *do* gotta leave.”

“*Mmm*, I know, but I’m sleepy.”

“I’ll buy you breakfast.”

Jimin thought this over for several seconds, and then he sat upright at last.

Yoongi tossed his silk shirt at him so that he could shrug it on, retrieving his trousers to place them down on the bed for him. Jimin fumbled with the buttons a few times before sighing wearily, dropping his hands back into his lap rather than finish fastening the last couple up. Yoongi had to help him button up his shirt because he was a little too sleepy to do it himself. The buttons that he
had fastened were all in the wrong holes, and so he had to undo them and slip them in again. He had his head hanging forward, his hair over his eyes in a thick curtain and shielding them from view.

As he finished buttoning his shirt up for him, Yoongi shifted to get a look at his face, eyeing his softly pouted lips before moving to press a quick kiss against them.

Jimin made a sleepy sound in response that was almost a purr.

Several minutes later, fully dressed and not a single possession left in the room, Yoongi locked the door and he escorted Jimin down to the reception-area. As he handed the keys back, the man said the usual cordial parting: hoping that they had a great time and an even better night’s sleep, and that they would come back soon, and he knew that he might just do so again. After all, they really had had a great time, and he knew that Jimin would agree. They left the hotel and they went across the block to get to the parking lot and jump into his car.

Jimin sank into the passenger-seat with a happy sound, his head against the headrest and his thighs spread wide to take advantage of the leg-room.

Yoongi just smiled at this sight as he started the car and he drifted out of the lot to roll onto the main road again.

The destination of choice should have been Haight-Ashbury, to bring Jimin back to his makeshift home for the day so that he could resume sleeping all afternoon long if he wanted to. Yoongi could probably check up on Namjoon too, ask him the usual questions about business to seem casual and cool. Yet, he had promised him breakfast to get him out of bed, and there was only one place that he could think of visiting to get it. So he steered the car down the packed mid-morning roads in the direction of Lower Pacific Heights.

What better place to share breakfast than at Mickey’s Joint? It was where Jimin had suddenly appeared yesterday morning, standing on the sidewalk outside of the window almost as if he had stepped right out of one of his daydreams: in his white tee-shirt and blue jeans, with a skateboard in the crook of his elbow. It seemed almost like fate that he should take him back there, let him taste some of their cheap but delicious dishes, and look at the bay from out of the window.

Eating breakfast at that diner was as much a part of Yoongi’s mundane daily routine as sorting out business, and if he maybe got to start making a habit of sharing this pastime with Jimin, then it might just become something more special than that.
Over the duration of the ride, Jimin briefly napped, tucked in place by his seatbelt with his head lightly bobbing from the slight movement whenever he turned a corner or stopped at a set of lights. Yoongi left him to nap during the brief journey, seeing no point in waking him up. They had already shared quite the amount of conversation in the hotel room, and so he should just leave him to rest until they got to the joint. After all, it was only roughly a ten minute drive to get there, even with the current level of traffic.

Yoongi parked the car on the curb outside of the building, killing the engine and looking over at Jimin. He had his suit jacket folded up on his lap in the current heat, his arms also folded over his chest because it was the most comfortable position that he could achieve with the seatbelt in place over his ribs. He might just be drooling, he wouldn’t be surprised if he was, but at least he didn’t snore.

“Jimin? We’re here. C’mon, you want breakfast, right?” Yoongi said, as he reached over to give his arm a squeeze and soft tug. “You gotta get outta the car if you want breakfast.”

“M’kay,” he mumbled, as he rolled his head back against the padded headrest for a few seconds. “Just gimme a sec.”

Jimin slowly opened his eyes to lessen the blinding effect of the bright sunlight, his eyelids fluttering open until he was able to roll his eyes to hold his gaze. He looked much more refreshed than he had at the hotel, much more alert too, and that was a great sign. It meant that he wouldn’t fall asleep on the table, at least.

“Where are we, baby boy?” he asked in a mumble, balling his fists up to rub at his droopy eyelids.

“Mickey’s Joint, the place you crashed yesterday morning; ‘member?”

Jimin grinned at this as he stretched out on the seat, a series of husky noises escaping him. Then he removed his seatbelt to stretch that little bit better, massaging at the back of his neck and rolling his stiff shoulders.

Yoongi climbed out of the car first, wondering if the other man was waiting on him to open his door like he had at the restaurant. He was just about to go around the front of the vehicle to do so when Jimin popped the door open and he got to his feet. His suit jacket was folded over his arm and his silken shirt wasn’t tucked into his trousers very neatly, but he still looked pretty good regardless of this fact.
So Yoongi shoved the keys into his pocket, and then he moved to shove the door open, the bell ringing overhead. He held it for Jimin, who made sure to brush their fingers together as he accepted it and he stepped inside the diner after him. He felt his fingers twitching at this brief contact, his eyes scanning the interior to find several patrons inside in the midst of eating late breakfasts; clearly enjoying a Saturday off or a late shift that they were in no rush to fill. His favourite table of choice happened to be free, and so he moved to go over to it without much thought at all.

“Do you always sit at the same table?” Jimin asked, lingering by the table as he sat down with his back against the wall.

“Uhuh, I can see the entire interior sitting here,” he replied, as he glanced up at him. “Anyone comes in, I’ll see ‘em. Anyone out on the streets, I got the perfect view of ‘em.”

“Good for business, I guess,” Jimin remarked, sitting down on the bench to face him.

The lingering particles of salt that were scattered across the surface of the table told Yoongi that someone had used this booth before them, someone that had made a bit of a mess. Yoongi wiped the salt free without much thought at all, hastily wiping at his palm as Jimin twisted to eye the counter curiously.

Annika was in the midst of serving food to other patrons, hastily placing down a dozen plates and mugs with that wide and friendly smile of hers. But Yoongi knew that she would approach their table the very second that she was available.

“I can see the bay too,” Yoongi added, as he finished knocking salt off his hand. “It’s nice to look at it whilst eating.”

Jimin turned to eye the window at this, his hair shifting to fall free from the sudden movement. As he brushed it back in place off his brow, Yoongi got to see the way that his expression relaxed just looking at the far sight of the bay down at the bottom of the sloping road. Just like always, it was a blue as rich as the sky, the little white yachts floating on the surface reminiscent of the occasional drifting clouds; the surface choppy with waves that would likely fill their ears with soft roars if they were to stand on the very edge of the shoreline.

Jimin looked at the bay like it was some priceless work of art hanging in a gallery, and Yoongi couldn’t help but wonder if his own expression was the exact same when he found himself staring at the younger man for longer than intended.
“Oh, I was starting to think we wouldn’t be seeing you today, honey,” Annika declared, as she moved to their table. The serving tray was snagged under her armpit to allow her to slip her notebook free, likely to jot down Jimin’s order. “It’s later than usual.”

“I can hardly stay away when I’m hooked on the coffee here,” Yoongi replied, dragging his gaze away from Jimin. “Good morning.”

“Good morning to you too, and you brought a friend,” she remarked, as she looked at Jimin; who also turned away from the window politely. “You were here for so short a time yesterday that I didn’t even get a name.”

“Jimin, most people call me ‘Jimmy’ though,” he replied, giving her a warm smile as he rested his chin in his palm.

“Jimmy? I’ve got an uncle called Jimmy, and he used to call me Annie,” she replied whip-crack quick. “Now, what can I get you two today?”

“Um, can I get a menu?” Jimin asked, looking across the diner to try and locate a board of some kind on the wall.

“I’ll get you a menu, darling. Until then, coffee?”

“Coffee,” Yoongi agreed. “I’ll order with him.”

Annika crossed the diner to disappear into the kitchen, emerging a minute later with two large mugs placed on her tray along with a menu.

Jimin accepted the menu with thanks, quickly scanning the options so that he could order whilst Yoongi added a slight hint of milk to his own mug and he stirred at it briskly.

Yoongi ordered his usual breakfast like always, feeling no need to break his routine. He was starving, and the fry-up would fill his stomach better than anything else on the menu. But Jimin just had to be unconventional, ordering bacon, egg, and cheese grilled toast and fries, with pancakes and sweet waffles as a side. The order was enough to make Yoongi smile to himself as Annika quickly jotted down the order and then collected the menu, telling them that their food would be right with them.
“You eat like a kid,” Yoongi remarked, as soon as she was out of earshot.

“Hey, I’m still nineteen years old, so, I’m enjoying it whilst I can,” Jimin argued. “Also pancakes are for everyone, Yoongi. Kids, old people, even you.”

“Me? Pancakes? Seriously?”

Jimin grabbed the milk jug to add a splash to his own mug, shooting him a smile as he did so. He waited for him to grab the sugar dispenser too, just like Seokjin did, to douse a shocking amount of it into his coffee, but he didn’t. He just stirred at it slowly for a few seconds, and then he dropped the wooden stick onto the table without a single care.

“You ever tried them before, baby boy?” Jimin asked, wrapping his hands around the mug and cocking his head at him.

Yoongi looked up from his coffee to see a tousled lock of hair falling free from his ear, hanging so perfectly across his brow and almost begging that he reach over to fix it back in place for him. Had the diner not had so many other people present, he would have done so, but he decided to refrain from getting too close right now.

“Yeah, as a kid,” he replied, as he also wrapped his hands around his mug. “Didn’t really get ‘em, and besides, my mother hates fried food and shit like that, says it makes you fat and ruins your complexion. So, I ain’t tried a lot of food growing up.”

“So, that’s why you’re so skinny,” Jimin remarked with faux surprise, his eyes growing comically round.

Oh, Yoongi was so desperately hoping that he would fix that lock of hair back in place because he could hardly stand looking at it. His fingers were twitching around his mug, longing to just do it for him because it was nothing at all. But the diner was in public, packed with so many sets of eyes just like the restaurant, and so he couldn’t seem to do it. Kisses and touches inside of hotel rooms just between them, where the rest of the world was so far away, were his current sober level of comfort.

“I think coffee’s the reason why,” Yoongi replied, sticking his tongue out to wet his lips.
“Next thing, you’ll be telling me that you’ve never tried Pop Tarts,” Jimin joked, as he gave him an amused smirk that made his eyelids crinkle at the corners.

Yoongi actually went to reach over and fix his hair, but he stopped himself at the last moment, reaching up to roughly rub at his nose instead. Jimin didn’t even notice because he did so incredibly discreetly, and after a few seconds, he finally shook his head to knock the lock of hair back in place.

“Not bad for a first date, huh?” Jimin asked in a quiet voice, looking down at his coffee rather than holding his gaze.

“Uh, no. Ain’t bad at all, it was actually pretty great, Jimin.”

“Was that…”

Jimin paused to let this hang in the air between them, seemingly trying to discern if he should finish asking this question.

Just like earlier, in the hotel room, it seemed that Jimin was hesitating with his words, which was something somewhat unexpected from him. Yoongi had assumed him to always be blunt and unflinching, but it seemed like he was now starting to think his words and actions over more carefully, perhaps just for him.

Yoongi didn’t really know how to feel about this, but he did know that he liked it.

“Was that the first date that you’ve ever been on, Yoongi?” he finally asked in a quiet voice. “I mean, not any cover-up dates with girls in high school or whatever, if you did that-”

“I didn’t.”

“Me neither,” Jimin continued. “I know that I probably shouldn’t have asked, that it’s not important or anything, but it’s been playing over and over in my mind and I couldn’t help it. I just had to ask. If you don’t feel comfortable talking about it, just let me know. OK?”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment, not wanting to reply too quickly. He needed to collect his
own thoughts first because this might just begin a deep conversation between them, and he wasn’t entirely sure if he was comfortable with that. Not in public like this, with eyes and ears on him always. Not when he couldn’t hide his vulnerabilities and emotions away from Jimin, because he had such a habit of seeing right through him.

Jimin remained silent from across the table, looking between him and his coffee as he waited for him to break the silence.

“I ain’t ever been on a date before,” Yoongi admitted in a soft voice. “D’you think I’m the type to go on dates, huh?”

“Maybe not, but I don’t really know that much about you, Yoongi,” Jimin replied in his own quiet voice. “I mean, I know things about you that I don’t think anyone else knows. But, at the same time, I feel like we’re still strangers, despite…everything. Do you feel that too?”

“Yeah, I do,” he agreed. “But I know that I don’t wanna be strangers.”

“You…you don’t?”

“No, not after yesterday, after everything,” Yoongi explained with a soft head shake. “No, I ain’t about to fall asleep in…in your arms like that, and-and act like it don’t mean anything to me.”

“Yoongi…”

Jimin dragged his name out for a moment, but he didn’t add onto this, rather he just turned his head to stare out of the window.

Yoongi couldn’t help but notice that his eyes looked wetter than usual, that he blinked rapidly as he pulled his lower lip in.

“Have you ever been on dates, huh?”

“No, not real dates, not ones I count as meaning anything,” Jimin replied, before sighing heavily and shifting his gaze back to his face. “I don’t count older guys buying me drinks, cinema tickets, that
Yoongi found his coffee much more interesting than holding the younger man’s gaze at this. He tracked the softest plumes of heat coming from the surface, and he ran his gaze across the soft curve of the lips of the mug and the handle, because his mouth had turned terribly dry and he didn’t really know what to say to Jimin.

Hadn’t he expected this kind of reply, all things considered? Jimin had made it so abundantly clear that he hadn’t had the most safest and gentlest introduction to sex and other men over several conversations that they had shared, even when he hadn’t been as blunt with his words as he could have been. It had been between his words that had revealed the most telling things. Like how he had gushed about finally getting to experience ‘morning sex’ and had revealed a little more about his casual hook-ups of the past.

The fact that Jimin had never gotten to experience a real date before shouldn’t have been so shocking to him. But it was another facet to him that made Yoongi yearn for him that little bit more; some sentimental ache inside of him that he had never even known had existed.

Yoongi resonated with him in so many ways, understood what it felt like to be that kid growing up: gripped by lustful urges towards his fellow students that had made him almost snap his pencils in his desperation to not spring an erection in his stupid pleated uniform trousers; who had held the eyes of older men inside of stores or hanging around the sidewalks smoking and had just known that they could have taught him things in some filthy alley across the block.

Jemin was all of his teenage desires and fears personified, the darkness to his light. He was every fleeting thought and urge that had been unfulfilled through fear and weakness, but he didn’t look brave or strong to Yoongi’s eyes.

Not even remotely.

“You know? Sometimes, I look back and I hate it. It disgusts me, the way that I acted as a kid,” Jimin muttered, as he cocked one elbow on the table. He pressed his fingers against his brow to massage at his hairline as if nursing away a headache. “I just acted exactly how my dad wanted me to, just to make him hate me that little bit more. It’s like…hetero people that hate us, they act like all we want is cock, yeah; that’s what they say.”

Yoongi stuck his tongue out to wet his lips at this, still staring at his coffee like it was an object of great fascination.
“They act like we just want fucking and nothing *deeper* than that, and when I look back at myself and I think about the shit that I went through just to get some; I fucking hate the fact that a little part of my brain thinks ‘they’re right’. I hate it so much. Why did I act like that, Yoongi?”

“You were desperate, Jimin, and they took advantage of that. If you’re gonna hate or feel disgust, don’t direct any of that at yourself. Direct it at the fuckers that knew you were…were hurting, that saw that you needed something and took advantage of that,” Yoongi said in a whisper-soft voice. “You keep telling me I ain’t allowed to hate myself, to feel bad for the past, so, I’m gonna tell you that too.”

“Desperate?” Jimin repeated in a soft voice. “For what?”

“For luh-love, for attention, affection, all of that…that shit that I wanted too,” Yoongi explained, as he shifted on the padded seat. “You said you wanted someone to make you feel like a-a good boy, right?”

“Hmm,” Jimin breathed out softly, his fingers gently playing with his earring.

“The, uh, the pleasure,” Yoongi stammered out. “It made you feel good, even if only for a couple of seconds. It made you feel like a good boy until the-the bad feelings came back ‘round like they always do, and-”

“Yoongi-”

“and I know how that feels,” Yoongi continued over him, more than aware of how uneven his voice was. “I know how it feels to huh-hate yourself afterwards, ‘cos it makes you feel like a-a freak, an animal, and-”

“It’s OK, Yoongi, I understand,” Jimin said, reaching over to place his hand on top of his; his palm warm from the coffee cup.

The weight of his hand settling down on his was enough to still the shaking, to make Yoongi take a deep breath and hold it in his lungs. His heart was racing in his chest in a way that he hated, because he could feel that familiar tightness coming back that made it hard to breathe. Yoongi really didn’t want to have another freakout in front of the Jimin, not after what had happened last night, and especially not in public.
“Just stop talking, hmm?”

“Suh-sorry, I just…” Yoongi breathed out heavily, his shoulders lifting and falling as he let go of his coffee mug to press his hand over his eyes. “It spilled out, I couldn’t help it. Shit, it kinda hurts to breathe right now.”

“Deep breaths, baby boy, you got this,” Jimin said in a soothing tone, squeezing his hand in his own.

“I got this…” Yoongi sighed out, turning his hand over to let him take hold of it properly.

“In and out, just close your eyes and breathe, I’m right here,” Jimin added, his voice so soft and so caring that he struggled to believe that all of that attention was aimed at him and him alone. “It’s OK.”

“Talk, just talk. Please.”

“When that weight hits you, when it hurts to breathe and the world feels too big,” Jimin whispered. “Just hold your breath and close your eyes, and suddenly, the world’s so small, baby boy. It’s so small, and it’s just inside of your head where no one else can get you or hurt you. Inside your head, you can find peace, you can float like—”

“Waves,” Yoongi forced out, still taking sharp gasps for breath because it hurt to draw in anything more than that.

“like you’re floating in the bay,” he continued smoothly. “Every breath is a wave, so, you’ve gotta go nice and slow. Deep breaths. Calm those waters down, baby boy.”

Yoongi squeezed his eyes shut tightly, to force any hint of light away so that he could focus solely on this task. It wasn’t that hard visualising waves when they had been looking at the bay out of the window just a few minutes ago, but in his current panicked state, his own private bay was caught up in a tempest. He could see the choppy waves, curdled with thick foam, thrashing around inside his head-space, and no amount of focus could seem to calm them.

But when Jimin squeezed hold of his hand again, he found it, he found his anchor, and Yoongi
managed to take a breath that didn’t send a spike of pain down into his chest. Then another, and another, until the thrashing waters were started to breast into waves instead. The roaring quieted down, and it took him a moment to realise that it had been his racing heart making that sound and not his imagination.

Yoongi watched the waves rising and falling until they were nothing more than gentle licks that disturbed the vivid surface. He was so focused on imagining them that when he opened his eyes to stare at the table, he found that his chest had long since stopped aching and he was able to breathe normally again.

“Better?” Jimin asked in a soft voice, cocking his head ever so slightly to look at him.

“Yeah, better…” Yoongi replied, swallowing hard to find that his throat was dry.

“Here, let me.”

Jimin grabbed several paper napkins from the dispenser, moving to blot at his face for him because he had broken out into a light sweat at some point.

Yoongi felt clammy all over as he retrieved his mug of coffee and he took a sip. The heat was comforting on his tongue as he swallowed it hard, closing his eyes again to feel the younger man delicately blotting at his face.

“Does that happen to you a lot, Yoongi? Is that what happened to you in the bathhouse, when you got dizzy and needed support?” Jimin asked in a soft voice.

“Sometimes, I feel like…I can’t breathe. You ever get that feeling?”

Yoongi opened his eyes slowly to see him playing with the napkin, his own coffee currently being ignored in favour of him.

Jimin stayed silent, his expression hard to read right now. Had he realised that this was what he had been talking about when he had told him about how he had tried suppressing and ignoring everything? Was he now fully aware of the fact that his constant references to being fucked up weren’t just exaggerated for pity and attention, but the honest truth?
“I get it all the time,” he continued. “It’s, like, this sudden crushing weight on my chest that makes breathing hurt. And it does, it does hurt, that ain’t a figure of speech. It hurts so bad that it makes me just stop breathing, but that don’t help too much. I gotta breathe, I just end up choking on air.”

“What’s going on right now, baby boy? Anything you wanna talk to me about?”

Yoongi took another sip of coffee, playing his words over and over in his mind as he swallowed it and he ran his tongue around his mouth. It was the most open-ended question possible, and a part of him wondered if Jimin had done that on purpose. There was so much going on in his mind that it would take him an entire day sitting in this booth, dozens of cups of coffee, and a lot of sweat-soaked napkins, to even get close to telling Jimin about it all. Could he even hope to explain a fraction of it, or should he just hold his tongue and stave off stirring up any more emotions?

 “…Not right now, no, I’m OK,” Yoongi replied, as he caught sight of Annika making her way towards their table again. “Maybe later, in the car?”

“Sure thing, baby boy,” Jimin said, placing the napkin aside. “Just keep thinking about those waves, yeah?”

“Jimin?”

“Hmm?”

“Talk to me too,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice, holding his gaze as he did so. “‘Bout… ‘bout what’s going on.”

Jimin didn’t reply to this because the waitress stopped right beside their table, but he saw something on his face that was as good as any confirmation.

“Here, darling,” Annika declared, placing his plate down for him and then quickly adding the bowl of fruit salad and glass of milk too. “And for the certain someone with the big appetite…”

“Oh good, I’m starving,” Jimin joked, a quick and perfectly rehearsed smile lighting up his features as if what had just occurred between them had been nothing at all.
This made the woman laugh as she placed Jimin’s plate down too, adding the smaller plates to the side for him. She was about to move away when she caught sight of him and she paused, and Yoongi wondered if he looked off in any noticeable way.

“You OK, honey?” she asked, placing a hand down on his shoulder without much thought at all. “You’re looking a little peaky, and I know that flu season’s coming up soon.”

“I’m fine,” Yoongi replied, his own smile nowhere near as fast or convincing as Jimin’s was. “You ain’t gonna catch the flu from me, I’m perfectly healthy.”

“Then I’ll expect a clean plate from the both of you,” she retorted with a soft smile.

As soon as Annika had crossed the diner, Jimin retrieved his cutlery so that he could start eating. Yoongi made no move to do so just yet, instead watching the waitress until she went back into the kitchen and then running his eyes across the interior of the diner.

Right now, Yoongi saw a dozen or so strange faces that he had never seen before: white, black, and Hispanic, male and female, as young as a kid and as old as a grandfather, and he wondered if any of them had noticed his episode from a moment ago. Had they seen Jimin holding his hand and whispering to him, or maybe even noticed his discreet studying, and just knew that they were a…a couple? The thought was slightly unnerving, made his fingers twitch around his mug, but he didn’t feel as frightened as he once had. He didn’t want to get up and leave, to jump in his car to get away from their staring eyes, just like he hadn’t wanted to do so in the restaurant.

All because of the young man sitting facing him right now, eagerly cutting into thick slices of cheese-laden grilled toast with a hungry smile on his face.

“Eat up, baby boy,” Jimin remarked, glancing up at him as he did so. “Breakfast’s the most important meal of the day, you know?”

“It’s usually the only meal I eat,” Yoongi replied, still nursing his coffee rather than moving to eat.

Jimin speared the toast on his fork before shovelling some scrambled egg on the tines, shoving his first bite of food into his mouth with zero hesitation. As he chewed the mouthful, he studied him with a hard to read expression, and so Yoongi took a final sip of coffee before relinquishing his hold on his mug for his knife and fork. This pleased Jimin, made him smile as he sliced into his own French
toast, egg, and fried tomato, and he finally started eating his breakfast.

For the first few minutes of breakfast, they were both silent, far too busy eating to care for small talk. Yoongi went between looking at his plate and the window, which he used to gauge the street outside and keep an eye out for any familiar-looking cars pulling up to the curb like Seokjin or Hoseok’s (just to be safe), and across the table at Jimin - who looked so pleased eating that he wouldn’t at all be surprised if he was swinging his legs back and forth under the booth table like a child. The atmosphere inside of the diner was incredibly light, just like it always was when he had breakfast even when Jimin was present, and Yoongi was glad of it.

It meant that they would be able to share breakfast like this more often, supposing that Jimin would wake up and get out of bed for him.

Jimin cut into his bacon so that he could get it into little bites, and then he tore a nice chunk of syrupy fluffy pancake free with his fork before stabbing at the bacon.

Yoongi watched dumbly as he ate the mouthful, fatty bacon and sweet pancake and all.

“Jimin, that ain’t right,” he muttered, as Jimin chewed the food happily and he moved to get more onto his fork. “Where’d you learn that?”

“OK, listen,” Jimin declared around the mouthful, wiping a sticky blob of syrup out of the corner of his mouth. “If there’s one thing that I know, it’s shitty American culture, and shitty American culture dictates that bacon and pancakes are a thing.”

“But…the grease and the syrup?”

“It’s a sweet and sour thing, yeah; it’s sweet and salty, or savoury or whatever…”

“You just said you know about these things.”

“Just try it,” Jimin suggested, as he waved the fork at him. “Like you tried the lobster and that fondant thing. Try it for me.”
Yoongi cheeked a mouthful of egg, tomato, and toast, thinking this over for a moment as he chewed the bite. Jimin was clearly going to go on and on until he sampled it, so he swallowed the mouthful and he took a quick sip of milk to cleanse his palate before leaning over to accept it from his fork. Just like at the restaurant, Jimin wiped at his chin with his thumb to clean away a trickle of syrup.

As he sat back in his seat, Yoongi caught sight of Annika looking at their table as she passed them by with the coffee pot in hand. Had she been smiling at the sight of Jimin feeding him, or had she just been smiling anyway and he had just happened to notice? He wasn’t at all certain as he let the bite of food settle on his tongue, tasting the instant saltiness of the fried bacon first before it blended into the incredibly sweet stickiness of the syrup.

“Yeah?” Jimin asked, watching him chewing the bite intently.

“Uh…dunno,” Yoongi replied, quickly chewing before swallowing. “I ain’t like it, but I ain’t hate it either.”

“Baby boy, you talk funny sometimes,” Jimin remarked, pausing in the act of eating to cock his head at him. “I like it though, I think it’s kinda cute.”

Yoongi stuck his tongue out to lick free any hints of lingering syrup, finding this remark very interesting.

Did he talk funny? Yoongi was aware of the fact that he didn’t speak as grammatically correct as his friends and associates did, that he tended to slur and shorten words out in his haste to address them so that they would hurry up and get their asses into action and leave him in peace again. It wasn’t that he was uneducated, not even close, for he had graduated from a public school for boys just like his father had done so before him, regardless of the racist superiority of his fellow classmates. But it hadn’t been until Jimin had pointed it out that he had really paid it any attention.

“You’re so rich but you talk like you aren’t,” he added, just to clarify. “It’s just cute, I think.”

“Oh, yeah?”

Jimin nodded at this as he carried on eating his breakfast, a slight smile on his grease-smeared lips.

Cute.
Unsurprisingly, Jimin finished his main breakfast serving first because he was clearly hungry and incapable of pacing himself. He had left nothing more than smears of syrup, butter and grease on the plates. Yoongi was still eating his omelette when he turned his focus to his waffles, which had been covered in a scattering of strawberry chunks and whipped cream: the very definition of a sweet dessert.

“So, what’d you prefer, huh?” Yoongi asked with a soft smile. “Lobster in gratin, or bacon and cheese grilled toast?”

“I know which one I’m supposed to say,” Jimin replied, returning the smile and hovering a bite of waffle and whipped cream in front of his mouth. “Considering the fact that the lobster and gratin comes with Chardonnay that I couldn’t afford to buy unless I saved up for a year, but-”

Yoongi guffawed at this, loving that usual blunt way that he made jokes.

Yes, he was pretty certain that once upon a time, Jimin would have needed to have saved up for a year to treat himself to such things. But now that he was spending time with him, was his secret…boyfriend, then he was going to find that such treats might not be as rare as that.

“I like this too - this diner, this vibe,” Jimin continued in a soft voice. “I like going out with you in the evening, that excitement and knowledge that I’m gonna experience new things I’ve never had before; but I like sitting here with you now in the morning: coffee and comfort food, the sunlight on your face. It’s…I guess it makes me imagine what it would be like sharing breakfast with you in an actual home. You know?”

Yoongi paused in the act of sipping at his coffee, his remark catching him by complete surprise.

Just like how he had found himself daydreaming about the sight of Jimin lying in bed, bathed in sunlight and looking so perfect, Jimin had also had a brief daydream about him; about them sharing breakfast together in the morning, maybe after a passionate night, or tender morning sex, or even just sleeping tangled up in the covers together.

Now that Jimin had said it, Yoongi couldn’t help but realise the fact that it felt like that too. He could picture Jimin vividly right now - sitting at his kitchen counter, wearing nothing but his Valentino blouse with his feet swinging back and forth slowly in some rhythm that only he knew. Maybe, he would be nursing his coffee in both hands, or maybe, he would be fiddling with his earrings and reading the paper or the pullout section for celebrities and TV guide, should he prefer that to reading
about business, politics and nothing but death on every single page.

Yoongi hated the fact that imagining Jimin like that made another sharp twinge of pain happen in his chest, a twinge that might just have been anxiety over his sudden excitement at the thought, or a hopeless longing for something that he knew he would constantly deny himself.

Something perfect, something clean and happy and good.

“Maybe one day, right?” Jimin finished, giving him a quick smile before turning back to his waffles.

“Yeah, I’d…I’d like that, Jimin.”

Oh, Yoongi hoped that Jimin knew just how much he ached at the thought, even when he couldn’t say it aloud right now.

Yoongi moved his plate aside, just a tiny sliver of toast and tomato left to the side, and then he retrieved his fruit salad to finish his breakfast. After dabbing his mouth clean with a napkin, he reached into the bowl, knocking a chunk of kiwi aside to grab a strawberry half.

“You don’t like kiwi?” Jimin asked curiously, having clearly noticed the action.

“Nah, I think they taste funny, always kinda bitter to me,” he replied around the mouthful of strawberry. “You can have it, if you like it.”

“I love kiwi,” Jimin stated, moving to pluck the chunk free from the bowl with his fingers. “I think they’re sweet, not bitter. I hate mango though, that’s just weird.”

“You don’t like mango?” Yoongi asked in surprise, pausing in the act of tossing a blueberry into his mouth. “Everyone likes mango- the fuck d’you mean you don’t like mango?”

Jimin grinned at this as he popped another verdant chunk of kiwifruit into his mouth, even when Yoongi’s surprise was genuine.
Talk about a shocking revelation. They had quite a lot in common, but their tastes in fruit were rather polarising. All that Yoongi could do was watch him sorting the kiwi from the rest of the fruit, plucking it free to eat and sneaking a chunk of strawberry too, just to be cheeky.

By the time that they were finally finished eating, it was 10:41am. Yoongi could hardly believe that he had been awake for a couple of hours already and hadn’t done a single second of business, save for phoning Seokjin to check on the transactions. He was going to have to stay updated on this, to not fall too out of the loop with distractions, however beautiful, charming and interesting that they might just be. He didn’t want to end up like those old men that he distrusted because they were so detached from the streets and nitty gritty side of business.

Yoongi reached into his suit jacket to pull his wallet free, the plates all stacked together in a pile and covered in crumpled and soiled napkins. He was in the act of pulling a bill out when Jimin made a series of noises and he caught him by surprise.

“No no no, I’m paying for breakfast,” Jimin remarked, as he shifted to pat at his clothing for a moment. He had to grab his borrowed suit jacket and check that too, before slipping a rather crumpled $20 bill out and slapping it down on the table. “There, my treat, baby boy.”

“Jimin?”

“Hmm?”

“That’s my twenty,” Yoongi pointed, eyeing the bill with his fingers still shoved inside his wallet.

Jimin had just offered to pay for their breakfast this morning after he had bought him a dinner yesterday evening - a rather sweet act, if not for the fact that he had offered to do so with the $20 that he had taken from his wallet last night. It hadn’t been used on buying cold drinks or snacks, and so clearly he had forgotten about the fact that it wasn’t actually his money. Or, he had been hoping that he would have forgotten, that was.

“If it was in my pocket, it’s my twenty,” Jimin declared, before grinning at him. “So, I’m paying for breakfast.”

This made Yoongi snort laughter as he pulled out another bill to cover the tip, not only because he tipped the same amount every single time, but because there might not be enough leftover cash from Jimin’s $20 to pay for the tip.
After signalling to Annika that they were finished, Yoongi shoved his wallet into his suit jacket pocket. He held the bill out to her just like always, between his index and middle finger, and she accepted it and she slipped it inside of her work dress. Jimin watched the entire exchange curiously because he had never seen it before, and as soon as she had collected all of the dishes together onto the tray and she had moved away, he shifted to collect his suit jacket too.

“Oh, Calvin Klein,” Jimin hummed, as he eyed the inner lining of the suit jacket. “Wait…I’ve been wearing Calvin Klein this entire time?! Holy shit!”

Yoongi shifted to get to his feet with a soft smile and Jimin copied his actions, slipping into said designer jacket so that he could quickly follow him out of the diner and back onto the street. As he retrieved his keys and he unlocked the car, he darted around the front of the vehicle to jump into the passenger-seat. Yoongi started the car, pulled away from the curb and he drifted down the street just like always; the windows rolled down to allow a slight breeze to bleed into the car.

Jimin snapped his seatbelt in place, settling back in his seat and folding his arm on the window rest so that he could watch the streets going past them intently.

For a minute or two, the interior remained silent, until the car stopped at the first set of traffic lights in their brief journey.

“So, about that talk?” Jimin said to break their temporary silence. He turned his head away from the window to look at him again. “Do you want to talk to me, Yoongi?”

“Mmm, you mean about the freakout in the diner?”

“I mean in general,” he replied, shifting in his seat to study him instead of the outside scenery. “I like that we’re talking so much like this, like we have over the last day. We’ve talked about a lot of things, Yoongi, and I guess I just wanted to check that the things that we were talking about hadn’t upset you in any way, hadn’t caused you to have any, um, relapses in terms of how you feel about yourself.”

“I dunno, I don’t think so? I mean, I told you that I ain’t good with words,” Yoongi replied, restlessly tapping his fingers on the steering-wheel as he looked out of the front window. “That ain’t an excuse to get outta talking to you, it’s the truth. You’ve had to listen to me mumbling and stuttering enough times already, Jimin.”
“Think about the restaurant, Yoongi,” Jimin suggested in a quiet voice, reaching over to place a hand on his knee and giving it a soft squeeze. “Think about how you thought that you wouldn’t be able to explain your feelings to me, but then you could. You could find the words that you wanted to say, it just took you a little while to find them.”

Yoongi made a soft noise at this as he settled back in his seat, his eyes staring at the green light and willing it to hurry up and change so that he would have something to do with his hands rather than restlessly tap them on the steering-wheel. He wanted to look over at Jimin, but it was hard doing so when his mouth had went dry on him. No amount of lip wetting or running his tongue around his mouth seemed to help. After a moment, the light changed colour, and he finally found his lips moving to speak.

“Back in the hotel,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice, rolling the car through the set of lights. “I was talking to the receptionist, and I called you ‘my boyfriend’.”

Jimin twisted away from the window to look at him so sharply at this that he might just have pulled a neck muscle. He was surprised that he didn’t hear the sound of it tearing as he glanced at him out of the corner of his eyes.

“It just slipped out, right outta my lips, like, I didn’t even try and catch it,” he explained, letting go of the steering-wheel to instinctively run his fingers over said lips to save him from gnawing on them. “I froze up, I went fucking stiff, and I didn’t think I was gonna be able to walk away from him. It was strange, it muh-made this lump appear in my throat that almost choked me and my fingers clenched up tight, but…but it didn’t scare me. Y’know? Like it used to, it-”

“It felt new, felt strange,” Jimin finished for him, just like he had last night.

“I dunno what I felt. I guess it was anxiety, maybe? I told you, I get that a lot,” Yoongi explained, twisting the steering-wheel to roll onto the next street. “So, I wandered back upstairs and climbed into bed with you, and when you started talking, I felt that…that tight feeling in my chest just slowly loosening up again. Even when we weren’t talking ‘bout that shit, I still kinda relaxed. It didn’t hurt to breathe that much, but my heart was going so fast in my chest I thought you might’ve heard it. I ain’t felt like I could relax in a situation like that, I ain’t never even thought of it before. It ain’t that I was casual or anything like that just-”

Yoongi paused for a moment to try and figure out what exactly he was trying to say. His past sexual experiences hadn’t exactly been casual in the true sense of the word, save perhaps his moments of intimacy with Hoseok. Hiring massage boys to scratch an itch and then kicking them back out onto the street was less casual more…
“It was emotionless,” he finished in a quiet voice. “Get that moment of pleasure, get away from everyone, and just ache inside ‘til the urge came ‘round again and I repeated it.”

“I know, baby boy,” Jimin said in his most softest voice, still giving his knee a tender massage. “We all get that feeling, you’re not alone like you think you are. I don’t think there’s a single gay guy in this fucking city that hasn’t ached inside like that.”

Which translated in Yoongi’s mind as meaning that Jimin too had known that ache deep inside, just like he had told him in the diner. Quick anonymous sex with men that he had so naïvely thought might have actually wanted to have spent time with him, always in public spaces and nowhere remotely close to safe and secure; always filled with risks and danger. Yes, Jimin had been seeking that moment of pleasure too, only to end up chasing his own tail over and over.

“Is there, uh, is there anything that you wanna talk to me ‘bout?” Yoongi asked in a quiet voice, more than aware of the fact that he was just a few minutes away from Namjoon’s house.

Jimin didn’t reply to this question right away, rather he took a moment to think his words over first. He kept one hand on his knee just for the sake of it, moving his other arm off the rest to hold it out of the window and play with the current that was drifting past the window. The breeze would be cool and likely smell of the bay, just the way that he liked it. If they reached the house, Yoongi supposed that he would just need to kill the engine and wait for their conversation to end naturally.

“I’ve told you a few times actually, about me never being in a relationship before,” Jimin said, as he moved his hand against the current in a soft wave. “I thought there was something wrong with me, maybe because of my parents. That lack of familial love or whatever, it went and fucked me up in the head just that little bit more. I never wanted to commit because I didn’t feel it. I didn’t ever feel like I could support another guy, so, what started off as unintentional hook-ups with strangers I thought were interested in me, turned into intentional meetings with guys that would end in sex and nothing more, or me flirting and then walking away before I actually felt something towards him. I started thinking that maybe that’s just how it’s supposed to feel, you get the urges and the satisfaction, but you don’t get anything else. Maybe us kinda guys don’t get love and happy endings, unless they come at the end of a massage, yeah?”

Yoongi glanced between him and the front window rapidly as he listened to him talking, and it took him a moment to realise that he was gnawing on his lower lip as he did so. It took him quite a lot of effort to stop doing so.

“You just…you grow up so vulnerable, so impressionable to the shit that you see every single day, and the shit that I saw was the perfect family: a man and a woman, two kids, suburban bliss. My own
family was so fucking far from that that I grew up thinking that I was the reason we were poor, I was the reason why my mum and dad were always arguing and plates were getting thrown at walls, all because I liked dancing around the house like a ballerina when I was five years old. How can I achieve something perfect when I’ve never had it before? Shit, I was running away from home and letting old guys fuck me in their cars when I was eleven- how can I support anyone, Yoongi?"

Yoongi was aware of the fact that he was holding his breath and it took him considerable effort to resume breathing.

Was that a rhetorical question, or was he supposed to answer it?

A quick look over at the younger man showed him that Jimin was staring out of the front window; his expression hard to read, but his lips turned down tautly at the corners. That was a sign that he was upset, either because he was disgusted or angry or even just plain sad, and so he had to do something more than just nibble on his lip and avoid his gaze. Jimin deserved something more than that, considering how much that he had listened to him.

“I dunno, Jimin, but you’re doing something,” he replied in a quiet voice. “You’re supporting me, even if you dunno how to do it right. It’s like...you gotta learn these things, yeah, and you’re learning now. We both are. You grew up in a broken home, but that don’t mean that you gotta make your new home like that too. What, uh, what you got with Kim right now ain’t broken, it seems solid to me, like something brothers would have. Maybe, we...we gotta make a family anyway we can, with anyone we can?”

“Yoongi,” Jimin said in a whisper-soft voice, uneven and slightly breathless in a way that made him drag his eyes away from the front window. “Last night, when I couldn’t sleep, when I was watching you, I felt something that I’ve never felt before. I told you that I didn’t wanna fall asleep because I was scared that you might leave me in the middle of the night, but it’s just so much more than that. I was scared to fall asleep and wake up to an empty bed because then it would have just turned into another fling and nothing more than that, and I didn’t-”

Jimin took a sharp intake of breath at this, dropping his head with a soft series of noises as he reached up to pinch at the bridge of his nose. Yoongi saw him roughly wiping at his eyes, blinking rapidly as if to force away any welling tears that might just be gathering at his lash line.

“I’m starting to feel things, Yoongi,” he confided in that same soft voice.

Yoongi realised that he had completely sailed past Namjoon’s street and that he was going to have to circle the block to get back to his home, and so he twisted the steering-wheel to do so. As he guided
his car around the corner, he spared a quick look at Jimin, unable to see much more of his face than a hint through his tousled hair, for he still had his head hanging forward so that his hair obscured most of it from view.

“I’m feeling things that I’ve never felt before, and if you think that you’re scared, then believe me when I tell you that I’m terrified. I can’t control the little feelings when they hit me, it’s like I’m powerless to them; the waves of fondness and whatever else hits me- I dunno, I dunno what the feelings even are. Why does watching you fastening up your cuff buttons or…or cutting up your breakfast make me feel raw, Yoongi?”

“I…I dunno,” Yoongi replied, his eyes glued to the road so that he didn’t repeat his earlier mistake.

“It feels like I’m so vulnerable, but I’m not supposed to show it.” Jimin continued, finally lifting his head to stare out of the front window. “My dad taught me that showing weakness meant that I should brace myself for the next punch, so, I hide it. I tell you that it’s natural to feel vulnerable, yet I’m hiding behind you to shield my own vulnerability, and that’s wrong. I need to stop using you as my own shield to deflect my insecurities off because it’s only gonna hurt us. I want us, Yoongi, do you understand? I want you, and I don’t even know what that means exactly. I just know that I want you more than I’ve ever wanted another person before. That’s why I couldn’t sleep last night, because I’m starting to get invested in those feelings and I’m scared that I’m gonna get hurt for giving into that weakness.”

“I…I get you,” Yoongi mumbled, as he scanned the stretch of houses to locate Namjoon’s familiar blue and teal home, all the while thinking about how he had fumbled to hold onto his hand in the diner because he had known that his touch would have soothed that ache in his chest.

“Are you OK? I’m not freaking you out, am I?” Jimin asked suddenly, a hint of concern detectable in his questions. “With all of this emotional shit and-”

Yoongi let go of the steering-wheel with one hand to drop it on top of his hand, holding it in place on his knee and giving it a soft squeeze that was as good an answer as any words could be.

Jimin stopped talking at this, either because he had lost his train of thought or because he had decided to stop in case he said something upsetting for the both of them. But even that was good enough for him, because Jimin had given him another peek into his thoughts and emotions, had just strengthened that little bond between them that Yoongi was starting to feel developing.

It was so small, so fragile, but it was a bond that he wanted to shelter, to protect until it was so much stronger.
Yoongi killed the car on the curb, and for a moment, he just stared at the wheel rather than move or speak. He slid his eyes across the dashboard to look at Jimin, waiting to see if he was going to move to get out of the car first. Yet, he stayed still, clearly able to sense that he was trying to speak in that preternatural way of his.

“Back in the diner,” Yoongi said to break his silence. “You, uh, you did this thing, cocked your head to the side, and your hair fell over your brow. Jimin, I sat there for five whole minutes, sweating and itching to just reach over and fix your fucking hair.”

Yoongi didn’t know why he was telling him this, just that he felt like he needed to hear it.

“It ain’t even sharing feelings, Jimin. That ain’t the only wall that I’m tryna knock down, it’s everything. You hold my hand, you kiss me, and you don’t seem scared to do it, but just touching your hair when we ain’t alone, it terrifies me. I dunno why letting you-you slip your fingers inside of me don’t terrify me, but just touching your hair in public does. I…I’ve gotten so used to monitoring every single thing that I do, I guess, just to make sure that no one suspects anything. Even when I wanna do something, I can’t.”

“Baby boy?”

When Yoongi looked over at him, Jimin reached up to ruffle his hair forward over his eyes on purpose. The lightly sprung tousles dangled there, just begging to be raked back off his face, and he could see his lips parting in a smile. Even when he couldn’t see his eyes, he just knew that they were crinkled at the corners in that usual sweet way.

“Touch it,” he said in a soft voice. “Fix it for me, please?”

For a few seconds, Yoongi could only stare at him dumbly because his hands were just limply resting on the steering-wheel, his fingers unable to even twitch around the stiff leather. But then he managed to pull one of his hands away and he reached over the space between them to gently brush a tangle of hair back off his brow. Just like always, the locks tried to settle in place from his natural middle parting, some falling in place, but most of them still slipping forward so that he had to brush them back again rapidly. He really needed to tuck them behind his ear, and yet Yoongi wanted to just keep brushing them back over and over because that way, he got to carry on touching his hair.

Jimin almost purred under his breath, a pleased sound escaping him as Yoongi let go of the steering-wheel with his other hand and he shifted in his seat to place both hands on his head. Yoongi couldn’t
help but tangle his fingers in his hair, not tugging but rather just teasing; scrunching tight handfuls against his palms and hearing it almost rustling in response. He could see that he was making more of a mess, and yet Jimin allowed him to just carry on doing so.

Yoongi was aware of the fact that he had started laughing softly under his breath at some point, as he finally attempted to neaten up his messy locks. As he brushed his hair back behind his left ear, Jimin opened his eye to peer at him, something twinkling in their depths that could have been mischief or simple happiness; he couldn’t tell. He just fixed his hair back in place to reveal his face again, wondering if he should maybe cup his face in his hands or not.

“You can touch my hair whenever you want to, baby boy,” Jimin said softly. “I don’t mind at all, I like it. In public, if you feel brave enough, or just in the car when you don’t. I really like it when you touch it, OK?”

Jimin moved to open the passenger-seat door at this, climbing out of his car. Rather than stay seated inside to watch him go up to the house, Yoongi popped his door open just as he went around the front of the vehicle. Jimin gave him a curious glance as he crossed the sidewalk to get to the front steps of the house.

“Are you OK with me phoning first, hmm? Or should I wait for you?” Jimin asked, as he made his way up the steps.

“Lemme, uh, lemme phone you first, just for a lil while,” he said, following him up the steps at a much slower pace; not exactly dragging his feet but wanting to linger back ever so slightly. “Til I feel more, uh, more comfortable.”

“Oh, your jacket-”

“You keep it,” Yoongi spoke over him, just as he reached up to start removing it.

Jimin paused in the act of shrugging it off, his eyes growing round with surprise. Yoongi reached up to grab the jacket and he pulled it back up onto his shoulders for him, smoothing the lapels down neatly.

“At least I’ll have something to wear the next time that we go on a date,” Jimin joked with a smile.
Yoongi made a noise in agreement as he glanced at the front door, eyeing the blue paint job and the slight cracks in the surface, and then he looked back at the younger man.

Jimin was studying him with a hard to read expression, his fingers fiddling at the buttons of his suit jacket as he stuck his tongue out to wet his lips.

“Mmm?” he hummed.

“Yoongi, just…” Jimin shifted to place a hand on his shoulder at first, before rapidly moving it to the back of his neck instead. “Don’t become a stranger, OK, baby boy? Don’t cut me off, please,” he said in a whisper-soft voice, his palm so warm and soft against the back of his neck that he could feel his own fingers itching to reach up and touch him. “There’s still so much to talk about, and-”

Yoongi couldn’t stave the urge off any longer, he had to reach up and grab hold of his waist, pulling him close enough so that their chests were touching and there was just the slightest distance between their lips. Not even to kiss him, to make Jimin move to do it for him, rather just because he felt like he needed that hint of intimacy between them. The most tender and meaningful words seemed to spill free when he was able to shut everything else out and just focus on Jimin: his warmth, his scent, his touch. Maybe, Jimin would understand his actions more than his words; would understand that he was pulling him close because he really didn’t want to go down those steps and climb back into his car right now.

Yoongi was scared. He was aching and raw, and he didn’t know what was going to happen when he left Jimin alone on the front steps. Could he come back to this, this feeling that he was experiencing right now, in several days? Could he really hope to make this blossom into something like a relationship, or was he going to ruin it by distancing himself the very second that Jimin was out of sight? Out of sight, out of mind…and his heart. He didn’t know, but he did know that the thought of letting go of his waist seemed too difficult right now.

“and just think about all of the mornings that we could wake up together like that. I could make you breakfast. I’m not the greatest cook, but I’d try, and that’s all that matters in the end, right?” Jimin continued, managing to sound both hopeful and desperate in equal amounts as he stroked at his neck. “Just don’t cut me off, OK? Don’t hurt me like that, please.”

Yoongi lifted his hand so that he could cup his chin in his hold, gently tipping his head back to press a chaste kiss against his lips.

Jimin let his breath out in a soft sigh against his mouth, breaking the kiss so that he could press their brows together instead and just stay like that for a moment.
“Jimin?”

“Yeah, baby boy?”

“I ain’t gonna hurt you, I promise.”

By the time that Yoongi was climbing back into his car, Jimin had already unlocked the front door with a hidden key to let himself inside the house. He twisted the keys to start the engine and he pulled away from the curb, driving back to his mansion several neighbourhoods away to finally get cleaned up and slip into some fresh clothing.

On the brief ride, Yoongi’s mind turned rather blank as he guided the vehicle along the streets, not even really focusing on the way that his hands turned the steering-wheel or shifted gears until he was killing his car in his drive at last. He was still rather light of thoughts as he entered his home, undressing on his way up to the second-floor and folding his clothing over his forearm rather than leave it puddled on the floor. He vigorously brushed his teeth to rid himself of the taste of beer and marijuana, emptying his pockets out onto his bed so that he could shove his blouse and trousers into the laundry basket for his maids to clean for him. Then he went back into the bathroom to resume cleaning up.

Yoongi didn’t know why the tears started flowing when he was in the shower, just that they did so. One second, he was slicking his hair back off his brow and blinking water out of his eyes, and the next, he was hunkered down in the bathtub with his face in his hands and his lips pulled back from his teeth in an agonised grimace. His entire body was shaking underneath the scorching stream as if he had doused himself with freezing cold water instead, and it was hard to breathe because the air inside of the bathroom was heavy with heat.

“Nnn-nuh-no one else can hurt me,” Yoongi hiccuped, as he dropped one of his hands and he hugged his knees against his chest, repeating the mantra that Jimin had said in the diner. “It’s suh-so small, it’s so small-huh-”

Yoongi dropped his face to press it against his knees, the shower stream hitting the top of his head to run down his back in rivulets and washing his hair over his ears so that his hearing was muffled by the sound of it running down to hit the bottom of the bathtub and the wall tiles. He took several quick gasps for breath as he listened to the water bouncing off the porcelain over and over like crashing waves. His nails were scratching at the tiles and so he reached up to snag his fingers in his hair instead, squeezing and tugging restlessly as he tried to catch his breath again. It took him several minutes to do so, but eventually he was no longer crying, just hiccuping for breath as he lifted his head and he planted his chin on his knees.
At least the tears hadn’t drained him of energy like they usually did, for they had made him feel a little better in fact. They were the ones that hadn’t been shed over the entire day, from his episode in the diner and the constant anxiety that he had been dragging around since; all mingling together to just slip free rather than stay trapped inside. For once, Yoongi actually felt like he had gotten rid of a little weight that had been on his chest crushing him.

“Suh…shit,” Yoongi groaned, slicking his hair back off his brow again and holding it in place as he opened his eyes at last and he blinked water out of them.

The first thing that he saw was his feet, still covered in the remains of soap from the sudsy water that was lingering around the drain, then his knees, which he had hugged against his chest with his other arm. Yoongi watched water running down the rounded bumps of his knees for a few seconds before he shifted his gaze down to his thighs. He could still see the faint marks that Jimin had left behind, soft pink blemishes not exactly shaped like his mouth but close enough.

Yoongi lowered his hand down to touch one of them just like earlier, rubbing his thumb over the pink blemish as he slowly blinked shower water out of his eyes. He took a deep intake of breath, trying to stop his hiccups as he traced the mark. Then he lowered his head so that he could pout his lips out softly, pressing a kiss against his damp skin right where the blemish was. He could taste soapy water on his lips as he pressed a series of kisses against his thigh, finding that it helped him regulate his breathing, that it calmed him down just like how sucking his thumb had once done so.

After a couple of minutes, Yoongi was able to lower his legs again to slump against the side of the tub, slowly moving to finish cleaning up so that he could leave the shower.

Yoongi had just stepped out of the bathroom and he was in the act of roughly towelling at his hair when something almost clicked at the back of his mind. Something that had completely escaped his thoughts until right now.

Today was the 1st September.

Today was Jungkook’s birthday, his eighteenth birthday.

Yoongi took a sharp intake of breath that caught in his throat, almost hiccuping on it as he lowered the towel from his damp hair and he felt his fingers twitching until it dropped to land on the flooring by his feet.
Before he could stop himself, Yoongi darted over to his wardrobe and he shoved it open, rifling through to try and locate something, anything that he could slip into. He was in such a rush that he didn’t care for neatness, pulling out a black shirt that he hastily unbuttoned and shoved his arm through. He wrenched his shirt on as fast as he could, stumbling around his room as he tried to get to his bed. The towel got in the way, damn near tripped him up as he dropped to sit on his mattress and he reached for the phone.

Yoongi shoved the receiver into the crook between his neck and shoulder as he grabbed the actual phone to start hitting the buttons and dialled his friend’s number. The dialling tone blared down his ear as he started fiddling with the kinked cord.

“Hello? Gigi, what are you calling me for?” Hoseok asked in a rather mellowed-out voice, and it was hard to tell if he was stoned or just sleepy because he had disturbed his weekend lie-in.

“Seokseok, this’ gonna sound crazy, but I need your help,” Yoongi said, hoping that his voice didn’t sound as thick with tears as he thought that it did. “I, uh, I dunno who else to ask but you.”

“What does that mean?” Hoseok asked curiously, and he could easily picture him twirling a lock of his hair around his forefinger as he lounged on the kitchen stool.

“It means that I need you to help me find something, a gift for someone.”

“A gift? Oooh,” his friend almost purred in interest, his voice revealing that he was now much more alert and eager to listen. “Who’s birthday is it? Is it a birthday, or is it a gift for that certain special someone?”

“It’s a birthday gift,” he confirmed. “Uh, Seokseok? How much d’you know about dogs?”

“…What the actual fuck, Gigi?”

“Dogs,” Yoongi repeated, as he reached down to start buttoning up his shirt, his fingers fiddling for a second until he recalled that he wasn’t wearing a blouse now. “Listen, I need a dog, but not just any dog. I need a big dog, yeah, that’s the important part. It’s gotta be big and-”
“OK, Yoongi, OK, slow down, you’re talking too fast,” Hoseok spoke over him, forcing him to hold his tongue as he finished with the buttons and he moved onto the sleeves. “What you’re telling me right now is that you…you want a dog. A dog as a present, a big dog.”

“Uhuh,” he hummed, as he quickly folded up one of the sleeves to his elbow.

“So, you phoned me because you think I’m going to know where to find big fucking dogs, apparently. That’s new. I know the best places to find pussy and blow in this city. Dogs? Not so much, Gigi...” Hoseok remarked wryly, and Yoongi was willing to bet that he was kicking his bare feet back and forth just like how Cleopatra swished her beautiful tail. “Dogs, hmm.”

As Yoongi finished rolling up his second sleeve and then he quickly neatened up the low neckline, his friend made a series of noises under his breath. They were breathy, heavy with sedation that showed that Hoseok was mostly certainly stoned, but at least he still had clarity today.

So whilst he waited for him to finish thinking, Yoongi got off his bed and he moved over to his wardrobe, carrying the phone with him balanced against his stomach so that the wire would stretch across the bedroom.

“You know, Gigi? I’ve got a guy, Park. He’s got a dog, a real big bruiser...or at least that’s what it looks like. In reality, it’s the most stupidest fucking dog. It’s not a guard dog, not even close.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Hmm, I could call him up for you, find out where he got the dog from? There must be a breeder in the city, right?”

“That’d be real helpful,” Yoongi agreed, as he rifled through his wardrobe to grab a pair of loose black trousers. “Hey, I’m gonna come get you, yeah? Pick you up, take you out for the day. You’d like that, right? You can help me out, I know you like shopping.”

“Well, if you don’t take me out I’ll probably just...drink or something. Maybe go out tonight instead and hit up some club. There’s a new one that’s always flooded with poppers and shit; great way to get laid, I.”

“I’m only taking you out if you promise to not touch that shit, or go to that club tonight, Seokseok.”
“have some good memories of that joint,” Hoseok finished, before rapidly mumbling something, his words lost under the static of the line.

“What? Didn’t catch that,” Yoongi said, cocking his head and staring inside of his wardrobe. “Promise me, Seokseok. You ain’t ever broke a promise to me, so, you gotta promise straight up - none of that shit.”

“God, daddy, you’re such a fucking downer,” his friend groaned melodramatically, but he knew that he had him reeled in. This was all just an act, like always, and soon enough, Hoseok would come around. “You’re running off across the city, being some…oh, I dunno, some hotshot Casanova, and yet, I can’t have a little fun-”

“Hoseok.”

“just a little bit of fun after all of the shit that I put up with every single day and-”

“Hoseok, shut the fuck up,” he spoke over his incessant whines. “Get dressed, stop drinking champagne at 11am, and wait for me to come pick you up. If you find out that breeder from your guy, I’ll buy you something nice; yeah?”

“Hmm, now that’s an offer I can’t refuse, Gigi…”

“Dress nice, yeah, y’know I like it when you dress nicely,” Yoongi replied, as he moved back over to his bed and he dumped his trousers on the covers beside the phone. “You do put up with a lot of shit, so, lemme reward you for it and take you out today. Like I said, anything you want, I’ll buy it. Just help me out, find me that breeder, and I’ll make it worth your while.”

“What if I want a new car?” Hoseok drawled, the softest rustling sound down the line signalling that he was moving.

“Then I’ll buy you one,” he stated without a hint of hesitation. “But you don’t want a new car, not with your current baby. No, I think I ‘member you mentioning you needed some new cologne…”

“…Fine, come and pick me up. I’ll call my guy, I’ll get dressed up nice.”
Before Yoongi could say something in reply to this, Hoseok ended the call. He listened to the dull drone on the end of the line for a few seconds before shifting to drop the receiver in the cradle, satisfied that his friend would get the job done. After all, Hoseok had yet to break a promise or let him down.

Yoongi grabbed his trousers off the mattress and he quickly slipped into them, moving to retrieve a belt from his wardrobe to tug tautly around his thin hips. After he had added his Rolex and a cap, grabbed his keys and wallet again, he exited his bedroom and he bounded down the stairs to leave his mansion.

It was almost as if his crying episode in the shower hadn’t even happened because Yoongi was so distracted with the current situation.

It took him just a minute or two to arrive at Hoseok’s mansion across the neighbourhood. Yoongi killed the car on the curb outside and he got out of the vehicle. He had no clue if his friend was even dressed considering the fact that he had gotten here so fast, but he knew that his mansion would be unlocked. He went around the back of the house to enter through the open back door, just like always, seeing that the ground-floor area was empty; not even a sign of Woori cleaning up.

Unsurprisingly, the sight of a bottle of Valium lying across the counter beside a bottle of white wine was present and accounted for.

Yoongi came to a stop in front of it, eyeing the little white pills with the heart-shaped cutouts, and then he swept them into the container and he popped the lid back on. Just to stop Cleopatra from possibly licking or eating them. Speaking of Cleopatra; he made a series of tsking noises out of the corner of his mouth to catch her attention. It took a minute, but she appeared on the winding staircase across the massive ground-floor and she glanced at him through the glass panels that served as banisters. Then she quickly trotted down the stairs to get to him, her little paws padding on the marble flooring.

“Morning, princess,” he said, dropping down to start stroking the cat. “I missed you.”

Yoongi scooped her up into his arms, cradling her against his ribs so that he could stroke under her chin as he moved to get to the stairs. He went up them at a slow pace, his sandals softly slapping against the steps as he got onto the landing.

The first-floor contained an entertainment area: with an LED stereo sound television and sound
system, and display units filled with VHS films, cassettes, vinyls and more; the furniture consisting of a plush loveseat sofa and dozens of throw cushions on the flooring that were shaped like hearts. He noticed a cast-off lace thong on the floor beside one of the velvet cushions, and he dragged his eyes away to resume going up to the second-floor, which was Hoseok’s bedroom.

“Seokseok?” Yoongi called, as he went up the stairs. “You ready, huh?”

“Just give me a minute,” Hoseok replied, unknotting his silken robe to slip it off and start getting dressed. “I just finished calling people, you’ve got no patience, Gigi.”

Yoongi came to a stop on the top step, quickly glancing at his bare behind as his best friend retrieved clothing from his wardrobe. Then he turned his attention back to the cat hugged in his arms, planting a soft peck on the flat plane between her pointed ears.

“Oh, yeah? It all go well?”

“We have an appointment with the breeder at 12,” Hoseok explained, as he grabbed a pink pullover from the rack, this time slipping it on rather than knotting it around his shoulders. “The breeder is located in Mission, which is a great coincidence, because the department store that you’re taking me to is there too.”

“You find out the breed?” Yoongi asked, trying his very hardest to not stare at his firm behind that was still visible underneath the hem of his pullover.

“Hmm, a Great Dane,” Hoseok replied, as he grabbed a pair of black trousers and he hopped on one foot to stick his leg through them. Luckily, he wasn’t stoned enough to stumble and land on said ass. “You know the breed, right?”

Yoongi made a noise in agreement whilst his friend tucked the ends of his pullover into the waistband, zipping it up and then fastening the button.

Hoseok hunkered down to retrieve a pair of shoes, moving over to his bed so that he could sit on the end and slip into them. They were leather loafers, patent with a Cuban heel, and as he slipped them on, his hair fell forward over his eyes.

“Am I dressed nicely?” Hoseok asked, as he sat upright and he fixed his hair in place.
“Mmm, you look nice,” Yoongi remarked in a quiet voice, his fingers still scratching at Cleopatra’s ears. “I mean, you always look nice, Seokseok.”

“Someone’s in a great mood today,” his friend declared, as he got up off the bed and he moved to cross the bedroom to get to a side table. “You must’ve had a great night, huh? If I didn’t know any better, I’d assume that you got a nice hard pounding, but…well.”

“Uh, it was a good night,” Yoongi replied, as he watched him retrieving his wallet and watch. “You, uh, you ready?”

Hoseok must have figured out that he was trying to avoid talking about it, and so he just quickly fastened his watch around his wrist and he crossed the bedroom to get to the stairs. Yoongi moved to go down them again, and when he reached the bottom, Cleopatra jumped out of his arms to trot across the main-area. His friend grabbed his sunglasses from a murano glass bowl placed on an ornamental oaken display cabinet, and he proceeded to slip them up onto his straight and pointed nose - finally ready. They left through the back so that he could shut the glass doors and then he went back around to the front drive.

“Oh, also, I ordered something that needs to be picked up around 12:30,” Hoseok said, as he sank down in the passenger-seat and he got comfortable.

“What?” Yoongi asked, knowing that he might just refuse to answer him because it was none of his business.

“You’ll find out,” he rebutted without even looking at him.

Yoongi reversed his car out of the drive so that he could start rolling across the city. It would take him a little while longer to reach Mission, for it was further south than Haight-Ashbury and Hayes Valley, his most recent haunts for the last few days. He quickly unrolled his window to let a cool breeze in and he focused on the road in front of him. The car interior was silent, a little too quiet for him, and the temptation to talk was overwhelming. Even when he generally liked silence when he was driving, he just felt like he needed to say something to his friend.

Something about his date, perhaps.

“I went out last night with that mule I told you ‘bout. I, uh, I took him to that restaurant. Y’know
‘The Valley Vineyard’, or whatever it’s called. Anyway, it was nice, Seokseok, it was real nice,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice. “We spent the night together too.”

“Sex?” Hoseok asked, not even a hint of hesitation in his voice.

“Not the way you’re thinking exactly, uh-”

Yoongi let go of the steering-wheel to gesture with one hand, his fingers curled up into a tight fist that he rapidly pumped in perfect imitation of a handjob. This made Hoseok snort laughter, clearly finding his mime act entertaining.

“I told you, I ain’t doing that right now,” he continued, as he took hold of the steering-wheel again. “It works good for me.”

“Yes, but does it work good for him too?”

Yoongi had the most brief mental image of Jimin, of his neck and his profile as he had been rutting against his behind; his lips slack so that little moans escaped him, with his eyes half-lidded as waves of pleasure coursed through his body.

“…Yeah, it works good for him too,” he replied in a quiet voice.

“It’s nice seeing you like this, Yoongi, less tightly sprung and more…relaxed,” Hoseok said, staring out of the front window. “I don’t think I’ve seen you this relaxed in months, maybe even a year. I’ve told you a million times that you’re too strict on yourself. You never have any fun, never go out wining and dining, never try and meet anyone new unless it’s for business. Last night was good for you, so, keep it up.”

“Keep it up?”

“Hmm, next weekend, go out with him again. Later in the week, hell, a couple of days from now: go out with him. Unwind, because God knows you’re gonna drop dead from a heart attack if you don’t get rid of some of that stress.”
“Seokseok, I’m telling you this ‘cos I trust you. I trust you keep this secret, yeah? Don’t tell your daddy, don’t tell your mother, it’s just between us.”

“I know,” Hoseok said, as he reached over to give his knee a soft squeeze. “I’m still keeping secrets for you from when we were kids, Gigi.”

Upon reaching the department store, Yoongi parked in the huge lot and he let his friend escort him inside the building.

The interior was filled with individual stores and booths, along with escalators to go up the floors, and many benches for customers to sit on and relax. There was a decorative fountain to add a touch of class to the store, which was lit by warm, but somewhat yellow-tinged lights. The glass store windows were filled with mannequins in a variety of clothing, or posters featuring thin and attractive models with garish makeup and even more garish hair, and Yoongi couldn’t help but stare at them as he followed him across the department store.

Yoongi had little choice but to follow Hoseok around the perfume store, ready to whip out his credit card or cheque book in order to pay for whatever he wanted. They couldn’t take too long browsing, but he knew that if he tried to make his friend hurry up, he would purposefully drag it out that little bit more.

The air inside of the store was filled with a faint cloud of scents, all mingled together in a way that would easily induce headaches after an extended stay inside of the store. The interior was lit by white and sterile floor lights, filled with glass display units, and the walls had dozens of posters hanging on them to advertise the goods. The designs varied from bright and abstract, to rather enticing and erotic, from typography to illustrations and even photographs. Inside of the display units, there were rows and rows of boxes, in front of which there were sample spritzer bottles for customers to spray.

Hoseok shoved his sunglasses up onto the top of his head, squinting at the bright light before letting out a soft groan and pulling them down again. Clearly, he was a little sensitive to the bright lights today, which wasn’t a surprise at all.

“You got a headache?” Yoongi asked, as his friend started studying the bottles.

“No, just a little hungover,” Hoseok replied, even when that seemed to clearly not be the case. “God, why don’t they have labels or something? How can I tell what they smell like just by looking at them?”
“You gotta spray ‘em, Seokseok,” he retorted wisely.

His friend grabbed one of the spritzers with a forced laugh, hitting the nozzle to spray a rather musky and heavy cologne into the air between them.

Yoongi wrinkled his nose up at the scent, finding it far too potent, the kind of cologne that his father would slap against his throat and cheeks.

Hoseok shelved it again with his own grimace, grabbing another bottle to sample instead.

“You know, I already have like five colognes,” he announced, as he sprayed the next one into the air.

“Yeah, I know.”

“I just said that last week so that you’d take me out shopping again,” he continued, moving along the display unit. Yoongi followed after him, running his gaze across the store to eye several customers. “It worked, it always works. When will you learn, Gigi?”

Hoseok grabbed another spritzer bottle and he hit the nozzle, spraying a fine mist into the air.

Yoongi felt his body almost hardening in response to the waft of scent, that blend of spicy but floral notes hitting him and catching him by complete surprise. He couldn’t help it, it was a completely involuntary reaction to the smell of the cologne.

That was Jimin’s scent.

Yoongi dragged his eyes away from the display to look at the spritzer in Hoseok’s hand, his entire body rigid. He knew that it was Jimin’s scent because he had been breathing it in since last night, had smelled it on his clothing and had tasted it on his tongue to know it intimately enough.

“Hmm,” Hoseok hummed, cocking his head and letting the scent hang in the air between them for a moment. “That’s kind of nice, don’t you think?”
Yoongi managed to make a sound at the back of his throat in agreement, his tongue just about lifting to press against the roof of his mouth. Did he look as stiff as he felt right now, his muscles almost thrumming because he was so tense? Yet, judging from the fact that Hoseok moved to grab another spritzer, the answer was: no.

Whilst his friend was busy checking out other products, he lifted up the cologne box to study it, turning the cardboard rectangle over in his hands and looking at the colourful stripes. He couldn’t see the bottle because it was hidden away inside of the box, but he was willing to bet that it was an attractive bottle. It would have to be attractive to catch Jimin’s eyes, he just knew it.


Yoongi found his lips curling up at this. Of course Jimin owned a cologne that had sold out when it had first hit the market a couple of years ago, that had turned into a rather hot item to own since. At least it wasn’t just hot, it actually smelled nice too. He spared a quick look up at the walls to try and locate the poster, running his eyes across the store quickly. The cologne poster had an illustration on it, of a man dressed in a large black leather jacket and tight white jeans, turned away from the viewer to show ‘Jules’ emblazoned on the back in red letters. The sight of it made him tighten his fingers around the box, because Jimin owned a leather jacket just like it.

Yoongi was so busy staring at the poster that it took him a moment to realise that his friend was speaking to him. It was enough to make him jolt in surprise.

“…you think?”

“Huh?”

“I said that I like this one,” Hoseok said, as he grabbed the *Jules* spritzer bottle. “But, I like this one too. What do you think, Gigi?”

“Not that one,” Yoongi said, waving his hand at the bottle of *Jules*. “I, uh, I wanna buy that one.”

“Really? Isn’t it a bit…soft for you?” he remarked, eyeing the box. “I thought that you preferred leather?”
Yoongi just made a noise under his breath as he reached over to grab the other spritzer bottle, spraying another mist of scent into the air. He got a spicy hint of nutmeg, followed by the pleasing aroma of ylang-ylang that made him hum under his breath.

“That’s more you, Seokseok,” he stated confidently. “You ain’t soft either, so, this suits you more.”

A minute later, with two bottles of *Jules* and Cacharel *Pour Homme* placed inside a small bag, Yoongi scribbled his signature on a sheet of cheque paper and he slid it across the till to the cashier. There, that was the first task completed, and so it was onto the next.

From the department store, Yoongi had to drive across several blocks to locate the breeder’s home. It was 11:54am when he finally stopped the car outside, a little earlier than needed but better than late. The view outside of his window showed him a decent-sized yellow home that was surrounded by tall wrought iron fencing, which he assumed extended right around to the back garden too.

Hoseok climbed out of the car and so he copied his actions, letting his friend enter the property first.

There was a welcoming mat on the top step of the porch, covered in faux muddy paw prints, and that was a clear sign of the kind of person that the breeder was. His friend hit the doorbell and he glanced back over his shoulder at him, following his gaze to eye the mat too.

Hoseok was just about to open his mouth, no doubt to make a witty remark, when the door swung inwards and a woman appeared in the doorway. She was only rather short, with deeply tanned skin and a full head of black hair, with an oval face and rather nondescript features. But she looked friendly, especially when she looked between them both and smiled.

“Good morning, I called earlier about possibly purchasing one of your dogs?” Hoseok said, holding out his hand in greeting.

“Yes, you’re here for your appointment. Right on time. Cristina Esponita, it’s lovely to meet you,” she said, as she accepted his hand and she gave it a quick shake. Then she held it out to him too, and so Yoongi moved to accept it.

“Actually, I’m the one looking at buying a puppy,” he explained, shaking her hand in a loose grip. “My friend recommended me.”
“OK, well, if you two come on inside, I’ll introduce you to my prized bitch,” Cristina said, as she let go of his hand and she waved at them to enter her home.

Yoongi entered the home first, so that Hoseok could close the door behind them both. He saw a medium-sized ground-floor with dozens of toys placed here and there on the wooden flooring, and the area was divided into a sitting-area and a large puppy play-area.

“The reason I like to show people Sally,” Cristina explained, quickly glancing back over her shoulder at them as she guided them in the direction of the slide-glass doors, “is because I like first-time owners to be fully aware of the kinda dog that they’re looking at.”

Yoongi eyed the gaggle of puppies inside of their pen to see that most of them were asleep. But at their arrival, a few of them lifted their heads or cracked their eyes open to look at them. He saw tan ones with black muzzles, black ones with white patches, and even a brindle puppy nestled in among a few black and white spotted ones. Good-looking puppies, just enough cuteness to be appealing as a gift for a boy.

“Big,” Yoongi remarked, as he looked away from the puppies.

“Yes, very big,” she agreed, before sliding the door open.

“So, this is Sally,” Cristina explained, as they stepped out onto the patio. “She’s the mother to all of the puppies that I have for sale, and the father is also purebred. I have the documentation for the litter, you can check over it all inside, along with the veterinary documents for their vaccinations.”

Yoongi found his gaze focusing entirely on the dog as he listened to her talking, noting that though she was lying at the end of the garden, she still looked pretty huge. She was white and dappled with splotches of black all over her body, and she had floppy ears that were currently lying still. Clearly, she was basking in the sunlight and enjoying a nice mid-morning nap. But at Cristina’s whistle, Sally lifted her head up to look at them. Then she got to her feet and she trotted across the garden in their direction.

“That’s the biggest fucking dog I’ve ever seen,” Hoseok said in a rather impressed tone, one arm folded over his thin chest and the other one cocked up so that he could play with his necklace chain. “Hey, Gigi? Imagine getting humped by that thing.”

“Oh!” Cristina exclaimed, before laughing at the remark. “Don’t you worry about that, Sally’s a
good girl, so, no humping.”

“Oh? That’s a shame,” his friend remarked with a wry smirk.

“If you want to see just how big she is, pat your thighs and say “up”,” she suggested.

Yoongi realised that she was telling him to do this, on account of the fact that he was the one looking at purchasing a puppy. So he shifted to pat at the fronts of his thighs just as Sally approached him, repeating the word “up”.

This command made the dog jump up onto her back legs just as he straightened up again, planting both of her forepaws right against his chest with enough strength to almost knock him right back on his ass.

Yoongi managed to recover by grabbing at her sides, awkwardly patting at them in the pretense of stroking the dog to cover up his slight stumble. Her snout was just inches away from his face, breathing hard gusts of hot breath right onto his skin. Then she dropped back down again and she proceeded to sit on the patio to look up at him, her tongue lolling out in a rather dopey grin.

“Gigi, she’s taller than you!” Hoseok declared, laughing uproariously. “Oh my god! Will the puppy get that big? Please say yes.”

“The puppy could get that big, or even bigger,” Cristina said, as he brushed at the front of his shirt roughly to knock away any dirt. “If you pick a male, that is.”

“No, no males,” Yoongi stated, patting at Sally’s head affectionately. “A female’d be a good idea. The dog ain’t for me, so, I don’t wanna risk getting some rambunctious boy that’ll tear up a sofa.”

“The puppy’s a present? I’ll assume it’s not for a special lady,” she joked with a knowing smile. “I think most women prefer smaller dogs, and my babies are far from small even when they’re puppies.”

“Uh, no,” Yoongi mumbled, as he rubbed at the back of his neck. “It’s for my, uh, my lil brother.”
“Oh, how wonderful,” Cristina said, moving to cross the patio and get close to the door. “Now, if you come with me, you can look at the choices and the documentation. If you’re a first-time buyer then don’t worry, I can go over anything that you need assistance with and…”

**1st September, 1984, 1:03pm: Western Addition, San Francisco, United States of America**

Yoongi killed the car against the curb, parked a little further down the street than usual so that Jungkook wouldn’t be able to look out of the window and see his vehicle. He wanted to keep that much a surprise, because he knew that the boy would recognise the model on account of the fact that he had taken a photograph of it not that long ago.

As he shifted to sit back in his seat, Yoongi noted that Hoseok was looking at him from over the tops of his Ray Bans Wayfarers like always, likely wondering why he hadn’t rolled right up to the front door.

Yoongi looked at the rear-view mirror for a few seconds, eyeing the massive pet carrier that was sitting on the backseat. He couldn’t see the puppy inside of it, but he was pretty certain that he could hear her sniffing away inside the box curiously. After studying the carrier, he glanced down at the dashboard, on which there was a white cardboard box done up with a red ribbon that was knotted into a plush bow. Though he knew what was inside of the box, he hadn’t actually looked at the cake because Hoseok had entered the bakery himself to purchase it. All that he knew was that there was a cake inside of it, just for Jungkook.

Jungkook didn’t know Hoseok, and yet he was going to receive a cake as a present from him. Yoongi didn’t even know if the boy would have eaten birthday cake before, if the tradition had even spread into Korea yet.

“Hey, Seokseok, I need you to do me a favour,” he said, as he looked away from the cake box to glance at his friend.

“Don’t you mean ‘another favour’?” his friend remarked dryly, still lounged in the passenger-seat rather comfortably.
“Go inside the joint, check it out for me. The woman that works the counter, she speaks Korean only, yeah? Her English ain’t great, so, just do a quick check.”

“Check inside the joint for what exactly?” Hoseok asked, as he finally shifted to sit upright in his seat and he slipped his sunglasses up on the top of his head.

“See if the kid’s in there, enter the place and then leave again. Just bullshit the reason you’re there, you’re good at bullshitting; yeah?”

“Gigi, I don’t even know what the kid looks like and you want me to check for you? Why don’t you check, huh?”

“I wanna keep it a surprise - the present,” he explained, removing his seatbelt and letting it snap back in place. “Just check, you’ll know him when you see him. Look for a kid with a mop of hair and eyes the size of golf balls, and it’s him.”

Hoseok sighed wearily at this, but at least he moved to pop the passenger-seat door open and he climbed out of the car, moving around the front of the vehicle. He gave him a quick look through the front window as he did so, before stepping up onto the curb and crossing the sidewalk to enter the restaurant.

Yoongi watched the door swinging shut and then he twisted to look back at the carrier again, briefly wondering if the boy would even like the present before coming to the conclusion that he was going to fucking love it. Of course he was going to love it. The boy hadn’t shut up about dogs that first day that they had met, for he seemed to absolutely love them, and a big dog? Well, that was even better. Jungkook didn’t know that he was bringing him a present or even visiting him today, and that meant that the present would be so much more special.

Hoseok emerged from the restaurant a minute later, lazily strolling over to his window so that he could rest his hands on the glass and glance in at him.

“The kid’s inside, sitting in the far corner. Looks like he’s studying or making a scrapbook or something. I just said something to the lady, asked if they took reservations for special events. She was clueless, so, I just brushed it off and left. There, was that good enough bullshitting for you, huh?”

“He’s inside?” he repeated, shifting in his seat to look back at the pet carrier. “Good…”
Yoongi felt his lips curling up into a rather smug smile as an idea hatched in his mind. He moved to pop his door open and go around the back of the vehicle, retrieving the pet carrier and rifling around a store bag to find the collar and leash that were shoved inside of it. With Hoseok’s assistance, he managed to get the red leather buckled around the puppy’s neck and then clip the leash on, stretching the length to loosely knot it around the base of a lamp post just outside of the restaurant.

“I’ll be right back,” Yoongi said, as he shoved the door open and he entered the front.

“Good morning, Prince Min,” Mijoo said from behind the counter, speaking in Korean and not even attempting English when addressing him.

“Morning,” he said, as the door shut behind him with a soft thump and sealed them inside of the restaurant; running his gaze over to look at the corner table.

“Oh!” Jungkook exclaimed, his already massive eyes growing even more rounded as he stared up at him. “Oh, I- um-”

“Nice to see you too, kid,” Yoongi replied, moving to get over to his table and hunkering down to get onto the floor cushion with a soft grunt. “You seem surprised to see me.”

“A little, but you came, big brother,” the boy said, as he gave him a happy grin. “So, that’s all that matters. I just…I didn’t expect to see you today, is all. You’re so busy, I thought you might be doing business.”

Yoongi settled onto the cushion comfortably for a moment, folding his knees in front of him and dropping his hands into his lap. He saw that Hoseok was indeed correct, for the boy had several things placed on the table in front of him: sheets of paper, covered in large characters that looked rather childish but were neat to his eyes, a dozen pens, a thick photo album, and a spread of Polaroid photographs covering the surface. There was also a large glass of milk, with the remains still at the bottom and condensation beaded on the outside.

Jungkook was sitting cross-legged at the opposite side of the table, wearing a black and white striped tee-shirt tucked into a pair of fitted denim jeans matched up with those same white no-brand sneakers. His mop of dark hair was still hanging across his brow and his ears.

“You look busy to me, kid,” he remarked, as Jungkook retrieved his pen and he started nibbling on
“Uhuh,” Jungkook hummed around the pen, quickly grabbing a shot so that he could turn it over and start scribbling on the back. “I didn’t want to send them until I had a couple of pages, you know? So, there’s something interesting for him to read. I’ve been jotting down things to tell him over the last week or so, and I’ve finally got enough. I’m going to tell him about the journey here, and the restaurant, about the apartment we’re living in and the stuff they’ve got here. There’s so much to tell him about now, and I’ve got all of the photographs too.”

“Yeah, I can see a lot of shots. You see anymore big dogs, huh?”

“Hmm, I saw a few more,” Jungkook explained with a fond smile, glancing up from the Polaroid to hold his gaze. “I saw them in a park. I tried to take a few photographs, but, uh, it’s hard talking to the owners, asking them to stop so that I can take a photograph. Do you want to see them?”

“‘Course I do, kid,” Yoongi said, as he shifted to fold his elbows on the table.

Jungkook let out a happy noise at this, a giddy sound as he grabbed a stacked pile of Polaroids to rifle through them and locate the ones that he was looking for.

Yoongi saw that the photographs on the table varied from the snapshots that he had taken the day that he had escorted him around the city: shots of buildings in Civic Centre, of the colourful sights of The Castro, and the Painted Ladies, and there were different ones too. The boy had taken dozens of shots of pretty park plants and trees, a few of the bay from various regions of the city, and even some shots that looked to be the skyline taken from the top of an apartment block. He had a good eye, that much was certain, even if he was just taking tourist shots for his friend.

“There was this one, I saw this one on…um, Tuesday? Yes, Tuesday, down in my… home place?”

“The Bayview?” he replied, figuring out that Jungkook was trying to say ‘neighbourhood’ but he didn’t know the correct English word for it.

“The Bayvee…you,” Jungkook repeated, as he handed him the first photograph. “My home place. What dog is that?”

“The dog?” Yoongi repeated, eyeing the shot and seeing a very familiar flash of silky black and
brown fur sitting on a patch of grass. “That’s a Rottweiler, kid.”

“Oh, I can’t say that!” the boy exclaimed, before laughing giddily. “It had a deep bark though. It was kinda scary until I gave it a pat on the head, then it licked my hand and I knew that it was a good dog. Um, then there was this one.”

Yoongi handed him the photograph of the Rottweiler back so that he could accept the next photograph. This time he saw that it was a golden retriever, a shaggy sandy blond dog with bright chocolate eyes and a lolling pink tongue. It was looking right up at the camera, showing that it was a playful and sweet dog, and he had no doubts that the boy had been given plenty of licks and slobbering kisses from it.

Yoongi found himself hoping that the puppy that he had bought him was going to grow up to be that friendly-looking.

“That was Thursday, in the Chinese part of town,” the boy explained. “It’s a handsome dog, right?”

“Yeah, real handsome,” Yoongi agreed, as he exchanged photographs for the final shot. “Oh, wait, this’ a-”

“Small doggy!” Jungkook exclaimed, bursting out into laughter. “Ah, it was so tiny! I asked if I could pick it up, um, I said “hold? I hold doggy?” , and the owner, she laughed a lot, but she let me pick it up. It felt so nice hugging it against my chest, ah~”

Yoongi studied the snapshot of the chihuahua with a grin, listening to Jungkook laughing at the memory so sweetly.

When he glanced across the room, Yoongi saw that the boy’s mother was in the act of cleaning up a table, a soft smile at the corners of her lips as she listened to them talking and laughing with one another. It must have pleased her greatly, hearing her son talking to people that weren’t just her and her husband, interacting and having fun in a safe way even in this foreign land that they were still very much learning to live in.

“Hey, kid? Come outside for a sec; yeah?” Yoongi said, as he handed him the photograph back.

“Huh, why?” Jungkook asked curiously, adding it to the pile of Polaroids.
“Just come outside,” he reiterated with a smile, lifting his hand to curl his fingers invitingly. “You got your camera, right?”

“Uhuh,” the boy nodded, as he shifted to retrieve his camera from the floor beside the cushion to flash it at him. “I mean, I’ve only got a couple of pieces of film left, because mama said I use too much and she won’t buy me anymore yet, so~”

“Jungkookie, you do use too much,” Mijoo argued, straightening up again. “I gave you some allowance last week, and you spent it all on film and candy in a day!”

“Candy, huh?” Yoongi remarked with that same grin on his face. “Yeah, that shit’s addictive here. C’mon, I got something I wanna show you.”

It took Jungkook a few more seconds of contemplation before he got to his feet and he followed him across the restaurant, his Polaroid camera in hand and his eyes round with curiosity. Yoongi shoved the door open and he held it for him, allowing the boy to step out onto the sidewalk. The first thing that he seemed to notice was his car, but then the sight of the puppy tied to the lamp post beside it caught his attention.

“Oh my good!” Jungkook exclaimed in English, so close and yet so far. “Big brother!”

Yoongi moved to hunker down in front of the puppy, gesturing at him to join him.

Jungkook did so, dropping to sit on the sidewalk without a single care and placing his camera aside so that he could reach out with both hands. She went straight to him, letting him drag her onto his thighs so that he could start lavishing her with attention.

“Oh, look at her,” Jungkook almost cooed. “She’s such a cute puppy! She’s got, um, stripes!”

“Stripes?” Yoongi repeated, before laughing softly as he eyed her dark brown and black brindle coat. “Yeah, I guess she has, kid.”

Hoseok climbed out of the car again, shifting to sit on the hood of his vehicle and watching them both intently.
Jungkook dropped his head to look at the puppy, earning himself a wet kiss in return from a glossy black nose and bright pink tongue. When he burst out giggling, Yoongi fancied that the puppy winked at him with her almond-shaped chocolate eyes.

“What kind is she? Do you know?”

“A ‘Great Dane’,“ Hoseok explained, as he glanced between the puppy and the boy and he joined into their conversation in Korean. “They grow up to be big dogs. I heard that you like big dogs, Jungkook.”

“I do,” Jungkook replied with a grin, his expression and body language seeming to hint that he was comfortable around his best friend even when they had only just met. “Um, back in Korea, the dogs aren’t really big. Jindo, pungsan, sapsali, they’re kinda medium, you know? But here, there’s dogs as big as people!”

Hoseok snorted at this exclamation, no doubt recalling the fact that they had had a brush with one such dog today. Yes, Yoongi could still recall how heavy and big the puppy’s mother had been, and he couldn’t help but wonder how Jungkook would react to such a sight. The boy would probably piss himself.

“Is she yours?” Jungkook asked, glancing up at Hoseok again and clearly assuming her to not be his because Yoongi hadn’t mentioned owning a dog before. “What’s her name? She’s so cute.”

“She’s yours, kid,” Yoongi replied, watching the boy playing with one of her ears. “So, what’s her name, huh?”

“Huh?” Jungkook hummed, twisting to look at him as he gave her ear a kneading rub between his thumb and fingers.

“She’s your dog, Jungkook. I bought her for you, for your birthday.”

The noise that Jungkook made in reply was unbelievable, caught somewhere between a squeak and a laugh. For a few seconds, he just stared at him dumbly, but then it registered with him and the boy reached over to grab at his arm. He tugged on his shirt sleeve excitedly, almost like a child.
“Seriously, big brother?! You bought me a puppy?!” Jungkook exclaimed. “My own puppy?!”

“Yeah, so, how ‘bout we take her inside?” he suggested, as he shifted to unknot the leash from the bottom of the lamp post and he offered it to the boy. “Seokseok, bring the cake in, yeah?”

“Yes, master,” his friend drawled sarcastically, moving to climb back into the car.

Yoongi held the door so that Jungkook could go back into the restaurant again, camera and leash in hand. Then he waited for his friend to toss him the keys and carry the cake box into the joint before following them both inside.

Unsurprisingly, the sight of a puppy trotting across the restaurant made Mijoo shift to lean over the counter, staring at the animal in complete surprise.

“Jungkookie, honey? Where did you find that puppy?"

“Yoongi bought her for me, mama!” Jungkook explained, dropping to the floor to undo her leash and letting the puppy race circles around him. “He bought me a puppy!”

His mother straightened up to look over at him at this, her expression hard to read.

Hoseok shifted to place the cake box down on the counter, reaching up to fix his hair and study Mijoo from over the tops of his sunglasses.

“This is a nice place,” his friend remarked in English, eyeing the interior curiously. “Could do with some work, to brighten it up and make it more appealing, but I’ve got some connections. A little cash injection could help legitimise this place, right, Gigi?”

“Mmm, that’s what I was thinking,” he agreed with a nod. “Get those names for me, I’ll sort that shit out.”

“So, what’s the pretty lady’s name?” Hoseok asked, switching back to Korean and giving her a wide smile.
“Son Mijoo,” she replied in a quiet voice, reaching up to touch her hair instinctively. “My husband is Jeon Jungil, and our son is Jeon Jungkook. ‘Kook’ is the generational name, but, well, we’ve been blessed with just a single son so far. What’s your name?”

“Jung Hoseok,” he replied, as he held his hand out in offering to her. “I’ve got two sisters, ‘Seok’ is the generational name.”

When Mijoo placed her hand in his, Hoseok didn’t shake it, but rather he lifted it to his lips to plant a quick kiss on her knuckles like he did with his own mother. It was enough to make the woman laugh softly, caught by surprise by the gesture.

“Seokseok, stop flirting with married mothers,” Yoongi muttered out of the corner of his mouth.

“Just being friendly, Gigi,” Hoseok retorted. “Look, she likes it.”

“Um, what’s in the box, Prince Min?” Mijoo asked over her son’s excited laughter and cooing. “Is it something for the dog?”

“No, it’s cake,” he replied. “It’s a birthday cake, you eat it for dessert. It’s, uh, it’s a tradition here. I dunno if it’s a thing in Korea yet, but I don’t think it is.”

“We just restocked the pantry,” Mijoo explained, looking between them both and lingering her gaze considerably on Hoseok. “I could prepare lunch for you all to enjoy, as a celebration?”

“Uh, sure,” Yoongi said, as he looked between her and her son for a few seconds. When the woman moved to go through the curtain to enter the kitchen, he turned to look at Hoseok. “You go play with the kid, yeah, I just wanna talk to her.”

“Play with? What, is he eight or eighteen?” his friend retorted.

Yoongi ignored him as he ducked under the counter to also enter the kitchen after Mijoo, finding that the area was rather small but well equipped.
There were dozens of pots and pans of varying sizes present, along with a decent-sized stove and large sink. The woman was in the act of hunkering down to drag a sack of rice free, so that she could scoop out several small cups and start washing it in a large pan in the sink. He could have offered to assist her, but he doubted that she would have let him wash rice in her kitchen, not when she knew that he was the heir to Moon Tiger Mob. So he just stayed out of the way to observe her for a moment.

“Are you, uh, you making miyeokguk? I used to have that as a kid on my birthday, our maid cooked it really good. She used to put mussels in the broth, just for me.”

“Jungkookie has already had his birthday serving of miyeokguk, so, I’ll have to prepare another important meal,” Mijoo explained, as she moved over to the stove. “We don’t usually celebrate it on the day, but wait for the new year. But now that we’re in America, Jungil said that we should try some American customs instead.”

“You don’t mind doing that?”

“It’s strange, but it’s not a bad thing,” she replied, running water to fill the pot for a few seconds. “I suppose it makes sense to do that, to celebrate the day of birth every year. I think that I could get used to this custom, but not any of the strange ones that I’ve heard about.”

“We got plenty of strange ones,” he agreed with a nod, folding his arms over his chest so that he could watch her rigourously washing the rice, pressing her weight down onto it and grinding with her palm before grabbing handfuls and turning it over to ensure that she cleaned it fully.

“Your friend? Is he important, Prince Min?” Mijoo asked curiously, looking over at him as she worked.

“Yeah, his father’s my gang uncle, works right under my father,” he explained. “He, uh, he’s basically just below me in the hierarchy, and that’s his photo on your wall right there.”

Mijoo followed his pointed finger to look at the photographs tacked above their calendar.

Yoongi could see the three shots, printed on glossy paper: his father, him, and Hajoon all neat in a row. His father’s photograph was an official one, one of him sitting in a wingback chair with documents in front of him that he was signing. Hajoon also had an official photograph, one cropped from a family portrait, but not his. His photograph was far from official.
It was rather strange looking at a candid black and white snapshot of himself, taken whilst he was out on the street and seemingly through a store window of some kind judging from the glare across the bottom of the shot. At least he wasn’t wearing a baseball cap, just to make it easier to see his face.

“So, yeah, Hoseok’s important, and he’s one of my men,” he finished.

“I’ll have to call him by a respectable title then - Master Jung,” Mijoo suggested, as she turned back to the rice. “I wouldn’t have known this fact unless you told me, for when he entered the restaurant a few minutes ago, I didn’t think anything like that of him. I don’t mean to sound disrespectful, Prince Min, it’s just-

“He’s unconventional,” Yoongi agreed in a quiet voice, before cocking his head. “Mijoo? Is everything alright? You seem…tense? Is this ‘bout the dog? Did I break a family rule by buying him that dog, huh?”

Mijoo grabbed a dish towel so that she could start hastily drying at her hands, that same erratic air coming off her that he couldn’t help but notice. It had been present since right after she had spotted the dog, and Yoongi wondered if she in any way disapproved of the gift that he had bought her son, but she didn’t want to tell him that she did. For fear of upsetting her son, or fear of angering him. Yet, he didn’t care. He would prefer that she tell him truthfully so that he would be able to talk it over with her, to smooth over any problems so that her son’s birthday wouldn’t be ruined because of him.

“Jungkookie will have to promise to take care of the dog. I know how he is, he can get forgetful sometimes, and it’s a big responsibility,” she explained quickly. “It’s why I refused to buy him one as a child. But he’s never stopped begging for one, not once for the last ten years.”

“I’ll help him, yeah?” Yoongi remarked in a soft voice. “I’ll give him, uh, I’ll give him an allowance. He has to buy food for the dog with it, he can save up the quarters and buy some candy every now and again or whatever, but it’s for the dog first. I’ll make sure he takes her on walks around the block, there’s a park close by he can exercise her in. I can help him train her too. The breeder said that those puppies are the sweetest you can find. Smart, loyal and friendly.”

“Oh, I’m sure they are, it’s just…”

Mijoo shifted to glance through the doorway and eye her son, who was hunkered down and aggressively tickling the dog’s tummy to make her pant excitedly and nip at his hands. Hoseok was
sitting at his table a few feet away, checking over his Polaroids with great interest.

Yoongi could see something on her face that looked almost...nostalgic, sad maybe. She was looking at her child, who was now considered an adult in many parts of the world, so he supposed that it made sense. Yes, he could see that it wasn’t the puppy that Mijoo was thinking about right now. It was the fact that her son was eighteen and now had a great amount of responsibility that would just reinforce the fact that he was no longer a kid.

“He’s eighteen, Mijoo,” he pointed out. “He ain’t a kid no more, and it’s just a dog. He’s more than capable of the responsibility, but I got a feeling that ain’t exactly what this’bout. Is it?”

“I always tried hard to shelter him, back in Korea,” she explained in a whisper-soft voice. “I knew that he was growing up, but, Prince Min, what a time for a boy to grow up. Our country is so beautiful, was so beautiful, but now...now and in the last few years, it’s been a frightening place. I needed to keep him sheltered, you understand? Even now, when he’s eighteen, I still see him as a child because I had to treat him like one to keep him out of danger and trouble. But just like his father, he’s too brave-hearted and intelligent for me to keep an eye on.”

“What’d you mean?”

“I knew that he was going to those protests, the student ones, back in Seoul. I knew that he was causing trouble with the police, but he always had perfect excuses whenever I confronted him about it all. Right before we left Korea, he got himself into trouble and he was caught graffiting some kind of protest slogan on a wall. He was chased by a soldier and he got hit with a rubber bullet. It only bruised his shoulder badly, but that’s not the point. The point is that I let him run around like that, even when I was aware that he was at those protests. That bullet could have killed him or severely disfigured him. So, I didn’t keep him sheltered well enough as a mother.”

“So, you think you gotta shelter him even more now, huh?” Yoongi mumbled, as he shifted to lean back against the wall. “If you ask me, the boy’s smart and brave, maybe a lil stupid every now and again, but he’s a good kid. I don’t think you gotta shelter him now, not here. You dunno anything ‘bout America, Mijoo; how’re you gonna protect him?”

“Prince Min? I know that I can’t ask this of you, that I shouldn’t impose, but...if you could keep him safe from the drugs and the crime, from the guns, if you could.”

Yoongi reached over to grab at her hands, pulling one free from the dish towel so that he could take hold of it and squeeze it in his own tightly. The contact caught her by surprise, made her take a sharp gasp as she twisted to look at him with her wide and rounded eyes.
“I’ll keep an eye on him,” he promised in his own whisper. “You can trust me. I took care of him that day I took him on a ride, kept him outta trouble, I told him to stay away from certain streets. He’s gonna learn how to behave here without taking another bullet; don’t you worry ‘bout that. Yeah?”

“Thank you, Prince Min,” Mijoo said with a relieved smile, her lips twitching at the corners and her eyes too wet. “Please tell Jungkookie and Master Jung that I’ll be making tteokguk and galbijjim, with side dishes. Hopefully, Jungil will be back by then, so, we will be able to share the meal together.”

“That’d be nice.”

Yoongi gave her hand another squeeze before letting go again, allowing her to go over to the stove to start preparing the lunch. Then he exited the kitchen, pushing the curtain aside to glance into the main-area of the restaurant. As he moved to duck under the counter again, he saw that Jungkook was seated at the table, in the act of explaining something about a snapshot to his friend rapidly; the puppy lying happily in his lap because she had clearly taken a great liking to him already.

“Your mother’s making tteokguk and galbijjim, kid,” Yoongi said, as he moved to join them at the table and he lowered himself onto the cushion to eye the Polaroid in Hoseok’s fingers. He saw that it was of one of the many rainbow flags hanging in The Castro. “Sounds delicious, right?”

“Hm, I love galbijjim,” Jungkook agreed with a vigorous nod.

“She’s cooking lunch? Then, I think I’ll go and offer my assistance,” Hoseok remarked, as he dropped the photograph and got to his feet and proceeded to stretch.

“You? Cook? Seriously, Seokseok?”

“Yes, even it’s just helping with the preparation,” his friend said, reaching down to give his hair an annoying ruffle that he knew would irritate him. “I’m getting restless. I know I don’t cook ever, but I’m getting restless and I need to distract myself.”

“You got any pills, huh?” Yoongi asked in English. Hoseok made a noise in disagreement as he crossed the floor. “After you help with the cooking, I got a backup bottle in the glove box. You can take a couple, but in front of me. I wanna see how many you swallow.”
Hoseok was probably just going to stand in the kitchen for a few minutes and act all sweet with Mijoo, maybe lightly flirt because he seemed to live in a state of flirting with absolutely anyone for fun. Hopefully, he would actually help her with the cooking, but he doubted it. He knew his friend too well.

“What were you talking about?” Jungkook asked curiously, as he watched Hoseok going into the kitchen.

Yoongi made a noise at this, shrugging it off to let him think that it wasn’t important. In reality, he just hadn’t wanted him to hear him talking about pills with his friend, lest the boy figure out that they were talking about actual drugs and not medication.

“Your friend’s nice, he’s nice and funny.”

“Hoseok? You like him?”

“He smells nice too,” the boy added as an afterthought, eyeing his photographs before looking down at the puppy again. “But guess what? I thought of a name for her!”

“Oh yeah?

“Tigger!”

“’Ti…Tigger’? You sure you ain’t tryna say ‘Tiger’, kid?” Yoongi joked, wondering if the boy wanted to name her after the fierce and proud beast, or maybe even after the symbol of the mob that his family worked for. “Y’know, like the animal?”

“No, Tigger,” Jungkook clarified. “Like in ‘Pooh’.”

When he saw his rather blank expression, the boy made a noise under his breath.

“The bear, the chubby bear with the honey? It’s in the books! My mama used to read them to me, I
still have them, I brought them with me.”

“Shit, I didn’t know that they had ‘Winnie the Pooh’ over in Korea, kid,” Yoongi remarked, as he looked down at the dog. “Yeah, I know what you mean now. I just got a lil confused.”

“It’s because she’s stripey! Like Tigger, but she’s a puppy!” Jungkook grinned mischievously at this, clearly finding his own wit highly amusing. “Do you like it? Or do you think I should give her a better name?”

Yoongi had been in the act of studying the puppy, and when he glanced up at the boy, he saw that he was looking at him with an almost uncertain expression. He had made the joke and had picked quite a great name for the dog, but it seemed like he was a little bit worried that it might be silly, or even childish. But... what names for dogs weren’t silly or childish? Rex? Buster? King? Angel? They were all silly really, and so there was nothing wrong with the name that he had chosen.

“Tigger it is,” Yoongi said with a soft smile. “She looks like a Tigger to me.”

Hoseok re-emerged after fifteen minutes spent in the kitchen, his pullover sleeves rolled up to show that he might just have helped Mijoo prepare some form of food. He was looking antsy as hell, and so Yoongi tossed him his keys so that he could retrieve the pills from his car. After doing so, he sat down at their table again and he handed him his keys, unscrewing the pill bottle without a hint of reservation.

“Kid decided to call her ‘Tigger’ after-”

“After the cartoon,” Hoseok finished. “Well, I mean the book character, but they made that film a couple of years ago. Remember? ‘77? Or was it ‘76?”

“Are you taking medicine?” Jungkook asked curiously, as he watched him shaking out two of the Valium pills.

“Medicine?” Hoseok repeated curiously, moving to place the bottle down on the table. “Yes, medicine. I take this medicine for my brain, it needs it.”

Yoongi grabbed the bottle and lid so that he could quickly screw it back in place and shove it into his trousers. Just to stop Hoseok from taking any more. It was a bad lie to tell the boy, all things
considered, but it wasn’t entirely untrue. His brain was hooked on the drugs, had been for a couple of years now, and it was much better than telling the boy the truth. Not after he had just promised Mijoo that he would keep her son away from all of that shit.

Hoseok knocked back the pills and he dry swallowed them with a quick grimace, giving them both a brief smile that showed that he was medicated and calm now.

Jungkook returned it, a rather sympathetic smile on his face, and Yoongi just shifted to reach over the table and stroke Tigger. The puppy stirred at his touch, lifting her head so that one ear flopped funnily over the top of her skull in a way that made the boy laugh.

“Do you want to hold her?” Jungkook offered, grabbing the puppy and hefting her up over the table in offering.

Yoongi had little choice but to take the puppy from him, placing her down on his own thighs. Tigger could have decided to get off and go back to her owner, to curl up and sleep there, but she just settled in place and she proceeded to stare up at him with those puppy dog eyes of hers. He could feel her tail shaking from side to side against his lower legs, and he realised that she was eyeing up his mouth, clearly thinking about giving him a wet kiss too. He placed a hand on her back and he lowered his head ever so slightly to see if she would.

Jungkook must have been watching him the entire time, must have had his camera readily prepared, because he heard the sound of the shutter clicking hard just as Tigger planted her wet nose right against his mouth in a kiss.

Yoongi couldn’t help but laugh, reaching up to wipe at his mouth roughly as the puppy continued nuzzling at his wrist and chin affectionately. Well, Cristina hadn’t lied about the puppies being friendly, that much was obvious. As he wiped his mouth clean, the boy tugged the piece of film out of the device.

“This is a nice shot,” Jungkook said in a quiet voice, holding the Polaroid by the edge to study it. “You look happy in it, big brother.”

“Oh yeah?” Yoongi remarked, looking up from Tigger to eye the boy across the table. “Why’d you say that? Don’t I always look happy, huh?”

Jungkook glanced up from the Polaroid to study him, before quickly looking over at Hoseok. It
seemed that he was wondering if he should reply to the question, now that there was company and not just the two of them like last time. What could he possibly want to say to him that his friend couldn’t hear, he didn’t know, but he was highly curious.

Yoongi just resumed stroking the puppy as he held his gaze and he waited for him to speak.

“It’s not that you don’t look happy,” Jungkook explained slowly, picking up a pen so that he could play with it. “It’s that you have this kind of…air around you, big brother. You’re smart, you’re tough and you’re really funny too. But sometimes, when we talk, there’s something about you that I can’t seem to figure out. It’s in your eyes, mostly. I noticed it when we went on that ride. When you talk about certain things, your eyes kinda mist over, and I get the sense that you aren’t happy. I mean, everyone has those moments. You might just have had a sad moment when I was with you, and I just assumed you to be like that often.”

Yoongi could sense that Hoseok was looking at him, could almost see his face out of the corner of his eyes, but he didn’t look away from Jungkook once whilst he was speaking because he was enraptured by him. Jungkook had revealed that he was a lot more observant and mature than he and his mother had been giving him credit for.

“When we were in that place, the colourful part of the town, and you told me about that disease,” he continued. “Big brother, I could feel waves of pain coming from you, and I wanted to say something to you, but I didn’t know how to back then. But I’ve thought about it a lot since, and I just wanted to tell you that it’s nice when you smile. I really wanted to get just one photograph of you smiling, so…”

Jungkook held the Polaroid up to show him it, revealing a snapshot of him laughing - his head thrown back and his mouth open to show his teeth as Tigger nuzzled against his neck playfully. Then he placed it back down on the table and he gave him his own brief smile.

“Well, kid, I kinda feel like smiling when you’re ‘round,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice.

Just like Mijoo had predicted, Jungil returned shortly before the lunch was finished, carrying in several boxes of beer and alcohol to no doubt replenish the stock for their gambling customers. After greeting them warmly, he disappeared into the kitchen to help with the cooking, but Yoongi knew that he would spot the dog and Hoseok soon enough and start asking questions.

It was 1:45pm by the time that Mijoo and Jungil were quickly setting the table with their lunch: placing down large serving trays covered in bowls of steamed rice, tteokguk, galbijjim, pajeon, kimchi, and various seasoned namul, along with cups of fragrant herbal tea. It was a colourful spread
of food, bright reds and oranges and greens clashing against milky whites and rich browns so appealingly.

Yoongi had to move a second table closer for them to all fit around: Jungkook’s parents and him on one side, Jungkook and his dog and Hoseok on the other. He found himself wondering if he was even going to be able to eat, considering the size of his breakfast, but the scent of it all was so delicious that he was pretty certain that he would be able to finish at least a single serving.

“Would you like to join us in prayer?” Jungil asked, holding one of his hands out to him in offering because he was holding his wife’s hand in the other.

Jungkook moved to hold his hand out to Hoseok, so that his friend could take hold of his hand over the table too and complete the circle.

Hoseok had already retrieved his chopsticks and he had been in the act of grabbing some braised ribs when he did so, whilst Yoongi had lifted his cup of tea to take a sip.

“Uh, no, we don’t pray,” Yoongi muttered, as he looked away from the table and he eyed his friend. Hoseok looked like he had just been slapped across the face at the mere suggestion of praying, and so he gestured at him to get him to drop his head too. “Excuse us.”

“Of course, Prince Min,” Jungil said, grabbing hold of his son’s other hand to complete the small prayer circle around the table instead.

Yoongi expected that the man might pray aloud, as families were apt to do. Yet, the three of them just remained silent and they took a moment to silently reflect on the meal that they were sharing. Then they all moved to start eating, signalling that lunch could start at last.

“So, uh, Mijoo?” Yoongi asked, as he eyed the main soup. “What’s so special ‘bout tteokguk?”

“Tteokguk? You don’t know about tteokguk? Big brother, there’s a tradition that says that you have to eat it to grow a year older,” Jungkook explained, as he held his bowl under his mouth. “So, when I take a sip, I’ll be eighteen at last!”

“Do you age after every sip?” Hoseok asked, before adding. “Yoongi will be fifty when he’s finished his serving.”
This made the family laugh heartily and made Yoongi pause in the act of grabbing a chunk of rice cake from the thick and fragrant broth. His friend gave him a rather mellowed-out smile, the Valium having kicked in to calm his anxiety just right; just taking the edge off until he could add some champagne or white wine on top.

“Big brother? Is that what you’re calling Prince Min, son?” Jungil asked curiously, a smile on his face showing that he wasn’t shocked or mad about the formality, but seemingly amused.

“He asked me to call him it, daddy-”

“Not ‘he’, Jungkookie, remember? We’ve spoken about your manners,” Mijoo remarked from over the rim of her own soup bowl. “‘Prince Min asked you to call him it’, yes?”

“And what are you calling the dog, son?”

“Tigger,” Jungkook replied around a chunk of braised beef, the rib held between his teeth so that he could feed meat scraps to said puppy.

“Ah, like the storybook character,” Jungil said to himself. “Hmm, yes, you used to love that character. One time, when Jungkook was just a child, he had my mother paint his face just like an actual tiger; he loved the character that much. Prince Min, did you buy him the dog?”

“Yeah, sir, I did,” he replied around a chunk of pajeon. “I promised to help him feed her and train her, if I need to. But I think the kid’s got this.”

“I used to have a dog, when I was a boy,” the man explained in a rather wistful tone. “I should be able to teach her a few tricks. She looks like a mild-mannered and friendly dog, a little bit like me.”

Mijoo made a soft sound at this, smiling at her husband.

Yoongi locked gazes with her for a moment and she gave him a knowing nod before turning back to her food.
“So, how’s business been since I last checked?” he asked, as he grabbed a chunk of perilla-kimchi. “I assume you’re bringing in cash?”

“Yes, Prince Min,” Jungil replied, nursing his cup of tea. “We’re bringing in money. We have to pay men that visit us every week a tax, or that’s what the man that helped us find the home and business told us. The men don’t say what the tax is for, but I think that I know what it’s for. For our first week, we made enough money to pay them, so, hopefully we will be able to keep paying the tax.”

“They can be quite frightening,” Mijoo added in a quiet voice. “I’m scared that they might threaten us if we don’t have enough money prepared. But it’s hard, Prince Min. Between stocking the restaurant with food and alcohol and our own home, we have just enough money left for the tax. But what if we don’t?”

“I’ll replace ‘em with my own men, men I can trust,” Yoongi offered. “I’ll make sure they don’t threaten you, or intimidate you, I’ll make sure they ain’t predisposed for violence. The tax is…it can be pretty heavy at first, I know, but me and my friend are gonna get this place better equipped. We’ll invest a lil cash, get some guys to spread the word and increase your reputation. Before y’know it, you’ll be serving customers food and cards, yeah? My investment, you don’t ever have to pay that back. Just keep serving me food like this, that’s all I need.”

“Oh, Prince Min,” Mijoo almost gushed, her tone revealing her to be both relieved and flattered. “I don’t think that we can thank you enough.”

Yoongi just turned back to his food at this rather than reply, knowing that whatever he said would just be denied by her and her husband. He didn’t really think that he had done anything at all, save for buying their son gifts and tipping well. But he was also going to inject cash into the joint to help legitimise it and make it look less suspicious to the authorities in the future. That was something they could rightly be thankful for.

Yoongi was in the act of sipping at his tteokguk when Jungkook started playfully tugging on a chunk of bone with his puppy, Tigger trying her very hardest to gnaw on the joint to get scraps of meat and gristle off it. He managed to pull it free successfully, dropping it onto the tray to retrieve another chunk of meat for them to share. He was pretty certain that the puppy shouldn’t be eating too much galbijjim, but a little bite here and there was probably fine. It was probably a lot tastier than dog food, that much was certain.

“Mijoo? Your cooking is absolutely wonderful,” Hoseok said, as he dabbed at his mouth with a napkin. “Why, if I didn’t already have a maid, I’d be begging you to work for me just so I could enjoy it every single day.”
Yoongi saw that Hoseok had actually eaten his full serving for once, a lot more than usual. He might not have eaten breakfast, he might just have. Whatever the case, he had left just a slight dribble of soup and a few spoonfuls of rice. His compliment was rather amusing, considering the fact he had joked about wanting her as a maid, but it was still enough to make the woman smile happily.

“Ah, our Mijoo is a wonderful cook,” Jungil announced, as he reached over to place his hand on top of hers and he gave it a squeeze. “I first met her in a restaurant, her grandmother’s restaurant. She served me jjukkumi gumi, and I knew, at that exact moment, that I needed to marry her.”

Yoongi saw something on Jungkook’s face at this, the well-known look of an embarrassed child that was going to whine that his parents were being “gross” and giving out “too much information”. But the story was kind of nice, he supposed, in that way that married couples all had their own stories about how they fell in love. He knew that Hoseok’s father and mother had met at an Asian art exhibition that his parents had sponsored, and that his own parents had been an arranged and loveless marriage of convenience. It should have been nice hearing such stories, and yet he found a funny weight starting to settle in the pit of his stomach as he prodded at his serving of rice with his spoon.

Yoongi couldn’t help but think about Jimin, talking about how he had grown up absorbing perfect families all around - a man and a woman, a happy meeting in a normal location; whilst fiddling with his earring and struggling to find the right words to tell him that his parents had done nothing but fight with each other. He thought about how neither of them had had a proper relationship that had started from meeting in normal public settings that they could make jokes about to other people.

But…they had met in a restaurant, over food and wine, and though it had progressed rapidly into sex in a bathhouse that exact same night, wasn’t it really the closest thing to normal that they could hope to achieve?

Yoongi found that weight starting to ease off at this thought, realising that it was actually the truth. Had Jimin realised it too yet, or had he yet to figure out the fact that they had met somewhere other than parking lots, outside of bars, or loitering around the park?

“Big brother? Are you OK?” Jungkook asked suddenly, Tigger still tugging at the bone in his fist.

“Huh?” Yoongi glanced up from his serving of rice to look at the boy, raising his eyebrows curiously.

“You, um, you were pulling that face again,” he remarked in a quiet voice.
“I’m good, kid, just thinking,” he replied, as he shifted on the floor cushion. “Don’t you worry none ‘bout me, yeah?”

Hoseok moved to get to his feet, crossing the restaurant to get over to the counter to retrieve the cake box. Jungkook had been too distracted earlier to have even noticed the box, and so when he shifted to place it onto the table, his eyes latched right onto it. Everyone had finished eating, nothing more than scraps present, and so he was clearly breaking out the cake as dessert.

“Um, I need a knife…”

“Let me go and get you one, Master Jung,” Mijoo said, gathering together the used bowls and plates so that she could clear the table for him.

“Here, Jungkookie, you should open it,” Hoseok said, gently pushing the box in front of him. “We might just have met today, but cake is important for birthdays here, so…”

“A cake? Um, thank you, Hoseok,” Jungkook said, as he collected the bone that Tigger was chewing on and he placed it aside. Then he grabbed hold of the red bow so that he could tug on it and open the box. It popped opened so that the several sides dropped to land on the table and reveal the contents. “Oh!”

Yoongi saw that the cake was covered in a cream icing rather than glazed, a fluffy chiffon cake of layered sponge with a top covered in massive dollops of cream and strawberries. The bottom was also fringed by slices of strawberry, and in the centre there was a small piece of chocolate fondant that had ‘happy birthday’ piped on it in white icing. It was a beautiful-looking cake, and when Mijoo returned with several plates and a large kitchen knife, she also made noises of appreciation at the sight.

“Oh my! This is American birthday cake, honey,” Jungil explained with a pleased smile. “Just like I told you about. Birthday cake is very important, it’s like miyeokguk.”

“How funny,” Mijoo said, before laughing happily. “I wonder why they have cakes like this? It’s such a big cake too!”

Hoseok accepted the knife from her so that he could start cutting into the cake, and when he moved the first slice away and revealed the layers of sponge, cream and jam, the boy’s mother eyed it with a great interest. Yoongi was pretty certain that she was studying it so that she could probably learn
how to prepare such a cake too.

“Here’s your first slice of American tradition, Jungkook,” Hoseok declared with a wide smile, placing the cake down on the plate. “And it’s a tasty slice, if I do say so myself.”

“Shit, Seokseok,” Yoongi muttered in English, hating the fact that his terrible joke had brought a smile to his lips. “You been thinking of that one the entire time, huh?”

“You know it,” he replied, as he resumed cutting into the cake for everyone.

Even after Hoseok had served the slices of cake, there was still quite an amount left that the family could store and eat tomorrow as a treat. The cake really was huge, but considering the price tag, it made sense.

Yoongi retrieved his spoon so that he could get a chunk of cake and sample it, his mouth almost watering instantly at the intense sweetness.

“Who needs drugs when you’ve got cake, huh?” Hoseok joked, as he sat down again. His own pupils were pretty blown from the pills that he had swallowed not too long ago.

How ironic.

“This is for birthdays?” Jungkook asked around a huge bite of cake, cream smeared on both his mouth and around his lips. “Big brothers, when are your birthdays?”

Yoongi realised that he was asking this because he was joking about wanting to eat some more cake on their birthdays. He snorted at the question and Mijoo shifted to wipe at Jungkook’s mouth to clean it up for him. Before she could move to wipe his nose, Tigger jumped up to do it for her, her pink tongue slobbering out greedily to clean it up.

Jungkook cheeked his bite of cake and he smiled at him warmly, a slight blob of frosting still on his nose that Tigger hadn’t licked clean yet. The restaurant filled with laughter and cooing sounds at the sight of the puppy cleaning at his face, the kind of picture perfect moment that deserved a photograph. So Yoongi moved to grab the Polaroid camera from the floor and he held it up, fiddling with the dials before squinting down the viewfinder and hitting the button.
On the snapshot, Jungkook had his face scrunched up as the puppy lapped at his nose, and his mother was visible to the side with a hand clapped over her laughing mouth; her eyes crinkled at the corners in happiness.

Rather than place it down on the table, Yoongi decided that he was going to keep this candid shot, slipping it into the breast pocket on his shirt whilst the boy moved to get another massive spoonful of chiffon cake.

God, Hoseok been been right all along, he really had needed this temporary break to unwind. Even if tomorrow brought more business and stress with it, at least today had been pretty goddamn great. First, there had been waking up in Jimin’s arms and the morning sex, then the diner breakfast, and now this: this perfect birthday celebration with delicious food, tasty cake and smiles and laughter.

Yes, Yoongi was pretty sure that when he went to sleep tonight, he was going to do so with a smile on his face.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

5th September, 1984, 4:31am: Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco, United States of America

Namjoon tracked the bead of condensation down the side of his glass because it was the only interesting thing to look at right now. Sure, he could have watched the variety of people across the bar instead, like the small grouping of young women congregating around the jukebox to lightly sway in rhythm with the music blaring from the neon system; or the bartender moving up and down the counter to serve drinks to the customers that were standing or sitting at it.

But that wasn’t exactly much more interesting, not after roughly four hours already spent inside of various bars and comedy clubs breathing in secondhand smoke, the lingering tang of alcohol and perfume, and the constant noise that came with it all.

Namjoon knew that he could have a much harder job like what Jimin had used to have (and still did). He could be a runner, darting around the city on foot, skateboard or by car wasting gas, just so he could meet casual addicts or picky buyers that would try and rip him off. He could be a mule, risking a hell of a lot more like a higher prison sentence and possible death with every single smuggling trip across the globe, but he wasn’t. Therefore, staying in bars and clubs for several hours a night wasn’t that bad at all.

Just boring as hell.

Namjoon dragged his eyes away from the glass to glance across the bar quickly, scanning for a familiar face that might have nestled itself away inside of the crowd of other patrons. He saw no sign of long blond hair set above a beard and denim shirt making its way in his direction again, just bouncy blonde hair matched with sparkly dresses and loud printed shirts and mini skirts.

His buyer was either in the bathroom, making a call on the pay phone outside, or even in the bathroom, but soon enough he would reappear again to finalise their transaction. He had already paid in advance, having bought him his glass of water so that he could discreetly place it down with the folded-up notes for his marijuana hidden out of sight underneath the glass.
All that Namjoon needed to do was to wait for him to approach the table again, so that he could slip him his eighth of marijuana and then hit the streets to continue his dealing. Then he could go home and maybe crack open a beer, or light up a joint, or maybe just sleep. The way that he was feeling right now, all three of them in a row would be perfect.

Namjoon only ever drank water whilst he was dealing. Not to stay sober for the sake of deals, but rather because he needed to drive around the city in his rather old Datsun *Maxima* sedan. He couldn’t risk driving into the back of another car with a swag bag filled with several pounds of marijuana in various baggies and more alcohol in his system than Jimin had when he went wild. He guessed that that was what made dealing like this often seem boring, because hanging around in bars without even a single beer bottle in hand was rather pointless.

The air in the bar was hazy with smoke from both cigarettes and joints, because businesses in this part of town would never get any customers if they banned marijuana from being smoked on the premises. Too many ex-hippies ran the scene here that were much too lenient for their own good. It was no secret that this happened in the bars, nightclubs, comedy clubs and more, yet Namjoon had yet to be busted working on his turf for the past couple of years.

Marijuana was still being hunted down by the cops, was still the familiar enemy of the DEA, but right now, he guessed that they were a little occupied trying to cut down on the *real* menace that had taken over the streets to care too much. Heroin was that exact menace, of course, along with cocaine and whatever other party drugs were flooding club bathrooms on the side. Marijuana, therefore, was almost like the irritating little brother that wouldn’t go away, but wasn’t a real threat. Dealers and pushers might get arrested if they were stupid about it and they didn’t stay smart, but otherwise, it was a hell of a lot easier selling that shit these days.

Namjoon should know, he only ever dealt with the substance personally. He had guys that could shift the other drugs just fine all across several neighbourhoods that belonged to his turf. He had even had them circulate Prince Min’s stolen cocaine, for he hadn’t had a single eight-ball pass through his fingers in a seedy bar transaction for cash. No, just marijuana was his speciality, which was the best thing that he could sell.

Considering the fact that users could drop smoking it any day that they wanted to, or slowly slip their way into hardcore drugs, selling marijuana took talent, charisma, and likeability. Users tended to like dealers that they felt like they could trust, could be friendly with; that weren’t going to smash their teeth in if they were a few dollars short and promised to cover the costs with the next deal.

Namjoon thought that most of his men were woefully unequipped with these particular skill sets. That was why he let them sell the hardcore drugs to addicts so desperate for a hit or a line that they didn’t care in the slightest who they were talking to. He had let buyers slip him short cash for their habitual eighth of marijuana, and he *always* got it back the next time that they came around for more, with grateful thanks, thumps on the back, and words of praise for him being ‘a real cool cat’.
Goddamn, Namjoon loved hippies.

Therefore, when all of these factors were taken into consideration, Namjoon was pretty damn good at his job. He was content with it, even when he knew that people might just think that he shouldn’t be. But he was only making money selling drugs as harmful as alcohol, if not less harmful. His buyers weren’t addicted, couldn’t overdose, and they also couldn’t mix it with other drugs for a boosted effect like they could with booze. He thought that he was really no different than a bartender, all things considered.

Sure, his guys occasionally had to beat the shit out of someone, but that wasn’t his call. Namjoon liked to think that those aspects were…disconnected from him. If he didn’t witness it, if he wasn’t told about it, then he just assumed that it didn’t happen. Even when he knew better than that. It wasn’t like he could stop them, after all. He didn’t make the rules, and he was most certainly supposed to follow them if he didn’t want to end up a sorry sucker like Seunghyun Choi. He was already taking a huge risk on his customers by accepting short cash for his product, but it was a risk that he was willing to take. He trusted pothead hippies a hell of a lot more than those with a nose for cocaine, and that little bit of trust that he extended them always worked in his favour.

Namjoon was in the act of dropping his head to look at his glass of water when he finally caught sight of his buyer.

“Hey, man, you doing good?” Sam mumbled, as he approached his table again, his voice just about audible underneath the jukebox.

“Yeah, I’m doing good,” he replied. “You leaving now?”

“Yeah, got an early shift,” he said, before grimacing theatrically.

Namjoon moved to lift up his glass as he got to his feet, revealing the baggie to the man so that he could quickly grab it. Just like that the marijuana had been collected, but they still gave each other a quick embrace just for the sake of it. It was all acting in the end, anyway.

“Travel home safely, yeah,” Namjoon called, sitting back down at his table again and placing his glass down because the prop was no longer needed.

Namjoon wasn’t stupid. He didn’t deal out in the open, where people could see him and raise his
profile to any undercover cops itching to pull a guy in for an eighth of marijuana because they hadn’t arrested anyone all day long. No, he had his tricks depending on where he was, what props he had at hand to use, and they all worked just fine.

His buyers knew the drill: baggies under cup containers, baggies inside food bags, baggies slipped from hand to hand through fake handshakes whilst a buyer slipped their payment down the back pocket of his jeans. It was all tricks, small but useful tricks, and he prided himself on how efficient the entire system was.

Namjoon watched the other man leaving the bar before turning back to his glass of water again.

The various lights inside reflected off the glass, the strongest shade being bright red from a Budweiser sign hanging on the wall behind him. He should probably leave this place soon, but he always liked to linger a little longer after his last fixed deal to test the waters and see if someone wanted to start buying from him. Oftentimes, that wasn’t the case, but sometimes he managed to clinch another buyer to add onto his list.

Perhaps having been watched from across the bar, Namjoon couldn’t help but notice a guy eyeing him intently. That could be a good sign, or a bad one, but having already canvassed the place for rather obvious undercover cops, he had long arrived at the conclusion that they weren’t here tonight. He had seen enough woeful attempts at guys hoping to attract more hardcore dealers to them: the clothes, the constant sniffing and scratching that bordered on acting and not habitual tics.

Why would they hang around a bar known for stoners and beer, and nothing more than that? They had very little chances at bagging a cocaine or heroin dealer, and so they would most certainly be at the more affluent clubs for the former, and various desolate areas across the poorer neighbourhoods for the latter.

The man across the bar had black hair, slicked back off his face, a clean shaven face, and he was wearing a shirt with an open neck and a gold medallion that was undoubtedly a Saint Christopher. He had a beer bottle in hand and a toothpick rolling from one corner of his lips to the other. Nope, he was pretty certain that he wasn’t a cop and that he was safe.

Namjoon waited, hoping to keep his expression as neutral as possible. Soon enough, the stranger decided to retrieve his beer and he sauntered his way over to his tiny table against the wall.

“You, uh, you maybe got another gram on you, huh?” the guy asked in a low voice, as he lifted his beer bottle to his mouth.
“Maybe, you got a wire on you, huh?” Namjoon retorted sarcastically, to which the guy snorted loudly.

“Cop? You think I’m a cop? Buddy, I didn’t even graduate,” he retorted, reaching down to grab his shirt and quickly lifting it to flash his bare midriff at him. No wire was visible, just more hair like the stuff all over his revealed chest. “Not that you need to graduate to get a badge, you know? But still…”

“What? Are you a new buyer, or are you looking for better prices? I got an eighth for 20 dollars, I only sell grams to guys I trust to keep coming back for more, you know?” Namjoon mumbled, as he slowly ran his eyes across the bar. “You gonna be coming back for more? If so, I got a gram for you for 10 dollars.”

“My last guy got himself busted about a week ago,” the guy replied. “He used to charge 13 dollars a gram, 25 dollars an eighth. Blind fucking robbery, huh? I, uh, I’ve never bought from Asian guys before, but if the shit’s good, the shit’s good, yeah? Is it good?”

“Yeah, man, it’s good,” Namjoon confirmed with a nod. “What’s your name, huh?”

“Anthony.”

“Well, Anthony, if you’re interested in getting more grams for lower prices, then you should do this. Give me the cash discreetly, I’ll stash the gram in the restroom, inside the dispenser,” Namjoon said, as he looked across the bar. “Go over to the counter and wait for me to leave, then go in and grab it. That’s how I deal. I don’t do upfront, unless you invite me into your house. Yeah?”

“I get you, that’s probably why my man got busted,” he remarked. “Stupid dumbass, he practically walked over and flashed the stash to absolutely anyone. How exactly do I give you the cash discreetly?”

“I get you, that’s probably why my man got busted,” he remarked. “Stupid dumbass, he practically walked over and flashed the stash to absolutely anyone. How exactly do I give you the cash discreetly?”

“Get the cash in your palm, folded, then offer me a hand shake,” he explained. “I’m pretty sure there’s no cops in this joint tonight, but I’d rather stay smart. It’s better for the both of us that way.”

Luckily, Anthony was a lot smarter than he had hinted at during their conversation. He didn’t grab his wallet and start rifling through it in front of him like an absolute dumbass, for he just simply slipped his hand into his jeans pocket, acting casual as he rocked back on his heels.
“That song, huh?” Anthony loudly declared, as he glanced at the jukebox, his entire posture and tone the epitome of a chilled out guy. “Damn, I hate that pop shit. Don’t you, man?”

“Yeah, I prefer rock,” Namjoon agreed, watching him slipping his hand free again with his fingers slightly curled in to crumple the bill up and hide it from wandering eyes.

“Rock’n’roll, that’s the real shit,” the man said, before laughing heartily and offering him his hand, pretending to be shaking it in agreement. “Good taste, man.”

Namjoon felt the note between their fingers, quickly folding his inwards to snag hold of it and keep it hidden.

Anthony gave him a quick wink before moving back over to the counter, lounging against the wood casually.

Wow, now this was the kind of buyer that Namjoon could get used to, if he was interested in buying more of the merchandise, that was. He had a few like him, a few men and women that really knew how to deal, but he had also had enough jittery ones in the past.

Namjoon got to his feet to go to the bathroom, shoving his own hand into his jeans to look cool and casual too.

Namjoon pushed the restroom door open hard, entering the small room. It smelled like urine and antiseptic cakes, which was still less pungent than the smoke and alcohol in the main-area of the bar. The flooring was as clean as restroom flooring could get, with the occasional scrunched-up ball of paper littered in the corners and the rather unpleasant sight of a used condom cast-off by the bin.

Nice.

Namjoon left the crumpled note in his front jeans pocket so that he could retrieve the gram baggie from his other pocket. He had to check several baggies before finding the smaller amount, shoving the rest back away for later. Then he crossed the restroom to get to the sinks, eyeing the singular paper towel dispenser stuck on the wall beside the long-ago busted liquid soap dispenser.
The urinals were reflected in the cracked mirror on the wall, and the two small stalls were to the left. Though one of them had the door swung open to show that it was empty, the other was closed and had the international red occupied symbol by the lock.

Namjoon eyed a set of jean-clad legs visible from under the gap in the bottom of the stall, and he wondered what was going on inside of the cramped cubicle. Cocaine, mostly likely, but he was pretty certain that he could hear the sound of someone struggling to work their lighter. Maybe, they were smoking it? Or maybe, they were trying to light up for another reason entirely, like heroin? He just looked away and he shoved the baggie up into the dispenser, pushing it to the side so that it would sit snugly inside.

Well, if that kind of shit was being circulated here, or on the streets outside so that buyers could sneak into the bathrooms to use it, Namjoon guessed that he might need to move to another bar. It was too risky hanging around a bar that might get flooded by DEA agents looking for big time bust. No, he would be sure to contact his usual buyers that met him here and schedule their future deals somewhere less risky.

Namjoon exited the restroom to go into the main area of the bar again, moving back to his table to sit down. He folded his arms on the table, sparing a quick scan of the bar interior. As he did so, Anthony moved to go into the other room.

After a minute, the other man re-emerged and he gave him a brief nod from across the bar as he lounged against the counter again, signalling that he had retrieved the baggie.

Namjoon decided that it was time to leave the bar. He had no more known buyers meeting him here tonight, had gotten no feelings from the other customers that they were interested in his goods. He had one more certain deal for the night to complete, and then he really should call a few men and check-up on them from nearby payphones to their locations. Just to make sure that they were dealing and not slacking off.

Just like always, upon leaving the bar, Namjoon returned to his car parked across the block to restock his supplies and to move it along the neighbourhood. He didn’t like leaving it parked for too long in a fixed location, lest it attract any suspicion or catch the eye of someone that might just plan on stealing it. Luckily for him, he had a deal already waiting for him in The Castro, and so he jumped behind the wheel, started the engine, and he pulled into the road to drive across the block.

“Goddamn, it’s hot,” Namjoon muttered, quickly rolling his window down and then settling his folded arm on the window rest.
Sadly, the gap in the window really didn’t cool the car interior down. All that it did was let a fragrant scent of the bay, exhaust fumes, and fried food come in, which was at least refreshing in comparison to the bar interior. It took him just several minutes of rolling down traffic-filled streets until he was in The Castro, and then he turned the wheel to steer him in the direction of his deal location.

The streets of The Castro were much more savoury at night compared to Haight-Ashbury, which Namjoon was sadly aware of. The neighbourhood that he and Jimin currently called home had been overrun by hard addicts and homeless over the last few years, and the vibrant hippies that had once lined its streets had since moved onto more safer locations to be free from the threat of violence. Now, The Castro was the more welcoming and vibrant part of the city, and he always enjoyed sailing through the neighbourhood at all hours.

It was nice seeing people hanging around in small groups, drunken but happy people. They would smoke together, eat street food together, just stick together. Sure, the bathhouses across the district and the alleyways might not be all laughter and smiles, but that didn’t really bother him in the slightest.

No, Namjoon had heard enough from Jimin to know that the scene was a lot less seedy than it appeared on the surface to those not involved. The bathhouses were friendly places, even with the stink of sex hanging in the steamy air, and the bars by all accounts were always fun places to go. There were less chances of brawling, more choices of drinks and snacks, and certainly friendlier conversations to be had. Namjoon would happily turn down another man’s offer of sex over a few beers, than have a swinging dick decide that they wanted to smash his face in on the street outside for looking at them funny any night.

Namjoon caught sight of his buyer easily as he pulled into a parking lot at the end of the street. He killed the car so that he could hunker forward and retrieve the man’s order for a quarter of marijuana. It was certainly bigger than his last deals, but it was smarter that way.

A quarter could keep a casual stoner high for a week or two, supposing that they smoked a joint every day or three. But most of his clients preferred smaller deals that worked out as higher prices by the end of the month, probably because they were scared of being caught by an officer carrying enough marijuana to possibly look like a dealer rather than a buyer.

David was waiting for him on the curb outside of a McDonald’s, smoking a cigarillo and watching the flowing traffic with a marked lack of disinterest. He was still dressed in his work uniform: his mechanics polo a deep blue that complemented his dark skin tone, and his jeans were covered in various grease and oil stains.

Namjoon quickly crossed the road whilst the traffic had stopped at the lights down the street.
“Am I glad to see you, Kimbo,” the older man called when he caught sight of him, pulling his cigarillo away from his lips to crack him a wide grin. “Long time, no see, huh?”

“I thought you might’ve dropped it by now,” Namjoon joked in return, reaching out to accept his offered hand to let him tug him close.

David let out a howling laugh at this, throwing his head back as he thumped him hard on the back thrice. Clearly, he thought that the joke was a good one. The scent of his cigarillos was clinging to his clothing so that when Namjoon breathed in, he could taste the burning and pungent scent on his tongue.

“Nah, nah, I just know when to smoke it,” the man replied. “Half the kids these days think you gotta smoke all day every day, that it’s cool. No, you gotta think of it like fine wine instead. It’s a treat, you enjoy it, you savour it. You don’t puff a goddamn ounce a day just because you can.”

“I’d agree with that statement, if I didn’t have a bit of a habit myself,” Namjoon retorted with his own laugh. “Quarter, yeah?”

“Yeah,” David agreed, as he shifted to shove his hand inside of his jeans to pull out the cash. “Here you go, Kimbo,” he said, holding the small wad of bills out to him. “You gonna get something too, huh?”

“I’m just gonna get fries, cheap and convenient,” Namjoon replied, glancing through the glass walls to study the joint. “Let me guess, you want a double cheeseburger?”

“You know I like that extra cheese,” David said, as he dropped to sit on one of the benches. “I’ve tried every kind they sell in the stores, but I can’t find the stuff they use, goddamn.”

Namjoon snorted at this as he separated the food money from the marijuana payment, shoving a folded-up series of bills into his jeans so that he could slip a couple of extra coins out. Then he pushed the door open to enter the fast-food joint and finish their transaction.

Namjoon had perfected this trick by heart, just like his bar tricks. He would collect the orders of food on the customers’ behalves and slip his baggie inside of the paper bag, carrying it over to them as if he had done nothing at all. Then they would sit together, talk a little, before they left with their marijuana and he had their payment shoved down into his pocket. No passing police officer could do
a thing if they didn’t see the physical transaction, and when he took cash only and he exited the joints with food bags, they had no grounds to suspect that he was planting shit inside of them. He had never even witnessed a squad car slow down as it passed them by when he did this trick; it worked that well.

“Good evening and welcome to McDonald’s; what can I get you?” the blonde cashier asked with a customer-service friendly smile.

“Uh, can I get a double cheeseburger with fries, extra fries, and two Coca Colas, please?”

“To stay or to go?” she asked, as she hit several buttons on the till.

“To go, please,” he said, placing the money down on the counter for her.

Namjoon had to move to stand to the side at this, waiting for the order. It took just several minutes and then the woman was bringing the order to him.

“Here you are. Enjoy your meal, sir,” she said, as she held the bulging paper bag and cardboard drinks tray out to him.

“Thanks,” Namjoon said, accepting the order and placing the tray down for a moment to quickly shove his hand into his jeans pocket.

It was so simple a trick that Namjoon opened the bag to ‘check’ that the order was correct and he dropped the fat baggie of marijuana inside of it whilst the cashier was completely distracted serving the next customer in the line. He grabbed the drink tray and he quickly left the store to get to the outside benches.

“Is the little dude on holiday, huh?” David asked, as he shifted to sit on the bench facing him.

‘Little dude’ happened to be his nickname of choice for Jimin, just like how ‘holiday’ was actually a reference to him muling. Once upon a time, Jimin had done deals with the older man too, before moving onto his smuggling escapades, and they knew each other well from many run-ins at various bathhouses in The Castro.
“He’s back and forth just like always,” Namjoon explained, putting the drinks down and then dropping the bag onto the table. He pulled one of the fries containers out to place it down on a pile of napkins. “He just got back though, and he’ll probably be here for a little while before hitting the skies again. You seen him recently?”

“Yeah yeah, I saw him at a bathhouse last month,” David said, as he settled on the bench more comfortably. “I was surprised to see that he had someone with him, though. That little dude’s always flying solo in the bathhouses, even when I’ve told him that’s not so smart these days. He should at least bring a friend, or find someone he knows and trusts when he’s inside. Just to keep an eye on him, to keep him from doing something stupid.”

“Oh, yeah?” Namjoon asked curiously around a mouthful of fries, suddenly recalling what had happened that night that Jimin had showed up at the house again after their meal with Prince Min.

Yes, it seemed that the incident that David was talking about had to be the trip to the bathhouse with Prince Min. That had been last month, and his friend hadn’t went to one in quite some time before then because he had been so busy. So David had seen him that night, and that meant that he might just have a little bit of information about it too. Sure, his friend had accidentally told him some of the more lurid details of that night when he had been outrageously drunk, but any other facts about what Jimin was up to when he wasn’t around were always good facts to know.

It wasn’t that he didn’t trust Jimin, for Namjoon most certainly did. He trusted sober Jimin, who could be quite different to wasted Jimin, when he wanted to be. Wasted Jimin was much louder, and he had a bit of a habit of getting touchy-feely and kissing everyone, which was most certainly not a good idea these days. Not when him getting wasted and kissing a stranger could give him Kaposi’s Sarcoma, which could potentially result in his death. That was why he found himself agreeing with David’s words of wisdom about always being with a partner of some kind, just because Jimin could really do with one.

Namjoon would never tell him that, of course, because it would piss the younger man off. But it was true, and he couldn’t help his impulsive feelings when it came to his best friend. Just the overprotective older brother, indeed - he had been completely spot-on that evening.

“Yeah, but don’t you worry about him, he never messes around with any guys,” David said, as he grabbed some of his fries. “If you wanna know the truth, our little dude’s got a bit of a reputation.”

“A reputation? What do you mean?”

“The guys there call him ‘lotus blossom’, and quite a few of them always crack jokes about how he’s
a tight little bud that needs to hurry up and bloom for them. On account of the fact he won’t let them fuck him.”

“Yeah, that sounds like Jimmy,” Namjoon remarked with a pleased grin.

“But he seemed awful fond of the guy that he was with,” David added, as he grabbed his drink and he hovered the straw in front of his mouth. “He looked kinda cute, another little dude - twink as hell. Well, until I saw the massive fucking tat on his back and then I knew that he wasn’t no cute twink. That kinda tat screamed gangster.”

“Uh, I think I know who you’re talking about, and yeah, I’d suggest not calling him that to his face if you see him again, man,” Namjoon replied, as the other man took a deep sip of cola. “Not if you like your face.”

“I do, I do like my face, a lot of guys like my face.”

“Those guys should be glad that Jimmy’s not heard them calling that yet, though, or they’d get a punch in the mouth,” he remarked, before shaking his head softly. “Lotus blossom’? Seriously?”

“I called him it once, as a joke. I didn’t get punched, but I think that I was lucky,” David replied, as he gave him a knowing grin.

“Real lucky.”

“Anyway, I gotta blow, but you know I’ll be calling you up soon enough,” the other man said, grabbing his paper bag and drink container.

“Don’t go smoking a whole quarter in less than a week yeah, brother,” Namjoon joked, holding his fist out in offering for him to bump.

“Yeah yeah, like you don’t want my cash,” David retorted, as he gave him a solid. “Catch you later, Kimbo.”

Namjoon watched him go for a moment, his fries and cola still on the table in front of him. As soon
as he was out of sight, he turned back to the food to finish eating it. It was always better to linger than to run off after transactions in such heavily public places, and it would only take him a couple of minutes to do so. He happily finished his serving of hot and salted fries and coke, watching the streets intently as he did to see that The Castro was as lively, but welcoming as always.

On the slight breeze, Namjoon could head distant voices cheering and hollering, but not angrily, along with pop music pounding from somewhere on the block. It covered most of the other sounds: like the screeching blare of police sirens that seemed to sound every night in the city, or the constant honking horns of gridlock on every single corner.

As soon as he was done eating, Namjoon checked his jeans to retrieve a small pile of coins that he would need. Then he collected his rubbish together to dump it in the public bin on his quick walk over to the payphone at the end of the street.

The phone was really nothing more than a rectangle bubble placed on a thick black lamp post, with company logos placed on the deep blue exterior. The receiver was also black with a kinked wire, sitting in a cradle with a metal keypad and a slot for cash to be fed into. The buttons were likely covered in so many germs, but after hanging around in dive bars all night long, germs no longer seemed like that much of an issue to him.

Namjoon quickly fed the first couple of coins into the machine, so that he could rapidly dial the number of a payphone across the city on a street where one of his guys would be working. He listened to the dialling tone for a minute, waiting for him to pick up. But the dialling tone just carried on sounding until the call cut off because no one had answered. He pulled the phone away from his ear to eye the device curiously, the coins slipping free to settle in the slight lip below.

Why hadn’t Jihyuk picked up? He always picked up at this hour, because he had long since exited his bar of choice to hang around the streets in the shadows for more open dealing with customers in cars. If he hadn’t picked up, there were three possible reasons: he was still in the bar, he was in the middle of a transaction and was unable to get to the device in time, or he was unable to do so for a more serious reason.

“…Goddamn,” Namjoon muttered, as he fed the coins into the machine again with a weary sigh and he started dialling the next number.

Inje was sure to pick up for him, because he would be finishing his round any minute from now and would be parked not too far from the payphone. Namjoon knew that he would, and so he waited for just several rings before the static crackle of someone picking up sounded down the line.
“Oh hey, it’s the boss man,” Inje said in a rather dopey voice, just like always. “You calling to check up on me? Pf, I told Woo that you didn’t trust me.”

“Yeah yeah, less of the jokes,” Namjoon muttered. “You got anything to report, huh? Any issues, any troubles on the streets? Just let me know, I’ll sort it all out.”

“Nope, not up here. It’s been just like every other night, boss man. I’ve been dealing since sunset, about ready to drop off for the night. Do you want the cash now or later? I can deliver it through your mail slot if you want, on my way through the neighbourhood, or come around in about…five hours from now?”

“Put it through the slot now, that way you can sleep longer,” he suggested. “Make sure to leave a note. Let me know how much you circulated, and I’ll check and pay you your cut tomorrow afternoon, just like always.”

“Will do, boss man. You call anyone else yet?”

“Well, I tried calling Jihyuk right before you, but he never answered,” Namjoon explained, as he shifted to lean against the bubble and he ran his eyes across the road beside him. “He might be busy dealing, though, so, I don’t wanna make any assumptions. His spot is a prime location, he pulls in a lot of business there. Anyway, I’m gonna end the call now. Good work tonight, Inje.”

“Thanks, I’ll be sure to be as specific about the deals as I can with my note,” Inje said, before he ended the call on his end for him.

The leftover change came out of the slot in the machine, and so Namjoon collected the coins together and he proceeded to feed them inside again.

One call down, a lot more to go.

For the next several minutes, Namjoon dialled various numbers to have brief conversations with his current network of evening dealers. Through them, he found out that the streets were currently inactive in terms of police circling around; that there had been no incidents to report in terms of violence, such as buyers threatening them with weapons for their cocaine; and that none of them had gotten themselves busted. That was good news, but he couldn’t help but wonder why the hell Jihyuk hadn’t picked up tonight.
Namjoon felt strong concern about this as he finished up his last calls and he crossed the block to jump into his car again. After what had happened in the gang these last couple of weeks, like the burnt deals and backstabbing dealers getting themselves murdered, he was a lot more vigilant in regards to the potential for something suspicious or unusual happening. He had had dealers not pick up in the past many times, but that had been a different time. That was why he was going to pay the younger man - or at least his area - a visit, just to check up on him.

Even when Namjoon knew that he was probably just overthinking it, worrying over nothing, he couldn’t help but tap his fingers on his steering-wheel restlessly as he guided his vehicle along the busy streets. Jihyuk really was probably just caught up in the middle of a transaction and he had been unable to answer the call. The man couldn’t be slinging marijuana around and answering the phone at the exact same time, and the former was most certainly more important than the latter.

But still…

Namjoon was sailing along Frederick Street, passing the corner of Ashbury Street, when he caught sight of something unexpected. He slowed his car down to a crawl as he got closer to the corner and he glanced at the rear-view mirror, eyeing the man on the sidewalk intently because he was so very convinced that he recognised him. He had to pull up to the curb and stop the vehicle for a moment, just so that he could climb out and quickly cross the street. It was as he drew closer to him that it clicked and he figured out who he was looking at.

“Jihyuk? Hey, aren’t you supposed to moving it around tonight? Why aren’t you down on the corner of Cole and Carl Street, huh?”

“I am, well, I mean I was,” his dealer explained, as he roughly rubbed at his brow. “I was moving pot around my usual spot, no problem, right until the point in which there was a massive brawl, and by brawl, I mean a guy took a fucking glass to the face.”

“You serious?” Namjoon asked in surprise, slowing down to come to a stop right beside the younger man. “Some guy got glassed in, uh, in Antonio’s? The bar? You’re kidding right now, right?”

Jihyuk was aggressively smoking his way through a packet of cigarettes, quite a few cast-off butts at his sneaker-clad feet. The smoke was hanging around his shaved head and he could see something jittery in his thin and deep-set eyes, something that looked anxious and perhaps a little bit frightened.

“No, I ain’t kidding. I saw it with my own eyes, man.” Jihyuk emphasised, pointing at said eyes before pulling his cigarette free from his lips. He blew a thick lungful of smoke out of his mouth, which floated around their heads like a rain cloud. “It happened right in front of me.”
“Shit like that doesn’t happen in Antonio’s, Jihyuk. That place is packed with stoners. What’d you mean that it happened right in front of you?” Namjoon asked, unable to help himself because what his dealer was telling him seemed to make no sense at all.

“It literally happened right in front of me,” Jihyuk repeated, watching him moving to retrieve his own stick of choice: his being a joint from his back jeans pocket. The younger man grabbed his lighter and he held it out in offering.

“Thanks, man,” Namjoon said around the joint, inhaling quickly several times to get the end to catch alight.

“I sit at the corner of the bar most nights, it’s the best spot to keep an eye on the interior,” Jihyuk continued, as he shoved the lighter back into his denim shorts pocket. “I can listen to a lot of conversations too, so, I was there tonight. It seemed pretty calm to me, the usual. Which’s exactly when a guy comes outta nowhere and starts hollering before he smashed a pint glass on some other guy’s head. I mean, the dude did nothing. He was just sitting there with his girl talking, but he got ruined, man. There was blood and shit everywhere and the girl was screaming. Christ.”

Namjoon took his first proper toke on the joint, holding it in his lungs as he watched the younger man rubbing at his brow again. Judging from his mannerisms and expressions, Jihyuk was being completely truthful with him. He had never seen him look so shook-up before, and that meant that he needed to try and figure out what had happened at Antonio’s so that he could find a way to sort this issue out.

“Was it just a brawl, huh? You said the guy did nothing, but maybe it was personal?” he asked, breathing the lungful of smoke out and wetting his lips.

“I dunno, man, it might’ve been personal. But I do know that there was something floating around in that bar,” Jihyuk muttered, as he stubbed the toes of his sneakers on the paving flag, an inch of ash falling from his cigarette stick. “Something crazy.”

“Crazy?”

“Yeah, crazy,” the younger man repeated with a vigorous nod. “Listen, before that shit went down, I saw a deal going on in a far booth. Thought it was coke, you know, it’s not uncommon there. I know a few guys that circulate it around the neighbourhood for a guy called Ahn. I didn’t recognise the guy, I figured he might be a new brother on the streets. But that shit? That shit right there? That
wasn’t coke, man.”

“Hey, brother, just slow it down,” Namjoon suggested in a soothing voice, trying his very hardest to get Jihyuk to relax because he was looking far too twitchy. “Take a few deep breaths, just slow it down. I know that shit’s got you all shook-up, but you’re not in Antonio’s now. No need to worry, yeah?”

Jihyuk let a lungful of smoke out in a hard huff, dropping his head to stare at the pavement for a moment as he tried to get himself together.

Namjoon shifted to lean against the brick wall behind them, smoking his joint and looking between him and the road casually as he waited. The younger man had just said something very important and that meant that he just needed to be patient and coax as much information out of him as he could.

Jihyuk had seen a man that he had never seen before dealing drugs on their turf, a man that he thought might work for another dealer called Ahn that monopolised on the crackheads in the area. Except, he was pretty certain that what he had witnessed being dealt hadn’t been cocaine. That meant that he had seen something else instead, something much more potent to the senses and dangerous on the body and mind.

Namjoon had a couple of ideas what it might just be, but he wasn’t going to say anything to his dealer right now.

“What kinda info do you want from me? I didn’t get a good look at the stuff, at their faces or anything, I just saw a deal going down.”

“Tell me about the guy, the one that caused the brawl. What was he acting like?” he suggested, as he lifted the joint to take another toke on the end.

“He was all hopped up on something, he went mental. I’m talking shirt ripped off, screaming like an animal and throwing a table across the joint kinda mental. It hit some chick, it didn’t hurt her, but damn, talk about lucky. He just grabbed a pint glass and smashed it right down on his head. There was blood everywhere, man. It was crazy shit. That made this other guy jump up to try and get him to just calm down, you know, but the hopped-up dude? He just kept hollering and fighting. It’s like that, uh, PCP shit, right?”

“It sounds like a couple of things,” Namjoon replied, all the while thinking that it was something
completely different than that. “You said a guy called Ahn has guys selling coke in that area too?”

Jihyuk made a noise in agreement at this, his own cigarette just an inch or so long by now; almost smoked down to nothing at all.

Namjoon thought this over for a moment intently, finding that he most certainly recalled that there was a dealer over in the Cole Valley neighbourhood that dealt in cocaine. He didn’t know his supplier, but he was pretty certain that it wasn’t Seokjin, and that he wasn’t ranked above him in terms of experience or position. No, he just had guys dealing for him, and if he was dealing shit like that then someone needed to be told about it. It could put a lot of future deals at risk, and he wasn’t going to have some dealer fuck everything up for him, his dealers, and the other guys working the area.

“You get away before the cops showed?”

“Course I did,” Jihyuk declared, snorting hard. “We wouldn’t be having this conversation if I hadn’t. Would we?”

“Good point,” Namjoon retorted with a wry smile.

“I’m just pissed off more than anything,” the young dealer said, before sighing heavily. “I can’t go anywhere near that place with the police swarming the block, so, I’m stuck here. I can’t move shit around here. Not without getting risky. You think I should risk it?”

“No, go home and rest,” Namjoon suggested, as he pushed off the brick wall. “You’re no good for business when you’re shook-up like this, it’s gonna distract you. Hit the streets earlier tomorrow night instead, but avoid Antonio’s and the surrounding streets for a couple of nights. Go around, uh, the corner of Waller and Shrader Street. I got guys in that area, you won’t be close to overstepping our territory. You’ll be safe.”

“Sure thing and, hey, I’ll make up for tonight, I swear,” Jihyuk promised, stubbing his cigarette out on the wall. “I ain’t gonna end up short at the end of the week ’cos of this. I’ll make up for it.”

Namjoon bumped his fist against his hard as he said his goodbyes. Then he moved to get back to his car, pulling the door shut behind him. Well, at least he now knew why Jihyuk hadn’t answered the payphone call, and what had happened tonight. Sure, this knowledge meant that he had more work to do, but he had an idea on how to sort out the most pressing part of the trouble.
Rather than head back to his house, Namjoon decided to drive along the block and take the corner so that he could get onto Cole Street first, then Carl Street to check on the area. Just like Jihyuk had told him, he saw that the street right outside Antonio’s bar was surrounded by several police cars, because the ambulance had presumably left some time ago. He could see people being interviewed by a couple of officers, and the entire area was empty of civilians as a result.

“Oh, shit…” Namjoon mumbled, turning his head to look at the scene as the car rolled past.

Yes, Jihyuk really couldn’t go anywhere near that place now, or tomorrow, or even for a few days afterwards.

Namjoon had to circle the block again before heading up Clayton Street to get onto Haight Street. By the time that he arrived back at his house, the sun had already risen in the sky for dawn.

The very horizon was golden, blending into the deep purple skies above it that had just several clouds floating across the surface. He thought that it signalled another hot day to come. It was an even more magnificent sight to behold when he was foggy-headed from the marijuana and the colours and sunlight were just so much brighter; more vivid.

Namjoon killed his car outside of the house, and he grabbed his swag bag to climb out of his vehicle and go up the front steps.

Just like Inje had promised, he had posted an envelope of money through his mailbox slot, and he wasn’t the only one that had done so.

When he opened the door and he stepped inside the house, Namjoon saw a whole pile of envelopes and baggies on the floor in front of his door, and so he quickly closed it shut behind him and he locked it securely. Then he hunkered down to take off his sneakers and he retrieved all of the parcels, gathering them into the crooks of his elbows to carry the items against his chest and enter his living-room.

“No, not the floor, not the floor- ah,” Namjoon muttered, as several of the envelopes dropped to hit the floor rather than settle on the table. He had to hunker forward to grab them again, placing them back on the coffee table with a heavy sigh. “Good, good envelopes.”

Namjoon had a bit of a habit of talking to himself when he was stoned, a habit that he was never
fully aware of, but had been told by others was pretty amusing. He guessed that he had developed the habit from all of the time that he had been alone in his house before meeting Jimin, because the rooms were too big and empty to stay silent in. But even after his friend had more-or-less moved into his home, he still had the old habit.

After ensuring that the envelopes were going to be good and stay where he had placed them, Namjoon straightened up and he crossed the room to enter the kitchen. His mind was set on getting himself a beer, because he felt like he really needed one after what had happened tonight.

Upon entering the kitchen, he noticed that there was a note stuck to the front of the refrigerator, one that hadn’t been present when he had left the house earlier in the night. The little yellow square of paper was enough to stir his curiosity and make him move over to retrieve it, pulling it free from underneath the magnet to lift it up and read it. He had to squint in the current lighting to see what it said.

“Hey-ho, Daddy-o!” the note boldly opened with, making him snort to himself as he eyed the piece of paper.

“How old are you, huh?” Namjoon mumbled with a soft head shake.

“So, I wanted to try cooking and I made some stuff. There’s leftovers. Try it! Let me know if you like it! If it’s shit, then tell me the truth. I promise to not punch you…too hard.”

“Cooking…huh?” he asked, as he lowered the note to run his eyes across the rest of the kitchen curiously.

It was kind of weird knowing that food had been made, and yet…he was seeing no sign of anything to prove that it had. The sink was empty of pans, pots, dishes and even soapy water - the steel basin spotless and clean. They had all been put away in the various cupboards and were hanging on hooks across the wide room. The counter was nice and neat, not a hint of crumbs left on the surface.

Wow, if this was what happened whenever Jimin made food, then he would need to get him to cook more often.

Namjoon turned back to eye the note again, turning it over to check the back to see that it was empty. There was no secret message, no hurried afterthoughts scrawled onto the back because the front of the sticky note had been filled with his friend’s large and looping print. He found himself briefly
wondering what exactly had made Jimin want to give cooking a try, because the younger man had never done anything like that before that he could recall.

After a moment of thought, Namjoon scrunched the note up in his fist and he tossed it at the rubbish bin. It missed in a spectacular fashion, bouncing off the rim to shoot across the kitchen and disappearing from sight seconds later.

“Out of sight, out of…mind,” he declared, as he pulled the refrigerator door open and he checked the contents.

There were two Tupperware containers in the fridge in front of him. In one he could see somewhat lazily rolled, but still tasty-looking rolls of kimbap that had been cut into nice bite-sized portions; and in the other there was some kind of vegetable fried rice mix that looked…interesting. He pulled them both free and he was about to place them down on the counter when his nose detected the strong scent of…fudge?

“What the fuck?” Namjoon mumbled, knowing for sure that he most certainly wasn’t tripping bad enough to hallucinate scents.

No, he could smell fudge, and when he looked at the top shelf of the cramped refrigerator, he saw a plate that was covered in tinfoil. But it didn’t cover all of it, for he could see a hint of a dark brown sponge peeking out from the bottom.

Jimin had actually attempted to make a fudge cake from one of those instant mixes that he saw on store shelves all of the time. It smelled pretty damn good to him, but the fact that it had been wrapped up in tinfoil was clearly a sign that he was not supposed to touch it tonight.

Goddamn, he really wanted to sample some of that cake right now. It might just be the munchies speaking, but he was pretty sure that it wasn’t. But…if he touched that cake, then he was most certainly going to get a hard punch from Jimin.

“Is this food really worth a punch?” Namjoon asked himself, as he stared at the Tupperware containers in his hands, his brow furrowed lightly.

That was a great question.
Sure, food was always great and it looked so good that he didn’t think that he could avoid the temptation. Maybe, it might not taste as great as it looked, but that was a risk that he was willing to make. Besides, he could always lie about the taste to avoid the punch (and hopefully get a slice of cake too).

The thought made Namjoon snort again as he moved to go over to the counter. He slipped the cutlery drawer open to retrieve a spoon and then he went back over to the refrigerator to grab a bottle of beer. There, he was ready for some hardcore cash counting now.

Namjoon was in the act of crossing the kitchen to go back into the living-room when another thought hit him.

It crossed his mind that even if he told him the truth, Jimin could punch him anyway. His friend could argue that he was lying to not anger him and - *thwap!* There, the dreaded hard punch to the biceps that would leave a bruise for days when he didn’t even deserve it!

Oh, he hadn’t thought about that…

Namjoon slowed his walking down to a stop, standing in the doorway of the kitchen for a moment. He eyed the Tupperware containers first, then he lifted his gaze to the living-room across the narrow hallway, and he cocked his head to look up at the staircase to his right. Whilst he was stuck in place, pondering on this massive problem, Jimin was upstairs asleep in his bed - the veritable sleeping giant that would punch the shit out of him if he insulted his cooking.

“…You know what, fuck it,” Namjoon mumbled with a lazy shrug, too stoned, too tired, and too hungry to really care at this point.

A minute later, sitting cross-legged on his sofa, Namjoon went between mouthfuls of food and counting stacks of cash. He had to keep the stacks all separated and check any notes inside of the envelopes to be certain that the totals all added up, just so a dealer couldn’t brag about netting a whole ounce in a night if their envelope didn’t even make it past half an ounce in currency. It was easy work, so long as someone didn’t lie or get confused with deals and leave him to figure out the mistake, that was.

It turned out that Jimin was actually not a bad cook. His kimbap was pretty good for a first time attempt, the rice firm enough to hold the contents together. His fillings left a little to be desired, because he had packed quite a lot of chilli sauce inside some of them, but he would learn to tone down the sauces or serve them as dips instead over time. But the vegetable fried rice was actually a surprise. He had fried it with just the right amount of soy sauce and egg, and the vegetables were soft
and not crunchy and hard.

If Jimin cooked that once a week, and he cooked his kimchi spaghetti and chicken salad, then they only needed to find four different meals to avoid ordering junk for a whole week! They were so close to that healthier diet that he had been hoping to achieve…so long as a slice of fudge cake was allowed here and there.

By the time that he was finished eating, Namjoon was in the act of sealing up all of the money again to put it away for safekeeping in the safe. Good, he was doing good save for the incident with Jihyuk, but he was going to sort that out soon enough. Not only would the younger dealer give him his earnings tomorrow as soon as he could, he also had an idea of his own.

Well, Jimin might not punch him when he told him the truth about his cooking, but he might just punch him when he saw the Tupperware containers that he dumped in the sink when he woke up tomorrow.

Namjoon thought this over for a moment before deciding to run a little hot water to soak them in. There, that was…better. Then he went upstairs to enter his bedroom, the stairs creaking softly under him as he ascended and he went along the landing. Just like every night, the door was wide open because of the busted lock, allowing him to glance inside before entering.

Jimin was lying on his stomach and taking up less space on the mattress than usual, his arms under his pillow to hug it against his face comfortably and the covers down around his hips loosely. Usually, he fell asleep in a position that he could only think of as ‘the starfish’ on account of his splayed limbs. His friend was sleeping in one of his tee-shirts, which wasn’t at all a surprise, a red and white striped one, along with a pair of tight briefs. He was deeply asleep, his back rising and falling softly with every breath, and that meant that he needed to be quiet to not disturb him.

Namjoon crossed the bedroom to get to his bed. Jimin had stayed true to his promise to clean the room up, and so he didn’t need to worry about tripping over anything that he had left dumped on the flooring. Had there have been anything, the sunlight bleeding in from the open window would have revealed it to him. He lowered himself down onto the mattress, hearing it creaking from their combined weight. But Jimin remained deeply asleep, the noise not disturbing him in the slightest.

Namjoon collected the phone receiver to get it in the crook between his neck and shoulder, eyeing the napkin that Jimin had taped to the wall just above it so that he could dial the series of numbers:

Prince Min’s phone number, scrawled in black pen ink in big block print across the white paper.
5th September, 1984, 5:18am: Pacific Heights, San Francisco, United States of America

The sight in front of him was familiar, very familiar, and as Yoongi reached up to dab at his brow, he felt beaded sweat clinging to his skin.

Each inhale was hot because he seemed to be breathing in steam, which was fragrant with minerals; and every exhale made him want to gasp more air into his slightly restricted lungs. The pressure was as familiar as the sight of the glowing walls, for it was that thick blanket of heat weighing him down that came from one place, and one place only.

Yoongi was pretty certain that he was in the bathhouse again, he just didn’t know how exactly he had gotten here. The last thing that he was fully aware of was rolling onto his side to slip his arms under his pillow, wanting to get comfortable because he had been drifting off to sleep at last. Now, he was standing in a bathhouse across the city, and it was the most jarring lost of awareness that he had ever experienced.

Had he jumped in his car and travelled all of the way down to The Castro? Surely not, because he would have remembered doing that. Yoongi had never experienced sleepwalking before, so there was no viable explanation for how he had gotten to the bathhouse like that. Especially when it would have required him driving his car.

Could this actually be a dream? That seemed much more likely, all things considered. Not only because the last conscious memory that Yoongi possessed was of himself lying in his bed, but also because when he looked down, he saw that he was wearing just a shirt; wrinkled with wear and not even buttoned-up fully.

But…could a dream really feel this realistic? Could he really feel the weight of heat on his chest in a dream? Was it possible to wipe sweat off his brow and feel it trickling down the sides of his face when he wasn’t able to feel such sensations in reality? Surely, a dream felt less rich than this? But being caught up in a dream right now was the only logical explanation for it all, and so he was going to accept that it was quite possibly just the most vivid dream that he had ever had.
Yoongi stopped wiping at his face because it seemed rather pointless. He was just going to carry on sweating the longer that he stayed in the bathhouse, and so he just raked his hair back off his brow to try and stop it from hanging in his eyes annoyingly.

A quick scan of his surroundings showed Yoongi that he wasn’t really in the bathhouse, not exactly. No, though the winding maze-like hallways were similar, they weren’t the same as the ones that he had wandered along that night. The lighting was different, for one, for he could see deep blue glowing neon coming from somewhere within the maze. It blended with the blood-red bulbs from the main hallway, and their marriage created a hue of purple that spread across the walls that was highly pleasing to observe. The hallway that he was standing in was also a lot narrower and longer than any of the ones that Jimin had escorted him along, which made him feel a slight hint of discomfort.

The night that he had first entered that bathhouse, Yoongi had been like a puppy, toddling along behind Jimin; so very curious and eager and frightened at the exact same time. He had wanted to see what it was like inside at last, but had also been terrified of what he might have witnessed.

Right now, Yoongi could feel that same curiosity stirring within him, begging him to move forward down the hallway and see what was inside of the niches. He couldn’t hear much at all coming from the hallways, not like that first night.

Oh, Yoongi could recall the rather unpleasant symphony that had echoed off the thin walls of the bathhouse: creaking bed springs, slapping skin, heavy breathing, gasping and grunting, shouts of pleasure and of pain; all filling his skull until he had felt weak and dizzy and had almost collapsed in a panic.

But, right now, Yoongi could hear little more than his own heavy breathing, along with the distant sound of hissing steam and dripping water, which was presumably coming from the shower block. There was no sound of sexual activity, no scents of it either, and he couldn’t even hear faded voices coming from close by.

Could he be alone right now?

The only way to find out was to have a look inside of the niches and rooms that stretched along the hallway, of course, and so Yoongi decided to do so.

As he wandered down the hallway, Yoongi was to find that the bathhouse was actually as empty as he had assumed, for every single niche that he checked out was empty. He saw no rooms in which a variety of beds were waiting to be used, just hollow niches filled with shadows and nothing more
than that. He had to turn onto another hallway to resume his search, hoping to locate something more than neon tubes at least.

Yoongi had no clue how long he had been walking for, one of his hands running along the slightly damp wall and his eyes constantly scanning the hallway, when his nose finally detected the familiar scent of cologne hanging in the air, hanging almost like a waft of steam. It had a spiciness to it that mellowed out into a subtle hint of floral notes: Jules.

There was no mistaking it, and Yoongi knew that it meant that Jimin was somewhere inside of the bathhouse too - he just needed to find him in the maze of empty niches and twisty corners.

The thought brought a smile to his lips as Yoongi almost flitted from niche to niche, scanning the darkness to see that they were all still empty. But the sight of a radiant aureole of pink bleeding out from one at the end of the hallway made him abandon the shadowy spaces in favour of checking that out instead. Upon getting closer, he was able to see that it was actually a room, the first room that he had stumbled across so far, and so he stepped through the open doorway as curious as could be.

The private room was lit with a soft pink glow, the walls covered in throbbing heart signs and mounted tubes. Just like the room that he had entered that night, there was a small bed against the wall, with a metal mesh frame and a thin mattress that was bare of sheets, but had a single pillow. Beside this, there was a side table covered in bottles and a box of tissues, and there was an armchair at the bottom of the bed. Overall, it was a pleasing room, and the sight of a certain someone lying on the bed was even more pleasing.

Jemin was lounged on the mattress currently, his legs cocked up behind him to kick them back and forth languidly. His thighs and the soft curve of his behind flexed tight with every movement, the ripple of his muscles enticing. The sight of his Valentino blouse on his body, buttoned up just enough to cover his nakedness, but to also reveal his chest and thighs, made Yoongi take a soft intake of breath as he leaned against the door frame to study him.

Jemin looked so beautiful, just lying there in his own world. He had his head resting on the pillow and his eyes were closed as he kicked his legs around, showcasing that he was very comfortable. But after a moment of study, he opened his eyes slowly to notice that he was standing in the doorway, staring at him.

Yoongi saw his expression shifting at this, his eyes widening in surprise at first, before crinkling at the corners in a happy grin.

Jemin lifted his head up off the pillow to stare right back at him, and the sight made him smile softly
in return.

“What? What’re you staring at?” he asked, moving to brush the usual lock of hair back off his face.

“Nothing, I just thought that you look beautiful,” Yoongi mumbled, as he stubbed his bare toes on the slightly damp flooring.

“Hmm?” Jimin lifted his eyebrows with a hum, for it seemed that he hadn’t caught his soft mumble from across the room.

“I said you look beautiful,” he repeated in a louder voice.

“I know, I just wanted to hear you say it again,” Jimin said, giggling and looking so very pleased with himself for tricking him like that.

Yoongi could only snort at this, finding it absolutely unbelievable that he had fallen for his childish trick. Jimin seemed to be quite the crafty type, very mischievous when he wanted to be, even when it clashed against his other traits drastically.

“You like it here; don’t you, baby boy?” Jimin asked with that same sweet smile, shifting to get up off the bed to cross the tiny room and draw closer to him. “It’s why you keep dreaming about it, hmm? I’m pretty certain that you’ve thought about this place again. Maybe, when you’re asleep, or even when you’re awake.”

Yoongi almost felt like he should take a few steps backward as Jimin got closer, just to ensure that there was a little distance between their bodies. But he found his feet moving him away from the doorway instead, sidling over to the wall so that he could place his hands on the warm plaster and lean back against it. It meant that Jimin was able to walk right up to him, cutting the distance down between their bodies to nothing more than kissing distance, as he lifted his arms and he planted his hands on either side of his head.

Jimin had effectively pinned him in place against the wall without even touching his body; chest against chest and their faces so close together that Yoongi could feel his breath puffing out to touch his skin. He felt a funny stirring sensation in the pit of his stomach at this, something that was most certainly a little kick of excitement.
That night in the bathhouse, he had done the exact same thing to Jimin. He had grabbed hold of his shoulders and he had gently shoved him into one of those niches, just so he could kiss him in the dark for the first time. Now, Jimin was pinning him to the wall with little more than his gaze.

Yoongi found his fingers twitching and curling up against his palms because he wanted to touch him. He wanted to hold onto his waist, or even just settle his hands on his chest to stroke at the cotton blouse whilst they spoke.

“You know, I really do think that you think of this place a lot,” Jimin whispered, his gaze glancing between his eyes and lips constantly as if he was considering a kiss. “I think that sometimes, when you’re alone, you…fantasise about this little room. You like to think about us being in this room together. Don’t you?”

“I…I think about it, yeah,” Yoongi agreed in a rather strained voice, wetting his lips with his tongue so that they didn’t feel so dry. “Sometimes.”

“Hmm, I wonder what you think about?” he asked, his lips twitching upwards at the corners. “I wonder if it’s something like this…”

Yoongi could see the rest of the private room over curve of his shoulder, and the sight of the two of them writhing around on the bed that the younger man had just been lying on, was enough to make him gasp in shock.

Jimin was standing right in front of him, was pinning him against the wall, and yet he was also lying on the bed across the room, just like he was.

What was happening right now? Yoongi didn’t know, for it was almost like a dream within a dream, or perhaps some kind of strange illusion. Whatever the case, he could feel Jimin’s warm breath still puffing out to touch his face as he stared across the room, just to let him know that he was still keeping him pinned in place.

The tube lighting had changed so suddenly that he hadn’t even realised it, for Yoongi could now see that the private room had plunged itself into a crimson glow instead of that lovely soft pink. He could see it washing over their exposed skin, that vivid redness unmistakably erotic in a way that no other colour could achieve.

Yoongi could see that he was lying on his back on the bed, a puddle of clothing trapped underneath
him that they had stripped out of and had tossed aside without much care at all. Jimin was lying on top of him, so that he was cradling him within in his arms and his spread thighs; skin against skin and their mouths and tongues exploring each others’ bodies.

Jimin’s tongue tracked the curve of his throat so slowly, up to his jawline, so that he rolled his head back as far as he could to make the sensation last as long as possible. Yoongi could see his brow twitching and his lips trembling as his fingers tangled in Jimin’s black hair; his expression one of sheer ecstasy. His spread thighs trembled when Jimin’s tongue found the little sensitive spot behind his ear, his hips instinctively bucking up to rub against his.

“Is it like that? Do you think about things like that? Or…” Jimin wet his lips with his tongue painfully slow, and Yoongi struggled to not stare at his mouth the entire time. “Do you think about those secret desires of yours? The ones that you told me about; about being fucked?”

Jimin dragged this word out for emphasis, and just hearing it made Yoongi gulp hard as he dropped his gaze to his chest. Holding his eyes was much too hard right now, especially since he had managed to peek right into his private thoughts like that.

“Oh, baby boy, look at that blush!” Jimin cooed, a soft laugh escaping him as he nibbled on his lower lip. “You’ve turned all pink again, I love it!”

“Suh-sometimes, I think about fuh…fucking,” Yoongi admitted, struggling to speak because there was a lump in his throat. “Sometimes, I feel buh-bad, so, I grab a drink and try to not…think. But sometimes, sometimes, I get real vivid thoughts. I-I find myself staring up at my ceiling for so long, and when I come back ‘round and check my watch, I was daydreaming for twenty minutes.”

“Only daydreaming? Not…touching yourself?”

“Nuh-no, not yet,” Yoongi stammered, shifting from foot to foot awkwardly. “I don’t wanna tuh-touch myself just yet. I feel bad when I do, not like when you touch me, Jimin.”

“Hmm, I can make you feel good,” Jimin almost purred. “You know that I can make you feel so fucking good, baby boy.”

When Yoongi rolled his eyes to look over his shoulder again, unable to fight his curiosity, he heard his other self crying out in pleasure.
“Nnn, like that, like tha- oh!”

Yoongi was paralysed, unable to look away as Jimin pounded his hips forward into him; trapping him between the mattress and his body. One of his hands was holding onto his hip, the other on the mattress to support his weight and let him anchor himself for fluid movement.

Had Jimin changed the dreamy illusion across the private room, or had he done so accidentally? Had his own fleeting thoughts about his sexual fantasies triggered the sudden escalation? If he had caused the change, then he was not able to reverse it, because no matter how hard that he tried to think about them just kissing again, they continued having sex.

“Does that feel good?” Jimin grunted, his voice ragged with exertion.

“Uhh-huh,” he gasped in response, his eyes rolling as he tried to look back over his shoulder at him. “God, it feels so good.”

Yoongi could see himself on the bed: squirming; his spine curving as he desperately tried to lift his behind up and grind against him for that little bit more stimulation. His fingers were snagged around their puddled clothing tightly, his tendons straining underneath his skin from the strength of his grip, and his jaw was clenched tight enough to make his veins also ripple. The sight of his teeth, laid bare and gritted, revealed to him how desperate that he was, how hungry; and it was enough to make his already burning face feel even hotter.

Yoongi dragged his gaze away from the bed to look at Jimin, catching sight of a rather smug smirk on his face. Did he know that he was starting to feel a coiling heat in his gut right now, that he was wanting to squirm against the wall just as much as his other self was squirming on the bed? Judging from the smirk on his lips, he did.

“That could be us, baby boy,” Jimin said, shifting so that his lips were hovering right beside his ear. “I’ve offered you it so many times. You know that I want it, I know that you want it. But, you keep saying no.”

Yoongi tried to reply to this, to do something, but he found that the lump in his throat choked him too much to allow him to speak. He couldn’t hold Jimin’s gaze now, could only stare over his shoulder at the bed across the room again to watch their other selves.

The sight and sound of the metal headboard connecting with the wall let him know the exact rhythm
that Jimin was pounding into his other self with. Fast and hard, maybe a little rough, but he could see how much that he was enjoying it. From his rippling tendons and curved spine, to his sweat-slick skin and rapid breathing; Yoongi could see and almost feel how much he was enjoying it.

It was as if there was a string between his body and his other self, a string that was connected to his very gut so that every grind, every thump of their bodies connecting, caused it to twist tighter and tighter until his own loins were prickling with heat.

“Why’d you keep saying no?” Jimin asked, his tone sounding both curious and a little bit upset to his ears. “Don’t you want me like that?”

“I do, shit, I do, I just-”

Jimin breathed down his neck, making him tremble weakly in his hold from the heat. Yoongi felt his knees knocking together from the sensation, a plunging shiver of pleasure spiking down into his belly that made him moan weakly.

“You just what, baby boy?”

Yoongi could feel Jimin’s fingers on his body, for he had moved them from the wall to take hold of his waist instead. Now, he was no longer pinned against the wall by his arms, for he was tangled up in his hold, but Yoongi didn’t feel like he was trapped exactly. Jimin’s hold was too gentle for that, his touch too…tender, as his fingers skirted the slight dip of his sides to find his hips.

Yoongi stuck his tongue out to wet his lips, tasting the sharp tang of sweat as he did so. It was no wonder that he was sweating right now; from both the heat and the sex in front of him. But before he could hope to open his mouth and reply, his other self cried out from the bed.

“Fuh-fuck! Jimin, more, just a lil more, huh! Huh, I-mmm so close!”

“I-I, shit,” Yoongi wheezed, his throat struggling to work because he couldn’t seem to think straight right now. “I, Jimin, I’m-”

“Huh…uhh,” his other self whimpered, letting go of the covers so that he could reach back and seize hold of Jimin’s buttocks, forcing him to fuck him that little bit deeper. “Yes, like that, just like tha-”
“Baby boy, oh, you feel so good,” Jimin groaned breathlessly, sloppily rutting against him so that the slap of their skin connecting was sickeningly loud.

“I-I-”

“What, Yoongi?” Jimin asked again, so patient and calm; as if what was happening right behind him didn’t affect him in the slightest.

“Oh, oh, I’m cum- Jimin, I’m-”

“I’m scared!” Yoongi shouted, squeezing his eyes shut and reaching up to clap his hands over his ears, just to block it all out. Just to force it away and let him finally get the crushing weight off of his chest. “I’m scared, Jimin! I’m scared that it won’t feel right! I’m scared that it’ll huh-hurt! I’m scared that I’ll fuck it up, that I’ll fuck up everything good that we’ve managed to build together, and you won’t luh-love muh-muh- shit! I-I-I’m just so fucking scared, Jimin!”

When Yoongi opened his eyes again, he found that the private room was empty. There was no sight of Jimin hovering in front of him, trapping him against the wall. Their other selves were no longer present in the bed, though their terribly crumpled clothing were still on the mattress, as if they had wanted to leave their trace on the room. He was all alone at last, slumped against the pink neon wall and trembling weakly.

For a few seconds, Yoongi could only stare at the bed dumbly; his chest rising and falling rapidly as he tried to catch his breath. His heart was racing so fast that he couldn’t believe it. After he felt like he had gained some control over his body again, he moved his hands away from his ears to push his hair back off his face instead.

Yoongi found that his hair was soaking wet when he raked his fingers through it. But not with sweat from the heat of the bathhouse. No, when he lowered his hands and he stared at them, he saw beaded droplets of water clinging to his palms. The tangy scent of salt was overwhelming, just like…brine.

“Huh?” he breathed out heavily, staring at the beaded water and grains of white sand on his skin.

“What the…?”

Yoongi licked his lips again, tasting the salty substance on his skin because he was coated in it. It was as if he had just stepped straight out of the sea, and he found himself wondering if it was
because Jimin had touched him. The younger man had told him about how much he loved the bay, after all.

Yoongi wiped his hands on his shirt roughly, and then he grabbed one of the loose cuffs to dab at his face and mop the water free. He had to carry on breathing slow and deep to get his racing heart to settle down, for it was thumping so hard that he could hear it in his ears.

As he left the private room, Yoongi tried to not think about what he had just blurted out to Jimin. He tried to push it as far away from his thoughts as he possibly could, because he felt a surge of embarrassed disgust washing over him. He had sounded so weak, so pathetic, and it was no wonder that Jimin had disappeared on him after he had shouted about how he was scared of having sex with him. It was enough to make him drop his head with a heavy sigh, watching his bare feet as he walked along the red hallway because there was nothing else to look at.

After some more pointless wandering in the hopes of finding Jimin again, Yoongi heard something echoing through the bathhouse, but it was so far away that he was unable to discern what it was. He had to just pick up his pace and almost jog down the hallway until the volume increased enough for him to finally make it out clearly.

*Thwack!*

The noise caught Yoongi by complete surprise because he knew it, he knew that he recognised that soft swatting sound. It was enough to make him stop walking, dragging his bare feet to a stop until he slowly lifted his gaze up to stare at the closest niche.

Yoongi could see something in the darkness inside of the hollow, something like a face, but it was hard to make out who exactly he was looking at. All that he knew was that he could sense a strange sensation coming from the darkness, something…icy, something unpleasant. It was enough to make his skin break out into goosebumps at the sudden wafts of chill air touching his sweaty skin. He had little choice but to lean closer, just to try and see who was lingering in the niche.

Yoongi had just started to edge into the shadowy space when he realised who he was looking up at. But it was far too late then, for they had made direct eye-contact with each other.

The sound that he had heard…was the sound that a golf club made when it connected with the ball and swung up high into the air.
Yoongi was looking right at his father, standing there in the niche, glaring back down at him from under the brim of his sun visor.

“Shit!”

Yoongi stumbled backwards in a mixture of shock and horror, his feet rapidly backpedaling until he felt himself stumbling. In his haste to get away from his father, he accidentally tripped over his own feet, and he hit the floor with a jarring *thump* that made him bite down on his tongue hard. The pain was so sharp that his shoulders shot up to almost hit his ears, and it made tears well on his lash line instantly.

Yoongi was certain that he could taste blood, and when he reached up to touch his mouth, his fingers came back covered in a thin smear. In the harsh neon glow, it looked almost black, looked toxic, and he found his breath catching in his throat to choke him as he stared up at the other man in terror.

His father had caught him in the bathhouse at last, wandering the hallways like every other desperate cruiser in the city, and now he was in so much trouble. It was the kind of terror that made his entire body turn freezing cold, his legs so rubbery that he couldn’t possibly hope to get back upright again. He just knew that he could smell his fear. Just like a shark, his father had scented blood, and now he was going to devour him.

The hallway lights plunged into a deep red that was far from lust. It was a shade of red that throbbed with anger, with danger and fear, and Yoongi felt a sharp whine escaping his lips as he swallowed a coppery dribble of blood and saliva. His tongue hurt so much, and he was certain that it was swelling in his mouth already. The urge to sob was overwhelming, but he knew that he wasn’t supposed to.

Not in front of his father.

Yoongi was never supposed to cry in front of his father, but his stinging tongue had involuntarily caused several tears of pain to roll down his cheeks as he tried to rapidly blink them away.

“Crying? *Hmm, typical, how fucking typical,*” his father muttered in disdain, the corners of his mouth turning down severely as he stepped out of the shadowy niche. He was dressed just like how he had been dressed that day on Presidio Golf Course; his clothing washed in that unpleasant red glow. “*All that you ever did as a child was cry. I know, your mother told me. You would cry and scream, until she relented and she sat you on her knee instead of your nanny. I told her that she spoilt you; look at you, crying like a goddamn girl.*”
“I’m nuh-not crying,” Yoongi argued back, even when his hiccup gave him away. He reached up to wipe at his eyes roughly, trying to knock the tears away as fast as he could. “I’m not crying, shut up.”

“Hmm? Oh no, of course not,” his father remarked acerbically, turning over a golf club that he had in his grip as if testing its weight. “You’re just throwing one of your famous temper tantrums. Why, you’ll find something to break and embarrass me, just like always. Like that window at the golf course, when I didn’t let you get your own way. Or like your mother’s favourite vase that night that we last shared dinner together, and she told you to not kiss her cheek in case you gave her that disgusting queer disease-”

“Shut up, shut the fuck up!” Yoongi cried out, his voice tearing out of his throat raggedly. “I ain’t got AIDS! I told you both a million fucking times! I showed you the fucking paperwork! Why don’t you believe me?!?”

“Because they’ve all got it, Yoongi!” his father shouted back, his fingers clenching tightly around the iron. “All of the queers have it, it just takes awhile until it kills them! I’ve told you that a million goddamn times too, but you don’t believe me! No, you just carry on playing this sick little game of yours, just to upset your poor mother and me!”

“It ain’t a game!” he argued, knowing that he should stop shouting but struggling to resist the urge.

“You’re disgusting! You’re like an animal! You belong on the floor, crawling around like a goddamn dog! Forget crying like a little girl, you’re acting like a bitch!”

Yoongi breathed rapidly through his nose as he tried to calm himself down, his teeth so tightly clenched together that his head was aching. He needed to stop yelling at his father because he knew that it would end badly for him, but he could feel himself giving in to the urge to carry on fighting. He couldn’t just sit here and let the man attack him like this, stabbing him over and over again with his barbed words and dagger-like tongue. He had to defend himself from his assault, even if it might just end in him getting struck by his father.

“I’ll bet that you act like a bitch for other men too. You’re not a man, not even close, so, you probably just bend over for every pervert that you pick up in that hideous car of yours.”

“I ain’t had sex in five years! Five years, father! Ask Hoseok, he’ll tell you that too!”
“Hoseok? Hmm, there’s an example of you and your sick influence. Hoseok was such a good boy growing up, but then you snaked your way into his mind and now he runs around calling himself... what, what’s the word that queers use when they want to pretend to be normal? Bisexual? Pft, that nonsense. Hajoon was too soft on him. I told him so many times, he was too soft on the boy. He would have snapped out of the habit quick enough had he gotten spanked as a child when he had started acting queer.”

“Don’t you call Hoseok queer!” Yoongi shouted, his fingers curling up into tight fists in his lap.

“Well, at least he might stop acting like that one day, when he finds himself a woman,” his father muttered to himself. “There’s something wrong with the boy, but in time, he might turn right again. Not like you. You’re always going to be wrong inside, Yoongi.”

“Then there must be something wrong with you too, ‘cos you fucking made me!” Yoongi snapped, unable to withstand this verbal battery any longer.

Oh, the way that his father’s expression turned slack with shock caused a sick surge of enjoyment in Yoongi’s chest. Well, for several seconds at least; until it hit him that he had made a huge mistake.

“You little-”

Yoongi could do no more than flinch as his father swung his golf club out, unable to even lift his hands up before it hit him. The sensation of the head whacking his bare thigh was hideous, a sharp sting that made him cry out in mingled shock and pain. A quick look up at his father showed him black anger all over his face, his lips pulled back in an uncontrollable grimace of rage.

Yoongi tried to drag himself away from his father, his fingers scrabbling on the damp flooring as he crawled backwards. But his back suddenly smacked into the wall hard and stunned him for a moment. As he froze up in shock, the club smacked him hard on his shoulder and connected right with the rounded bone. That caused a sharp flare of pain that hurt even more than the initial whack to the thigh, and this time, he let out a yelp of pain.

This was a dream, he knew that it had to be a dream, but that had hurt him so much that he could hardly believe it. It didn’t feel like a dream when his shoulder started throbbing hideously, not even remotely.

His father’s weapon of choice was an 8 iron, of course, the metal head solid and heavy enough to
really cause some damage. He had felt the weight of the club in his own hands countless times when he had held a selection of irons out to his father out on the greens, and now he was using it against him like a weapon.

Yoongi threw his hands over his head just in time to save his skull from the next blow, catching it on the back of his hand instead. The contact was enough to split the skin with a stinging burn, and it was this blow that finally made him burst into tears.

“I didn’t make you that way! I didn’t make you sick! Don’t you dare-”

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry!” he sobbed, shielding his head with his arms, his knuckles aching and likely heavily bleeding. “I didn’t-”

“blame me for your depravity!” his father hollered, his voice thundering off the walls.

“mean it! I didn’t mean it! I’m sorry, daddy!”

“Do you do this on purpose? Is this to hurt me, hmm?!” his father asked, his face scrunched up in effort. “You know that I can’t stand faggots, Yoongi! It’s why you do it, isn’t it?! Because you know that it hurts me, and when you don’t get your own way, you need me to suffer so I’ll give in!”

“Nuh-no! I don’t wanna- ah!” Yoongi squeaked in pain, twisting to show his back to him, hoping that it would deflect most of the blows away from his head and arms. “Daddy, stop! Lemme explain! I can’t explain when you- ow! When you hit me!”

His father’s breathing was ragged as he reached up to slick his hair back off his face, his lips pulled in taut. At least he had stopped hitting him with the iron, though he knew that that might only be temporary.

Yoongi took several gulping breaths as he lowered his arms from his head, squinting up at his father through his tears.

“Wuh…why’d I do that to huh-hurt you?! Why’d I wanna make you hate me even more?! I duh-don’t wanna be this way! If I was normal, then you’d love me, dad!” Yoongi shouted, his voice cracked from his tears.
“You want me to love you?” his father asked. “Take a woman as your wife, stop indulging in your disgusting perverted habits, and maybe then I’ll love you.”

“I-I can’t,” he sobbed, swallowing hard. “I can’t do it, I tried looking at wuh-women like that, but-”


Yoongi couldn’t stop a series of pathetic sobs from escaping, hating the fact that his father would take that as an answer. But he couldn’t do this anymore, couldn’t speak to him like this after he had just beaten him like a dog. His skin was stinging from the blows from the golf club, there was blood running down his injured hand, and his chest hurt even more somehow; that horrible ache present that made him feel like he was dying.

When the club came down to smack him hard on the side of his ear, Yoongi didn’t even think. He just scrabbled up to his feet as fast as he could using the wall for support, before racing down the hallway to get away from his father and his wrath.

In his haste to get away, Yoongi ended up bouncing off the walls so hard that the impact made his sore arms sting, so that there would be even more bruises on his skin.

“I’ll never love you if you don’t renounce your disgusting ways, Yoongi! No son of mine is a faggot! No son of mine is going to bring our clan to an end and ruin everything that I built up! Never! You hear me, Yoongi! Never!”

Yoongi shot around a corner as fast as he could, his bare feet slipping on the damp flooring so that he went reeling and he slammed into the wall. The force of the blow drove him to the ground, and yet he just scrabbled back up to his feet again to carry on running because he couldn’t seem to stop. Not when his heart was pounding in his chest with sheer adrenaline and his body was moving faster than his brain could possibly process.

Yoongi felt his sweat-clumped hair flying back off his face as he raced through the maze, the ends of his damp shirt skirting around his thighs. As he slowed down to take another corner, he felt something strange brushing against his lower legs, something hot and furry, and he almost stumbled over it in his surprise to stop and see what it was.

A quick glance down showed him that it was Jungkook’s puppy…Tigger? Yes, that was her name:
Tigger. She had just darted between his legs and she was now trotting down the bathhouse hallway with her thick tail wagging around like mad. She looked back over her shoulder at him to bark before shooting around the left turn. Her brindled body disappeared out of sight just like that, but underneath his father’s angry hollering, he could still hear her little paws padding on the damp flooring.

Yoongi stopped at the bisecting hallway, looking both ways to see that they were the exact same: the same vivid throbbing red tubes mounted on the walls, the same number of niches on each wall. He could choose either path, and yet he found his eyes sliding back to look at Tigger. The puppy was just sitting there, scratching at her floppy ear with her back leg and seemingly waiting for him.

What she was even doing in the bathhouse right now, Yoongi didn’t know, but the sight of her was strangely relieving in a way that he didn’t quite understand. It was like he wasn’t alone right now, so long as she was there.

When he took a step in her direction, she barked at him, a funny yipping bark as she got back on all four feet and she wagged her tail. Yes, it seemed like she wanted him to follow her, and Yoongi had very little choice in the matter.

He just needed to get away from his father as fast as he could, before he caught up with him and maybe continued thwacking him with that golf club of his.

Yoongi wanted to wake up now, he wanted to get out of this hellish nightmare, but he couldn’t seem to do so. He knew that it was all just a dream, that he would wake up in his bed completely fine (save for his racing heart and sweat-slick skin), but he just couldn’t find a way to do so. No matter what hallway Tigger guided him down, he could still hear his father’s voice echoing through the maze; calling him filth, cursing and threatening him in ways that genuinely terrified him.

“Guh-go away, just go away!” he sobbed, his palms pressing against his ears hard enough to pin them against his skull. “Just go away and lemme-”

Yoongi stopped talking for a moment, his words catching in his throat. His ears seemed to be detecting something, something that made him stop staggering along the hallway.

It was the soft roar of waves, echoing through the bathhouse from one of the countless niches all around him.
Oh, the sound was enough to make him slump against the wall, his body turning limp as he closed his eyes and he took several deep breaths. It was so soothing, so calm, that he could feel his panic starting to dissipate as he listened to the waves over and over.

It was just like Jimin had told him, for whenever he thought of those waves, those perfect blue and calm waters, he could feel his tight chest expanding again. Suddenly, it no longer ached to breathe, and he was able to open his eyes to stare at the glowing wall.

At first, the red walls started to change, started to mix into a shade of mottled purple until the end result was a deep blue, as beautiful as the butterflies on Jimin’s silken shirt had been.

The sight of it made Yoongi let his breath out in a soft sigh of relief, his fear melting away as he lowered his hands from his ears at last.

Tigger was sitting at the end of the hallway, right in front of a door that she had been guiding him to. It was the first door that he had seen in the entirety of the bathhouse, and he was pretty certain that that was how he was going to wake up. All that he needed to do was probably push himself against it to shove it open, and then he would wake up at last, he knew that it was so.

Yoongi used the wall for support, so that he could walk towards the door and push it open. In his mind, he was imagining that he would be able to see the wonderful sight of the bay stretched out in front of him when he shoved it open; or maybe just the ceiling panel above his bed that was just as perfect and blue. Yet, when he shoved it open with all of his strength, he discovered that it was something else completely.

Yoongi stumbled into the bathhouse Jacuzzi room, the air thick with steam from the bubbling currents trapped inside of the large machines. The door shut behind him with a loud thud, cutting him off from Tigger, but also his father at long last. He blinked rapidly and he squinted through the steam to see a rather surprising sight just a few feet away.

Jimin was floating in the Jacuzzi languidly, his naked body on full display and his golden skin flushed with heat from the water.

It took the younger man a moment to notice him, but when he did so, Jimin shifted to get to the side of the tub, folding his arms up so that he could place his cheek on his damp forearms and look up at him.
Yoongi could see his hair, slicked back off his face oh so perfectly, with little droplets of water stuck on his hairline and beaded in several stray locks. They ran down his cheek to his jaw in steady rivulets, just begging to be stroked free by the curve of his thumb, or even kissed away by his lips. In the blue neon glow, Jimin was glistening wet, and he looked so beautiful that Yoongi could feel his chest almost aching as he watched his full lips curving up into a smile.

“What’s with the face, baby boy?” Jimin asked in a husky voice, heavy with bliss from the scorching hot water. “Come here, come on. Talk to me.”

For a minute, Yoongi was unable to do so. His entire body had frozen up on him, and he couldn’t walk the several feet needed to get to the edge of the Jacuzzi. He might not be able to hear his father shouting anymore, but he could still recall his toxic words with ease.

Yet, when Jimin looked up at him like that, his heavy-lidded eyes so trusting, so loving, he found his feet moving him forward.

Yoongi lowered himself down onto his knees first, before sitting on the damp edge of the Jacuzzi and folding his legs to the side. The flooring was hot from the several machines, just as damp as the rest of the bathhouse, but it felt nice on his still stinging thighs.

Jimin shifted to pull some of his body out of the steaming water, his face hovering right in front of his. He made no move to kiss him, rather he just cocked his head and he ran his gaze down his face to stare at his lips. His own lower lip shifted as he sucked it in to nibble on it, flashing his slightly crooked front teeth at him.

“What’s on your mind, baby boy? Do you wanna talk to me about it? I can see it right there on your face, clear as day. You’re not as good at hiding things as you like to think you are, you know?”

“Oh, yeah?” he asked in a quiet voice, which was thick with tears.

“Mmm,” Jimin hummed, lowering himself down so that he could rest his head on his thigh. “You can’t hide shit from me, Yoongi.”

Yoongi saw his lips curving upward at the corners in a sweet smile, a knowing smile, and he couldn’t help but place his hand down on his head to lightly tangle his fingers in his soaked hair. He could feel the Jacuzzi water against his palm, still hot, just like he had felt the seawater in his own hair.
This was Jimin, but it wasn’t the same Jimin as earlier. This wasn’t his sexual side, the enticing and erotic side that crept out of him unexpectedly. This was different, was more tender and emotional.

This was the side of Jimin that often appeared when they were talking, whether it be about something mundane or something deep. The kind that touched his knee or hand when they conversed; that made soft noises under his breath and didn’t look away once. Yoongi knew it was so, because that soft smile on his lips said it all, and it was this side of Jimin that he liked more than anything else.

“I ain’t feeling so good right now,” he admitted in a whisper. “I feel…sick again, even when I know that you don’t want me to. It’s just…it’s so fucking hard, Jimin. Y’know?”

“Why’s it hard? Did something happen, or did someone upset you? Was it your dad, huh?”

Yoongi sucked his lower lip in to nibble on it, avoiding Jimin’s eyes as he resumed stroking at his wet hair. He didn’t really know what to say to this question, because he didn’t want to have to tell him about what had just transpired with his father.

“Yoongi, your hand!” Jimin exclaimed suddenly, getting up off his thighs to reach over and grab the wrist of his other hand.

Clearly, he had noticed the blood smeared all over his knuckles and palm, and Yoongi could see his eyes growing round in complete shock. When he flexed his hand, his knuckles stung dully and made him wince.

Jimin eyed the gash in his skin for a few seconds before looking up at him, leaving him no choice but to talk.

“My, uh, my father made sure to remind me that I’m just a disgusting pervert; y’know, in case I forgot?” Yoongi remarked, aiming for this to sound like a joke, but not quite achieving it. “It ain’t nothing new, but…it still hurts every single time. I thought that you get used to that kinda shit, that you build up walls or whatever, but I think I must’ve left a huge fucking hole in one of ‘em.”

“Building up walls isn’t a good idea, baby boy,” Jimin suggested. “You build a wall, and someone’s gonna try and climb it or knock it down eventually. Why was he angry at you? Why’d he say that to you, hmm?”
“He’s always angry with me, maybe not outwardly, but I can see that he’s angry the second that we look at each other. Jimin, it’s like he sits there, waiting, biding his time ‘til I say or do something wrong, just so he can spit at me. It could be a name, a number, y’know, I get confused for a sec. But before I can correct myself, he makes sure that he can beat me to it, and then he sits there, looking down at me like I’m useless. But sometimes, ‘specially when he’s drunk, he gets really mad at me, and he says…”

“What does he say to you, Yoongi?”

“He calls me a fuh-fuh-fuh-” Yoongi pressed his lips together with a hard huff to stop his stuttering, swallowing the word hard because he couldn’t seem to say it aloud. “Jimin, he just calls me the most disgusting names you can think of, and he accuses me of doing this to hurt him and my mother. It just huh-hurts when he says that, y’know? It hurts being told that I’m the one hurting ‘em after what they’ve put me through. What kinda mother tells her son to not kuh-kiss her in case she gets AIDS, Jimin? What kinda father calls his son an abomination to his face?”

“Remember what you said to me that day? That maybe we have to make our own families? I think that you’re right in a way, even when I was wish that you weren’t. Yoongi, baby, we all want our parents to love us, to be proud of us, but sometimes…sometimes, it doesn’t work like that.”

“Why? Why don’t it, Jimin?” Yoongi asked, more brusquely than he had intended to because he was still tender from his confrontation with his father.

“Because, sometimes, our parents are bad for us. Sometimes, they hold us back from what we’re supposed to be or do, and sometimes they wanna control us more than they should. Abusive parents, they’re bad for you, and we both know that, Yoongi. We both know how bad that they are.”

“Why does he hate me so fuh-fucking much, Jimin?” Yoongi whined, reaching up to roughly wipe at his stinging eyes to force the tears away. “I never did anything to deserve this. I was a kid, just a kid, but he hated me even then. Why? Just tell me why, please?”

“Oh, baby, my sweet baby boy, I wish I could tell you why, but I can’t. I dunno why, but I do know that it’s not your fault,” he said in a soothing voice, shifting once more so that he could get on eye-level with him.

“Did he know? Did he know all of that time that I was gonna be guh-gay? Is that why he hated muh-me when I was a baby?”
“No, no, Yoongi,” Jimin cupped his cheek in his hand, forcing him to hold his gaze as he spoke. “Listen to me. You’re not the reason why he hates you. You’re not responsible for anything. He hates you because of something wrong inside of him, not inside of you. Think about bullies, think about how they hurt others because they feel bad about themselves and they need to hurt someone else to feel good. That’s all he is: a bully. Your dad, my dad - both big fucking bullies.”

Yoongi took several quick gasps to try and catch his breath, reaching up to place his bleeding hand against Jimin’s to keep his palm on his cheek. Just for a little longer, just so he could feel his warm and soft skin and feel safe again.

A part of him, deep down in his aching chest, knew that Jimin was telling him the truth. His father was a bully, he always had been, but that still didn’t negate the agony that the man could cause him with his words. He had been his victim for his entire life now, and he wasn’t going to be able to finally stand up for himself after that constant spiral of abuse. The next time that they saw each other, it would just continue, and he would be powerless to stop his cruel words from eating away at his mind like acid.

“Is it hurting to breathe again?”

“Shit, Jimin, it hurts to breathe always. It uh-only stops hurting when you hold my hand and tell me I’m guh-gonna be ‘k,” he admitted, before giving him a brief smile that felt more like a grimace.

“Just hold your breath, baby boy,” Jimin purred, moving to slip his hot and wet arms around his neck in a tight embrace. “Let the waves wash over you and carry you away, hmm?”

Jimin tugged him over the edge of the Jacuzzi, right down into the roaring bubbles that filled the machine.

Yoongi couldn’t even let out a cry of shock, for it happened much too fast. All that he could do was wait for the scorching slap of the steaming water to hit him as he was dragged down by the younger man’s weight.

As he tumbled over the side, Yoongi thought about how this was almost like diving into the sea, minus the freezing cold temperature that would make his heart skip several beats in his chest. No, when he hit the bubbling water, he just felt his breath escaping his lungs in shock as his body plunged down deep and-
Yoongi jerked in his sleep without even thinking, his hand going straight to his ringing telephone to grab the receiver so that he could press it against the side of his head. He had only just managed to pick up before whoever was calling him would get directed to his voicemail instead, which was a close call indeed.

As he pressed the cold plastic against his flushed and sweaty cheek, Yoongi rolled onto his side with a soft groan. He hadn’t even opened his eyes yet, for he was still trapped somewhere between reality and his dream.

“Y’hello?” he slurred heavily, reaching up to cradle his face in his free hand because his head felt too heavy to possibly hold up right now.

“I’m sorry for calling you right now, Prince Min, but I wasn’t certain when exactly would be the best time. On account of your daily business duties, and what not.”

The voice on the other end of the line sounded familiar to his ears. Not familiar enough to be one of his friends, who he would recognise from their very first breath down the line, nor recognisable enough to belong any of the enforcers that he spoke to on a daily basis. Whoever it was was speaking far too formally to be any of those goons anyway. He had a slightly husky voice, clean of an accent that would hint that he hadn’t been born in America, but he just couldn’t seem to figure it out.

“I’m suh…ry, who’s this?” Yoongi grumbled, as he managed to pry one of his eyelids open. “Who-mmm I talking to exactly?”

“Kim, Prince Min.”

“Kim?” he repeated dumbly, slowly lowering his hand from his face. “Kim, as in Namjoon Kim?”

“Yes, Prince Min, as in Namjoon Kim,” he confirmed. “I’ve got your number, you gave it to Jimin.”

“Wuh…you calling me for, huh?” Yoongi managed to groan, dropping his face into his pillow because he was too weak to hold it up any longer. When he inhaled, he found that it was hard to breathe through the cotton, just like it had been in the bathhouse. “What’s gon…on?”
“I need to talk to you, Prince Min,” Namjoon confided in a serious tone, his voice lowering ever so slightly as he did so. “It’s about something serious.”

“Wait, is everything alright?” Yoongi asked suddenly, a little jolt coursing through his system as he turned his head to breathe more easily. His chest suddenly felt funny, felt tight in a way that twinged sharply. “Jimin, he’s alright, yeah?”

“Of course, Prince Min,” Namjoon replied without missing a beat, instantly putting his worries at ease. “I’m sorry if I might’ve frightened you, he’s fine; asleep in bed right now, in fact. You might just be able to hear him snoring.”

“So, what’d you need to tell me about that’s so important?”

“It’s to do with an incident that happened this morning, in the early hours. An incident that I think you’ll wanna know about.”

An incident on his turf? That was why the young dealer was phoning him at this ridiculous hour?

It made sense, it made a lot of sense, but that hadn’t stopped Yoongi from assuming that it might have actually had something to do with Jimin for a moment. Of course, it had had nothing to do with him in reality, and he had kind of expected that all along, but it was still great to have had it confirmed by Namjoon. It meant that the funny feeling in his chest could go away now and leave him in peace.

“K, speak to me, Kim, tell me what went down,” Yoongi mumbled, as he wriggled around to get more comfortable.

“Last night, I was working my turf,” Namjoon explained, talking fast but speaking with crisp and clear diction. “I personally deviate between The Haight and The Castro most nights, working the bar and club scenes. Pot only, that’s all I physically deal, but I got guys shifting harder stuff in the area too. But that wasn’t all that was out there on the streets last night, Prince Min.”

“Oh, yeah?
“Some of my guys deal in coke, yeah, but not heroin. I don’t sell that, I never have. It’s not popular in my turf, Prince Min. I got hippies wanting the smoke, and gay guys wanting a couple of lines to loosen them up. Heroin? That’s more Chinatown and the surrounding area. Maybe Mission? Most certainly The Bayview.”

Well then, Namjoon knew his stuff. He had not only connected the dots between old heroin dens up in Chinatown - where Seunghyun Choi had once owned a den and Jimin had since helped flood with inflated cocaine; but he also seemed to be well aware of the problem in Mission too. Yes, the dealer had a smart head on his shoulders, and so it was no wonder that Jimin seemed sharp with these things too. He was learning from Namjoon, and his best friend was mostly certainly schooled on the streets.

“You saw heroin floating ‘round your turf?” Yoongi asked, as he reached up to run his fingers over his lips and he wondered why he would call him over a relatively minor issue like this; one that Seokjin would be much more useful for.

“No, I didn’t see heroin, Prince Min, that’s the thing. If I had, I’d have alerted Kim, Seokjin Kim, my supplier, about it. That’s not important enough to harass you about. What I’m trying to say is that you can see the kind of area that I’m used to working, that my men are used to working. It’s chill, it’s a lot safer than some parts of the city. But last night, one of my guys witnessed a deal going down in a bar, and not long afterwards, a guy got his face sliced open with a glass.”

Yoongi stopped running his fingers over his lips at this, falling completely still for a moment. He didn’t even blink as he stared down at his wrinkled pillow, playing his words over in his mind.

Namjoon’s clients seemed to be hippies and stoners, nothing extreme and nothing violent at all. Therefore, an incident like that on his turf was most certainly something unexpected. Not only did it mean that something else had been floating around that night, it also meant that the surrounding area was going to be rife with police activity for the next week or so, putting his business ventures at risk.

Yes, he could see why Namjoon had decided to call him now, and Yoongi shifted on his mattress as he stuck his tongue out to wet his lips.

“Your guy see what it was, huh? He hear anything floating ‘round maybe, got asked ‘bout a brand he don’t sell by a couple of narcs hoping to pull him in?” Yoongi asked, vaguely alluding to the possibilities of this being Sacramento Snow, without directly naming the drug to the dealer.

“No, I asked him all of that and he said that he didn’t get a good enough look at the deal. He thought it was coke, on account of the colour, but-”
“But it wasn’t blow,” Yoongi finished for him, turning his head to look at his clock to see that it was now 5:20am.

“It was something potent, Prince Min, the kind of drug that makes you glass a dude in a bar and start screaming like a fucking lunatic until four guys restrain you. You know, that kind?”

“Yeah, sounds like potent shit,” Yoongi agreed, as his fingers stroked at his wrinkled bed sheets. “D’you have any idea what it might just be, huh?”

“Yeah, Prince Min. I think it could be speedball, assuming from what my man told me. That shit fucks you up, I mean if you don’t drop from an overdose then you dive out of a window having a freakout - it’s bad shit. The mix messes with your brain too much, puts you into that fight-or-flight panic response. Sounds like the guy that my man saw in the bar went with fight, which was a bad call on his end.”

“Mmm, and you ain’t ever seen that shit in your neighbourhood before, right?” Yoongi asked, hoping to not sound too eager about what he was hearing.

“No, like I said, Prince Min, even heroin dealing is rare in my neighbourhood. Addicts get it from somewhere else and then drift into The Haight to shoot up in hobo dens, but they don’t get it here. Speedball? I mean, Christ, I’ve never even seen it with my own two eyes before.”

“Alright, so, your man saw a deal going down in a bar, a bar I’m gonna no doubt see all over the fucking papers this morning,” Yoongi summarised, wriggling under his covers as he did so. “He saw enough to see something that looked like blow, but you’re sure it ain’t blow. If he saw that much, did he happen to see a face? Happen to recognise the guy slinging it?”

“He didn’t give me his name, on account of not knowing the dealer, but he knew who he worked for. He said Ahn, said that a coke dealer named Ahn worked in the neighbourhood too and that he often caught sight of deals going down. I haven’t got a first name, sorry, but I know the area that it all went down in.”

“Where?”

“Corner of Cole and Carl Street, over in Cole Valley,” Namjoon explained, before quickly adding. “A neighbourhood that small can only have so much influence, so, I think that you’ll be able to find
“Mmm, I think I already know the Ahn you’re referring to,” Yoongi said, as he moved to roll onto his back again. “Kim, you did good calling me first, even if it’s 5-fucking-am in the morning and I need all the beauty sleep I can get these days.”

This made the other man laugh down the line, a rather dopey-sounding laugh that was at odds with his seemingly intellectual demeanour.

“Uh, Kim?”

“Yeah, Prince Min?”

“What’d you dream ‘bout?” Yoongi asked suddenly, the question rolling off of his tongue before he could possibly hope to catch it.

For a moment, the line remained silent because it seemed that his question had taken Namjoon by surprise. It was a very sudden and unexpected question, and so it made perfect sense that it might have just surprised him. Or he might just be thinking his question over before giving him a reply.

“Oftentimes, my dreams are just like my regular days, save for the fact something crazy happens in them. Maybe, I get hit by a car and a pretty chick jumps out to see if I’m alright. Maybe, Jimin breaks the toilet again and then blames me - because he always does that, OK - and then I gotta try and fix it. It’s usually the kind of stupid stuff that when you wake up afterwards you think…what the fuck’s wrong with my brain? Yeah?”

Yoongi laughed softly at this, finding this fact not at all unsurprising from Namjoon. Yes, it seemed that the rather smart and prim young man that he presented himself as was really just a façade, for underneath that he seemed bumbling and quirky, and so goddamn endearing.

“Sometimes, I don’t dream, so much as recollect. Like, I kind of drift through my old memories and relive them, sadly having to put up with all of my embarrassing mistakes and bad jokes because I can’t change them.”

“It sounds nice, it sounds real nice,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice, his fingers still playing with the kinked cord. “Getting to relive good memories is why people record everything on those
goddamn JVC camcorders these days.”

“And, uh, there’s obviously the occasional dirty dream, but, hey, that’s natural, right?” Namjoon added, before letting out a flustered laugh. “Don’t judge.”

“Kim, what’d you think dreams mean?” Yoongi asked him, as he stared up at the still dusky purple sky visible through his ceiling panel. “I mean, like, what’d you think they mean in general? Are they important? Do they got messages in ‘em?”

“I, uh, I like to think that dreams are important, in some way,” Namjoon said after a moment of thought. “I’m not sure why, but they must mean something, right? Something about what’s going on in our minds, even when we aren’t in control of them. The subconscious mind, and all that.”

“Yeah, I get you. You’re smart, Kim, I like that. I dunno a lot of smart guys, just a bunch of smartasses.”

“Prince Min, if you don’t mind me asking…why exactly are you asking me about dreams? Is there something that you wanna talk about?”

Yoongi took a moment to think this over, wondering if he should really delve into this conversation with him right now. Did he want to talk to someone? Of course he did, on account of his rather unusual and unsettling dream, but there was really no one that he could turn to, that he could talk to about it…save for Jimin.

“Kim, what if you said something to someone in your dream? What if you admitted something in it, something you ain’t admitted to someone before? What, uh, what’d you think that means, huh?”

“I think that it means you should probably tell whoever it was what you said to them, to dream them. Clearly, it’s something that you need to tell them, or you want to tell them, but in reality, you can’t. Maybe, because you’re scared to, or maybe, because you’re worried you might anger or upset them.”

“Mmm…”

“Prince Min, if that someone’s Jimin, then I can tell you right now - you can tell him whatever it is that you’re worried about. I swear that you can. Between you and me, he, uh, he would bend over
backwards for you, and I don’t mean that as innuendo. I mean that he would literally push himself to his limits, just for you.”

“Why? Why’d you think that he’d do something like that, Kim?”

“Because he likes you, Prince Min, he likes you a lot,” Namjoon admitted, his tone sounding entirely earnest. “I’ve known him for a couple of years now, and I’ve never seen him act like this over another guy before. It’s a good thing. I’m so glad and relieved that he’s starting to mature and not act like he used to. In the past, you know? It means that I don’t have to worry over him as much as I used to.”

“Kim? You, uh, you don’t need to worry ‘bout me, yeah?”

“I know. Do you wanna talk to him? I could wake him up, put him on the phone for you; if you want?”

“No, no, it’s fine. Let him rest, he should rest,” Yoongi muttered, as he carried on fiddling with the phone cord. “I can talk to him whenever, can call him and, uh, talk. Yeah? Uh, thanks for the tip, Kim, I’ll be sure to follow up on that and make sure that none of that shit ends up on your turf again.”

Yoongi ended the call with a weary sigh, shifting to drop the receiver back into the cradle so that he could lie back in bed and stare up at the ceiling. He could see that the sky was still deep purple because it was so early in the morning. The sun had probably only just started rising on the horizon, lifting up above the Golden Gate Bridge to cast a vivid orange wash over the bay, and he could still see the faintest hints of stars lingering before they would fade out under the sunlight.

For a moment, Yoongi just stared up at the sky blankly, his mind empty of thoughts, before reaching up to brush a tangle of hair off his brow with another sigh.

The phone call and subsequent conversation had occurred so fast that he had been unable to really think about his dream. He had reacted on instinct, pushing his foggy confusion aside for the sake of business, but now that he was finished talking to Namjoon, he was finally able to reflect on his dream properly. Not that he wanted to do so entirely, that was.

As Yoongi slowly wrapped a stray lock of hair around his forefinger, he thought about how strange it was that he had had a deep conversation with Jimin in his dream: one in which the young man had
actually said meaningful things to him. Even though Yoongi knew that it had all been his own imagination, it really had felt like Jimin had told him those things. It was as if they had really had that conversation together, in a bar or hotel, or even over breakfast, and he had listened to him intently the entire time.

What he had told him made perfect sense, because Yoongi had often pondered upon these possibilities in the nights when he had found that he had been unable sleep.

Like how his parents didn’t love him and likely never would; like how his father was really nothing more than a bully that had used his own insecurities against him his entire life; like how there was nothing wrong with him at all and that he should never think those things.

Yet, even when Yoongi’s sleeping mind had tried to tell him these things, to put his waking mind at ease and lessen the burden, he knew that he would still find himself refusing to accept these facts.

Yoongi knew that he would constantly find himself hoping that he was wrong about his parents hating him, that his father wasn’t actually the bad one, but it was in fact him - that he really was fucked up in some way, because it was what he had been thinking for most of his life now.

But maybe, if Yoongi were to hear those things coming from Jimin’s actual lips, he might just find himself believing in them that little bit more.

How his dream had went from intensely sexual to terrifying in such a short amount of time was something that he was still trying to discern. It was probably because he was scared of his growing feelings for Jimin, that he was scared of the fact that he now had ‘a boyfriend’ and that he was feeling things for him above and beyond simple sexual attraction. Yes, that was probably why his erotic dream had rapidly spiralled out of control.

Yoongi stopped playing with his hair to reach down and brush his covers off his waist, wanting to be free of the material. He was in the act of doing so when his hand brushed against the stretch of his stomach, and when he glanced down he saw that his shirt was racked up to near his ribs. It was likely a result of him tossing and turning in his sleep, or he might just have tugged it up subconsciously at some point.

Yoongi eyed the thin smears of semen on his bare lower stomach in mild confusion and disgust, making no move to climb out of bed and get cleaned up. For a moment, he was so confused by the sight of it that he could only stare, but then he realised where it had come from.
His dream, of course.

Yoongi reached down to touch his stomach, his fingers skating in the substance as he lifted his hand up to study it. Then he shifted to grab a bunch of tissues from the box on his side table, hastily cleaning his soiled hand and stomach up.

As if the events of his dream hadn’t made him feel mingled disgust and anxiety over his desires already, the fact that he had had a wet dream just made him feel worse.

Yoongi tossed the bunched-up tissues away and he shifted to grab his alarm clock, ensuring that an alarm for 7am was set so that he would get a couple more hours of sleep. Then he lay back down on his stomach, burrowing his face into the cotton of his pillow.

When he breathed in, he could scent and taste *Jules* because he had sprayed it on his pillow before falling asleep last night. It was a rather silly thing to have done, but he had just given in to the temptation because he had been unable to resist it.

It was nice, the cologne smelled nice and he found it highly calming to breathe it in as he drifted in his thoughts, floating between sleep and reality until his alarm finally sounded.

Yoongi retrieved his phone again, placing it down on the bed so that he could start dialling Seokjin’s car phone number. Sure, he could sort this affair out on his own because he was more than certain that he knew who he needed to grill for information, but his friend had his benefits.

Seokjin was far smoother with his words when it came to getting information, especially since he had much closer bonds to his men than he did. He stored so much information away in that brain of his, that it was always useful to have him on hand to confirm or deny any potential claims that Ahn might just make.

Yoongi listened to the dialling tone for just a moment, before the static crackle of him picking up sounded down his ear.

“*Good morning, Yoongi, I trust that you slept well.*”

“No, not even remotely,” he replied, as he ran his tongue around his mouth. “Business?”
“What do you think? So far, the same as always. Though, I think that I might be short of earnings on a deal over in Taiwan, so, I’ll make sure to figure out what went wrong there for you, Yoongi.”

“You got any guys that can do that for you? I got a use for you that goes beyond you phoning people all across the world and wasting your fucking dimes. Yeah?”

“Oh, yes? Well, I’m certain that I have men that can sort the minor issues out for me, but what exactly am I assisting you with today? If I might ask?”

“I need you to come pick me up, yeah?” Yoongi said, swinging legs over the side of his bed. “We’ve got business to see to. Ahn, Taehwan Ahn, does that name ring a bell to you?”

“I recall it, yes, he’s…he’s a blow dealer down around The Haight, right? I believe that he has dealings in and around Cole Valley mostly. Why do you ask, Yoongi?”

“I just got a tip that leads me to think either he’s another speedball dealer, or his men are dealing behind his back and he don’t have a fucking clue. Either way, I wanna go find out for myself,” he explained, getting to his feet and stretching his back with a series of soft grunts. “Where’re you right now, huh? You close?”

“I’m in Chinatown currently, I can be at your house in fifteen to twenty minutes. Will you be ready by then?”

“Bring me coffee, I’ll be waiting,” he said, before shifting to drop the receiver in the cradle.

Yoongi showered as fast as he could, lathering shampoo and soap hastily and washing it free before wrapping a towel around his waist and shoulders. Then he brushed his teeth and he splashed handfuls of freezing cold water onto his face to fully wake himself up. He got dressed in his usual clothing of choice, grabbing a black shirt and trousers followed by a baseball cap. He made sure to shove a pair of leather gloves into his back pocket, just in case he needed to break out his fists at some point over the morning.

As soon as he was ready, Yoongi exited his house and he locked up, waiting on the drive until Seokjin’s Testarossa pulled up on the curb outside. He quickly moved to climb into the passenger-seat, tugging the door shut behind him and moving to fasten his seatbelt in place. He had just snapped it across his body, when the older man collected a coffee container from the drink holder.
and he held it out to him.

Yoongi accepted the coffee from him, the Styrofoam hot against his palm and the steam coming from it strong and aromatic. Then he sat back in his seat with a groan, nursing the drink in both hands, and his friend pulled away from the curb to start driving again.

“So, Taehwan Ahn, or one or more of his men, are dealing in Sacramento Snow,” Seokjin stated, as he slowly completed his u-turn and he started rolling down the sloping street. “That’s what your tipster told you? Who exactly told you about this, Yoongi?”

“I got the tip from Kim, Namjoon Kim,” Yoongi said, lifting the coffee container to scent it. “I trust his sources, I trust his knowledge. D’you?”

“Hmm, of course I do. Kim’s never done us wrong, so, if he says that he’s discovered Sacramento Snow in his district; I believe him,” Seokjin said, as he turned his head to look at him. “Did he say that he knew it was that, or did he just give you enough information to deduce that that was what he was talking about?”

“He was hazy on the details, he never saw it personally, but he had enough info and his own ideas, to tell me that he thought it might just be speedball. He didn’t know the brand, I didn’t say it to him. I find the less guys that know ‘bout it, the better,” he explained, before taking a quick sip of the coffee. He winced at the acidic taste, before swallowing hard. “What I wanna know is: d’you think that Ahn’s in on it, or d’you think he’s completely oblivious?”

“I have reason to think that he might just be oblivious, because there’s no reason to assume that he’s actively dealing in speedball. One, Cole Valley has never popped up once when we were trying to track it down originally, which means that it must’ve recently appeared over in that neighbourhood. It’s either a sudden new and completely unexpected business venture on Ahn’s side, or he had nothing to do with it. Two - and this is what’s making me believe that he had nothing to do it - Ahn is a very strict man when it comes to business. He’s about as professional as a dealer can get, I assure you.”

“Mmm, I seem to ‘member him being clean,” Yoongi agreed as he took another sip of coffee.

“So, no, I think that we’ll find ourselves hoping to track down one of his men instead,” Seokjin finished, before turning back to the wheel.
It took them twenty minutes to reach Richmond, and in that time, Yoongi drained his morning coffee. It wasn’t as nice as the stuff that Annika served him most mornings, or his own home-brewed roast, but it was strong enough to fully wake him up at least.

Seokjin remained silent for the duration of the ride, not questioning their current objective, but presumably thinking it over as he guided his vehicle across the city. Hopefully, his friend was correct, because Yoongi really didn’t want to cause even more trouble with dealers after the Choi incident. He had pissed off his father enough already with that decision, and so he was going to need to be careful about how he played this one.

Upon reaching the house, Yoongi popped his seatbelt free and he climbed out to go around the front of the car. He saw that Ahn owned a decent-sized home, one that he had clearly bought with his earnings over the years that he had worked for the mob. He eyed the sight of a small tricycle in the front lawn and he found himself wondering if the child that it belonged to might just be present in the house.

Yoongi tugged his gloves on as he walked up the drive, seeing the way that Seokjin eyed him curiously. It was always better to be safe than sorry, just in case. Leaving as few prints as possible in buildings that might have the potential to turn into future crime scenes was always a smart idea. He let the older man press the doorbell on their behalf, noticing that he had pressed it with his knuckle to also not leave a print on the plastic.

Seokjin might just be certain that they were going to find Ahn completely innocent and oblivious, but he was also clearly wanting to minimise the chances of them discovering the fact that he might be hiding something from them.

After a minute of waiting, the front door swung inwards to reveal a rather young-looking woman, dressed in a summer dress with her hair hanging loose in a long curtain of black around her shoulders.

“Good morning,” she said, looking between them both before turning her full attention to Seokjin. “Are you here to see Taehwan? He didn’t mention having any…business transactions today, I-”

“Excuse me,” Seokjin said, taking over the situation on his behalf. “I’m afraid that this is a rather sudden matter, and we apologise for any trouble. But, could you please alert your husband to the fact that Prince Min would like to see him today? I’m sure that he’ll understand what I mean, yes?”

This made her eyes widen considerably, and Yoongi noticed that she now found his face a hell of a lot more interesting to stare at. She could probably just about see it underneath the brim of his cap,
and he was glad that he had shoved his gloved hands into his trouser pockets to hide them from clear view.

“Um, excuse me for a minute, I’ll go and alert him. Would you like to wait inside?”

Yoongi moved to enter the house first, Seokjin stepping aside instinctively to let him do so. The woman, who they had both assumed must have been Ahn’s wife, crossed the floor to go straight to a set of stairs without a hint of hesitation, quite clearly sensing that this was an important matter.

Seokjin let the door shut behind them, and then he proceeded to wander a few feet forward and he glanced through an open doorway.

“There’s a kid in here, Yoongi,” he said in a low voice, not wanting them to be overheard.

“Oh, yeah? Then let’s hope you’re right in your assumptions, Seokjin. Otherwise, daddy’s gonna be going on a nice long ride to an abandoned lot and he might come back with a few less teeth,” he muttered, as he shifted to also look through the doorway.

Yoongi could see that there was indeed a kid present in the house, currently sitting on the floor in the corner with a plastic table set up in front of her. She looked to be in the act of drawing something, the television across the room playing some kids cartoon, and her still rather wispy hair had been gathered together in two tiny ponytails that stuck up like antennas on either side of her head. She was so unaware of the fact that they were looking at her from across the floor, for she was so engrossed in scrawling in her colouring book.

Yoongi ran his tongue around his mouth, tasting the lingering remains of coffee, and then he rolled his eyes to look at Seokjin. He waited for him to say something, but the older man was decidedly quiet. There was very little to say on the matter, and after a moment of waiting, Ahn’s wife reappeared again.

“Taehwan can see you now, he’s in his office at the end of the hall,” she said, pausing on the staircase to look down at them. “I really hope that he can help you with your business today, Prince Min.”

“Yeah, me too,” he agreed, as he ascended the staircase. “Cute kid, you’ve got a real cute kid.”
“Thank you,” she said with an unsteady smile, not exactly able to keep her concern off her pretty features. “Her name is Kimmy. We thought it would be a cute idea, because my clan name is Kim.”

Yoongi gave her a feigned smile at this as he resumed walking up the stairs, already going over the words that he was going to say to her husband in his head. Yes, he really did hope that the older man could help them sort out this issue today, because he wasn’t greatly looking forward to the alternative. Upon reaching the top of the staircase, he went along it and straight to the open door at the end of the stretch of landing.

Seokjin was right on his heel, their footsteps slightly out of rhythm on the wooden flooring.

“Prince Min,” Ahn declared, quickly getting out of his office chair to approach him with his hand held out in offering. “I wasn’t expecting to see you this morning, I daresay that when Ara told me that you were here, I almost dropped my coffee mug in surprise. You look to be in good health.”

“You got your wife and kid staying in the same place you do business?” Yoongi remarked, as soon as they had shaken hands thrice: his grip firm. “That ain’t exactly wise, Ahn.”

“I don’t do that kind of business in my home, of course, not the serious kind,” Ahn said, letting go of his hand. “This office is more for…my other business ventures. I do those kinds of business deals across the city, in safe locations. As I’m sure that you do too, Prince Min. I can assure you, little Kimmy and Ara are more than safe.”

“Good. So, let’s cut to business, Ahn, I’m busy, you’re busy, we’re all fucking busy; yeah?” Yoongi muttered, as he entered the office room and he dropped right into the recliner chair facing the desk. “Sit your ass down.”

“Of course, Prince Min, I would be more than happy to help,” Ahn said, still very much acting like he had nothing to hide from him. The older man dropped to sit in his seat, his gaze flickering over look at Seokjin too. “Ah, Kim, I wasn’t told that you were present today. I hope that everything is alright, in regards to business, that is.”

“Well, everything is alright in terms of your current profit margins, yes,” Seokjin confirmed, his voice sounding from somewhere over Yoongi’s shoulder. “It always is, Ahn, you run your business clean, and I appreciate that. We both appreciate that. There’s just a single issue that made itself apparent today that we feel that we need to discuss.”
“Alright. May I ask what the issue is, gentlemen?”

“You happen to look at the paper at all this morning?” Yoongi asked, dropping his gaze to eye the folded copy of the *San Francisco Chronicle* that was sitting on his desk. Then he shifted to retrieve it, unfolding it and rapidly scanning the front page before finding a small column and turning to the page directed. “See any shocking news that chilled you to the bone, perhaps?”

“Well, Prince Min, there’s shocking news in the papers every single day, yes. But I did see something rather surprising today, something that happened in my neighbourhood.”

“Mmm, you mean this,” Yoongi said, twisting the paper around to flash him the photograph of Antonio’s bar and the bold headline that declared that there had been a shocking assault there.

“That would be the story, yes, Prince Min,” Ahn agreed, reaching up to rub at his light stubble in a somewhat nervous fashion. “It was incredibly shocking to see that, I can assure you.”

“Ahn, are you aware of the fact that this morning, in the early morning hours, speedball was floating ’round your turf? In fact, it seems to have been responsible for this incident.”

“Wait, excuse me?” Ahn said, shifting in his chair to look between them both, his eyes growing in size. “Did you just say speedball, Prince Min?”

“You seem surprised to hear that,” Yoongi replied dryly, not letting the man’s apparent confusion trick him just yet. “Surprised to find out your guys are dealing shit behind your back, or surprised that we tracked it down to you this fast?”

“You haven’t tracked it down to me, because I don’t touch that, Prince Min,” Ahn declared, sitting forward in his chair and folding one elbow on his desk. “I deal in cocaine, and I ’own’ several small nightclubs and massage parlours; all of them approved of by my superiors for laundering purposes. All of my activities are clean and documented, just like Kim said. So, I don’t know what you’re talking about, not even remotely.”

“Mmm, we all *own* nightclubs and massage parlours,” Yoongi said, lifting his hands to frame his words with emphasis. “Guess what, some of us even own nail salons and arcades. But I don’t give a fuck what you own, Ahn. Tell me what y’know about this incident, right now, and let’s see if I can leave your office without smashing it to shit. Does that sound like a good deal to you?”
Ahn thought this over for a moment, his eyes rapidly moving between him and Seokjin. Clearly, he was now trying to figure out if there was an actual chance of him having his nose broken at some point during this meeting, and weighing up the pros and cons of not being helpful. The fact that his wife and daughter were downstairs no doubt greatly influenced his decision.

“I think that it sounds fair,” Seokjin said, standing beside a cabinet that was filled with presumed photographs of Ahn’s family, along with little trophies. He had his hands folded primly behind his back, just to stop him from leaving his fingerprints on anything.

“I oversee a lot of men, Prince Min, every single day and night,” Ahn explained, as he shifted to retrieve something from his desk. “I have twenty-five dealers alone working several neighbourhoods daily, and almost double that number of pushers and runners out on the streets. I keep as close an eye on them as I can, but sometimes, these men go rogue. You should know, you’ve assisted me in the past over such issues, Prince Min.”

Yoongi hummed at this, seeing that he had received a folder that he then opened up and started rapidly flicking through.

Ahn was telling the truth, for they had a little bit of a history working together. Yoongi had had to send out enough enforcers to try and assist dealers in the past with their less than compliant men - either for using their own stock and then not paying their dues, or for trying to rip their superiors or buyers off to try and save extra cash for themselves. As a result, he knew Ahn by more than just his name, but that didn’t mean that the man hadn’t stabbed him in the back.

Even the most friendliest of men working below him could stab him in the back whenever the opportunity arose.

“May I ask you how exactly you managed to connect this incident to me, Prince Min? Any information that you have on the incident could greatly aid me in figuring out what man, or men, might just have gotten me into hot water.”

“My guy was present and he saw one of your guys dealing speedball in Antonio’s bar, right before the incident,” Yoongi explained, as he tapped his fingers on the armrests restlessly. “Which you already know, ‘cos it’s right there in the papers.”

“Antonio’s bar? That’s Cole and Carl Street, right?”
“Yes, the exact corner,” Seokjin agreed with a nod, glancing away from the man’s photographs temporarily.

“Wait…wait, I know who that is,” Ahn said, as he sat bolt upright in his chair. “That’s Lee. Sooyoung Lee. He used to frequent the area for me, I’m certain that it must be him.”

“Sooyoung Lee, huh? What’s he like? What kinda guy is he?” Yoongi asked, finding this sudden revelation highly interesting.

“He’s, well, he’s a decent man,” the dealer explained, before quickly adding. “Or he was, until the drugs got to him.”

“He’s an addict? What’re we talking here? Blow? Brown?”

“Percocet,” Ahn corrected. “I wouldn’t trust either of those addicts with my merchandise, Prince Min, but he’s only addicted to painkillers. He had no use for cocaine, I trusted him with it on my behalf, and he continued to run the drugs for me without incident. I’m only now starting to see that that was a huge mistake on my part.”

“Why did you stop trusting him?” Seokjin asked, finally moving away from his cabinet to draw closer to the desk and stand beside his chair. “You said ‘had’, said ‘trusted’, implying that you’ve since terminated your connections with him. Would you care to tell us why exactly you did that, Ahn?”

“As of the previous weekend, yes, we parted ways,” Ahn explained in a quiet voice. “I summoned to my office, to go over some things in relation to his habit and his dealings. During a rather…heated exchange of words, I discovered that he had dabbled with heroin, and I said that I wouldn’t accept this behaviour. He promised me that it was just an experiment, that he wouldn’t touch it again, but…I don’t trust that logic. So, I terminated our business ventures and I hired a new man in his place. But it seems that Lee is still haunting his habitual spot, just not under me. He seems to have found himself another partner.”

Yoongi turned his head to look up at Seokjin, eyeing his own man to see what he was thinking.

Seokjin returned his gaze, his eyes telling him all that he needed to know. He believed that Ahn was telling them the truth, just like he did, and he very much thought that they should pursue the lead that he had presented them with.
“You got an address?” Yoongi asked, shifting forward in his seat to fold his arms on the edge of his desk. “You got anything that could help us track him down that ain’t just a name?”

“As it so happens, I still have his file,” Ahn said, as he moved to pull a desk drawer open. “I removed it from my binder, but I kept hold of it, just in case I needed it for reference in future financial situations. Here, Prince Min.”

Yoongi accepted the plastic wallet from him, in which he could see sheets of graph paper marked with countless dates and numbers. Yes, Ahn most certainly kept his dealings clean and professional, and he had to commend him for being so neat. He opened it up to flick through the sheets, locating the final one so that he could scan it. The last financial transaction was dated from the previous week, and had ceased to be updated. That part of his account matched the evidence, and so this lead was still as hot as could be.

Yoongi memorised the address, neatly written on a sticker stuck to the top corner of the wallet, and then he held it back out for Ahn. As the dealer put it back in the desk drawer, he got to his feet and he gestured at Seokjin that they were done here. His friend moved out into the hallway with a nod, likely already planning the route that they would take to drive to Lee’s address in his mind.

“I hope that Lee can assist you in finding out where the speedball is coming from. If I may be so bold,” Ahn said, hesitating for a moment as he shifted in his chair. “He’s not a bad man, Prince Min. I know that what happened seems to hint otherwise, but he was a good man before the drugs took control and ruined him. I hope that…that you find out what you need from him without having to take drastic measures.”

Yoongi thought this over for a few seconds, and then he turned to leave without another word on the matter. He descended the stairs after Seokjin, seeing that Ara was lingering close to the bottom of the staircase in an unmistakably anxious fashion, her fingers playing with the scooped neckline of her summer dress as she waited for them to hurry up and leave the house; hopefully leaving her husband in one piece in the process.

“Hang on, Seokjin,” Yoongi said, as he stopped at the bottom of the stairs and he eyed the open doorway to their right.

“Is everything alright, Prince Min?” Ara asked curiously. “Did you find out what you needed?”

“Yeah, your husband was very helpful.”
Yoongi pulled his wallet free from his back pocket, reaching inside of it to find a rather crumpled $10 bill. He shoved his wallet back in his trousers as he crossed the ground-floor, entering the living-room so that he could hunker down beside Kimmy’s table. She glanced up at him for a moment before sniffing hard, her nose a little bit runny. Judging from her face, she very much wanted to be napping right now.

“Here, Kimmy, this’ for you,” he said, as he held out the bill in offering.

“Huh?” she hummed, as she looked up at him; her eyes rounded and her lips completely slack in that effortless way that only children managed to achieve.

“I said, this’ for you,” Yoongi repeated, wagging his fingers to make the money shift in his grip. “Y’know what this’, yeah? This’ money, you buy things with it. This’ your money, ’cos I’m giving it to you.”

“Money?” Kimmy mumbled, as she looked at the note and she reached up to rub at her nose with the heel of her hand roughly. “Huh? Why is…why money?”

“Uh, for being so cute,” he replied, figuring out what she was trying to ask even when her mumbles were far from coherent.

“I get crayons?”

“Mmm, you can buy so many crayons with this,” Yoongi said, as he held the note out to her. “So, be a good girl for mummy and daddy, yeah? That means eating all of your vegetables, even the nasty ones.”

“M’kay, I’m draw you something,” Kimmy said, as she took the money out of his hand and she dropped it on the table.

“Oh, yeah? Well, I gotta go, but you draw me something nice, yeah?” he said, reaching out to give her head a little pat and then straightening up. “Use lots of blue, I like blue.”

Kimmy hummed at this contently, already turning her full attention back to her colouring book.
Yoongi exited the living-room, seeing Ara eyeing him with that same befuddled expression. Clearly, she had found this act rather surprising, but he felt no need to explain why he had done it. He just followed Seokjin out of the house and back to his car, climbing into the passenger-seat without saying single word.

“I didn’t know that you gave out allowances, Yoongi,” Seokjin remarked wryly, as he pulled his own door shut.

Yoongi snorted at this, finding the dry wit reminiscent of Hoseok. He was surprised that he hadn’t called him an uncle, or perhaps a grandfather, but he supposed that that would have been way too Hoseok for him.

“It’ll keep him on our good side,” he said, tugging his seatbelt in place. “I expect that Ahn’s gonna be a lot more vigilant ‘bout what’s going on on his turf now; don’t you?”

“Though I’ve no doubts that you would never use his family, or his kid against him, I’m not entirely certain that Ahn is aware of this fact,” Seokjin said, as he started the car again. “Therefore, there are two advantages to the situation.”

“Mmm, you read my mind,” Yoongi hummed, settling back in his seat and turning to look out of the window.

Unsurprisingly, Sooyoung Lee lived in a rundown apartment block all of the way across the city in The Bayview; one that would be crowded with poor families in the tiny rooms, and no doubt filled with noise at all hours of the day.

Entering the block, Yoongi was certain they they would be able to keep their activities hidden, because the sound of countless televisions blaring, babies crying, dogs barking, and even people shouting filled the dark and damp hallways that they had to walk along to locate the room number that Ahn had noted on his file.

Yoongi realised, as he walked along the hallways, that this was the kind of apartment block that Jungkook and his family lived in: with peeling outdated wallpaper on the walls and ruined carpet under their feet. It was also the kind of place that Jimin had called home when he had been a child, and just breathing in the stench of the damp and hearing the chaos behind of all of the different doors, was enough to make him pull his lips down in a grimace.
Upon locating the room on the seventh floor, Yoongi pounded his fist on the door several times before waiting. It was hard listening out for any sounds on the other side of the door with all of the commotion from the rest of the block. He most certainly didn’t want to press his face against the door, for the paint was cracked and covered in dirt, and so he had no choice but to wait for a minute and then repeat the act; just to make sure that he woke him up, should Sooyoung still be snoring in bed.

It took a minute or two, but then the door handle wriggled as the rogue dealer pulled it open.

“Uh, yeah? Hello?” Sooyoung called through the crack in the door, the chain lock still drawn in place.

“Open up, Sooyoung, we gotta talk,” Yoongi said, moving to press his face up against the crack and causing the other man to stumble backwards a step in surprise. “You probably dunno who I am. But that’s a bad thing for you, ‘cos only guys that fuck me over find out who I am.”

From the other side of the door, Yoongi heard the dealer making a series of noises, little squeaking sounds that were unmistakably that of fear and confusion. But he proceeded to unlock the door, for he had little choice in the matter. It was better to unlock the door and face him like a man, than to hide behind it like a coward until he kicked the door open hard enough to wrench the lock off the wall, after all.

When Yoongi entered he saw a tiny room, one with a small bathroom to the side and a single mattress on the floor. The place was filthy: rubbish all over the floor, and plates and glasses filling the sink that hadn’t been cleaned in what looked like days.

Sooyoung was standing there in his boxers, looking so very dumb as he looked between them both with slightly bleary eyes. He was a rather scrawny man, shorter than he was, with a shaved head and the still lingering remains of teenage acne clinging to his cheeks.

Yoongi walked straight up to him and he slapped him right across the face.

Sooyoung stumbled from the hard slap, luckily staggering backwards to collapse into a rather beaten armchair that was placed close to a coffee table. He let out a sharp yelp of pain before clapping his hand to his face, staring up at him in complete shock. Even now, when it was obvious that he was in trouble, he looked so very confused by what was going on.
“First, that was for pissing me off,” Yoongi said, as he hunkered forward in front of him with his gloved hands on his thighs. “Did that hurt? I hope so, ‘cos you deserved it.”

“Huh? Wuh…what’s going on?” Sooyoung asked in a whine, rubbing at his already reddening cheek as he looked between them both. “I’m sorry, I’m real sorry, but I dunno who you are, man?”

“Sooyoung, if I were you, I would consider not calling Prince Min ‘man’ to his face; yes?” Seokjin suggested, closing the door shut behind him just to stop anyone from loitering in the hallway to watch.

“Prince…Prince Min?” Sooyoung repeated, gawping at him like a fish. “Oh…oh, shit.”

Yoongi moved away from the chair so that he could canvas his apartment room. He grabbed his cast-off jeans, rifling through the pockets to locate what he was looking for. He knocked the understuffed cushions off his rather old sofa onto the floor to check that he wasn’t hiding the stash there. After some rummaging, he located what he was looking for, shoved between the mattress and the wall and hidden by his pillows: two baggies of drugs.

“Here,” Yoongi said, as he snatched up the heroin and tossed it at Seokjin; his friend catching it and proceeding to eye the contents. “Let’s see what kinda shit we got here.”

Yoongi popped open the cocaine baggie so that he could stick his finger inside and gather a little trace of it on his pinky finger. He shoved it under his lip to rub it into his gums, leaving it for a moment. He felt a slight zing of heat rushing up to his head and chest, but it was very weak and would linger for just a short while before fading away again. His heart barely even skipped in his chest, and he was glad for it.

“Low grade,” he muttered, resealing the baggie and running his tongue over his gum line to clean away the gritty powder. “That shit tastes like fucking talcum powder, and the heroin looks just as cut to me.”

“Hmm,” Seokjin agreed, eyeing the baggie intently. “I haven’t seen this level in a long time, it’s very low grade. Which begs the question: where the fuck did you get this from, Sooyoung?”

“Um, my guys, I got it from my guys, they supply me with the stuff,” Sooyoung mumbled, as he fidgeted in his chair, stubbed his bare toes on the floor and he refused to look at either of them.
Yoongi moved to hand Seokjin the cocaine too, seeing that his supplier also studiously examined that baggie before making a series of disgusted noises under his breath at the sight of the quality. He sniffed hard and he felt his cheeks flushing with heat as he stopped to stand in front of the rogue dealer again.

“Your guys?” he asked, as he dropped a hand onto his shoulder and he made sure to sink his fingers into his skin painfully hard. “You think that’s funny, huh? You think not answering my man’s question is real fucking funny, yeah?”

“Oh, no, I just-”

Yoongi let go of his shoulder to smack at his head again, his palm hitting the back of his head this time, which made Sooyoung jerk in shock. The man let out another whine of pain, for it no doubt stung like hell.

“You think that selling speedball out on the streets for our rivals, for backstabbers that are ripping us off, is funny, huh? Ha-ha, it’s so fucking funny, Sooyoung.”

“I didn’t mean it like that, I-”

Yoongi didn’t even blink as he slapped him across the face again, the sound of his hand connecting with his skin hard in the still apartment room air. He had hit him so hard that his palm had started tingling through his leather glove, and he shook his hand rigorously before clenching his fingers to lessen the sensation.

“Secondly, you address me by my name first,” Yoongi instructed, as he watched Sooyoung slumping in the armchair from the blow. “This level of disrespect, it’s unacceptable. Be thankful I ain’t knocked your front teeth in yet, I call that a mercy.”

“Prince Min, I didn’t mean it like that,” Sooyoung said in an uneven voice, his breathing hard and fast with fear. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry for being disrespectful. I dunno what’s going on right now, so, I spoke disrespectfully. I’m sorry.”

The dealer sounded like a whipped dog right now, sidling up to his leg in the hopes of getting an ear scratch instead of a kick to the side. Good, it was so much easier for them both when they started cooperating like this.
“Listen, Sooyoung,” Yoongi said in a soft voice, as he leaned forward and he grabbed his head in his hands. “You just gotta tell us one simple thing, yeah? You just gotta tell me who the fuck’s feeding you this shit, and that’s all I need. The blow, the brown. You ain’t get it from Ahn, we know you ain’t, ‘cos he dropped you from his lineup last weekend. Yeah?”

Sooyoung tried to nod even when he was holding onto his head.

“So, who’s supplying you the shit to mix with, huh?”

“Prince Min, I dunno their names, that’s why I call them my guys. I dunno their names, I-”

Yoongi sighed at this, letting go of his head so that he could roughly backhand him across the side of his face. This time, the other man cried out in actual pain. He grabbed hold of his head again as he reeled from the slap, to drag him back so that he could stare right into his eyes. Poor Sooyoung’s cheeks were starting to turn terribly pink from his fists.

“I don’t need their names, blood types, and what hand they like to wank off with, Sooyoung! What gang are they working for? Are they our guys? Are they outsiders? What’s their turf? Tell me the fucking facts!”

“They’ll kuh-kuh-kill me, Prince Min!”

“I’ll fucking kill you if you don’t stop jerking me ‘round!” Yoongi argued, shaking the man’s head hard for emphasis and eliciting a pathetic whimpering noise.

“I second that notion,” Seokjin said from across the room, his tone sounding incredibly bored.

“Listen, Sooyoung, you gimme what I need, I give you what you need, yeah? Ahn told me what you like, mmm, told me that you pop pills. Percs, yeah, shit, they really numb everything, right? Did you crush ‘em up, snort ‘em, just to see what would happen?”

“Yeah-yeah, Prince Min, I-I didn’t mean to get on them, but I had an accident, and I kinda…need them for the pain. It hurts a lot, Prince Min.”
“I know, I bet it does,” Yoongi agreed in a quiet voice. “So, how ‘bout you just tell me what I wanna know, yeah, and I’ll give you what you need to get rid of the pain? They ain’t gonna kill you, I ain’t gonna let ‘em, ‘cos you’re useful, Sooyoung. Who supplied you with the drugs?”

“Prince Min, I-I’ll tell you this,” Sooyoung stammered out, as he wriggled in his chair. “I don’t get my shit from Ahn anymore, he cut me off last weekend, like you said. I get it from Chinatown.”

“…Chinatown?” he repeated dumbly, feeling his expression shifting for a few seconds before he recovered. “Elaborate.”

“I, uh, Prince Min, there’s a place that I go to,” he explained, closing his eyes and furrowing his brow severely in concentration. “Clay Street, a building on Clay Street. The guys speak really bad English, I think they’re Chinese or something, ‘cos I’ve heard them talking to each other and it sounded Chinese.”

Yoongi let go of his face, shifting to stand beside Seokjin and leaning in close. His mind was rushing with thoughts, the slight hit of cocaine making it hard to think straight because his heart was racing a little faster than it should have been.

“Clay Street, that’s 14K, Seokjin,” Yoongi confided in a whisper. “They had an opium den there a couple of months ago, ‘member? It got busted and they lost business. He’s getting brown and blow from 14K? The fuck’s he getting that from ‘em? He ain’t made that connection on his own, someone else had to do that shit. Someone with influence.”

“Choi? It could be his lingering influence. He had to be getting heroin at a low cut somewhere else too. He might’ve set up negotiations before his…sudden demise,” Seokjin suggested in his own whisper, looking down at him rather than at the dealer across the room.

“Nah, I don’t think it’s Choi,” he disagreed with a soft head shake. “This’ too recent to be Choi, he’s been dead far too long to assert any influence on that neighbourhood anymore. The heroin, that could be legit 14K merch, even though it was shitty quality. The blow, though? I dunno where he’s getting that fro- shit…”

“Yoongi?”

“The blow, it’s been getting snapped up in Chinatown,” Yoongi blurted out, talking rapidly as he
tried to get his words out as fast as possible. “The, uh, the inflated shit, yeah? We flooded Chinatown with it, 14K traffickers were snapping it up like nobody else. ‘Member, Kim and Jim- and his mule, they were dealing it there?”

“I do remember, so, what exactly are you suggesting, Yoongi?”

“I’m suggesting that they’re cutting some of the stock we gave ‘em and repurposing it for the speedball. The cheap cunts.”

“Shit,” Seokjin cursed under his breath, his expression shifting in disbelief before he reached up to cover his mouth with his hand. “It makes sense, but…then, Sooyoung hasn’t been dealing Sacramento Snow. If he’s getting merchandise from 14K, then this entire situation is unrelated to Choi, or to Lee and Kwon.”

“No, he’s been dealing a fucking ripoff,” he agreed with a hard nod, before reaching up to rub at his mouth. “Shit, that ain’t right. That don’t add up, it don’t add up, Seokjin. He ain’t getting it from 14K…surely?”

Yoongi hated how uncertain that his voice sounded as he mumbled the question. He wasn’t supposed to sound uncertain about anything pertaining to business, especially not in front of his own men. Yet, he couldn’t help but let it slip out because he really was shocked and confused by this entire revelation.

Yoongi had been expecting to hear something coming out of Sooyoung’s lips that would point them in the direction of Bernal Heights or Mission; that would guide them right to Dukwon Lee or Seungho Kwon’s doors because they were the two other possible suppliers of Sacramento Snow. That would have been simple, would have been information that he would have fed to Hajoon so that he could use it in his attempts at helping him track down the source to negotiate with the man responsible for the drug. He might have even contacted his father about it, to alert him that the drug needed to be stamped out before it caused even more trouble for them.

But now that Sooyoung had just told them that he was getting cheap drugs from 14K, then that meant that it wasn’t even the branded drug that they were looking for. No, he had been pedalling a cheap knock-off because the original was in enough demand to create counterfeits, and the mere thought made him suck his lower lip in to gnaw at it.

That was certainly something to panic over.
“Yoongi?” Seokjin said in quiet voice, dragging him out of his temporary musings. “What? What are you thinking?”

“I’m thinking that it ain’t true,” he muttered, as he moved to stand in front of Sooyoung again. “Do either of these names mean shit to you? Dukwon Lee? Seungho Kwon?”

“No, Prince Min,” the dealer replied with a head shake.

“No? “No, I dunno ‘em”, or “no, Prince Min, I really wanna lose my front teeth today, so, I’m lying to you?”. What one, huh?”

“No, I dunno them, I swear that I don’t,” Sooyoung repeated, his eyes growing wide again in fear of being struck again. “Prince Min, I get the drugs from that place, I told you.”

Yoongi ran his eyes across the apartment room, searching for something a little bit more substantial than his fists. He eyed a telephone on the wall beside the door for a moment, and then he moved over to grab the receiver and he tugged hard. He pulled the wire out of the back of the device with little effort, leaving the solid chunk of plastic in his fist as good as any weapon.

“I’ll smash your teeth in with this, Sooyoung, so fucking help me! I’ll smash ’em in! Which one is it? Kwon or Lee?!”

“Neither! It’s two guys! I told you, shit, I think one’s called Cheng?! I think?! He’s got a tattoo on his hand and-and-”

“Sooyoung, that ain’t what I asked for! Which one’s giving you the shit!”

“14K! Prince Min! Why don’t you believe me, I-”

Yoongi felt his patience snapping like a thread and before he could help himself, he brought the receiver down hard to hit Sooyoung with it. His fist connected on a downward angle, slamming right into his left temple with a horribly loud thwack. He felt the impact coursing right up his arm to his shoulder, almost bit his tongue from the jarring sensation, and that was when Sooyoung burst into tears of terror and pain.
As he blubbered apologies at him, cowering in the armchair, a fat bead of blood started welling above Sooyoung’s eyebrow. Within seconds, it was gushing down the side of his face and it was enough to make him freeze in shock.

Yoongi swallowed hard at the first sight of blood pouring out of the gash on the man’s brow, a sudden shiver running down his spine that made him tighten his hold on the receiver.

It was just like his dream, his *nightmare*, from last night all over again. Him, standing above Sooyoung with a weapon in his hand, the young man crying and bleeding because he was scared and hurt.

Yoongi didn’t like the way that his stomach twisted up under his ribs, nor did he like the taste of bitter bile on his tongue.

“Christ, Sooyoung,” he muttered, as he reached up to cup his face in his hand; his voice uneven as he tried to collect himself. “Just tell me the truth. D’you think I *like* hitting you, huh? You think I get a kick outta it? I don’t, so, just fucking talk to me.”

“Buh-buh-but I did! Prince Min, I told you the truth!” Sooyoung almost blubbered, sinking down into his chair pathetically. “I get the drugs from suh-suppliers in 14K, but they get their drugs from somewhere too! I know that they duh-don’t have many connections here. Someone’s gotta be supplying them the drugs first! Ruh-right? I dunno who though, I juh-just deal the speedball for cash, Prince Min! I’m suh-sorry!”

Yoongi could see it, he could see that he was actually telling him the truth right now; that he wasn’t lying to try and cover another man’s ass. It was enough to make him drop the telephone receiver to the floor, his gloved fingers twitching weakly. He had just struck the dealer for no reason at all, all because he didn’t want to accept the fact that the situation he was looking at was frightening and immense; that might just be out of his limited control. That was wrong, was…was bullying, and he hated how nauseous that it made him feel.

Yoongi moved closer to Sooyoung, and the dealer flinched the very second that he lifted his hand up, instinctively expecting that he was going to thump him one across the side of the head again. But Yoongi didn’t do that, rather he just placed his hand on his shoulder and he gave it a soft squeeze.

“You understand why I did that, right?” Yoongi asked in a soft voice, still kneading at his shoulder. “You understand that guys always lie to me, yeah, they always make up the most craziest shit to try and fool me. What you told me, it ain’t make much sense to me ‘cos I was assuming it to be related to…another problem. But now I see that you’re telling me the truth.”
“I know, it suh-sounds crazy, Prince Muh-Min, but it’s the truth,” Sooyoung gasped, trying to get himself under control. “I’m suh-sorry, I fuh-fucked up with the heroin, but I told Ahn that I’m nuh-not using it! I juh-just needed the cash ‘cos I need my puh-pills, Prince Min.”

“Yeah, I know, I know,” Yoongi agreed, as he placed his hand on his head to give it a rather awkward pat. Then he glanced over at Seokjin, an idea starting to formulate in his mind. “You made a mistake, like I made a mistake hitting you just then. See, ain’t it a good idea to just admit when we fuck up, yeah? Hang on, I gotta talk to my man, but we’re not finished here, Sooyoung.”

Yoongi pulled his hand free and he moved over to Seokjin, seeing the way that his supplier studied him curiously. He seemed to be intrigued by this series of events, like he wasn’t entirely sure what was going through his mind, which was a highly rare occurrence.

“Seokjin, see to it he gets a steady source. Get him some good painkillers too, y’know what I mean? Oxycontin, the strong kind that actually work.”

“Yoongi? I’m afraid that I don’t follow?” Seokjin admitted rather boldly, looking over at the bleeding man for a few seconds before glancing back at him. “You want my men to supply him drugs? For free? He’s a traitor, surely?”

“He’s a traitor,” he agreed with a vigorous nod. “But what exactly d’you suppose I do with him, huh?”

“Kill him,” he replied unflinchingly. “Like what you did to Choi.”

This made Sooyoung almost whimper from across the small apartment room, the other man able to hear every single word that they were saying.

“Pft, Seokjin, we both know how fucking stupid that suggestion was,” Yoongi muttered, as he shook his head. “Kill a low-level dealer ‘cos he pissed me off? Y’know how many men piss me off every single day? Am I Tony Montana; gonna let rip with a submachine gun and blow ‘em all to shit? You only put important men into the ground, we both know that. Why’d you think I let Choi’s men, the ones in the dens, carry on dealing, huh?”

“So, what exactly are you going to do? Just let him go back to working for Ahn?”
“No, I got a better use for him,” Yoongi muttered, eyeing the man. “I’m gonna start planting some
snakes of my own in the grass, starting with him. He’s my inside man. That’s why I need you to set
him up with a supply of drugs, and get him outta this shithole. Set him up over in, uh, in The Haight.
I’m gonna get answers through him, and for that, I need him compliant.”

“It sounds like a risky gamble, Yoongi, I’m not sure that trusting an unreliable man that your own
man got rid of is a good idea,” Seokjin admitted in a quiet voice. “But I trust your instincts on this,
because your instincts are second to none. I just pray that we aren’t making a huge mistake with this.
If that’s what you want me to do, I’ll do it.”

“Thanks, here’s hoping I ain’t gonna fuck us both on this deal,” Yoongi muttered, as he crossed the
apartment room.

After some more rummaging, Yoongi managed to locate a bottle of prescription medication pills,
complete with a blank sticker on the front. He twisted the cap off and he knocked two of the pills
out, hesitating before knocking out a third, and then he screwed the cap back on.

Yoongi handed Sooyoung the pills, seeing the way that the dealer eyed them dumbly for a moment,
as if he was confused by the fact that he was offering him aid instead of hitting him. So he moved to
grab the board that he had been using to mix the drugs on, rapidly crushing the tablets into a powder
for him using the bottom of his spoon.

Whilst Sooyoung rapidly snorted the Percocet, Yoongi checked the cupboards by the tiny sink to
find something to clean the blood off of his face with. He located a cloth that had never been used,
the fabric still a spotless white. It wasn’t the best, but it would do, and so he wet the cloth and he
proceeded to wipe at Sooyoung’s wound with it.

When he pressed down against the gash to stem the still dribbling flow, the dealer winced, but soon
enough the medication would mellow that pain right out. As soon as the blood was all cleaned up,
Yoongi dropped the cloth onto his lap and he hunkered down in front of him.

“There’s more where that came from, the pills, but you’re working for me now; yeah? I got guys
coming, they’re gonna set you up somewhere else, and you gotta do what they say, Sooyoung. If
you run off, if you stab me in the back again, I’ll dump your body in the bay and no one will ever
find it,” Yoongi intoned, making sure to balance the sweet out with the bitter.

“I won’t do it again, Prince Min, I swear,” Sooyoung promised in a solemn tone.
5th September, 1984, 9:53pm: Pacific Heights, San Francisco, United States of America

Yoongi eyed the remains of the bourbon in his glass wearily, knowing that he was one drink down and wondering just how many more that he was going to swallow before he retired to bed. The answer might be no more, it might be many more, but he could only wait and see what his body decided to do.

Right now, lying on his settee and staring at the melting lumps of ice that were starting to dilute the golden liquid, it had crossed his mind more than once that he really just wanted to phone Jimin. He knew that it was true, and he was just using the alcohol as an excuse to delay it.

Yoongi really wanted to go upstairs, lie in bed, and just talk to Jimin again, because today had been the first truly stressful day in quite some time.

Yoongi was pretty certain that if he listened to Jimin talking, that it would set his worries at ease, even if just for a while. So long as it meant that he could fall asleep tonight, it was all that he needed. He didn’t need four glasses of bourbon to make him fall asleep like he had used to, because there was a voice far sweeter on his ears than the alcohol was on his tongue that could lull him to sleep.

Yoongi stuck his tongue out to wet his lips, the taste of the bourbon still present. Then he shifted to get to his feet with a soft grunt, crossing his ground-floor to get to his kitchen and grabbing the bottle of alcohol.

Yet, when Yoongi lifted it up and he went to add another splash, he found that he couldn’t seem to do it.

Yoongi lowered the bottle back down onto the counter with a weary sigh, hesitating in putting the glass down with it too. He knew that he should, but he just felt like he needed the drink with him. Even if he didn’t swallow a single mouthful, just so he could nurse the glass. It felt good having something to look at, to play with, and the glass was much better than sucking at his fingers or nibbling on his nails.
After a moment of thought, Yoongi added a finger of bourbon into the glass and he left the bottle on his sideboard. Then he went up his spiral staircase, his bare feet padding out of rhythm with his slightly unsteady heartbeat. He eyed the telephone in his study-area first, wondering if he should perhaps use that device so that he could sit at his table and look out of the window at the bay instead.

But Yoongi knew what he really wanted, and that was to curl up in his bed - the receiver pressed against his ear as he just drifted off to sleep whilst he listened to Jimin talking to him.

Yoongi entered his bedroom, the bourbon splashing around the glass with every dragging step that he took as he moved to sit down on his mattress. He placed the square glass aside for a moment, so that he could grab his telephone and put it on the mattress beside him, and then he settled back against his stack of pillows. He wasn’t exactly lying, more sitting, but the position was comfortable enough.

Yoongi retrieved the receiver, placing it against his head so that he could dial the number. He already knew it enough to not need to check his black book. The dialling tone sounded a few times, giving him enough time to wonder if Jimin would even be at his friend’s house at this current hour, or if he would maybe still be out on the streets: enjoying the nice nighttime freshness, maybe grabbing a bite to eat. But after a moment, there was a static crackle that let him know that someone had picked up.

“Hello?” Jimin said, his voice indicating that he didn’t know who was on the other end of the line.

“Uh, hey, it’s me,” Yoongi said, before letting out a rather awkward laugh. “Are you, uh, are you busy?”

“Wait, is that Yoongi?” the younger man asked, before letting out a series of noises.

Yoongi hummed as he grabbed his glass and he proceeded to swirl the finger of bourbon around it. The liquor held no interest to him currently, but it was something to play with to help ease off the nerves. He watched it hitting the sides of the glass, the ice cubes now nothing more than tiny slivers in the golden liquid.

“I didn’t expect you to phone like this, but I mean - wow, what an amazing surprise! Ha~”

Jimin let out a frothy burst of giggles at this, completely unable to hide his happiness at the fact that he had phoned him this evening. It was enough to make Yoongi smile in return, because hearing
how happy that he had made him caused a funny sensation of warmth to start spreading in his chest.

“What’d you do today, huh? You been busy? Maybe napping all day long?

“Me? Well, I did nothing at all. What a surprise, huh? I’m about ready to jump another plane across the globe though, so, I’m enjoying my freedom whilst I can.”

“Mmm, you can go to Seoul again, and Kowloon City; join in more protests and get drunk in seedy bars. Right?” he joked with a smile.

“Right, it sounds like so much fun. I can’t wait, it almost makes smuggling coke up my ass for twelve hours worth it,” Jimin replied, his tone rich with sarcasm.

“Yeah, but be careful if you go to any protests,” he suggested, as he sniffed at his bourbon. “I heard that it can get real dangerous, Jimin, and I don’t want you getting shot with a rubber bullet, ‘k?”

“OK, I promise to behave,” Jimin said in a soft voice. “I’ll be a good boy, you know that I will. What about you, hmm? What exactly did my baby boy do today?”

“Today, uh, I chased up on a lead that Kim gave me. Your Kim, I mean: Namjoon.”

“Huh? Namo gave you a lead? What’d you mean, Yoongi? What kinda lead?”

“Namjoon pointed me in the direction of a rather…troublesome matter, in regards to a rogue dealer and drugs proliferating our turf. But I’ve since tracked it down and sorted most of the issue out, so, it’s all good.”

“That’s good, Yoongi. I’m glad that you sorted it out so fast, but…is everything going to be OK? Like, Namo hasn’t witnessed something that he shouldn’t have, right? You told me to not go sniffing around because you made it pretty clear that it was dangerous, and.”

“You ain’t gotta worry none, Jimin. He didn’t see anything, it was one of his men. Ain’t nobody that knows he saw a thing, just me and Kim, your supplier.”
“Oh…OK, I’m relieved to hear that,” Jimin admitted, sighing out heavily. “Namo’s not here right now, he’s out on the streets working like always. He didn’t tell me a single thing about any of this this morning. He probably didn’t want me worrying or something.”

“It seems like something he’d do,” Yoongi agreed, all the while thinking about the conversation that they had shared this morning.

Yes, it seemed that Namjoon had probably not told Jimin for one of several reasons. The most obvious one was that he wouldn’t have wanted him to worry, but there was a chance that Jimin’s highly inquisitive nature might just be another reason. The mule was far too curious for his own good, and finding out about drugs and violence on their turf might just cause him to start sniffing around, even when he knew that he shouldn’t do such a thing.

But the fact that Namjoon hadn’t told him about their conversation meant that he had also clearly not mentioned the fact that they had talked about more than the incident; like the fact that they had discussed dreams with one another in the predawn hours.

“It’s just you right now?” Yoongi asked, moving to place his glass down on the side table. “Ain’t you lonely, huh?”

“Hmm, I’m used to it. I mean, sure, the bed’s small and that means that I’ve got it all to myself. But I do like sharing it, even when Namo usually smells like pot and he snores. I like it. I’d like it even more if we were sharing it right now,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, and he could just picture him lying in said bed and stroking at the covers slowly. “You don’t smell like pot, you smell like that nice cologne. What’d you wear, baby boy?”

“Uh, Antaeus, Chanel,” Yoongi replied, as he ran his fingers over his lips, all the while wondering if Jimin had any clue that his pillow smelled like him and he could almost taste him on his tongue.

“Chanel, hmm, that’s nice.”

“You, uh, you got voicemail, huh?” he asked suddenly, sticking his tongue out to wet his lips.

“Voicemail? You’re kidding me, right?” Jimin replied, a smirk audible in his voice. “Baby boy, the most expensive thing that we own is an Atari 5200. A voicemail machine is way too expensive, so, we just have to make sure that we don’t miss the real important calls. Why’d you ask, huh?”
“I, uh, I got voicemail,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice. “I got it, the whole thing. I can record the messages on tapes and everything - the full system.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah, I, uh, I guess what I’m trying to say is that…it’d be nice coming home on the days that you’re muling, but still getting to talk to you, y’know? Or just listen, I guess. On account of the fact that you couldn’t talk back to me, or hear what I’m saying.”

“Wait, you want me to…to call your phone when you’re working so that I can leave messages behind on the voicemail; that’s what you’re asking right now?”

“Yeah, not asking, though. More…suggesting,” Yoongi corrected, shifting to lie back on the pillows more comfortably. “Y’know, ’cos you’re going away soon and I guess that I just really wanna come home some days and talk to you - even when you ain’t in the country.”

Jimin didn’t reply to this, rather the line remained silent for a moment as he seemingly thought this over.

“Shit, Jimin, it’s just…it feels so nice listening to your voice again,” Yoongi sighed, rolling his head and closing his eyes.

“What happened, Yoongi? I can hear it in your voice. Something’s on your mind,” Jimin said, a faint sound down the line letting him know that he had just shifted in his own bed. “Talk to me, baby boy.”

“Today was…it wasn’t a good day, Jimin,” Yoongi admitted, as he left the receiver in place on his cheek and he reached up to snag hold of his wrinkled shirt front. “I’d to threaten a guy, some fucked up lil addict that got desperate and betrayed us ‘cos he needed his Percs. Threatening guys that betray us for cash, that’s one thing, but threatening guys like that; it ain’t ever feel good. But it’s business, and I gotta do it.”

“Is that all? Or, did something else happen? You know that you can tell me, you can tell me anything at all,” Jimin promised in a soft voice.
“I, uh, I’d a bad dream, and I guess that I don’t really wanna sleep right now,” he said, his own voice barely that of a whisper. “I can’t even begin to explain it, but it was bad, and it made me feel bad. I know that you don’t want me feeling bad, but it’s hard when I can’t even dream without…without my brain attacking me like that. When I’m vulnerable, when I can’t fight back.”

“Do you wanna tell me about that dream? Or, is it too personal right now?”

“It’s, uh, it’s personal, but I think that don’t matter now. Not after everything, y’know? I-I dreamt that I was in the bathhouse, and I was searching it ‘cos it was empty. But then I found you, I found you in one of the rooms and we talked. It…it got intimate, but I panicked, I scared you away. When I went looking for you again, I found my father instead.”

“Oh…oh, baby…”

“He was mad, he-he yelled at me and he hit me with one of his golf clubs. I was crying, there was buh-buh-blood, I.”

“Deep breaths, Yoongi, deep breaths. It’s OK, it was just a dream; remember? A dream can’t hurt you, not like you think it can.”

Yoongi gulped hard, shifting so that he could grab his glass and drain the bourbon. It burnt on the way down as he dumped the glass on the side table and he dropped back onto the pillows. He clapped a hand over his face, struggling to catch his breath for a few seconds.

“I’d to run away from him. So, I did, I ran as fast as I could ‘til I found a door. I thought that I was gonna wake up again, sweating and gasping for breath. But I didn’t, I found you again. You were there, Jimin, and you told me things,” he added, unable to stop himself from blurting it all out. “You told me things I’ve always tried to tell myself, but could never really accept. It’s, like, you were the part of me that was tryna protect me from the bad thoughts. Yeah?”

“Yes, Yoongi. I understand what you mean.”

“You guh-gave me comfort that I really needed, and then I woke up,” Yoongi finished, letting his breath out in an uneven sigh. “I woke up and Kim was phoning me. That was the dream.”

“It’s no wonder that you don’t want to sleep tonight, after having a dream like that.”
“I feel better now, I do,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice, hoping that Jimin could hear the complete honesty in his voice. “I, uh, I got a lot off my chest. I feel better, ‘cos you listened to me; just like I knew that you would.”

Jimin hummed at this, and he could picture him nibbling on his lower lip. Maybe, fiddling with his earring.

“In my dream, you…you told me that I ain’t the reason why my dad hates me, that it’s something inside of him that’s wrong, instead of me.”

“Hmm, dream me sounds fucking smart,” Jimin declared, making them both laugh softly. “Dream me also sounds honest, because that’s the truth, Yoongi.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Uhuh, there’s nothing wrong with you, with me, with either of us. If you were here right now, I’d cup those cute little cheeks of yours and say it right to your face, and then I’d kiss you right on the lips.”

Yoongi let his breath out in a sigh at this, opening his eyes to stare up at his ceiling panel to see the deep blue sky above him. There was a hint of stars scattered across it, tiny little twinkles of light that reminded him of how Jimin’s earrings caught the light and glinted at him.

“Hmm, now you got all of that off your chest; are you gonna go to sleep soon, baby boy? It’s getting late, you know that, right?”

“Yeah, I know,” he replied with a soft smile, and he wondered if the younger man could hear it in his voice the way that he could hear it in his.

“You’ve got so much business to do, you’ve gotta sleep. Not that you need your beauty sleep, of course.”

“You’re kidding me, right? I need to catch up on that shit. You’re the one that don’t need it, being my Adonis and all.”
“Hmm,” Jimin almost purred before laughing softly, the sound telling him that his cheeks were
flushed and that his eyes were crinkled deeply at the corners in contentment. “How poetic. That’s the
sweetest thing that a guy’s ever said to me, baby boy.”

“Uh, ‘member, back in the hotel, when you said that you dunno any poetry?” Yoongi said, wriggling
on the bed to get onto his side and curling his legs up in front of him. “I know some. I’d to read
poetry back in school, ‘k, and there was this one guy that stood out to me. E. E. Cummings. So, I
actually became a fan of his, I guess you’d say. There was this one poem of his that I used to read a
lot, even when it’s a lil…romantic, ‘cos I guess a part of me always craved that sappy shit. Even
when I’d act like it was disgusting, deep down, I really wanted to understand it, to…to like it.”

“What’s it go like, huh? Can you quote it?”

“I can quote it. Do…uh, d’you wanna hear a lil bit of it?” Yoongi asked, clearing his throat and
licking at his lips to wet them in anticipation.

Jimin made a soft noise in agreement at the question, wriggling to get comfortable and listen to him
too. He probably had the receiver cupped in both hands, pressed against his ear with a messy tangle
of locks across his brow.

“I carry your heart with me, I carry it in my heart. I’m never without it, anywhere I go, you go, my
dear; and whatever’s done by only me is your doing, my darling. I fear no fate, for you’re my fate,
my sweet. I want no world, for beautiful, you’re my world, my true, and it’s you are whatever a
moon has always meant, and whatever a sun will always sing is you’.”

Yoongi stopped talking, hearing nothing but complete silence on the other end of the line. It was
enough to make him swallow hard, waiting to hear him say something in return so that he didn’t
squirm on the mattress.

“I take it back, that’s the sweetest thing that a guy has ever said to me,” Jimin said in a soft voice.
“Is that it? Is there another verse?”

“Uh, yeah, but I always forget the second verse. The first one’s the best anyway.”

“I…I mean, wow, that was-” his boyfriend made a series of noises down the line, which were lost
under the crackling static.
“You didn’t hate it, right? It ain’t weird?” Yoongi asked, placing his hand down on his stomach because he suddenly felt a little eddy of worry starting to grow in his gut. “I, uh, I just thought I’d say it ’cos you mentioned the poetry and—”

“Yoongi.”

“I didn’t realise how fucking strong it sounded ‘til I started blurting it out like an idiot, and—”

“It was romantic, baby boy, I loved it,” Jimin declared over his rapid stammering, and his tone sounded completely sincere to his ears. “I loved it so much that I wish that I could say something like that in return. To let you know how much I loved it.”

Yoongi closed his eyes and he let his breath out in a heavy sigh, his entire body almost surging with relief.

Jimin had really put him at ease with his words after he had rather stupidly blurted out a poem that edged very close to sounding like a love confession. He should have known that it would have sounded like that to him, and yet he had wanted to tell him the poem regardless. It just felt so good knowing that Jimin liked hearing such things, that he liked the poem just as much as his teenage self had upon finding it inside of a musty old book in the school library.

“I, uh, I guess that I could just say sappy shit though. You said that you liked it, so, expect me to compare your eyes to stars and all of that in the future; until you beg me to stop because you hate it so much.”

“I’d never beg you to stop,” Yoongi breathed out softly.

“But wait, I thought that you hated talking to me on the phone?” Jimin asked, a rather mischievous hint in his tone that revealed that he knew that he was putting him on the spot with this question. “You sound like you’re liking it right now, baby boy. Quoting poetry to me so smoothly like that.”

“I, uh, I guess that it ain’t so scary talking to you like this after everything,” Yoongi remarked, shifting on his bed to get more comfortable and slipping one arm under his pillow to hug it close. “I, uh, when I close my eyes and listen to you talking, I can kinda picture you being with me. Y’know? Like, in my head-space right now, we’re sitting at Mickey’s Joint, waiting for our breakfast or some shit.”
Yoongi found himself closing his eyes at this, and he wondered if Jimin had done the exact same. Was he curled up just like him: his body in a loose and comfortable ball, his limbs sore with tiredness and his eyelids growing heavier by the second? Was he lounged in a tee-shirt, a wrinkled shirt, or was he possibly even naked right now?

“Actually no, that’s wrong. In my head-space, right now,” Yoongi corrected in a whisper, “we ain’t sitting in the diner, or anywhere public like that. We’re at my house. There’s a pool in the back garden, I’ll bet that you’d love it. I’ll bet that you’d dip your feet right in and kick ‘em back and forth whenever we talk out there; and we do, we talk out there a lot. So you can enjoy the heat and the sun, and so I can watch you swimming ‘round.”

“Oh, baby boy, that sounds so perfect. I could just dive right into that pool right now.”

“What ‘bout you, huh? What’re you thinking ‘bout?”

“In my head-space, we’re sitting by the bay,” Jimin confided in a whisper-soft voice. “It’s so nice and peaceful there, so sunny and warm, and I can smell the brine hanging in the air. We’re sitting close together and you’re holding my hand, just stroking it and giving it those little squeezes like you do.”

“Yeah, like I do,” Yoongi hummed in his own whisper.

“I might put my head on your shoulder for a little while, and you might just…put yours on top too. There’s not a lot of talking, but I like it like that, sometimes. Sometimes, touches, they say more than words ever can, and having you holding my hand is worth a thousand words.”

“Mmm, you sound like a poet to me, Jimin,” Yoongi mumbled, finding his eyelids fluttering as he tried to keep them open. “That was…was beautiful.”

“It’s the truth. Um, my head-space sounds so boring, right? Just sitting there, looking at the water and not even talking.”

“No, sounds great, sounds…perfect. We’ll have to go there one day, find the best spot in…in the whole city and just watch the waves. Yeah?”
"I’d like that a lot, Yoongi. In fact, I’d love it."

“I…love it too.”

Yoongi stopped talking for a moment, just listening to the soft sounds of his boyfriend’s breathing down the line. It was enough to make him copy his breathing rhythm, slowly drifting off until he could feel himself sinking down into sleep.

“Baby boy?” Jimin asked in a whisper, the sound of him shifting sounding down the line. “Are you asleep, huh?”

“Nnn, nuh…yet,” he managed to mumble in reply.

“Then you gotta hang up,” he pointed out, before laughing softly. “You can’t fall asleep on the phone. You gotta end it and then fall asleep, hmm?”

“I wuh…falling ‘sleep listening to you, listening to you…talking ‘n…‘n breathing,” Yoongi mumbled, his voice husky with exhaustion as he struggled to stay awake. “Wanna fall…‘sleep like that, darling.”

“Darling? Oh, that’s new,” Jimin said, seemingly pleased judging from his tone. “Go on, end the call. You need to sleep. Business waits for no man, and no baby boy either. I know that I’m gonna be gone again for a little while, but I’ll be coming back as fast as I can. I’ll try and leave a couple of messages for you, before I go. I just hope that Namo doesn’t flip his shit at the phone bill.”

“Jimin?”

“Yeah, Yoongi?”

“I hope I dream…‘bout you again,” he sighed.

Yoongi forced his eyelids open, eyeing the phone to see that it was right in front of him. All that he had to do was move his arm to drop the receiver, and then he could fall asleep properly. But he couldn’t seem to do so right now. Not when Jimin was still talking to him and he longed to just listen
to him for as long as he could.

“I hope that I dream ‘bout you and it don’t hurt like last night. I wanna…wanna have a dream that makes me wake up with a smile on my face. Yeah?”

“Hmm, I’ll make sure that dream me behaves; that he’s a good boy, just for you.”

“Thanks, darling,” Yoongi sighed, shifting so that he could move to end the call.

“Yoongi?” Jimin said suddenly, making him pause in the act of preparing his goodbyes.

“Mmm?”

“I know that I’m gonna dream about you too, baby boy.”

Chapter End Notes

10th September, 1984, 11:45am: Gangnam-gu, Seoul, South Korea

“…and, there, it’s out.”

Jimin let his breath out in a hard sigh of relief, finally feeling that wonderful sensation that he always felt when Taehyung slipped the goddamn condom free. It was unbelievable how good that it felt to not be clenching around a parcel that was several inches long and wide after over a half a day spent carrying it inside of his body; even if there was a horrible stinging sensation that lingered for a little while afterwards, as a result of him being stretched wide open again. It was a small price to pay, however, for he was now able to sit down and feel so wonderfully…empty at last.

Jimin winced ever so slightly as he lowered himself down onto the edge of the table. Though it was only discreet, the slight twitch at the corners of his lips, and his sharp intake of breath, didn’t go amiss by his partner.

“You OK, Jiminie?” Taehyung asked, dumping the parcel aside for a moment. “You wanna put any ice on that, huh? Maybe heat? You just say the word when we get back to my place, and I’ll find somethin’ for you.”

“I’m good, brother,” Jimin replied, actually telling him the truth this morning. “I mean, some heat and lots of cushions to sit on would be fucking great though.”

“A-OK,” Taehyung said, breaking out some new English slang and also flashing him the ‘OK’ sign with his finger and thumb. “But, maybe I shoulda asked you after this step.”

Jimin set his jaw in preparation as his partner’s fingers found a seam in the tape on his thigh, snagging hold of it so that he could give it a hard wrench. The tape lifted off his flesh with a harsh rasping sound, likely taking a nice layer of skin with it so that it left a lingering burn in its wake.
“They don’t pay me enough for this shit,” Jimin groaned, as the first piece of tape came free from his thigh - a vivid pink mark already appearing on his skin. “This should be illegal, literally illegal. Fuck coke, make duct tape illegal. Goddamn.”

His complaints made Taehyung guffaw heartily, and they even elicited several amused sounds from the two other men in the apartment room.

Jimin wished that he could laugh with them, but the pain of the tape being wrenched off his skin was just too much. All that he could do was reach over and tug at the tape on his right thigh too, wanting to free himself of it as fast as he could. He peeled it slower than Taehyung did, but at least it hurt him less that way.

After the baggies were freed from his thighs, Jimin had to leave Taehyung to get the two off his upper body, for he was unable to peel the tape off of his back properly. He didn’t know what hurt more, when it was ripped off his inner thighs, or when it tore free from his armpit and it made tears of pain well at the corners of his eyes. But it was thankfully a very fast procedure, a much faster one than the torturous removal of the condom.

After another minute, the four baggies had joined the slick condom on the table: the retrieval of the drugs now complete.

The next steps that had to be undertaken were weighing the cocaine to make sure that it was exact; ensuring that the agreed price was right and maybe bartering over it if it wasn’t; and then resealing the baggies so that they could be shipped across Seoul before phoning in the finalised transaction. Luckily for Jimin, he had to do no more than recall a quoted figure, and maybe do a little maths if it was wrong, and that was all. The other men had to do the repacking, phoning and transporting of the goods now, and so the burden was finally off his shoulders for a couple of days.

Jimin watched Taehyung working intently as he slipped his shirt back on, his fingers moving to button it up again without much thought at all. He didn’t even need to look down to locate the buttons, for he was more than used to slipping in and out of these shirts by now. Within seconds, he was securing the top button in place, and so he dropped down to grab his underwear and trousers from around his ankles and he tugged them up to fasten them up too.

Taehyung was filling the scales up with the cocaine quickly, squeezing the condom parcel to get the powder to escape it more easily. He had already pierced the two armpit baggies, and so there was a growing mountain of white powder filling up the steel bowl. He had tugged up his black tee-shirt to cover his lower face, for the powdered substance had a habit of taking to the air in a thin cloud and he clearly didn’t want to breathe it in.
Jimin wondered if he had ever touched cocaine before, if he had ever snorted a line or rubbed it into his gums like Yoongi told him he had done a couple of times. Had he swallowed it or injected it up his ass? Probably not, for the thought alone was enough to make him suppress a snort of laughter as he finished tucking himself into his underwear and then he zipped up his trousers.

Taehyung spared just a quick glance up at him at the sound, before turning back to the bowl in front of him. He was far too busy checking the weight to get distracted with small talk, and as soon as the condom was empty, he grabbed the next baggie to pierce it with his flick-knife too.

If not for the slight crackling sound of the cocaine pouring out of the baggie and down into the bowl, the apartment room was completely silent. Jimin could hear beeping horns and shouting voices coming from outside through the slight crack in the window, but the room itself was quiet. Neither Yoo or Ahn had said a word over the duration of the car ride, and they were both standing like sentinels across the room: the former by the door and the latter standing beside the telephone in preparation.

Whilst he waited for the cocaine to be weighed, Jimin couldn’t help but let his mind wander for a moment, his fingers stroking across the rough surface of the table.

Jimin was telling Taehyung the truth about feeling good today, because he really did feel so much better than he had after their last transaction. Sure, the sore muscles in his stomach and thighs would never go away during their transactions because of the fact that he had to smuggle parcels across the globe, but there was no throbbing headache or nausea present today. Maybe, it was just because he had drank less coffee this time around, and he had saved himself from a caffeine-related headache? Maybe, it was because he had slept for the entire plane ride, and had therefore rested himself adequately?

Or maybe, Jimin felt pretty good today because it was quite simply a good day? After all, he had left a final parting message on Yoongi’s answering machine just this morning before going out with Namjoon to collect the cocaine and board the plane. Wait…he had left the message yesterday morning, of course, on account of the stupid time-zone difference - the difference that he was now going to have to adjust to…again.

Yes, much like Yoongi had requested of him, Jimin had started leaving messages on his answering machine. At first, he had been scared that they might not have even recorded properly because he had never used such a thing before. But luckily for him, his messages had been saved, which was pretty crazy.

Right now, Yoongi had his voice saved onto his answering machine, and whenever he hit a button, it would just start playing aloud. That was kind of freaky when he thought about it, but in a good way.
Jimin wished that he had an answering machine too, just so he could do the exact same thing in return. Sure, he liked listening to Yoongi talking and looking at him the entire time, but he could still appreciate getting to listen to his voice when he was unable to meet him face-to-face.

Jimin had left several messages as a trial run, just to see if his boyfriend liked it and asked him to leave some more in the future. He had thought that the challenge would have been pretty easy, because it had just been talking to himself for a little while. But he had rapidly discovered it to be rather difficult. Talking to a person, one that could nod or hum, that could add a comment here and there to let him know that they were listening to him, was not the same as talking to a machine.

A machine was cold, silent, and strangely judgemental in a way that he didn’t quite understand.

As a result, Jimin had struggled to find interesting things to say on the first few recordings. But by his most recent one, he was pretty certain that he had finally gotten over that hurdle. It had been just as much about overcoming his lack of confidence than it had been thinking of things to say, and that sudden streak of confidence had worked wonders for him.

Jimin wasn’t entirely certain how long that his last message had been, but he seemed to recall that it had been a long one; one that Namjoon might see on the phone bill and go crazy over. Hopefully, Yoongi would like the message, and he hadn’t just bumbled for half an hour or so for nothing.

During their final evening phone call, Yoongi had told him that he had yet to listen to the messages that he had started adding to the machine for him. Apparently, he was going to save them until he was out of the country, because then he really had no other way of talking to him until he returned again. Jimin just wished that he had left enough messages to cover the nights that he would be gone from the country, because that way, Yoongi would have a message a night to tide him over. A new one to listen to every single evening, rather than replaying the same ones over and over until he got bored of listening to his voice.

Had Yoongi started listening to them yet? It was nighttime in San Francisco right now, the night of the 9th, and so it made sense that he had listened to at least one of the messages. He wouldn’t be able to call him tonight, and so if he wanted to talk to him, he would have to use the answering machine messages.

Whilst Jimin had been napping on the plane ride, completely dead to the world, had Yoongi been lying in bed listening to him talking; slipping down into his own dreams as he had? When he had been waiting to board the plane, filled with the usual mixture of trepidation and excitement, had his boyfriend been eyeing the telephone and trying to pluck up the courage to hit one of the buttons, his own stomach knotted with nerves?
Jimin didn’t know, but he hoped that the answering machine messages had helped lull him to sleep at least. That had been the main point of them, after all, and so he could only hope that they had done their job.

“…hear me, bro?”

“Huh?” Jimin hummed, looking up sharply from the scales to see that Taehyung was looking at him, his round eyes blinking languidly from over the collar of his tee-shirt.

“I said,” he repeated, reaching up to tug his tee-shirt down to not muffle his voice. “The weight’s exact, it’s all good to go, but you were starin’ off into space just then, Jiminie.”

“Oh? Sorry, I kinda zoned out there,” Jimin said with an embarrassed laugh, reaching up to rub at the back of his neck. “32.5 million, give a couple of hundred thousand; yeah? That’s the deal?”

“It’s all there on the paper,” Yoo replied, nodding at the suitcase that was placed right beside the scales.

Jimin moved to grab the piece of paper from the suitcase on his behalf, quickly scanning it to check the exact figure. Satisfied with what he saw, he gave Yoo a nod to let him know that he could call it in: thus completing the transaction.

“Are you guys gonna be able to get this outta the city? You know, after the flooding and everything?” Jimin asked curiously, wondering if the tragic event might in any way hinder the transaction and get him into trouble back home.

“Don’t you worry about that,” Ahn said in that rumbling voice of his. “We know what to do.”

“Yeah, what’s a flood, huh?” Taehyung joked with a wry smirk. “When you’ve got soldiers on your ass, all day every day, a flood ain’t that big an obstacle, Jiminie.”

“I know, I was just wondering.”
“You’ve got your head in the clouds today, huh?” Taehyung remarked, shifting to sit on the edge of the table. He grabbed the large spoon from the suitcase so that he could start shovelling the cocaine into the new thick plastic baggie. “What’s on your mind? You thinkin’ about a special someone when you’re supposed to be workin’?”

Jimin moved to sit on the table beside him, watching Yoo as the man rapidly dialled the first of several numbers needed to contact their guys across the ocean.

“Maybe I was?” he retorted, giving him a rather mischievous grin. “Why’d you wanna know, huh?”

“Y’know who I’m talkin’ about, Jiminie,” Taehyung said, quickly glancing between the bowl and the baggie so that he didn’t end up spilling the product all over the dirty apartment room floor.

Yes, Jimin did know who he was talking about, and maybe later, when the transaction was complete and they were crashing at his house, he might just tell him about Yoongi. He was still edging around the whole sexuality issue with his partner and friend, because he was still uncertain about how Taehyung really felt about the entire matter. But if they could get through several discussions without any arguing or distasteful words or looks, then he might just believe that the younger man could be fully trusted with the knowledge.

It took several minutes for the transaction to be fully completed: the cocaine repackaged and the phone calls done. As soon as Taehyung had received the all-clear from Ahn, he grabbed his holdall for him and he lugged it up onto his shoulder, gesturing for him to follow him out of the apartment room.

“Are you hungry? Because I’m starving, seriously starving,” Jimin exclaimed, as the door shut behind them.

“Food, huh? We could go to that restaurant again? It wasn’t washed away in the flood, thank god. Or, I could rustle you up some more stuff with my rations?” Taehyung joked, reaching up to give his cheek a hard pinch and tug. “It’s like you’re my son or somethin’.”

“Actually, I wanna learn how to make food,” he replied, his voice slightly muffled from his aggressive cheek tugging. “You’re a great cook, Tae, and I think that you could teach me a couple of things.”

“You wanna learn to cook?” his friend repeated, lifting his eyebrows high enough so that they almost
brushed against his red hair scarf. “Huh?”

“Yeah, I wanna learn. Why’s that so weird? Why’d you and Namo find it so weird that I wanna learn how to cook? It’s a basic skill, and I really should learn some things.”

“I mean, I can show you how to cook a couple of things? But, like, Korean food, obviously,” Taehyung suggested, as they went down the stairs. “I dunno how to make no American food, Jiminie. I guess it’s so weird to me ‘cos you never wanna do shit like that.”

“Huh? What’d you mean?” Jimin argued, his mouth falling slack in surprise. “Are you calling me lazy?”

“Yeah, I’m callin’ you lazy,” his partner agreed with a wicked smirk, clearly not aware of how hard that he could punch. “What? You wanna fight, huh? Pacifists don’t fight so good, Jiminie, you ain’t gonna stand a chance against me and my fists.”

“Whatever,” he muttered, pretending that he wasn’t worth the effort because he didn’t want to find out how strong that Taehyung might just be.

Upon exiting the apartment block, they had to jump a taxi just like always to get to his friend’s house. Even though it wasn’t that far away, the traffic-packed roads made the journey seem to take forever, and Jimin had often wondered if they might actually find that it took them less time to walk to his bungalow instead. But rather than suggest this, he just sank down against the old and worn leather and he enjoyed the slight breeze that came in through the open windows.

The sight outside of the window beside him wasn’t at all like the sights that he had seen on the news last week. Though he could see swollen sandbags littering the gutters and streets, and a lot more soldiers out than usual clearing away debris and rubbish, Gangnam-gu looked in far better shape than he had been expecting. Sure, he noticed that there was exterior water damage to some buildings, and there was a faint stench on the air like sewage that the breeze sadly couldn’t seem to waft away. But it looked like his friend’s neighbourhood had gotten off rather lightly, all things considered. It could have been completely devastated like the other districts: with no clean running water, electricity shortages, and damaged houses that were no longer able to be used.

Taehyung’s snug little bungalow could have been swept away in the flooding, but it was still standing like always. The front was filled with fresh sandbags that looked to have soaked the last of the flood water up, and it was built on slight foundations that meant that his house had been safe from major damage. The outside gate was stained from the water, and the little patch of grass had been drowned so that it was waterlogged and nothing more than a thick muddy sludge, but
otherwise, it was safe to stay in his home.

When Taehyung unlocked his door at last, almost half an hour after leaving the block, his dog made sure that she was ready for them. Cheonsa was sitting right in front of the door, meaning that he couldn’t enter the house without having her jumping up onto her back legs to plant her paws against his chest.

“Hey, girl,” Taehyung said, as he dropped to hunker down and lavish his dog with plenty of attention. “Did you miss me, huh? Did you miss my handsome face?”

“Pft, sure,” Jimin muttered, stepping around his friend and dumping his bag onto the sofa. “Tae, if a dog thinks that you’re handsome, then that means you must look like a dog.”

“I’d rather look like a dog than look like half of the guys I see out on the streets,” his friend retorted, having to move his face away because Cheonsa was trying to lick his mouth.

“Trust me, Tae, you don’t need to worry about that,” Jimin remarked with a fond smile, watching him ruffling at the jindo’s thick ruff of white fur. “I’m just gonna freshen up in the bathroom, yeah, but I’ll be right back.”

“Sure thing, but don’t take too long! With the water shortage right now, there ain’t a lot of water in the goddamn boiler…”

Luckily for Jimin, he was able to take a wonderfully hot shower and not worry once about the water suddenly turning freezing cold and making him yelp in horror. It felt so good emerging from behind the thin shower curtain after several minutes, feeling fresh and wide awake rather than aching and tired like usual. He rigourously brushed his teeth, got dressed in a pair of clean fitted jeans and a loose white tee-shirt, and then he exited the bathroom to join his friend.

Taehyung was lounged on his sofa with his dog mostly lying on his lap. His loose jeans were going to be covered in white fur, as was his black tee-shirt, but he clearly didn’t seem to mind. His eyes were glued onto the television screen, which Jimin quickly figured out was playing the news; judging from the random assortment of clips and rolling headlines at the bottom of the screen.

“Apparently, the commies are sendin’ aid to us now,” Taehyung muttered under his breath, his expression hard to read. “We gotta accept it, ‘cos if we don’t, we look like the petty ones. We look like we’re tryna cause more tensions, but I dunno…I don’t trust ‘em, and I don’t trust our
Jimin had obviously been following all updates on the floods carefully, had watched all of the footage on the news about the heavy rainfall that had lasted for a week and had caused Han River to swell and flood the capital. He had followed it all not only for the sake of business, but also because he had wanted to figure out if Taehyung had been alright. Now that it had been a week since the event, the damage wasn’t very evident in the areas that he had been through for business, but he knew for a fact that other more rural areas of the city has been devastated by the flood. There were homeless people, people that had no access to electricity and clean water and were dependent on staying in relief shelters that had been set up in schools and other large buildings across the capital.

In short, the capital had been hit by a disaster, even if the death toll was only rather small. The long-lasting damage on the capital was what was going to linger afterwards, long after the last of the putrid water had been soaked up. It was going to affect the economy, the agricultural industry, the taxes, and more importantly, it was going to have an affect on his future business dealings in the country.

“Well, I mean, I don’t live here, and so I don’t have that same connection to everything that happened in the past like you do, Tae. But so long as people get the aid that they need, that’s all that matters; right?” Jimin suggested, stubbing his bare toes on the flooring as he eyed the small television screen.

Had he been too blunt with this remark, on account of everything? It made sense that Taehyung was annoyed at the thought of North Korea sending aid, considering the still bitter tension between the two countries, and the past that was still so very fresh to most of the population that had lived through, or had been born during the events and aftermath of the war. It also made sense that Taehyung opposed any decision that his own government made, because he hated every single aspect of their party and policies.

But Jimin had wanted to be honest with his friend, after everything. Sure, bad blood was bad blood, but right now, he thought that such things needed to be ignored for the sake of the poor and suffering victims of this tragic event. Surely, his partner could see that too?

“Yeah, you’re right, but…I dunno, like you said, all of the history, Jiminnie,” Taehyung said before sighing heavily. “It ain’t so easy lettin’ go of some things, but I guess that those people need help and that’s the most important thing. Maybe, if they ever need help in the future, we’ll consider it for helpin’ us out like this.”

“See? That’s what I’m talking about,” Jimin said with a soft smile. “Put aside the bad shit for the sake of helping others, I like that. It’s mature, Tae.”
Taehyung snorted at this as he gently moved Cheonsa off his lap, leaving the television playing just to create some background noise. After washing his hands free from dog drool and fur, he moved to enter his kitchen, and so Jimin followed after him just like a puppy.

“You wanna learn how to cook, huh?” the younger man remarked, popping open his small fridge and eyeing the contents. “Well…gimme a minute to figure out what the fuck we can even eat. I ain’t exactly stocked up on food right now, after the fuckin’ flood, y’know?”

“No, I imagine that you’re running low,” Jimin remarked, as he shifted to lean against the counter and he watched him rummaging around the contents for a second. “If you need me to run to a store for you, I’ll do it. I don’t mind.”

“Nah, it’s OK, I got somethin’. Gukmul tteokbokki,” Taehyung said, as he started placing random items down onto the counter. “That’s the main dish, and it’s pretty easy, yeah? The sides can be rice and some beef, just to make it easy. I gotta use up the beef today anyway, so, I just hope the local store ain’t washed away on me…”

Jimin watched him placing a variety of ingredients down onto the counter: two packets of ramyeon, two small eggs, several pieces of tteokbokki, and a slab of fish cake. There were also some vegetables: napa cabbage, scallions and onion; along with almost empty bottles of soy sauce and corn syrup, a tub of chilli pepper flakes, and various condiments in little shakers. It seemed that this dish had a lot of different ingredients for an easy meal, but he guessed that the preparation might not be as hard. He also noted that the ingredients weren’t exactly in abundance, but like his partner had said, he was running low on supplies right now.

Taehyung retrieved a tub of pre-soaked rice from the freezer, dumping into the rice cooker so that he could time it and let it cook whilst they focused on the other dishes. He added the eggs to a pan to boil them, soaked the tteokbokki, and then he retrieved a tub of frozen stock too, so that he could heat it up on the stove. It smelled strongly of anchovy, mushroom and onion, and it was a rich brown in shade.

“Gukmul tteokbokki? That’s, um, gonna be like a soup right, Tae?”

“Ohuh, the basic version don’t have much in it, but you can add more ingredients to fill it up and feed as many people as you can,” Taehyung explained, fiddling with the dials to alter the heat on the stove rings. “That’s what my momma taught me. Always make it as full as you can, just in case you got some more mouths to feed.”
“Did your mum cook, huh? Maybe work in a restaurant or something?” Jimin asked curiously, eyeing the spread of ingredients and hoping that it tasted as spicy as it seemed that it would.

“My momma? You’re kiddin’ me, right? She ain’t never worked a single day in her life,” Taehyung said, before snorting hard. “My dad married her as fast as he could, just to make sure that no other guy could come along and grab her. She was, uh, fifteen then, and he was nineteen. He worked the entire time just so she didn’t have to, and a couple of years later, I popped out. She’s just a housewife through and through, Jiminie.”

“Then she must just be a great cook,” he mumbled, as he picked up one of the packets of ramyeon to eye it. “Waste not, want not isn’t her life motto, right?”

“Why make a lil bit of food, when you can make a lot and keep it for the next day?” Taehyung stated, his expression showing that he was incredibly confused. “You gotta think about leftovers, Jiminie, they’re real important here. Always have been, you never know when a flood or a really bad harvest might hit and fuck the economy up so you can barely afford a sack of rice.”

“I know, I grew up eating leftovers, Tae,” Jimin remarked, placing the packet back down on the counter. “America might not be prone to floods or famines, but it’s rife with poor people that can’t afford the abundance of food. Remember?”

“Yeah, I remember, and that shit still confuses me,” his partner muttered with a soft head shake. “So, you wanna learn how to make gukmul tteokbokki?”

“Sure,” he said with a vigorous nod. “It looks like it could taste amazing. I hope that I can find the ingredients back home though.”

“What’d you mean? Can’t you buy this kinda stuff in the market, huh?” Taehyung asked, as he retrieved a plate of beef from his fridge and he added it down onto the counter.

“I mean, I could probably find a lot of these things in Chinatown, if I went searching,” Jimin explained, as he slipped a knife out of the drawer. “I’ve never really went looking before, I usually let Namo buy all of the food for us, and he makes sure to get authentic ramyeon at least. The American stuff? Shit, Tae, it just doesn’t taste right.”

“What’s a ‘Chinatown’, Jiminie?” Taehyung asked curiously, shoving the vegetables over to him so that he could start rinsing them under the tap and cutting them up.
“Uh, you know how when people move to new countries, they have to find somewhere to live?” Jimin explained, hastily cleaning the cabbage under the running tap water. “Well, when a lot of Chinese people settled down in cities and built up their own neighbourhoods, they just started calling those areas ‘Chinatown’. You can find hundreds of them all over the world, not just in America. My city also has a smaller ‘Japantown’, and there’s all kinds of people living in those two areas: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese; yeah?”

“Huh,” Taehyung hummed under his breath, seemingly finding this highly interesting. “You think that Jungkook might’ve ended up in Chinatown?”

“Um, maybe?” he replied, placing the cabbage aside to grab the next vegetable. “He might’ve ended up there, or he might’ve been settled in The Bayview. That’s a popular area for immigrants too.”

Jimin watched Taehyung out of the corner of his eye as they started preparing the meal, hastily chopping up the cabbage, fish cake, scallions and onion. The scent that wafted up to hit his nose was pungent, and he wished that he had covered his face with his tee-shirt just like Taehyung had done earlier. His friend was trimming the best choices of beef from the somewhat gristly remains, slicing the fat and tougher meat away with his knife and then tossing it down to Cheonsa to snaffle up. She did so eagerly, not even a hint of grease left on the tiles because she licked that up too.

Jimin tried his very hardest to help with the cooking process, adding the soy sauce, corn oil, chilli flakes and dashes of salt and pepper into a new bowl. Taehyung showed him how to crush garlic with the flat of his knife, adding that into the bowl for more flavour. Then Jimin had to mix the seasoning up as well as he could by adding some of the hot broth to the bowl to make a rather thick sludge of bright red and spicy paste.

“See, it ain’t so hard,” Taehyung said, as he scooped the boiled eggs free and he dumped them into cold water. “You just gotta be inventive and experiment.”

“I experiment with a lot of things, Tae, but food isn’t one of those things,” Jimin retorted with a smirk, making his friend laugh heartily.

The seasoning was added into the massive pot of bubbling stock first and left to boil. Then Taehyung added all of the ingredients save for the ramyeon, letting the items float in the soup until the vegetables and tteokbokki chunks were soft. Finally, he added the ramyeon and the powdered stock and left the pot to simmer on the stove.
Taehyung allowed him to sauté the beef in a pan whilst the soup simmered; the soy sauce, garlic and salt and pepper dressing hissing at him as he stirred at it with the spatula. His friend made sure to glance over at him as he did so, just to make sure that he didn’t burn it by accident, and Jimin felt somewhat skilled as he did so. There was just something rather fun and exciting about using fresh ingredients like this, instead of preparing frozen goods that he just shoved into the oven.

Upon finishing with the cooking, they had to set the table by the window. First, there were the two bowls of steamed rice, then the shared plate of marinated beef, and then came the large pot of fragrant and vivid red soup. Taehyung had to grab a dish towel and wrap it around the hot pot handles, so that he could pick it up off the stove and place it down on a metal stand in the centre of the table. Before sitting down to eat, he retrieved chopsticks, spoons, and two glasses of freezing cold milk.

“It looks and smells amazing, Tae,” Jimin admitted with an amazed expression, dropping to sit on the plush floor cushion. “I can’t believe that I helped cook this.”

“You don’t need to add the eggs, or even the noodles, but if you wanna make it nice and soupy, you gotta do it, Jiminie,” Taehyung explained, as he joined him at the table. “Otherwise, it looks so empty. You also don’t need fresh stock, you can use the stuff you mix up from powder, or even just vegetables, if you ain’t got no anchovy in the fridge. But I think that it tastes so much better with fresh stock. So, there, I just taught you how to cook a nice big meal for you and your partner; yeah?”

“Actually, I wanna learn how to cook for someone else, not Namo,” Jimin said, as he fiddled with his chopsticks and he eyed the spread of food; tapping the ends of them against his lower lip. What should he sample first? The marinated beef, which had drawn Cheonsa’s attention and had made her sit down beside their table? The spicy and colourful soup that had steam wafting from the fragrant surface? Or maybe, just even the rice, which looked fluffy and soft and so very delicious to his eyes?

Taehyung had already shoved a chunk of beef into his mouth, and upon hearing this, he paused in the act of chewing to cheek it. He was clearly trying to figure out what he meant by that, but after a moment he seemed to do so.

“Oh, yeah? Shit, Jiminie, you’re talkin’ about Prince Min, right? What’s goin’ on? You do anythin’? You go out with him again?” he asked, firing questions out as he shovelled rice into his mouth.

“You sound eager to find out,” Jimin remarked, as he hovered a mouthful of noodles in front of his lips; caught by surprise by his sudden interest.
“Yeah, well, I mean, you trusted me with that big secret, Jiminnie, and I feel kinda proud ‘cos of it,” Taehyung admitted around his mouthful of beef and rice. “You don’t just tell anybody that kinda secret, and the fact that you trusted me with it makes me feel like you respect me. I wanna know all about it, just so y’know that I’m cool with it. So, tell me, lemme know; yeah?”

Jimin couldn’t help but laugh at this, feeling his cheeks suddenly heating up in both embarrassment and happiness. He placed his chopsticks down just so he could reach up and cup his cheeks in his hands for a moment, feeling the heat through his skin.

Taehyung felt like he respected him because he had trusted him with his secret; because he had told him that he was gay? Good, his friend was correct, but it was more than just a feeling of mutual respect that had made him tell him about his sexuality. There was trust, of course, built up from their close friendship and partnership whilst working for the mob, and there was love too; love for a friend that felt just like a brother to him, like Namjoon did. He hoped that the younger man also knew that these two things were just as important to him as respect.

“Tae, I’ve got another secret to tell you.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah. Prince Min…might just be my boyfriend,” Jimin admitted, unable to stop his lips from cracking open in a wide grin.

“What? No fuckin’ way!” Taehyung exclaimed, pausing in the act of shovelling noodles into his mouth. The comic look of surprise on his face was highly amusing, and the noodles dripped stock down messily into his bowl. “No way!”

“Yeah, but you gotta keep it a secret,” he demanded. “That’s another special secret, OK?”

“Last time you mentioned this to me, you were actin’ like it was nothin’,” he pointed out, dropping the noodles to point his chopsticks at him accusingly. “You were all like “hmm, I like him, but I dunno if he likes me”, and now you’re tellin’ me he’s your, uh, your boyfriend? What the fuck, bro?!”

“I know, I know,” Jimin said, reaching up to play with his earring and giving him a mischievous smile. “I was worried that he mightn’t like me, but it was fine. Prince Min likes me too. I think that
he likes me a lot, Tae, or I hope that he does, because I like him so fucking much. It’s kinda crazy how much that I do.”

“So, uh, so gay people, they have boyfriends too?” Taehyung asked curiously, showcasing his complete lack of knowledge. “D’you go on dates with him, like, to restaurants and shit like that?”

“U huh, we’ve been on a date,” Jimin explained. “He took me to a restaurant and I’d lobster and this really expensive white wine, um, it’s called Chardonnay. Then we stayed the night in a hotel and we had breakfast together. It was a wonderful date, the…well, it was my first real date, and it was perfect, Tae.”

“Wow, drinkin’ wine and stayin’ in hotels on a first date. Shit, he must be so fuckin’ rich,” Taehyung remarked, before snorting hard. “Who’d have thought that a man like that would wanna date a lil loser like you, huh? But, you said you went to a hotel, so like, have you, uh, y’know, fucked?”

“Um, not exactly,” Jimin explained, as he carried on tugging on his earring and he dropped his gaze to stare down at his soup. “Remember what you said that time, about the whole pregnancy thing? About how you can’t really risk having sex like that? Well, in my city right now, having sex with other men can be pretty dangerous, because of that virus that I told you about.”

“Ah…so that’s what you meant during the protest rally,” Taehyung said in a quiet voice, stirring at his food with his chopsticks, but making no move to eat. “When you said that people were dyin’, and you called ‘em your brothers and sisters. I’ve been tryna figure that out ever since you said it, but I didn’t think that you were talkin’ about gay people. Are you OK? You, uh, you ain’t got the virus, have you?”

“Don’t worry, Tae, I’m clean,” Jimin explained rapidly. “I don’t have the virus. You can only get it from blood and sex anyway, so, you’re totally safe around me. I promise you.”

“I trust you, you don’t look sick at all, Jiminie,” Taehyung remarked, oh so very naïve in his ignorance about AIDS. “So, what you’re sayin’ is that you’re both scared of havin’ sex, in case you get that virus somehow? So, you’re not doin’ stuff like that together? Just datin’ instead?”

“Kinda, I guess? I mean, I’m not scared, because I know that I’m clean, and I trust that he’s clean too. But Prince Min’s a little…frightened of it all right now, which makes sense. So, we haven’t been having sex, just…messing around with each other. It’s safer that way, and it’s something that doesn’t scare him too. Besides, it still feels good, so, there’s no need to rush anything.”
“I’m happy for you, Jiminnie, like really happy that Prince Min likes you like that, ‘cos you like him so much,” Taehyung said, as he grabbed a large clump of noodles with his chopsticks. “I dunno about this virus, but I hope that they can make medicine to cure it soon. It sounds scary to me, I hope that that shit don’t spread here too.”

“Me too, brother, me too,” he agreed in a quiet voice, stirring at his serving of soup.

For the duration of the meal, they ate in near silence, save for the news channel playing across the room occasionally drawing out a muttered remark from his partner. There seemed to be little to say, and Jimin would rather ponder on thinking of something interesting to talk about, rather than just participate in mundane small talk.

Jimin savoured the food completely and he even sipped at the broth to fully drain his bowl, nothing more than the sticky remains of rice clinging to the sides of the other bowl and not even a sliver of beef left on their shared plate. Taehyung also obliterated his own serving of food, his expression content as he leaned back on his wrists and he yawned loudly.

“So, Tae, what about you, huh?” Jimin asked, as he gathered their used dishes together and he stacked them to the side of the table.

“Me?” Taehyung grumbled around his yawn. “What’d you mean?”

“Has anything happened for you since I was gone? Anything interesting that you wanna talk to me about?” he suggested, moving to stroke Cheonsa because she was curled up beside him on the floor. The dog moved to climb into his lap, clearly taking the strokes as silent invitation to settle down there instead. “Except for the flood, that is. I imagine that you don’t wanna talk about that right now.”

“Actually, yeah, there is somethin’. See this?”

Taehyung moved to shove his hand into his deep jeans pocket so that he could pull something free. Jimin had no clue what exactly he was going to unveil, and so he watched him with a great interest. His friend pulled something free that instantly revealed itself to be an envelope: a white rectangle covered in stamps and writing.

“I got a letter, from my friend in America,” he explained, as he waved the envelope at him.
“You finally got the letter? That’s great,” Jimin remarked with a happy smile. “He must have settled down well if he managed to send you a letter that fast, right?”

“Exactly, exactly,” Taehyung agreed with a vigorous series of nods. The movement made a thick lock of dark hair spill free from his hair scarf, which he made no move to fix back in place. “I thought I’d be waitin’ forever, y’know? ‘Cos it’d take so long for the letter to get all of the way here after everythin’. But then, I woke up this mornin’ and it was just lyin’ on my floor. Good thing Cheonsa didn’t start chewin’ on it, huh?”

“Have you read it yet?” Jimin asked curiously, eyeing the envelope to see that it looked rather… pristine. There didn’t look to be a single tear to signal that he had even opened it. “If I was waiting on something like that, I’d have read it twenty times by now.”

“Nah, I couldn’t, I had to come and get you for the deal,” he quickly explained. “But now that that shit’s sorted, I can finally open it up and see what’s goin’ on for him. I’ve been so worried that somethin’ might’ve gone wrong with the journey to America, but now I don’t need to worry.”

“You should read it aloud,” he suggested, as he carried on stroking Cheonsa, the thought just coming to mind so suddenly that he couldn’t help but declare it.

“Huh?”

Jimin realised that though it was just a letter, the contents of it might not necessarily be something that Taehyung would want to read aloud. Or at least not until he had read it first, just to be sure of the contents. It could be emotional, or filled with private jokes and references that only he would understand, and so he might not want him to know what the boy had written down for him.

Had Yoongi sent him a letter, he most certainly wouldn’t have wanted to read it aloud to him. But he guessed that it wasn’t the same. It was more like Namjoon sending him something, which he guessed he would share with Taehyung, even if he needed to explain a lot of things to him because he wouldn’t understand the references and language.

“Well, I mean, if the letter’s not private,” Jimin clarified, just for the sake of it.

“Nah, I don’t mind at all,” his friend said, as he tore open the envelope and he tugged the letter free.
Taehyung cleared his throat theatrically as he shifted on the floor cushion.

This made Jimin laugh softly as he also shifted, moving to place his back against the wall so that he could get comfortable with Cheonsa as his lap warmer. At least the dog was warm, and the floor cushion was plush, easing the dull ache in his thighs and behind. He watched him unfolding the pages so that a random spread of Polaroids slipped free to land on the table in a mess, and he quickly scanned the first sheet before smiling warmly.

“Ah, he opened the letter with English words,” Taehyung complained, before sticking his tongue out to wet his lips and lowering the pages to get comfortable too. “‘Yuh…oh, yo, Taehyung!’ Is that like another way to say hello, or something?”

Jimin nodded at the question with a smile, finding it highly amusing that his friend had learnt such a slang term already even when he had spent such a short time in America.

“‘How or…are you, main?’ No, man. ‘How are you, man?’ Oh, he’s so good with English, Jiminie.”

“Yeah, he sounds like he’s gonna fit in just fine, Tae. He sounds like every other cool kid back in Cali already,” he said, as he gave the dog’s ears a ticklish scratch.

“‘So, I’m writing this letter today, on the first day of September. What date is it for you? It’s probably October right now, it’s gonna take that long for the letter to get to you’.”

“Well, it didn’t take that long…” Jimin remarked.

“‘Today, I turned eighteen. Isn’t that funny? In America, I’m only eighteen. It’s like I’ve time travelled! There’s so many things I need to tell you about America, but I don’t think I’ve got enough paper. So, I’ll tell you the important stuff first. The other stuff can be in my next letters. I’ll bet that you wanna know how we got here, right? Well, that’s a big story. We had to get on a boat, this huge boat. I’ve not seen boats that big since when we used to live in Busan, and I found out that we weren’t the only people that were getting on the boat. No, there were lots of other families too, and guess what? We had to stay in the hull every single day with the cargo, and we weren’t allowed to leave once’.”

Taehyung paused at this, furrowing his brow as quickly reread the lines. It was as if he had found this shocking, and he had to double check that that was what he had actually read.
“Whoa, Jiminie, is this legit? Have you ever seen boats like that before?” he asked, glancing up from the letter.

“Yeah, I’ve seen them a lot,” Jimin explained. “Where I used to live as a kid, there was a great view of the bay, so, I used to see all of the big freight boats coming and going. I never really knew back then that they had people smuggled away inside of them, but you learn a lot of scary shit when you grow up, Tae.”

Taehyung thought this over for a moment before dropping his gaze back down to the letter, his tongue slipping free to wet his lips again.

Jimin found himself closing his eyes as he listened to the younger man speaking, just because it helped him imagine the boy’s words all the more clearly. He could run his fingers through Cheonsa’s fur slowly and just listen to Taehyung’s husky drawl as he slowly read out his friend’s account of being illegally smuggled into another country. It was fascinating to listen to, even when Jungkook didn’t fancy his letter up too much.

“Mama didn’t do too well on the boat, she kept vomitin’ all of the time. I thought that she was sick but it was just ‘cos of the sea. Eventually, she stopped bein’ sick and that made the last of the journey feel so much better. I’d been so scared that she might’ve needed a doctor to help her, but there hadn’t been a single doctor on-board. There’d been some rich people present. They’d to be rich, to have afforded the journey, but I never found out what their jobs were. They didn’t talk to me once. I think that they thought I was poor trash or somethin’”. Pft, typical fuckin’ rich people, huh?”

“Hmm, you said it, brother,” Jimin agreed, all the while thinking about how rich Yoongi was and how he most certainly wasn’t typical.

“It took us almost two weeks to get to America, and when we were finally free from that boat, Taehyungie, ah! I wanted to drop to my knees and kiss the ground”. Two weeks? Two weeks stuck in the fuckin’ hull? Shit, I couldn’t last that long on a boat. Could you, Jiminie?”

“You’d be surprised how long you could last when you’ve got no other options, Tae,” he remarked in a quiet voice.

“So, after getting off the boat, we were all separated and sent off to meet someone that’d help us out. The man that we were sent to was called Mr. Oh, and he gave us all of these documents. It turned out that we owned a restaurant and had a home too, before we had even arrived in the
country. It was courtesy of Moon Tiger Mob”. Wait…do immigrants really get all of that, Jiminie?”

“Read on, Tae, wait for the catch,” he replied, turning his head so that he could open his eyes a crack to look at him. “There’s always a catch.”

“Mr. Oh told us that we’ve gotta pay a tax so that-” Taehyung turned the page over to continue reading what was on the back, “we can keep the restaurant and house.” - oh, there it is.”

“Told you so.”

“But it’s not so bad. The restaurant has a lot of guys comin’ to it to play cards. They’re illegal here too, if you bet on ‘em, and so we let the men play cards in our basement where it’s safe and they can’t get arrested. Sometimes, people come in to try the food, but that’s a lot rarer. They’re missin’ out on mama’s cookin’ though, so, it’s their loss.”

For some reason, this made Jimin laugh to himself, for he found the boy’s words endearing. He was telling them both about the fact that his parents ran an illegal gambling front, and yet bragging about his beloved mother’s cooking in the exact same sentence.

How cute.

“The home is small too, it’s really small, but it’s better than nothin’”, Taehyung continued. “It’s an apartment room, and there’s just three small rooms inside of it, but we can share it just fine. Sure, I wish that I’d a bedroom, and not just a mattress on the floor, or a TV too. But right now, payin’ our tax and learnin’ to fit in is the most important thing. Maybe, one day in the future, we’ll be able to afford a better home, a proper home. But right now, it’s all that we need. I wish that I could show you, but all that I can do is take photographs”.

Taehyung paused to glance down at the table for a few seconds, eyeing the spread of Polaroids, and then he looked back at the letter.

“I added some photographs for you, so you can see the kinda sights that I get to see too. I hope that you like ‘em, and I’ll try and get some more for you. Mama won’t buy me any film right now. But, guess what? I got a brand new camera too! The same one as you, so, the photographs look so much better”.”
“He got a new camera? I wonder how he bought that,” Jimin pondered aloud, also eyeing the Polaroids. “That’s certainly not included in the immigrant package, and his parents would have to save up for months to make enough in change to afford a new camera, Tae.”

“Uh, maybe he brought the last of his savings with him or somethin’?” Taehyung suggested with a shrug, showing that he was completely clueless. “Uh, where was I up to…oh. There’s so many photographs, and I tried my hardest to annotate each one for you. Maybe, your partner can tell you more about ‘em and-” ha, he’s talkin’ about you, Jiminie.”

“Of course he is, and I can tell you all about the Polaroids,” Jimin agreed with a nod. “I know most of the city off by heart, save for the rich parts, but I don’t think we need to worry about that.”

“‘Also, I made a friend, but I’m not tellin’ you who! Guess! You’ll never believe it. I’ll be sure to get a photograph with him as proof’”. Huh? I wonder who he made friends with?” Taehyung mumbled to himself, turning the sheet of paper over to eye the back. “Wait, he’s scribbled somethin’ on the back here. It’s in a different colour of ink and everythin’; he must’ve added it right before sendin’ the letter.”

“What does it say?”

“Somethin’ about a…a dog? The ink’s run through the paper, I can’t read it too good, but it looks like it says somethin’ about a dog. Shit, my mouth’s dry from all of that readin’,” Taehyung muttered, as he placed the sheets of paper down on the table. “You want a beer, huh?”

“Sure. Hey, can I look at the letter?”

When Jimin moved to grab the pieces of paper, Taehyung was already in the act of spreading out the Polaroids to examine them. He saw three sheets of small letter paper, which Jungkook had filled with large but neat print. A quick glance at the photographs showed him everything from cars to trees, to street signs and buildings, and even one of a dog.

Jimin was in the act of reaching over to collect his glass of milk when he noticed something still sticking out of the envelope: a little corner of white. He placed his glass down and he retrieved the envelope, pulling a folded piece of paper free.

“Whoa, Tae! You missed something. He’s put a picture in here too, a drawing.” Jimin said, as he unfolded the sheet of paper to study it. “It’s of a dog, the one on that photograph.”
“This one?” Taehyung said, moving to grab the Polaroid to turn it over and look at the back. “Oh, he got a dog for his birthday as a gift, from his secret friend. Shit, that’s a good-lookin’ dog. What breed’s that?”

“A Great Dane,” he said, without a hint of hesitation, studying the drawing intently. “They’re big dogs, don’t let the cute puppy face tell you otherwise.”

Jimin studied the sheet of paper to see a variety of hastily drawn sketches of a dog, one that was apparently now the boy’s pet. They were in pencil originally, and had been drawn over it in ink to add sharper details and to define the stronger lines, but the roughness of the sketches was what appealed to his eyes the most. The dog, which was actually more of a puppy, had been sketched in several different positions: lying down asleep on its side; lying with its head on its paws; sitting upright with an ear cocked comically; trotting; and even a close-up of its face.

“These are actually really good,” Jimin remarked, as he held the sheet of paper up for closer study and he stared into the puppy’s eyes. “Wow, he could probably make some money out his skills. I’ll bet that he could draw some sweet comics.”

“That’s what I said!” Taehyung declared, as he shifted on the floor cushion. “I told him he could totally make manhwa or somethin’. He’s got the skills and he’s got a great imagination too.”

“Was he studying art in university before he moved to Cali, huh?”

“University? Nah, he ain’t even finished high school when he moved to America, Jiminie. He never had any plans sorted out for university, with everythin’ goin’ on here.”

“You said that his dad was a politician, right? I imagine that he’d have probably went into studying that, even when he looks like a fucking great artist to me,” Jimin remarked. “I don’t imagine that it’d be easy to study politics in this climate though.”

“Well, y’know how it is,” Taehyung mumbled, as he started bobbing his leg up and down restlessly. “Even art’s somethin’ that always gets suppressed durin’ times of revolution. There’s too many chances of someone makin’ art with hidden messages against The Butcher, so, art’s really been sufferin’ here, Jiminie.”

“Everything’s been suffering here, Tae,” he muttered, as he placed the drawing down onto the table.
“So, about that beer,” Taehyung declared, getting to his feet with a soft grunt to go into his kitchen.

“Hey, Tae?” he said, as he ran his eyes over the Polaroid photographs.

“Uhuh?” he called back, the sound of him rifling around in his fridge echoing throughout the bungalow.

“I was just thinking about something. You could mail this to him, if you wanted to,” Jimin replied, glancing over at the younger man just as he stepped back into the main-area with two brown bottles of beer. “But I just thought that I could offer you this instead. If you mail it, it could take a couple of weeks to reach him, especially after the flooding. If you wanted, I could take the letter with me and mail it for you when I’m in America instead?”

“Huh?” Taehyung hummed, his lips slack with confusion.

“You know, I just need to get a stamp and drop it in a mailbox, and he’d get it in a couple of days.”

“That’d be real helpful, Jiminie,” Taehyung said, as he moved to place the bottle down on the table for him and then he reached behind himself to touch his back with a wince. “Shit…”

“Are you OK?”

“How about we go share the bed?” Taehyung suggested, before quickly adding. “Liyin’ down right now sounds heavenly to me, I’ve been out draggin’ sandbags around the neighbourhood for a week now to help soak up the fuckin’ river water.”

“Sure thing,” Jimin said, as he gathered up the letter and photographs in one hand and he grabbed the beer bottle in the other. “Lying in bed sounds heavenly to me too. Did you volunteer to help?”

“Yeah, and I’d to work with fuckin’ soldiers, so, it was fun, as you can imagine,” his partner muttered, crossing the main-area to enter the bedroom. “A lot of students volunteered to help clean up and hand out supplies to the victims, but the government’ll probably go right back to claimin’ that
we’re dangerous the second this all settled down.”

“You had to work with soldiers? Damn, brother…”

Upon stepping into the bedroom, Jimin sank down on the mattress with a heavy sigh, stretching out to his fullest extent as he dumped the beer bottle on the floor and he closed his eyes for a moment. It felt so good being able to lie down now, after over half of a day standing in queues and sitting in aeroplane seats. He wasn’t tired for once, or even wasted, so he could enjoy the temporary moment of relaxation.

Taehyung dropped to sit down beside him for a moment, rubbing at his stiff back with his knuckles to try and loosen the knot. Then he shifted to lie down too, folding his pillows up to make a nice thick buffer between his head and the wall. Cheonsa trotted into the bedroom after them to get on the end of the mattress, lying right by their feet just to stop them from stretching out too much.

Jimin placed the letter and Polaroids down as he retrieved his beer bottle, taking a deep sip of it and swallowing with a satisfied noise. Sure, the beer wasn’t the greatest, but he was starting to tolerate it.

“Mmm, tell me all about these photos,” Taehyung hummed, as he collected the stack of Polaroids and he held them out to him. “Tell me all about San Francisco.”

“San Francisco, Tae,” Jimin corrected without much thought at all, more than used to it by now. He accepted the stack, placing it down onto his stomach so that he could free up his hands. “OK, let’s see what we’ve got here…”

As he went through the first series of photographs, Jimin had to explain how the buildings that he was showing him were important government buildings and libraries, as were the statues. Taehyung found these interesting to study, no doubt because they were connected to politics, and he told him that he liked the neo-classical architecture a lot. Then came several rather obscure snapshots of the city skyline, presumably taken from an apartment block window or roof, which showed the beautiful sunrises and sunsets in the city.

“Mmm, these make me miss home right now,” Jimin mumbled, as he held the contrasting skies up in front of him. “Look at that, isn’t that beautiful?”

“Makes me think of Han River, especially the sunrise one,” Taehyung said, lifting his hand to lazily point at the blue and golden tinged sky. “The sunset though, that shit’s unbelievable, Jiminie. Does
“The sky really go that pink?”

“Pink, and lilac too,” he agreed with a nod. “Now you know why I love the city so much.”

Jimin shuffled through the next series of Polaroids, showing Taehyung cafés and bar exteriors, The Red Victorian Hotel and all of the eye-catching street signs and fliers that adorned The Haight comedy circuit. His partner eyed them all with a great interest, always making sure to comment on how colourful that the buildings were in comparison to the ones in Seoul.

“Oh, that place’s nice,” Taehyung remarked, just as he held up a series of snapshots of grass and trees. “I’ll bet Cheonsa’d love that park; wouldn’t you, girl?”

Cheonsa made a snuffling sound at this, opening her eyes just a crack to glance at them before closing them again. That was clearly supposed to be a yes.

“Uh, this could be Bayview Park,” Jimin suggested, as he rapidly looked between the photographs. “I spent a lot of time in there as a kid, it looks familiar to me, but grass looks the same in every park.”

“Bayvee…you Pak?”

“Uuh, it’s in The Bayview, that’s a neighbourhood in the city. His address on the letter said it, so, he lives there, and this is probably the park. I’ll bet that he takes his puppy there for walks and to play with it, right?”

“D’you know the place?”

“Yeah, I know it,” he agreed with a nod. “I grew up in that neighbourhood, it’s the poorest one in the whole of San Francisco, and I’m not gonna lie to you. Right now, it’s not the nicest or safest place to live, because of all of the welfare cuts, but it’s not a bad place, Tae. It’s just filled with poor people, is all. The real criminals over in America, they’re the politicians and rich people, not the poor families struggling to make the breadline. OK?”

“I get you,” Taehyung mumbled, lifting his own beer to take a sip. “I ain’t gonna judge, not the poor, not thieves, nothin’ like that. Y’know the kinda shit I did in the past, Jiminie. I can’t judge, it ain’t my place.”
Jimin thought this over for a moment, staring at the snapshots of the grass and trees. Then he placed them aside to retrieve some more with a soft sigh.

The next couple of photographs looked to be that of Jungkook’s home, the tiny apartment room that he had spoken about that he knew far too well from his own past experiences. Jungkook had gotten off rather well, however, for the room was in a much better condition to the usual ones: with carpet on the flooring, decent wallpaper rather than stained and peeling remains, and a small tub in the bathroom. He wondered what Taehyung thought of this dire representation of ‘The American Dream’, yet the young man remained silent rather than speak.

After looking at the remaining photographs, which were nothing more than random snapshots of food, crowds of colourfully dressed people, and trams, his friend shifted to sit up again.

“Hang on, I gotta get my album…”

Taehyung got off the mattress with a series of grunts and curses, dragging his stiff body across the bedroom to a small and thin bookshelf. He grabbed hold of a thick and large black book, pulling it free from the shelf to carry it over to the bed again. He dropped back down onto the mattress with a soft grunt and he placed the heavy album down on his thighs.

Taehyung opened it up, the thick spine almost creaking and the scent of dust and aged paper wafting up from it in strong waves.

Jimin shifted to sit upright too, dropping his head against his upper arm and eyeing the first page with complete fascination. He saw old photographs that were sepia-toned and even in monochrome: of children sitting on stools; of women with beautiful hair and earrings, wearing traditional dress that was no doubt as colourful as a rainbow; and of men with swords, guns, and military clothing.

“Who’s that? Is this your mum?” Jimin asked, gesturing at a photograph of a little girl with curled locks and a rounded face.

It wasn’t a Polaroid, but was in fact an old photograph that had foxing around the corners from age. That showed that it was at least a couple of decades old.

“That’s my momma,” Taehyung explained, as he slipped the rather weathered photograph free from the album and held it up for closer inspection. “When she was a little girl. The others are my
grandmother and her sisters, my grandfather, and also, that soldier is my uncle - Kyungsoo. He was a lot older than she was, and he joined the war effort when he was just seventeen.”

“He’s really handsome, Tae, and your mum and grandmother are beautiful too,” he replied. “She looks like a queen, she’s got that classical beauty thing going on. No wonder you’re so handsome, with a family as beautiful as this. What about your uncle? Did he survive the war?”

“He survived fightin’ against the imperial army, and then he ended up losin’ his leg in the stupid commie war. Ain’t that just the shittiest thing?”

“I’m sorry to hear that, Tae,” he said in a quiet voice, watching him slipping the photograph back into the slot again. “But he was a hero, I guess? It’s not like he had a choice, he didn’t willingly join the war effort, he had to fight to keep his country and family safe.”

“I guess you’re right,” Taehyung agreed, turning to the next set of pages and revealing more old photographs of his family. He quickly turned to find the next empty page, so that he could slip Jungkook’s photographs into the album too. “D’you got any photos of your family, huh? In an album like this? Or in your wallet?”

“I, um, I don’t have any photographs,” Jimin said in a quiet voice. “I ran away from home, so, I don’t have any. Not even a photo album, I didn’t take one with me.”

“You…you ran away from home?” Taehyung asked in a quiet voice, pausing in the act of turning to the next page. “Wait, what?”

“It’s not important, Tae, it doesn’t matter,” he mumbled, as he stared at the album pages; not wanting to hold eye-contact with him.

Yet, Taehyung was staring at him with an expression that showed that he wasn’t going to leave it alone. He looked completely speechless at this revelation, and Jimin just knew that he was going to have to explain it to him. So he shifted on the mattress and he let his breath out in a soft sigh.

“Tae, my dad used to beat me when I was a kid, especially when he figured out that I was…you know, that I liked other boys,” Jimin explained in a quiet voice. “So, I ran away a couple of times as kid, and when I was seventeen, I ran away for good. I haven’t seen my parents since, and I don’t really wanna see them again, or at least not my dad. I made…I made myself a new home instead, living with my partner - Namjoon, and I made something good for myself. You understand that,
“Uh…yeah, I understand, Jiminie,” Taehyung said, quickly turning to his empty pages and grabbing several of the Polaroids. “Shit, I’m so sorry that you had to go through that. I mean, your pa? He did that? What kinda man’d hit his own kid? I don’t understand.”

“Yeah, me neither, Tae.”

“It’s…it’s sick, Jiminie, and that’s the truth. Dads are supposed to take care of their families, of their wives and kids. They’re supposed to keep ‘em safe.”

Jimin started nibbling on his lower lip at this, thinking about the fact that he couldn’t understand or even relate to this sentiment. He had never felt any of these things towards his father: protector, carer, guardian. No, these things that Taehyung was saying to him made no sense, even when he had witnessed such things on television growing up. He had watched perfect made-up television families with their loving, handsome fathers, that didn’t smack their children with rolled-up newspapers and tell them that they were disgusting until they cried.

Just like Yoongi, Jimin felt nothing towards his father but confusion, anger and fear, and he knew that he always would.

“But your partner, Namjoon? He sounds like a real good guy, yeah? He took you in, he helped you out. That’s a real friend, right there. And…y’know that you got a home here too, yeah?” Taehyung said in his own quiet voice, slipping another photograph into the slot. “You got somethin’ good here too.”

“I know,” Jimin said in a whisper, shifting to drop his head against his upper arm again and closing his eyes. “You’re a real friend too, Tae.”

14th September, 1984, 10:56pm: Pacific Heights, San Francisco, United States of America
When the fax machine started rumbling, Yoongi looked up sharply because it had caught him by complete surprise.

The machine lit up and made a series of beeping noises, and then it started the printing process; deep droning sounds coming from it as the paper slowly started getting sucked inside. It would take several minutes until it was complete, but the machine made so much noise that he couldn’t possibly concentrate on what he was doing whilst it did so.

So Yoongi placed his notebook and pen aside to get to his feet and enter his kitchen. He filled up his kettle with water and then he placed it onto the stove, turning it on to boil it whilst he waited. At the end of the counter, sitting in his Tantalus, he could see a glass decanter of bourbon. But he elected to ignore it, as he moved to sit back down on his leather settee with a groan and he cupped his face with his hands.

Yoongi yawned loudly and he rubbed at his cheeks and brow slowly, his eyes closed as he gently kneaded his fingertips into his skin. He wasn’t nursing away a headache, not exactly, but he was soothing at a rather annoying build-up of tension that had appeared over the last hour or so.

Yoongi had been waiting on updates from Seoul for quite some time now, on account of the floods that had struck the capital earlier in the month. He had been hoping to receive a fax much quicker than this, but considering the fact that there was still a mass clean-up and aid effort going on, he understood the reason for the delay. He couldn’t be mad at his men for being slow in responding, not after the capital had had entire neighbourhoods evacuated and great areas of it had lost electricity and running water. No, all that he could do was hope that the devastation to the country hadn’t also devastated his profit margins too.

After several minutes of loud rumbling, the fax machine finished printing, and so he moved to grab the sheet of paper. It was still warm against his fingers, and he had to be careful to not smudge the ink as he held it up in front of his face and he eyed it.

Yoongi could see that he was eyeing a spreadsheet of some kind, one that had a variety of columns and rows filled with numbers and dates. The first thing that he noted was that there were black, green and red characters on the sheet, and he didn’t even need to read it to know what the colours meant.

Green meant profit, red meant losses, and a quick scan showed him far more red than green.

“Shit…” he muttered under his breath, as he scanned the sheet more carefully; wanting to see what the profits were at least. “This’ great, this’ just fucking great.”
Yoongi was looking at another loss in profit across the sea, where he was unable to truly get involved to try and fix the problem. He knew that he wasn’t the only man suffering losses, that his father and Hajoon would also be looking at massive dips in their profits too, but that didn’t matter right now. *His* profits mattered, and he didn’t like how this looked at all. No, he was going to have to find a way to minimise this as much as possible.

Yoongi retrieved a piece of paper from the fax machine, crossing his sitting-area to get to his typewriter. He had to send a reply as fast as he could in the hopes that his man would be able to give him better details, for the current estimate was too obscure. Tomorrow, he would be sure to bring the spreadsheet with him and pore over it more intensely over his breakfast at Mickey’s Joint, jotting down every single detail that he could in his notebook. But tonight, his brain was far too dead to possibly understand what he was looking at in great detail.

Yoongi spent a moment eyeing the blank sheet of paper, collecting his thoughts together before he started typing. He studied the spreadsheet again, noting the dates and the fact that the profits weren’t in recovery despite the fact that the flooding had finished. That meant that the presence of the army in the capital was clearly hindering business, and so needed to find a way to get his men over there to start negotiating around them.

If Jimin could smuggle a key of cocaine into that country without getting caught, then they should be able to shift it around the goddamn country. They had the easier end of the deal by far.

After some thought, Yoongi shifted to start typing on the machine. He made sure to use short and succinct sentences to save room and to be direct, because there was no need for waffling his words now. He needed to know of any casualties, of possible arrests, of lost stock as a result of destroyed buildings; he wanted to know what regions were suffering the most so that he could move his men around the districts that were safe until the issue was resolved; and lastly, he needed to know if it was safe to keep moving drugs through the country for the rest of the month, or if he should stall it and move his stock into other countries instead.

Yoongi had many questions, and with any luck, his correspondent over in Seoul would have all of the answers.

“There,” he muttered under his breath, as he pulled the sheet free and he gave it a quick read to ensure that it was flawless.

Satisfied that it was, Yoongi went over to his fax machine and he placed the paper onto the scanner. After hitting several buttons, the machine scanned his message, and with several more presses, he was sending it across the Pacific Ocean all of the way to Seoul. In just a couple of minutes, the
message would have been relayed to his man, as easy as could be.

Technology was truly a gift.

Yoongi finished sending the fax and then he sat down on his settee and he turned his full attention back to his notebook. He found himself nibbling at his pen as he eyed the lines of writing, studying his calculations and notes intently. He hadn’t added anything else for quite some time yet, but he just wanted to make sure that it was all accurate. He was starting to feel tired, it was a lot of maths, and he wanted to ensure that he hadn’t made a massive mistake that Dohee would notice the second that she eyed his fax.

“Uh…” he hummed, as he slipped the pen free and he wet his lips as he got closer and closer to the bottom of the page. “Pyo…yeah, Pyo’ll do it for…ah-”

Yoongi quickly crossed out a figure before scrawling another one on the top, correcting his minor mistake because he had since decided that the figure was too high.

“Pyo’ll do it for $500 a month, not $650, and I’ll kick his fucking ass if he refuses,” he muttered to himself, twirling the pen between his fingers as he resumed reading his notes. “That’s $6,000 a year, but…carry over the interest on the…uh, the account, it ain’t nothing. $6,000 dollars from a savings account? Pft, looks like I can buy more wine with my unmarked bills, no sweat.”

Yoongi snorted at this as he turned the page, scanning the back to see that the rest of his calculations and notes looked to be accurate to him. Still, it was better to keep an eye out for any other potential overpriced fees that he had jotted down without much thought at all. Upon reaching the final line of scrawled notes, he realised that it all checked out.

There, he had sorted out his planned cash injection for the Jeon family restaurant at last.

Yoongi knew that though he wasn’t exactly investing in the restaurant for his own gains, he still had to be very careful with the money that he did inject into the business. It had to be completely untraceable, and therefore simply writing a cheque wasn’t the way to go. It also needed to be filtered down over the course of several months, just to make sure that the sudden influx of cash into the small restaurant account wasn’t at all suspicious to any potential watchful eyes.

With Dohee’s assistance as his accountant, and the legal work of several of his own men, he was going to trickle down a $10,000 injection without raising an iota of suspicion. It would go towards
covering taxes, both the legal and illegal kind, and it would help keep the Jeon clan afloat for almost a year until they could find their own feet in the world of business and take in enough money to not need his silent assistance.

Yoongi had already changed the men that retrieved their mob taxes to two of his own trusted enforcers, just to make sure that no goons would end up breaking poor Jungil’s nose because of a bad month’s worth of earnings. Now, he just needed to make the call and fax Dohee his request, and the injection process would begin in nice little increments of a couple of hundred dollars a month. All that he needed to do was hire one of his men to oversee the business account for the family and ensure that it all ran smoothly, and he already had an idea who to pick.

Pyo was a damn good launderer, and he would easily trickle the cash down into the Jeon family account under falsified business for his own fee. If Yoongi slipped $500 out of his saving account every single month to go straight into his man’s pocket, then he would have to spend that much in unmarked and untaxed cash just to ensure that he didn’t have missing bills floating around that could attract attention.

A poor and illegal immigrant family weren’t going to attract the eye of the IRS as easily as the son of a ‘real estate’ tycoon that was netting several million dollars a year from a variety of investments and land over in Silicon Valley, and had sizeable taxes to pay as a result. That was why he needed to ensure that all of the money that came from his accounts was perfectly clean, and balanced out by the illegal bills that he was secretly stacking to the side.

$500 a month? Well, that was nothing at all really. Not when his legal real estate and business ventures were involved, and if he added his illegal gains from everything else, it was spare change to him. To the Jeon family, it was a great amount of cash, just like it was to Jimin too.

Maybe, he would invest the cash into his boyfriend instead of wasting it on bottles of wine and whiskey? He could set up an account for him, a secret one, and slip cash into it before presenting him with his own credit card; just to see the look on his face? Or, he could give it to him in hand and offer to take him straight to Presidio Heights to buy himself a nice designer suit?

The options were endless, and Yoongi found himself smiling around the pen lid as he stared at his notebook.

A sudden whistling sound cut through the air, coming from the kitchen, and it jolted him out of his musings.

Yoongi placed his notebook down onto the table, for he would be sure to fax Dohee first thing
tomorrow morning. He got upright with a loud yawn, dragging his feet over to the kitchen counter so that he could turn off the stove with a hard twist of the wrist. Then he retrieved a dish towel and he wrapped it around the kettle handle to lift it up off the stove and pour the water into the mug. The strainer inside reacted instantly, the water slowly changing colour as he placed the kettle down on the stove again.

Yoongi had taken to drinking the tea upon Mijoo’s guidance, because she had taken note of the unmissable bags under his eyes and had decided to comment on his health. Oh, the woman had told him that he was too thin, that he worked too much, and that he didn’t eat enough either, and he had sat at the restaurant table and he had dumbly stared up at her for the entire lecture. Then she had went into the backroom and she had re-emerged with a little wooden box that had contained loose chamomile tea, which she had demanded that he take with him.

Apparently, it could help him sleep and fight off any anxiety that he might have in the process, for Mijoo had bragged about how great it was at aiding the mind. It seemed like the woman was very sharp, for she had made sure to mention this fact more than she had mentioned that it was a sleeping aid.

Yoongi hadn’t believed her at first, but after trading a finger of whiskey for a cup of the herbal tea one evening and sleeping for the entire night peacefully, he had since decided to see what drinking it regularly might just do.

When he removed the strainer several minutes later, the tea was a lovely golden shade in colour, and a fruity sweet scent was wafting up from the mug. Yoongi dumped the soggy tea down the sink and he cleaned the strainer before placing it away with the wooden box, making sure that it was sealed tight to keep it fresh. Then he grabbed the mug and he went up into his bedroom, balling one fist up to rub at his eyes roughly.

Yoongi moved to sit down on his bed with a soft sigh, nursing his mug of tea as he eyed his telephone. He could see that there was no light to signal that he had new messages from any of his men, or from Hoseok or Seokjin. There was none from Jimin too, of course, but that was because he was all of the way across the globe right now; in Seoul of all places.

Hopefully, Jimin was going to head to Hong Kong as fast as he could to get away from the flooded capital, and lay low there before returning back to San Francisco.

There were four answering machine messages currently recorded on the device, and already, Yoongi had listened to them several times over. All four of them were from Jimin, and he practically knew them off by heart by now.
For the last couple of evenings, Yoongi had been listening and talking to the messages, as if they were having a conversation with one another. The fact that Jimin had purposefully left little pauses here and there in his messages had just helped him do so. Until he arrived back in the country and he presented him with the chance to speak to him again face-to-face, it was the only choice that he had.

Yoongi shifted to hit the button on the device before sitting back against his pillows. He got comfortable and he listened to the momentary static crackle that came from the speakers, and then his boyfriend’s voice sounded out.

“OK, so, I’m gonna give this a shot,” Jimin said, before laughing under his breath. “I’ve never used an answering machine before, I actually went to start talking but then the voice said to wait for the beep. Talk about dumb, huh?”

“Pft, no, it’s cute,” Yoongi mumbled, as he nursed his cup of chamomile tea; his lips curling up at the corners happily. “It’s real cute, Jimin.”

“It feels so weird, it’s like I’m talking to a diary, and I’ve never had a diary before. But it’s kinda fun, I guess? I mean, if I start talking nonsense, please don’t tell me to shut up just yet. I’ve gotta get the hang on this, baby boy. OK? So, be patient with me.”

“Mmm, I’ll be as patient as you are with me, Jimin,” Yoongi said, his eyes staring into the steaming surface of his herbal tea. “Take your time, baby, you got this.”

“Uh…hmm, so, I just went completely blank for a moment. Sorry. But, I guess that the best way to try this out is to pretend that we’re having an actual conversation. That means mundane questions at first, but hopefully that’ll progress into interesting shit soon. OK, so, I’ll say something and then pause, mmm, and then you reply. Yeah? That way, we’re having a conversation! Neat, right?!”

“Uhuh, real neat,” he agreed, like he had done for the last several listens.

“I knew that you’d like it,” Jimin said in a pleased tone, almost as if he had heard his words. “Sure, I can’t hear you, but I’ll try my hardest to make it feel like I can.”

“You always try so hard, ‘cos you’re a good boy,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice.

“How’s the weather today? Hot, right? It’ll be hot for me right now, I know that much. Did you
The first time that Yoongi had listened to this recording, he had went blank and he had found himself unable to answer in the pause. The second time, he had found his voice, only for the pause to have been too short; forcing him to stop the tape and rewind because he had mumbled over his boyfriend’s next question. But now, Yoongi had perfected both the ability to talk and the length of the pause, meaning that he was able to reply without a hint of hesitation.

“I slept good, better than yesterday. The weather’s as hot as always, but there was a nice breeze out today. My day was business, business, and more fucking business, but it was a good day. I, uh, I ordered waffles at Mickey’s Joint today and thought ‘bout you.”

“Hmm, you’ve been working hard again,” Jimin hummed in automatic response, having already known that he would have mentioned business back when he had recorded the message. “You made sure to take a break though, right? To rest that pretty little head of yours?”

“I took a hot bath,” Yoongi replied around his thumb, nibbling at it unconsciously for a moment before pulling it free again. “I’m also drinking chamomile tea, so, that’s good, right?”

The pause lasted a moment longer, and in that time, Yoongi thought about what he had just said to him - about ordering the waffles in the diner this morning. Of course, Jimin hadn’t really heard about this fact, but it felt like he had because of their little ‘conversation’.

Yoongi had ordered them instead of his usual side of fruit salad, and he had eaten the serving only to have felt rather…uncomfortable for most of the day afterwards. The fluffy batter and whipped cream had sat in his stomach like a rock, even when he had enjoyed eating them for breakfast. He had wondered all day long on whether Jimin would have had something to say on this matter, if he would have understood why he had felt so nauseous, but he thought that it was pretty obvious why.

Yoongi had felt nauseous after eating the waffles for the exact same reason why he felt disgusting for waking up after having wet dreams: because it made him anxious.

“Good, you gotta promise me you’ll do the same tomorrow,” Jimin said to break his silence, to which he hummed in agreement. “Today, I went skating around the city for fun, just to enjoy the good weather. Every single time that I saw a red car, I kept twisting to try and track it, just in case it was your car. Sadly, they were all just hunks of metal and not your beautiful ride, but we can’t all be millionaires; can we, baby boy?”
Yoongi closed his eyes for a moment as he listened to him talking, trying his very hardest to picture it all in his mind. He could see Jimin clear as day, on a his skateboard, dressed in those skin-tight blue jeans of his and that cute white tee-shirt that managed to make him look so effortlessly fresh and youthful. The wind, which would be tangy with brine, would blow his tousled hair back off his face, and he might just be wearing a pair of sunglasses to block out the blinding rays.

Jimin looked so beautiful in his imagination, just like he would have looked in reality.

“I like skating around like that, it’s my version of cruising the streets. It’s good during day or evening, but I never do it in the afternoon. It’s gotta be just before sunrise, or just after sunset, because that’s when the city really seems to...come alive; when it’s at its most beautiful. What about you, when do you like to cruising in your ride, baby boy?”

“The evening,” Yoongi replied, once more speaking quickly. “Right before I finish with business, and I can try and clear my head. Driving really cleanses the mind ‘cos you just...uh, you let your body take over and your mind kinda shuts down. So, I like the evening, just at sunset too; so I can really dig those lilac skies.”

For the next minute or so, Jimin didn’t really speak on the message, rather he just struggled with something to say. He would let out soft noises every now and again, as if he was about to speak, but he never really found the right words to say.

Yoongi sipped at his tea and he waited for him to finish his first message, like he had done for the previous listens.

“Yoongi, um, I’m gonna hang up now, OK? But I’ll leave another message later, or maybe tomorrow? I’ll be sure to think of some really interesting things to say to you then, alright? Make sure to get plenty of sleep and eat a nice big breakfast, yeah?”

“Mmm,” Yoongi hummed after swallowing his mouthful of tea. “I’ll do that, Jimin.”

“So...bye bye, baby boy,” Jimin said in a singsongy voice, the sound of a smile present in his voice.

The first message ended with a beep, a pause of several seconds between it and the next message.

Yoongi took another sip of scorching hot tea, and then the second message started rolling as smooth
“Hmm, good morning, sunshine,” Jimin sighed heavily, before making a series of noises that seemed to hint that he was stretching out on the bed. “I’m tired, I think I’m gonna stay in bed all day long. I deserve it, right? For being such a good boy?”

“Sure, you deserve the rest,” he agreed. “Good morning, Jimin.”

“I think that…I’m gonna stay in bed all day long and maybe think of you, Yoongi,” Jimin said in that same heavy voice, a hint of huskiness in it that made Yoongi stick his tongue out to wet his lips. “I really need to get outta bed, shower, and eat breakfast, but I’m too comfortable right now. Do you ever get that, huh, baby boy? Do you ever wake up and just want to stay in bed instead of going out to do business?”

“It’s been a long time since I felt that way,” Yoongi replied, as he shifted on his bed to sit back against his stack of pillows. “Now, I can’t think like that. I gotta get up and work, no matter what. I’ve got too much responsibility, and I don’t trust anyone to do it all in my absence.”

“You work so hard, I’ll bet that you never have a real day off, right? Even when you aren’t working, you’re working; aren’t you?”

Yoongi hummed at this, and after a moment, Jimin sighed heavily.

“Why’s this so hard? Why can’t I think of something interesting to say? It’s just a phone call, but it’s so hard. I just wanna be able to talk to you face-to-face, I guess? Before I pick up the phone, I think to myself that I’ll say something really interesting and then I just mumble like an idiot. Um…”

It must have been several minutes of silence before his boyfriend found the right words to say, but he had at least taken the time to do so rather than just hang up and end the second message so quickly.

“Namo hasn’t seen or heard about any speedball in his neighbourhood again since that night, so, that’s good. I’ve not went out to any bars or anything in such a long time now that I’m a little cut off from the scene, but I’ll assume that the drug’s still floating around to cause mayhem. No, I’ve not been working either, but I go to Korea in…um, two days? Two and a half days, around that, and really…I can’t wait to go again. I’ll leave more messages before I do, I promise.”
“Jimin? Are you alright?” Yoongi asked, just for the sake of it.

Even when he had already asked this question, and had gotten the exact same reply, he still asked it again. Just because it felt right to do so, because it felt like a conversation to him.

“It’s one of those days again, the sad days. I…you’ve never seen me like that before, but I’m not all smiles and winks every single day, baby boy. I dunno, I dunno why I just wake up and feel sad, but I guess that it’s normal. We can’t be happy always, that’s why Prozac exists, right? Ha. It’s usually when Namo’s not here when I wake up of a morning that I get the blues, and I just mope around the house until he comes back. I don’t like being alone, I guess? I mean, not alone…more like being lonely.”

“I hate being lonely,” Yoongi admitted in a whisper. “I like being alone, just not…lonely. Being alone is.”

“It’s like when you’re alone,” Jimin spoke over him, “you choose to be alone and you have that moment of peace just for yourself. It’s good, we all need that moment of peace, sometimes. But when you’re lonely, you’re just…”

“You’re surrounded by people but they’re ghosts,” Yoongi finished for him, because Jimin never finished this train of thought on the message. “They’re faceless, nameless, they’re nobodies. So, you might as well be alone.”

“So, that’s why I wanna stay in bed all day,” his boyfriend said with a heavy sigh. “I’m sad and lonely. I’m sorry, this is a shitty message, Yoongi, I shouldn’t, um, I.”

The message cut off suddenly at this, signalling that Jimin had put the phone down on him.

Yoongi understood why he had done it, because he hadn’t been feeling good. But he wished so much that they had actually had that conversation on the phone with each other, so that he would have been able to talk to him and change his mood.

After a moment, the third message sounded, and the difference in Jimin’s mood was evident from the very first words that he said.

“Hey, baby boy, it’s Jimin again!” Jimin declared in a very upbeat tone, the sound of mattress
springs groaning and signalling that he might just have dived onto the bed. “Did you miss me?”

“I miss you so much right now, Jimin,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice, as he stared down into his herbal tea.

“Do you remember this one? ‘Miss me, miss me, now you wanna kiss me’? Hmm, you so wanna kiss me,” his boyfriend almost purred, and even when he had heard this line several times already, Yoongi laughed to himself. “I know that I’ll be missing you right about now, so, I’ll most definitely wanna kiss that cute little face of yours. I wonder where I am right now, whilst you’re listening to this. Seoul? Kowloon? Maybe still on a plane up high in the sky, floating like a cloud? Wherever I am, I’ll be missing you and-”

Jimin burst out laughing at this, an embarrassed little titter that always made Yoongi’s heart skip a beat. The contrast between his previous message and this one was unbelievable, and he was just so relieved to know that his boyfriend’s bad mood had passed in such short a time.

If only his own bad feelings could dissipate that quickly.

“That was so lame, right? Oh, why’d I mention kisses? Now I wanna kiss you, Yoongi. I wanna kiss you so much, it’s kinda crazy. You know, I’ve been thinking about that poem a lot, from the other day? That romantic one you told me, and-”

The first time that Yoongi had listened to this message, he had been rather surprised because he had had his eyes closed at the time. When the loud banging sound had interrupted Jimin, who he had been listening to so very intently, he had jumped in surprise and had thought that it had come from somewhere in his house. But Jimin had quickly dismissed his confusion just mere seconds later when he had started talking again.

“I’m on the phone! I’m- Namo, I’m on the phone right now! God!” Jimin yelled, the sheer exasperation in his tone still making him smile to himself. “Who’d you think?! Ah, I told you! It’s for when I’m working! Um, hang on a second, Yoongi. I’ll be right back.”

Yoongi had pondered over this moment of silence every single time that he had listened to the message, and he had since arrived at the conclusion that Namjoon had probably gotten several hard punches to the arm. That, or he had found himself in a headlock whilst Jimin had roughly ground his knuckles against his hair until he had begged for him to stop. After all, he had interrupted Jimin’s phone call, and he had proven himself to have snappy bite whenever someone irritated him: from being disrespectful and argumentative, to possibly punching out in annoyance.
“So, anyway, baby boy, what was I saying?” Jimin mumbled, as he presumably climbed back onto
the bed and got comfortable, the bed springs creaking again. “Oh, right! That poem! Well, I’ve
been…trying to write a poem for the last few days. It’s a secret, I didn’t tell Namo about it because I
know that he’ll find it and tell me all of the stupid mistakes that I’ve made. But, I’m still writing it. I
thought about making it a rhyming poem, because that shit seems easier? But then I realised how
hard and stupid everything sounds when you start rhyming. You know, like everything suddenly
turns into “roses are red, violets are blue, I think you’re cute and I wanna fuck you”.”

“That’s a great poem, Jimin,” Yoongi remarked, finding the rather crass joke amusing even when it
was so very immature. “I think I prefer switching it up a lil, like, “roses are red, violets are blue, take
me to bed, lemme make love to you”, yeah?”

“So! I decided to make it not rhyme! That way, it’s so much easier. I’ll give you a line, OK, just one
line,” Jimin said, pausing for a moment to softly clear his throat. “I’m suddenly so nervous, ha, and
it’s just a line, I…um.”

“It’s ‘k, take your time,” Yoongi said with a soft smile, finding the fact that he was nervous because
of him both endearing and surprising.

“OK, so… ‘the taste of wine has never been so sweet, as the taste of your lips. Against mine, night
after night’,” Jimin said in a whisper-soft voice, presumably playing with his earring as he did so.
“It’s funny, it kinda rhymes but not at the end of the line like it’s supposed to. Can poems work like
that?”

“They can work like that, yeah.”

“Did you like it? Was it nice? I mean, there’s a couple of lines that I’ve been playing with, but I like
that one the most, so, I told you it. Did you really like it? Be honest, baby boy.”

“Jimin, I can’t wait to hear the rest, and that’s the truth,” Yoongi replied, taking advantage of the next
pause to continue speaking. “I’ve listened to this recording a dozen times already, I know that line off
by heart. I wanna learn the rest like that too. I’ll, uh, I’ll have to write a poem for you too. I’ll end up
throwing so many pages of paper away trying, but I’ll still try it; just for you.”

“OK, I’m gonna go now, because I think that Namo’s coming upstairs to nag me to death. Get
plenty of sleep and don’t go mad because of business; OK? Until I get to see you again and kiss you,
just pretend that these ones are real.”
When Jimin made several kissing sounds on the recording, Yoongi let go of his mug with one hand to press his warm fingers against his lips. He didn’t really know why listening to him pretending to give him kisses made his chest ache a little, it just did; made it ache in both a good and bad way.

“Goodnight, Jimin,” he said, as he dropped his hand back to his lap.

Yoongi sniffed hard and he took another sip of his tea, the mug almost empty by now. There was a static crackle followed by a beep, and after several seconds of silence, there was another beep to signal the final message.

“Baby boy, I ship off tomorrow morning again. Urgh, wait…actually, I ship off today, because I just looked at the clock. Hmm, it’s currently 3:30am, give or take. Guess I’ll just drink coffee and nap on the plane, because I’m not gonna sleep tonight.”

Ah, this was his favourite message by far, and Yoongi always liked waiting for it to come on the most. Even when he already knew what Jimin was going to say in advance, it was still so nice listening to it. The reason why he loved it the most was because this was the message that Jimin had finally gotten it right; was the message in which he bumbled less and he finally found his confidence again.

As a result, his words flowed much more smoothly, and it was this smoothness that had been lulling Yoongi to sleep for the last few nights now; along with his nightly dosage of chamomile tea.

“Anyway, I was thinking about that dream that you had, and I realised that I never told you about my dream that night. See, I found an interesting book in the house today, about dreams; I shit you not. It seems that Namo has an interest in all of this stuff too. I didn’t really read it, just flicked through it, because it was filled with some massive words that I couldn’t even hope to understand.”

“You ain’t stupid, Jimin, you’d understand ‘em if you concentrated enough,” Yoongi said, listening to Jimin wriggling on the recording because he had presumably shifted to roll onto his stomach, or maybe his back.

“It’s funny, the night that we talked about your dream, I ended up having a real vivid dream too. I told you that I dream about the bay often, and I do, it’s just usually…I’m all alone in my dreams. This time, this time I wasn’t alone though, because you were with me.”
“Oh yeah?” Yoongi asked, hovering his cup in front of his lips. “What’d you mean?”

“I’d a dream that we were at the beach together. Baker Beach. Have you been there before? I’ll assume that you have, because it’s up in Presidio and that’s the nice, rich part of the city.”

Yoongi snorted at this before taking another sip of his herbal tea, finally draining the cup of the remains.

“We were at the beach, it was so hot and sunny, and we were just having fun; you know? And by that, I mean family friendly fun. Like diving into the ocean and sunbathing on the sand, like drinking cold beers and just…relaxing. Because you really need to relax every now and again. This is the funny part though, baby boy. In my dream, you were the exact same. I mean, you mumbled and grumbled, you got all shy and blushed bright red when I said certain things that embarrassed you. I thought that in dreams, people change, you know? Like, I thought that in our dreams, we’d imagine the people in them to act the way that we want. But you were the exact same, and do you know what I think?”

“What’d you think, Jimin?”

“I think it’s because…that’s exactly how I want you to be,” Jimin said, before making a series of childish noises down the line at the saccharine comment. “Ah! That sounded so…ah! My cheeks are hurting from grinning so much! Why am I like this, baby boy? Why am I so gay?”

“It’s, mmm, it’s exactly how I want you to be,” Yoongi retorted with his own grin. “Tell me more ‘bout the dream, yeah? I wanna know more.”

“There’s this one thing that I find really funny, right? It’s just a funny little thing, but it was something that I imagine you really would do. Even when it was so hot, you refused to strip all of your clothes off, because you were so shy. You wore a tee-shirt to cover your trunks, it was so cute. Ah, the way that the tee-shirt lifted to show your little black trunks, it made my heart skip a beat, baby boy, and it was only in my dream.”

The fact that Jimin had imagined him wearing a tee-shirt for modesty, was what made him feel so warm inside. It was so quintessentially him that it was unbelievable. Yoongi could hardly believe that Jimin seemed to understand him well enough already to dream of him in such an accurate way; like how he would still wear clothes on the beach because he wouldn’t want to reveal too much skin in public.
“Black trunks? What colour were you wearing, huh? I’ll bet that you’d look great in every colour: red, black, white, blue, ‘specially white,” Yoongi said, taking advantage of Jimin’s momentary silence to talk to him. “White…it’d clash against your skin so perfectly, Jimin. Shit, I’m probably gonna dream ‘bout that tonight.”

“Hmm, those soft little thighs of yours in those trunks, baby boy, I gotta see that sight one day. We’ve gotta go to the beach, promise me that we’ll go to the beach? I need to squeeze them and feel little gritty pieces of sand against my palms.”

“We’ll go to the beach,” Yoongi promised his answering machine with a nod. “We’ll go, one day with friends and-and one evening together, just the two of us. We’ll get to experience all the different kinds of sensations: like, uh, like sharing food and getting snapshots and shit; and then just watching the waves together, maybe…maybe, stealing a couple of kisses here and there?”

For a moment, the answering machine was silent, and Yoongi knew that he had to wait a little longer for Jimin to carry on speaking. After a further ten seconds, he broke his silence.

“What’d you dream about last night, huh? I’ll listen, you can tell me,” Jimin said, a series of static noises on the line telling him that his boyfriend had shifted to get comfortable.

“It’s, uh, it’s funny you asked that…”

So far, over the last couple of nights spent talking to his answering machine, Yoongi had shared three such dreams aloud, on account of the fact that he had slept one night without having a single dream. He had shared a rather eclectic mixture of dreams with the device, dreams that he might just tell Jimin when they next saw each other.

There had been the mundane dreams: in which he had been sitting on a park bench watching Tigger running around the grass whilst Jungkook had tossed sticks for her; and another that had consisted of him sitting in the backseat of a car, waiting on a phone call that had seemed important but he had not received by the time that he had woken up.

But there had been the dream in which he and Jimin had shared another evening meal at a restaurant together. His boyfriend had asked him to order for him again, and he had found the appetisers, entrée, and Chardonnay as delicious as their first shared meal. But when it had come to ordering dessert, his dream had gotten rather…heated. Yoongi had wanted to buy him something, a treat of some kind that he knew that he would have savoured, but Jimin had retorted that he had had a much better idea for his dessert.
Jimin had shifted to get under their table, crawling over to him on his hands and knees until he had been able to reach up and run his zipper, and then he had went down on him in the middle of the high-class restaurant.

That dream had ended in Yoongi waking up with a jerk, horribly aware of his throbbing erection as he had rolled onto his stomach to bury his face in his pillows. The pillows that had smelled just like Jimin's cologne, of course. But the position had just added pressure to his groin and had made him struggle to fall back asleep again because it had been impossible to ignore. Yoongi had clenched tight hold of his pillow, had tugged on his hair, and yet he had been unable to suppress the urge to grind himself down onto the soft mattress to just alleviate that pressure.

Even when he had really just been talking to an answering machine, Yoongi hadn’t told the device that he had frantically masturbated to the fleeting images that had been in his dream. It was also something that he was obviously not going to tell his boyfriend when he returned back to San Francisco, because he was still rather ashamed of it.

“I, uh, I dreamt that we were cruising together, in my car. The windows were down, the radio was playing. I dunno a lot of music these days, but I hear songs playing on the radio, sometimes. There was a song playing, but I can’t figure out who sings it right now,” Yoongi mumbled, as he tapped his fingers against his empty cup. “Anyway, you were singing along to it, lounged back in your seat with your arm outta the window, playing with the breeze. You had sunglasses on, your tee-shirt was knotted ‘round your hips, and you just looked so beautiful, Jimin. We were cruising and-”

“Hmm,” Jimin hummed down the line, just to make it feel like he was listening to him even when he most certainly wasn’t.

“And I realised that we were going nowhere at all, but that didn’t matter to us. I’d no fucking clue where I was driving, and I don’t think we’d a destination in mind at all. We were just…cruising, just ‘cos we wanted to. I, uh, I like driving ‘round like that, without any meaning at all. It just helps me relax when I get to feel the cool breeze coming in through the window and hitting my skin, y’know? So, in my dream, we were just driving ‘round the city, past the beach and everything.”

“When I’m busy working, you’d have probably listened to this a couple of times already, right? I hope so, I mean, just so you’ll get to fall asleep whilst I’m gone. I think that this message is probably the best one yet, because it feels…natural to me. Baby boy, I want you to tell me all about your dreams right now, and then when I get back home. I wanna hear them all, every single one, even if they’re kinda silly.”

“I’ll tell you all ‘bout ‘em,” he promised. “You gotta share your dreams too.”
“A part of me wishes that I… I knew where you lived right now, Yoongi. Just so I could race to your mansion and give you a kiss before I go, or… or just spend awhile in your arms before meeting Namo back at the block to get prepared for the flight. Seriously, if I knew, I’d jump on my board right now and come to you, that’s how I’m feeling right now. Is that stupid? Do you think it sounds stupid?”

“It’s the most romantic thing a guy’s ever said to me.”

“Hmm, just skating off into the night like that, that’s actually a funny thing to imagine,” Jimin said before snorting hard.

The telephone fell silent for a moment at this, and Yoongi placed his empty mug down on the side table so that he could roll onto his side and look at the device. He knew exactly what was coming next, and he found his fingers edging across his lips as he waited for his boyfriend to speak again.

“I dreamt about you, Yoongi,” Jimin finally said in a whisper-soft voice, presumably whilst clutching hold of the receiver with both hands. “I never really thought about it that much when I woke up that morning, but now… now I can’t stop thinking about it. Have you dreamt about me again? Do I… do I haunt you like you haunt me too? No, haunt isn’t the right word, it makes it sound bad, but I dunno another word for it. It’s like, um, an infatuation, I guess?”

“I do, I dream ‘bout you, and think ‘bout you too,” Yoongi admitted, as his fingertips started prodding their way into his mouth so that he felt them knocking against his front teeth. “It’s more than an infatuation, Jimin, it’s… deeper than that.”

“I’m gonna go away for a little while, but I’ll be back as fast as I can. Please, baby boy, please hang on. Please listen to these silly messages and think about how you deserve good things, that you deserve care and attention, even when I’m not there to give it to you and.”

Yoongi closed his eyes as he started lightly biting at his fingers, that annoying ache swelling in his chest again.

“I’ll be in your dreams to chase away the bad thoughts, right? I’ll fight those bad thoughts, I’ll keep you safe. It’s just for a little while, and the night that I get back, I’ll call you right away; the second that I get on solid ground. I’ll use a payphone, I really will. I, um, I know that I should just say goodbye and hang up now, but I can’t seem to do it. I- Yoongi, I’m gonna go, OK? There’s something that I… I really wanna say to you, but I can’t. Not yet, not until I see you again.
“Goodnight, baby boy, dream of me again.”

“Bye, Jimin,” he said, as he listened to the machine beeping again. “Safe travels, darling.”

Just like that, the bedroom fell silent again, and Yoongi slowly pulled his fingers out of his mouth.

That was it, all of the answering machine messages had played through and he had no new ones to listen to. The temptation to reach over and hit the button, to rewind the tape and listen to them all over again was so very overwhelming, but he knew that he shouldn’t, he should sleep.

Yoongi closed his eyes and he tried his very hardest to drift off into his thoughts, until his body grew heavy and the blackness behind his eyelids was impossible to resist. Yet, sleep wouldn’t come to him, no matter how hard that he wished that it would. Minutes passed by and his body remained light, and his eyelids didn’t seem to want to stay shut.

“Goddammit,” Yoongi muttered, as he slowly rolled onto his back and he stared up at his ceiling panel; eyeing the deep blue night sky above him.

Soon enough, it would be completely black, and if he stayed lying on his back like this, he would get to watch the slow but steady transition into darkness. But he didn’t want to do that, and so he shifted to sit upright and he climbed out of bed.

Yoongi found himself at his typewriter again a minute later, his fingers hitting the keys rapidly as he prepared a message. He didn’t really need to send it, because it was an issue that he would be able to solve on his own, yet he couldn’t seem to get the thought out of his mind.

Maybe, conferring for help like this, would actually work in his favour?

Maybe, it would just make it look like he was useless and he needed assistance with the most simplest task?

Whatever the case, he just finished typing his message up and then sat back in his seat to read it.

See the attached sheet for full info. My correspondent in Seoul has addressed my profit margins, but
I'm still waiting on individual explanations. I can send 'em when I get 'em if you require more info. Otherwise, I thought that you should know. I'll work on fixing these losses over the following weeks, I won't let the disaster turn my profits into one too, father.

Yoongi pulled the sheet of paper out of the typewriter and he crossed the room to get to his fax machine. He scanned the message first, then he scanned the spreadsheet as evidence, and when he had both pages copied, he pressed several buttons to transmit the message to his father.

Satisfied that he had addressed this unpleasant piece of business, Yoongi sat down on his settee and he folded his arm on the rest so that he could cup his cheek in his hand. Soon, the chamomile tea might just work on him and send him off to sleep at last. Hopefully, he would have enough time to get back upstairs to his bed, because if he fell asleep on his settee, he would be unable to hear his morning alarm.

Or, he might just find himself unable to sleep for the entire night again.

Yoongi sighed heavily at the thought, just knowing that that might be the case. Tonight, drinking tea and listening to Jimin’s voice might not be enough to fight away the restlessness at the back of his mind. No, tonight, he might just have needed his actual touch instead, the warmth of his body against his, and he wasn’t going to get that. Not for another couple of days, not until he was back in San Francisco again.

When the machine started rumbling loudly, Yoongi jumped in surprise because he hadn’t expected it.

Who was faxing him exactly? Surely it wasn’t his…his father? It was enough to make him turn his head to stare at the machine, languidly blinking whilst he waited for whatever it was to print. When the sheet of paper slipped free, he moved to grab hold of it and he held it up in front of his face.

Send your men to another country. I have negotiated with Chinese partners to cover Korean shipments for the time being. Profit losses will be made up in time, but not in Seoul. The problem will resolve itself. Sleep.

Yoongi read the message over several times slowly, just to make sure that he was reading it correctly. He lowered the sheet of paper and he reached up to rub at his lips roughly, thinking his father’s words over intently. Then he got up to go back over to his typewriter and he proceeded to type another message out as fast as he could; quickly reading it as he tugged it free and he went back over to his fax machine.
Yoongi added it to the stack of papers and then he began the copying process so that he could send the faxes to Seokjin. After scanning the three sheets of paper and hitting several buttons, he checked his father’s fax again just so he could read the last word and make sure that he was seeing things right.

Had his father actually told him to rest at the end of the message? He had never done that before, not once. He never said goodbye in their limited and brisk phone calls, he never ended his faxes with an acknowledgement of any kind, and yet…tonight, he had told him to sleep instead of staying up all night faxing correspondents and worrying over something that was out of his control.

Maybe, he had been drinking? Maybe, it was just because he had never faxed him this late at night? Or maybe, Hajoon had been to see him at some point?

Yoongi really didn’t know, and so he just placed the papers down with his notebook and then he went back upstairs to enter his bedroom. He settled down on his bed comfortably, hugging his pillow tightly as he reached over to hit his answering machine. He pressed several buttons to rewind and get to the right one, the message that he wanted to listen to again, and then he closed his eyes and he let his breath out in a heavy sigh.

“Baby boy, I ship off tomorrow morning again. Urgh, wait...actually, I ship off today, because I just looked at the clock. Hmm, it’s currently 3:30am, give or take. Guess I’ll just drink coffee and nap on the plane, because I’m not gonna sleep tonight...”

17th September, 1984, 10:47pm: Pacific Heights, San Francisco, United States of America

The sight of his wardrobe in front of him, almost empty save for suit jackets and pressed trousers, was a sight that he hadn’t seen in such a very long time.

The last time that Yoongi could recall his wardrobe being this empty was the morning that he had
moved into his mansion, right before he had started the great unpacking that Hoseok, his sisters, and his mother had assisted him with. Since that morning, the massive wardrobe had always been filled with clothing: from his winter coats and suits, to his shirts and tee-shirts, to his smart trousers and the occasional casual pair of jeans and pullovers that he very rarely wore.

The reason why it was so empty right now was because Yoongi had tossed countless items of clothing on his bed in the hopes of finding something - *anything* - to wear. He was starting to get a little bit anxious because he had yet to do so, and a quick glance at his Rolex told him that it was edging closer and closer to 11pm.

“…Shit,” he breathed out, dropping his wrist and turning to look back over his shoulder at his bed.

Jimin had been in San Francisco for over an hour now, having been processed at the airport right before the long ride back to Haight-Ashbury that would take him and Namjoon roughly an hour to complete. Right now, Jimin was probably lounged in the passenger-seat with the window down, sailing along the 101 with a cool breeze bleeding in through the open window, and here he was: tugging on his still slightly damp hair, completely naked, and stressed out of his goddamn mind.

Yoongi didn’t know why exactly he was panicking over this, because he only needed to slip into some clothes and then he would be ready. But, for some indiscernible reason, he couldn’t seem to do that. No, he was pacing between his wardrobe and his bed restlessly, occasionally reaching out to touch something or move a shirt aside to glance at another one, before repeating his actions over and over.

It was as if he wanted to impress Jimin, in some aspect, by showing up to his partner’s house tonight looking good, but he also knew that it wasn’t just that. It wasn’t just about *looking* good, but *feeling* good too, and right now, Yoongi wasn’t feeling too good. There was an eddy in his stomach that made him feel a little nauseous, and he couldn’t seem to stop biting at his lips and nails, even when he wanted to.

But that was just it - it was just a little bit of nerves and nothing more than that. Nerves were completely natural, there was nothing to worry about. But Yoongi was so used to feeling uncomfortable in his skin, that he couldn’t help but be frightened of his anxious behaviour. Hopefully, the sensation would alleviate itself completely when he finally pulled his car up to the curb outside of Namjoon’s house; but only time would tell.

Yoongi moved over to the bed for the umpteenth time, bending forward to grab hold of a random light blue shirt so that he could hold it up in front of him. His fingers tightened around the cotton, but he made no move to unbutton it to slip it off the hanger and tug it on. No, he just dropped it back onto the pile of clothes a few seconds later and he reached up to start running his fingers over his lips. He was in the act of turning back to his wardrobe when something caught his eye, and he
shifted his gaze to study it.

Lying on the floor, just beside his wardrobe, Yoongi could see that there was a colourful collection of store bags, all of them made from glossy and matte cardboard and embossed with designer labels. Hoseok had brought them to his mansion just this morning, showering him with an assortment of new clothes and accessories just because he had wanted to go shopping again.

Yoongi had yet to look at the contents of any of the bags, and so he hunkered down and he pulled one close to him to check it. The store bags were all sealed closed with ribbons, and he tugged on them to open the bag and empty the goods onto the flooring. The individual items were wrapped in lightly perfumed paper, so he carefully unfolded the paper to eye a random assortment of Calvin Klein briefs, and a single white shirt. He eyed it for a moment, and then he turned to the next bag to open that one too.

Within a minute, Yoongi had emptied the store bags onto the flooring to discover that he now owned new designer sunglasses, two brand baseball caps, a ridiculous amount of new underwear, and several shirts and blouses. Though each item was nice, picked out by Hoseok’s knowledgeable eye, there was just one that caught his attention and made him lift it up to eye it in more detail.

It was a Valentino blouse again, of course, because Hoseok had told him that he had his eye on several labels for him. This time it was a soft cream in shade with a wide collar, fitted and scalloped sleeve cuffs, and brown buttons embossed with little ‘v’s on the front, rather than decorated with print.

Yoongi couldn’t help but notice that this blouse was much more feminine than the other one, was softer in colour and style, and he wondered if his friend had bought it for that very purpose. It was the likely reason why, and he knew Hoseok well enough by now to know that he wouldn’t leave the feminine aspect out of it - especially not since he had willingly worn the other blouse and he had told him that he liked it.

Yoongi was pretty certain that he should just wear this blouse, but he was uncertain what to wear it with. His usual loose-fitting black and grey trousers? Or maybe, he should try and be more casual and instead wear his fitted jeans? After all, he was planning on going to Namjoon’s house to spend time with his boyfriend, and to possibly spend the night, so why should he dress like he was going to a high-class restaurant?

So Yoongi decided to wear his jeans instead. He slipped into the blouse, fastening up the buttons and cuffs, and then he tugged his jeans on and he tucked the ends inside of the waistband. After securing a belt in place, he was all dressed, yet he couldn’t seem to stop fiddling here and there, his fingers itching to do something.
Yoongi couldn’t help but run his hands down the front of his blouse, touching the buttons and then pulling at the collar as he studied his reflection in the wardrobe mirror. He hesitated for a moment before reaching up to unbutton the top button and spreading the collar, and then he shoved his hands into his pockets to try to act casual. It hard doing so when he felt so nervous, and when he smiled, he could see that it looked like a pained grimace at the corners of his lips.

“I look good,” Yoongi whispered to himself, trying his very hardest to stop his fingers rolling up tightly in his pockets. “I look good and he’s gonna say that I do; he’s gonna…gonna say something ‘bout how handsome I look.”

Yes, Jimin probably was going to say something like that, he just knew that he was, and this knowledge was probably what filled him with a little rush of confidence as he moved to step into his en-suite bathroom to spritz some of his cologne on.

Yoongi wasn’t planning on returning to his mansion tonight, and so he was certain to retrieve everything that he was going to need. He needed just his wallet and keys, which he shoved into his jeans pocket before hitting the light switch on his bedroom wall. The mess on his bed and floor could be cleaned up tomorrow, no problem. He just needed to check that everything was secure, no windows left wide open and the doors locked tight. Then he stepped into his sandals and he pulled the front door shut behind him.

Yoongi left his mansion and he jumped into his car just a minute later. He unrolled his window, he started the engine, and he slowly reversed out of his drive so that he could curve onto the road and start driving. The silence inside of the vehicle was rather heavy, but he really wasn’t sure if he wanted to turn the radio on to fill it. He just settled on getting comfortable, his elbow on the window rest and his right hand lazily gripping hold of the wheel.

Even though it was now officially the autumn period, the warm weather would linger on for quite some time before becoming cooler. As a result, he was able to enjoy a wonderful breeze that came in through the window, one that played with his hair and made his skin almost prickle with frisson. He could only imagine how nice it must feel for Jimin to finally be back in the warm but breezy city after a week of travelling through the sweltering heat of Korea and Hong Kong.

After nearly fifteen minutes of rolling across the city, Yoongi was finally in the right neighbourhood, and it took him just a further minute to steer his vehicle along several blocks to get to the exact street.

Upon slowing his car down to a stop outside of the house, Yoongi could see that there was a car parked on the curb that was more than likely Namjoon’s. He saw that it was a rather old model, a Datsun Maxima sedan, but it was in good condition despite this fact. Under his headlights, it looked
to be blue to his eyes, so that it clashed completely against his own car.

Yoongi pulled up to the curb to stall the engine for a moment, his eyes shifting from the car to the front of the house. He could see that the lights were on inside of it, presumably the living-room, should the layout of the house put that at the front instead of the back. It could be that room, or even the kitchen, and he saw that the first-floor lights were off, signalling that the two men were inside and might have only arrived home a couple of minutes ago. He killed the engine for good and then he pulled his keys out of the ignition.

Walking across the sidewalk to get to the front steps, Yoongi found himself playing with the keys awkwardly until he forced himself to shove them into his jeans pocket. He went up the entrance steps and he reached out to rap his knuckles on the door, moving back a step and trying his very hardest to not fidget.

“...be one of your guys?”

The sound of Jimin’s voice made his heart skip a beat in his chest, and Yoongi involuntarily took a sharp intake of breath as he reached up to rub at his mouth. It sounded like he was asking Namjoon who was knocking on the door at this late hour, asking him if it was one of his street dealers, and it seemed that his boyfriend was so very clueless that it was him on the other side of the thin door.

“No, I don't think so,” Namjoon replied. “Just give me a sec to check who it is and-”

The sound of a chain lock scraping came through the thin chunk of blue wood, and then the door swung inwards to reveal Namjoon through the gap. The young dealer eyed him for a few seconds with a blank expression, and then he turned his head to look over his shoulder.

“What?” Jimin asked, his voice sounding from the interior of the house even when he was out of sight.

“Jimmy, you aren’t gonna believe this...” Namjoon replied, as he pulled the door open fully and he moved aside.

Yoongi saw a hallway in front of him, one that had a short set of stairs at the end and two doorways on either wall, and then his gaze settled on Jimin. The younger man was standing just down the hall, barefoot and minus his jeans, and he reached up to rub at his eyes roughly before dropping his hands back down to his sides; almost as if he was trying to check if he was seeing things right now.
For a moment, Yoongi could only stare at him, and Jimin silently stared back. It was clear from a single glance that he was tired, his clothing wrinkled with wear and his eyelids slightly puffy, but he still looked so beautiful that he couldn’t believe it.

“Good evening, Prince Min,” Namjoon said to break the silence, lifting an arm to sweep it in the direction of the hallway. “Would you like to come inside?”

Yoongi shifted to step inside of the house, allowing the younger man to shut the door behind him at last. He heard it clicking as he stepped out of his sandals and then he walked down the hallway to draw closer to Jimin. His boyfriend was hovering in the living-room doorway, looking so very small and shy in the wide space.

“What’re you-” Jimin stopped, and he took a sharp intake of breath before reaching up to start playing with his earring. “You didn’t call, I thought that you’d forgotten that I got back today and-”

“Never, I’d never forget that,” he interjected in a quiet voice, reaching across the space between them until his palm found the soft dip of his waist.

“I tried phoning you, but you didn’t answer,” Jimin continued, taking a step closer to him in response to his touch. “I didn’t leave a message, but I was thinking of doing so, and I was just going to call you again when I heard the knock and… Yoongi.”

Yoongi could feel Namjoon’s gaze on his back, as he was still hovering by the front door to not get in their way or disturb them. He wanted to give Jimin a quick kiss, just for the sake of it, but the weight of his gaze made him uncertain. Yet, he found himself leaning forward to press a chaste kiss right at the corner of his mouth, and when he heard the softest sound that escaped Jimin’s lips at the contact, his fingers snagged hold of his silken shirt tightly.

“Am I awake right now?” Jimin asked, his voice that of a whisper as he pressed his brow against his. “Seriously, baby boy, am I awake? Did I fall asleep on the plane and think that I woke up, when this is really just a lucid dream?”

“Mmm, I’m pretty sure that you’re awake,” Yoongi retorted, unable to pull his gaze away from his lips. “D’you want me to pinch you, huh?”

“No, I think you’d need to slap me to wake me up from this kinda dream,” his boyfriend said, before
bringing their lips together in a soft kiss.

Just like that, Yoongi felt the anxiety in his stomach settling down, the nausea passing in favour of that funny fluttering sensation that made him feel so weak and vulnerable. He didn’t even care that his boyfriend’s partner was present right now, because the feel of Jimin’s lips against his was the only thing that mattered to him.

“Wait…” Jimin said, as he pulled his face away; his expression seeming to hint that he had just thought of something important. “I’ve gotta shower!”

“Huh?” Yoongi hummed, completely taken by surprise by this sudden declaration.

“I’ve gotta shower!” he repeated. “I’ve gotta freshen up right now, just gimme a couple of minutes!”

“Take your time, I don’t mind!” he called back, watching him shooting up the staircase as fast as he could without tripping and injuring himself.

“Wait, Yoongi!”

Jimin reappeared for a second, his head popping around the wall so that he could look down at him from the first-floor. His hair was a mess that was hanging over his eyes, and so he hastily brushed it back to hold his gaze.

“You look so handsome tonight,” the younger man called, flashing him a quick smile before he disappeared from view again.

Yoongi found his lips lifting in a rather embarrassed smile at this, and he couldn’t help but reach up to rub at the back of his neck as he leaned back against the door frame. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Namjoon moving to finally enter the living-room again.

“He’s just got off a thirteen hour plane ride,” the young dealer said with a soft smile, before quickly adding. “He’s probably spent around fifteen hours travelling from airport to airport too, so, as you can imagine, a shower’s the best thing to come home too. Right after food, that is. Prince Min, have you eaten dinner? I-”
“Call me Yoongi, drop the title, yeah?” Yoongi suggested, waving his wrist at him limply as he shifted follow him into the living-room and he leaned against the wall. “I’ll stop calling you Kim too, if you don’t mind.”

“I don’t mind, not at all. I’m honoured that you would let me address you so informally.”

“Yes, I ate earlier; why’d you ask?”

“I bought fast food on the drive here for Jimin after that plane ride, so, I ruined his appetite with junk. I’m so glad that you weren’t planning on treating him to an expensive dinner right now,” Namjoon explained, before sighing dramatically.

This made Yoongi laugh softly under his breath, just because Namjoon’s honesty was as refreshing as Jimin’s bluntness. Yes, he could easily picture Jimin chowing down on a burger on the ride back to the house after they had exchanged the drugs with one of Seokjin’s men because he had been stuck on a plane for thirteen hours, and he was glad to know that he had at least had something to eat after the arduous journey.

For a moment, the house fell silent save for the sound of the shower droning away upstairs, and so he glanced across the interior of the living-room.

Yoongi saw soft blue walls that matched the exterior, and light wooden flooring that worked well together. The furniture inside of the room consisted of a deep brown leather sofa that was rather busted, a low coffee table, and a television set that had a VCR box and games console set up on the display cabinet. One wall had a bookshelf covered in books, with even more stacked in towers around it, the other had a unit filled with VHS tapes, and the walls had several small photograph frames hanging on them.

That was it, a small room, but a nice-looking room: one that had a homely and warm sensation coming from it that clashed against his large sitting-area - which felt cold and empty.

“Are you taking him out on a date, Prince- I mean, Yoongi?” Namjoon asked, breaking their temporary silence.

“A date? No, I was planning on staying the night, actually,” Yoongi explained, as he dragged his gaze away from a framed photograph of a woman that he presumed to be the dealer’s mother. “You don’t mind, d’you? This’ your house, after all, and I should’ve asked your permission.”
“You wanna stay here for the night? No, I don’t mind at all, but…damn, this place’s a mess right now,” the younger man said, glancing around himself and then reaching up to scratch at the back of his head. “Uh, I could clean most of it up and then go and stay with a friend, so you two can have the place to yourself-”

“You ain’t gotta go, it’s fine. You ain’t gotta clean up either,” he interjected, watching Namjoon moving to start grabbing handfuls of rubbish from the sofa.

“Don’t you want a little…privacy, Yoongi?” he asked in return, turning to look at him again as he carried on grabbing food packets and soda bottles.

“Privacy? No, we don’t need privacy,” Yoongi mumbled, quickly figuring out what Namjoon was hinting at and finding the television across the room much more interesting to look at.

Namjoon seemed like he was going to say something at this, to point out the rather obvious fact that it would be a hell of a lot less awkward for them all if he were to leave for the night.

“Hey, can I park my car inside your garage?” Yoongi asked, the thought suddenly coming to mind and giving him the perfect excuse to change the subject. “Leaving it out on the street like that-”

“It’s just asking to be jacked, yeah, my thoughts exactly. I’ll go unlock the garage for you so you can-”

Yoongi pulled his keys out of his jeans pocket and he tossed them at him, and Namjoon managed to not drop them as he awkwardly fumbled to catch them. He eyed the keys for a few seconds before glancing up at him, his expression showing dumb confusion.

“Wait, you want me to park it for you?” the young dealer asked in complete disbelief. “You trust me? With that hot mama of a car? Seriously?”

“You only gotta go up the drive, Namjoon,” he retorted with a smirk. “You can get that far without crashing it, right?”

“Yeah, uh, yeah, I totally can. Holy shit, I’m getting to drive a sports car,” Namjoon muttered to
himself, as he moved to leave the living-room and he exited the house.

Yoongi lingered in the doorway for a moment longer, and then he moved back out into the hallway to glance inside of the kitchen. He saw that it had rather shockingly bright teal walls and dark wooden flooring and counters, and there was no dining table present inside of the space. Then he decided to go up the stairs, just for the sake of it. He could hear the sound of the shower buzzing away loudly from behind a closed door at the end of the landing, and he could see another door in front of him that had been left wide open.

A quick glance inside of it showed it to be a bedroom, a small and cramped bedroom that was well-lived in and surprisingly not as messy as the downstairs. Yoongi stepped inside and he pulled the door shut behind him. Except the door was bust and it didn’t even close, but rather swung open again to reveal the landing outside. He found himself snorting at this, thinking about how Namjoon had offered to leave for the sake of privacy.

Yoongi moved to sit down on the end of the bed, just so he could study the room more easily. He saw that it was also rather bare of furnishings, just like the rest of the house. There was a wardrobe, which had a broken door on the front, and a dresser that was no doubt packed full because the two young men were sharing it. Set on a small table beside the dresser, there was a record player, and underneath it there was a plastic box filled with vinyls. Save for a single blue lava lamp on the side table, there wasn’t even a lamp in the bedroom.

Yoongi saw that the window to his right was open, and so he moved to get to it and he glanced down at the street outside.

There was no sign of his car now, because Namjoon had safely stored it inside of the ground-floor garage built into the front of the house. He could see that the street had very little traffic, but the roads at both ends had varying flows of vehicles, and the sight of people hanging around under streetlights was unmissable to his eyes.

The breeze coming in was so pleasing on his skin, even when he could detect the scent of exhaust fumes over that of the distant brine, and he closed his eyes for a minute as he just savoured the sensation.

Yoongi was so lost in his musings that he hadn’t even realised that the shower sound had cut off. It was only when he heard a creaking floorboard that he turned away from the window.

Jimin had just stepped into the bedroom, clad in just a pair of white briefs that hugged his crotch and behind perfectly, and he was in the act of drying at his hair with a fluffy yellow towel.
Yoongi could see water still running down his chest and thighs that he had yet to dab free, and he was unable to look away from one particular bead as it ran down his chest and ribs, rolling over the dimples of his muscles to dip into his navel and then disappearing from his sight. His skin was so flushed from the shower that he was glowing, and he suddenly lost the ability to talk.

“Yoongi?” Jimin said in a quiet voice, slowly towelling at his wet hair to dry it. “You’re staring at me.”

Yoongi managed to drop his gaze at this, an awkward laugh escaping him as he reached up to rub at the back of his neck. He heard Jimin giggling at this, and a quick glance back up at his face showed him that his eyes were crinkled at the corners. He wanted to say something, and yet his lips kept moving only for no words to come out. Jimin had shocked him speechless, and he could sense that this knowledge pleased his boyfriend because his smile just widened as the seconds passed by.

“This’, uh, this’ a nice house,” Yoongi finally managed to mumble as he resumed rubbing at his neck. “It’s nice, Jimin.”

“Says the guy that owns a mansion,” Jimin retorted, leaving the towel around his neck for a moment so that he could lift his arms up and stretch his stiff muscles.

Yoongi felt his gaze latching onto him at this, unable to look away as he curved his back with a soft grunt, his arms up over his head to reveal his shaven armpits.

Jimin tried to loosen his stiff shoulders too, applying some pressure and rolling the joints as he let out a yawn. The movements made his muscles grow taut under his supple skin before relaxing again, and Yoongi found himself almost gulping when he rolled his neck back with a heavy sigh.

“Well, it’s still…still nice,” Yoongi finished in a quiet voice. “I like it, it feels welcoming.”

Jimin thought this over for a moment, dabbing at his hairline with the end of the towel, and from somewhere in the house, there came the sound of the front door slamming shut again. His boyfriend turned to look at the door, cocking his head and listening to Namjoon whistling for a few seconds as he walked along the hall to enter one of the downstairs room.

When Jimin looked back at him, Yoongi glanced up from his briefs to hold his gaze, wondering if he had been caught in the act.
“Hmm, you look so handsome,” Jimin said, tossing the towel at the dresser without a single care as he crossed the bedroom to get close to him.

“Uh, thanks,” Yoongi mumbled with a quick twitch of the lips, so very pleased that he had complimented him again, even if it made him get flustered.

Jimin slipped his hands up his chest to his shoulders first, cupping the rounded balls as he ran his eyes down his body. Then his hands shifted across to his collar, which he gently stroked between his fingers and thumbs as he lifted his gaze to hold his eyes.

“Look at that blouse, it really compliments your skin tone,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, trailing his fingers down the front of the blouse. “It brings out that soft tan, but you really need to spend more time on the beach, baby boy. Designer?”

“Valentino,” Yoongi replied, watching his fingers intently as he played with the brown buttons.

“The same as the other one, right?” he asked, showing that he had remembered the label. “Oh, baby boy’s got a favourite designer, hmm?”

This made Yoongi laugh softly, the sound making Jimin’s lips curl upwards at the corners as his fingers continued playing with one of the buttons.

The bedroom fell silent for a moment, and Yoongi could sense that the younger man was contemplating something, something that might have been a kiss or even just an embrace.

Jimin slowly moved to wrap his arms around his waist tight, pulling him into an embrace first.

Yoongi hesitated with his hands, wondering if he should place them around his ribs or waist, or even his neck. He settled on his neck, because he could close the space between their bodies that little bit more. When he pressed his chest up against his and he placed his cheek against his bare shoulder, Yoongi closed his eyes and he let his breath out in a soft sigh.

Oh, he could just melt into him, could just melt into the warmth of his ply body and touch, and he wasn’t at all surprised to find that his knees felt a little weaker than they had just a moment ago.
“Yoongi, this might just sound a little crazy to you, but…I missed you,” Jimin confided in a whisper-soft voice, his breath puffing out against his shoulder. “I missed you the entire time that I was working, and I missed you even when I was still in the city. Leaving those answering machine messages was hard, because I kept thinking about you when I did, but.”

“I missed you too,” Yoongi spoke over him, turning his face to press it against his neck. He felt his skin against his, warm from the shower and fragrant with wash that smelled like vanilla to his nose. “Shit, Jimin, I missed you so much it’s fucking crazy too.”

“but I did so because I wanted you to be able to talk to me when I was gone, like you wanted,” Jimin continued. “You listened to them, right? They helped you sleep, didn’t they?”

“Mmm, I listened to ‘em so many times,” he replied, his fingers brushing against the nape of his neck. “I listened and-and talked to you, and I fell asleep listening to you every single night, Jimin. It felt so nice, like you were right there beside me.”

Yoongi heard Jimin letting his breath out in an uneven sigh at this, his hold tightening around his waist so that it bordered on discomfort. But he didn’t care at all, for he wanted him to just squeeze him tight and not let go for a little while longer. He couldn’t help but press a soft kiss against his throat, relishing the way that his boyfriend almost trembled in his tight hold.

“You said that you couldn’t wait to gimme real kisses,” Yoongi whispered, as he trailed his lips up to his ear; feeling his cross earring against his lips as he spoke. “Jimin, you owe me so many kisses and-”

Jimin loosened his embrace so that he could turn his head and kiss him properly at last, cutting off his words and making him gasp in surprise until he pouted his lips out to return the kiss.

Yoongi felt his tongue brushing against his lower lip, imploring him to open his mouth, and so he deepened the kiss with a soft moan. He couldn’t help but move his hands from the back of his neck to cup his cheeks, just to hold onto his face. Jimin’s cheeks were still slightly damp from his shower and hot against his palms, and he gently brushed some of the beaded water free with the curves of his thumbs.

Yoongi couldn’t tell when each kiss ended and the next one began, for Jimin chased after his lips every single time that he broke the contact. He could barely gasp for breath without feeling his tongue curling out in the space between their mouths, licking against his lower lip until he brought
them back together again. His fingers ended up finding the damp lengths of his tousled hair, snagging locks tight to gently tug at it until Jimin moaned against his mouth and he dropped his hands down to his hips.

Yoongi felt his feet actually leaving the floor for a moment, because Jimin had just lifted him up with surprising ease that made him break the kiss and look down at him in surprise. His boyfriend started giggling giddily, hefting him up so that he could carry him across the bedroom, and he couldn’t help but start laughing too. Yoongi tightened his hold around his neck so that he could bury his face in his hair, lifting his legs up try and wrap them around his hips. Before he could manage to do so, Jimin reached the bed and he lowered him back down to his feet.

Jimin gently pushed him down onto the bed, and Yoongi felt the mattress creaking under him as he sat down in it. His boyfriend placed his hands on his head, his palms and fingers gently stroking their way down to his throat so that he could cup it in his hand and lean forward to press their lips together again.

Yoongi could sense an urgency to his kisses, a desperation that he was struggling to resist himself because it just felt so good at last to be able to kiss him again. After so long spent waiting for him to come back to the city, of dreaming and thinking about him, Jimin was finally in front of him, and he wanted to pepper kisses all over him: his face, his neck, his chest, all of the way down to his stomach and thighs; until he fell asleep in his arms.

But Yoongi could sense that Jimin was lusting for something more than that, for his touch was a little rough as he grabbed at his shoulders and squeezed them tightly.

“Mmm, Jimin, it’s too fast-”

“Huh?”

“It’s too fast, slow down,” Yoongi gasped, his voice uneven as he turned his face away and stole a quick intake of air.

But Jimin’s lips found his again as he started tugging at his blouse buttons, trying to pop them free. For a moment, Yoongi almost didn’t want to stop him, because he wanted to feel his mouth and his hands all over him too, but then he forced himself to break the kiss again.

“Jimin, wait-”
Yoongi moved to grab hold of his wrists, pulling them away from the buttons so that he could hold his hands in front of his face. The sensation of his kisses and touch had been too much, and he had needed to move his hands away before he had gotten too excited and had actually let him start helping him undress. He pressed a soft kiss against his fingers, taking a deep breath and holding it in his lungs as he tried to think of the right words to say to him.

“I-I need to prove to myself that I ain’t just here to scratch an itch, that…that I’m here for you, Jimin. If I can spend the night with you, then it ain’t just an itch, yeah?”

Jimin looked down at him, his brow slightly furrowed and his lips pouted as he listened to him talking.

Did he understand what he was trying to say? Did Jimin understand that he was trying to tell him that he didn’t want tonight to be another hazy night of frantic sex and whispered words of affection and tenderness, but that he wanted something more intimate than that.

Yoongi wanted to spend the night lying in his arms, talking like he had talked to his answering machine; feeling his fingertips tracing his jaw or spine, sharing his warmth and breathing in every single exhale that left Jimin’s lips. That was more intimate to him, more trusting, and he wanted that more than anything sexual.

“I need to prove to myself that this’ something good, yeah, that it’s something sustainable, and that I ain’t just gonna…gonna treat you like those other guys,” Yoongi added in a quiet voice. “If I can spend the night in your arms like that, then I’ll know. I’ll know - and, I know for a fact I can do it. I can do it, Jimin, you’ve just gotta trust me.”

“So…what you’re trying to say is that you just wanna spend time with me, without sex being involved?” Jimin said, moving to pull his wrists free so that he could shift to drop to his knees in front of him. He folded his arms on his lap, cocking his head to look up at him. “Yoongi?”

“Yeah?”

“You’re the sweetest boyfriend,” Jimin said, his lips curling up at the corners in a smile. “First, you were the softest baby boy, and now you’re the sweetest one too. I can’t believe this.”

“You don’t…you’re ‘k with that?” he asked dumbly, staring back down at him in confusion. “I-I just

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“You don’t…you’re ‘k with that?” he asked dumbly, staring back down at him in confusion. “I-I just
thought that…that it might seem stupid ‘cos we ain’t kids, but sex is just- sometimes, it’s too much for me and-

Yoongi stopped talking, struggling to get his words out right because they kept getting lodged in his throat and threatened to choke him. He even let go of one of his wrists to touch his throat, rubbing at it as if he could dislodged the words.

“Baby boy, sex is a treat, it’s not an obligation,” Jimin explained, letting him try and find his words. “Just because you’re my boyfriend, it doesn’t mean that we’ve gotta do stuff like that whenever we spend time together. If you don’t want it, then I don’t want it too. OK? What I want is to spend time with you, that’s all.”

“Jimin…”

“But, I’ve got one demand,” Jimin said as he shifted on his knees. “I still wanna kiss you, baby boy. Is that OK? Can we still kiss tonight?”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment, and then he reached down to cup his face in his hands. He leaned forward to press a soft kiss against his lips, giving Jimin the sweetest reply possible to his question.

Jimin laughed at this, looking up at him from under his half-lidded eyes, and Yoongi allowed him to move and nuzzle against his cheek.

“I dunno the right way to tell you what I’m feeling, it’s hard to explain,” Yoongi said, closing his eyes and letting Jimin pepper kisses against his cheekbone. “I guess that…that it’s like what you said, ‘bout how I used to view sex as just another business transaction for pleasure, and there’s still that part of me that huh-hates sex a lil. I guess I’m scared that I’ll start turning what we have into another transaction, and I don’t want that. I want…want a relationship, yeah?”

“Hmm, I understand, baby boy,” Jimin hummed, moving to hold his gaze again. “What you want right now is to…spend time together, like what people do. Right? Instead of spending a date night at the cinema or a fancy restaurant, or whatever, we can spend it right here: in this bedroom. Beds are real comfortable for snuggling in whilst you share thoughts, hmm?”

“Mmm, and sharing kisses too,” Yoongi said with a mischievous smile.
“Oh, let’s not forget about those,” Jimin joked with a grin, shifting to get to his feet and planting another peck in his hair. “You trust me, right? You trust me to take care of you, so, don’t worry about telling me stuff like that. OK?”

“I know, I know,” Yoongi replied in a whisper, closing his eyes and reaching over to place his hands on his bare waist. “I trust you so much. You’re a good boy, Jimin, and y’know how to take care of me.”

“See, we’ve just established a nice new rule, a healthy new rule,” Jimin said in a soft voice. “Communication, Yoongi, and that’s the best sign of trust. You just need to tell me things, about your thoughts and feelings. I’ll tell you things too, so that you don’t feel too vulnerable. Is there anything else you wanna tell me right now, anything important, hmm?”

“Uh.” Yoongi wet his lips as he looked up at him. “You look beautiful tonight, Jimin.”

For a few seconds, Jimin just looked back down at him as his words sank in. Then he let out the most sweetest burst of giggles as he cupped his chin and he tilted his head back.

Yoongi couldn’t help but grin at this, his own eyes crinkling deeply at the corners because he was filled with a mixture of happiness and relief.

“You’re the smoothest baby boy I’ve ever met too,” Jimin declared, as he tickled under his chin and he made him squirm and knock his hand free. “Calling me beautiful, when I’m practically naked. I see you, Yoongi, I see how sneaky you are.”

“Sneaky? Ain’t it a good thing?” Yoongi retorted, as he watched his boyfriend moving over to the dresser. “If you’re almost naked, you ain’t hiding anything from me. I can only see you, yeah? I can see everything, and it’s just beautiful, darling.”

Jimin made a pleased noise at this, a little purr as he dragged the top drawer open and he started rifling through it for something.

“Come on, get out of those fancy clothes of yours and just relax,” he suggested, holding a folded tee-shirt out to him. “You don’t want to wrinkle that pretty designer blouse, right?”

Yoongi got off the bed to move over to him and he accepted the folded tee-shirt. When he lifted it
up, he saw that it was quite large. Clearly, it belonged to Namjoon judging from the size, for it looked to fit his taller and wider frame much better than Jimin’s short frame. He wondered what the young dealer would think if he were to see him wearing it, and he imagined that he would have something witty to say like always.

Yoongi unbuttoned his blouse cuffs first, before quickly unbuttoning the front and slipping it free. He tugged the tee-shirt on, holding the lengths up so that he could unbuckle his belt and unzip his jeans. As he pulled them down, he noticed that Jimin was watching him intently, and the younger man got a rather quick flash of his bare behind as he stepped out of them.

Yoongi retrieved his jeans and blouse, folding them up to go on the top of the dresser. Then he turned to look at him, stubbing his bare toes against the flooring and stroking his palms over the soft blue tee-shirt. It was surprisingly comfortable, even if he was now in a state of undress equal to his boyfriend.

“Oh, Yoongi,” Jimin sighed with a fond smile. “Look how big it is on you, that’s so cute.”

“At least it covers my ass,” Yoongi joked, as he reached down to tug at the length of the tee-shirt. He was so very thankful that it was long enough to do that much, but he knew that the slightest stretch or movement would result in him flashing everything. “Not that there’s much to cover.”

“Now you look like a real baby boy to me,” Jimin purred, cupping his cheeks in his hands so that he could lean in and kiss him on the tip of his nose. “So soft, I just wanna…nibble.”

When he moved to give his ear the softest little bite, Yoongi cried out in surprise and he brought his shoulders up. His reaction made the younger man laugh, and he realised that he had once more reminded him of his rather ticklish body.

“Cute,” Jimin remarked, crossing the bedroom to leave and go out onto the landing.

Yoongi heard his footsteps softly pounding down the stairs, signalling that he was making his way downstairs for some reason. Jimin re-emerged a minute later, with several bottles of beer in hand and a Pop Tart between his teeth. He placed them down beside the lava lamp and he pulled the snack free to hold it out to him.

“Want a bite, huh?” Jimin offered, sticking his tongue out to lick a blob of jam and icing free.
“What’s it taste like?” Yoongi asked, moving to take a small bite of it and checking it so that he could lick flakes of pastry free from his lips.

“It tastes fucking nice,” he replied with a smirk, before taking another bite of the pastry.

“Mmm, I prefer the waffles,” he retorted, as he chewed the mouthful.

Jimin shook his head at this, his expression showing that he found this statement unbelievable. He exited the bedroom again, holding a hand up to gesture that he would be right back rather than talking around the large mouthful of snack.

Yoongi turned to examine the rest of the bedroom whilst he was gone. He checked the dresser drawers just for the sake of it, finding a rather surprising sight in the bottom drawer. There was an old model of camera, a Polaroid Onestep, and there was an assortment of film that was littering the bottom that looked to have been taken both from this camera, and a more recent model like the one that Jungkook owned.

When Jimin stepped back into the bedroom at last, Yoongi saw that he had a large bottle of lotion in his hand, and he settled down on the bed and proceeded to pop the lid up. His boyfriend squirted a liberal amount of lotion out before smoothing it against his lower legs, massaging it into his clean skin slowly as he hummed under his breath.

Yoongi collected a piece of film from the drawer, eyeing a young man that he didn’t recognise but he assumed to be his smuggling partner over in Seoul. He saw a handsome face framed by shaggy dark hair, and a glowing red neon sign in Chinese characters that signalled it had likely been taken in Hong Kong. He dropped it back in the drawer and proceeded to retrieve the Onestep, straightening back up and turning to look over at him.

“You got any film for this, huh?” Yoongi asked, as he lugged the rather outdated camera from hand to hand. “Maybe a couple of pieces still left in it?”

“That old piece of junk? No. Why’d you ask, baby boy?” Jimin asked, still massaging lotion into his skin in soft circular motions.

“I, uh, I was just thinking ‘bout how nice it’d be to have a snapshot of you in my wallet,” he replied in a quiet voice, watching him getting another liberal amount of lotion in his palm so that he could move onto his thighs. “So, I could look at it every now and again.”
Jimin looked up sharply at this, pausing in the act of massaging the thick cream into his skin. His eyes were rounded with something that looked like surprise, and then he smiled at him.

“Baby boy, I’ll buy a brand new camera as soon as I can, OK? And I’ll take so many shots of myself that you’ll need to buy one of those wallets that fold out to hold, like, photos of entire families!”

This made Yoongi snort laughter as he put the camera back down in the drawer and he shoved it shut. Then he shifted to join him on the bed, settling down on the edge of the mattress and watching him massaging the lotion into his firm thighs. The temptation to help him complete this task was overwhelming, because he had really enjoyed giving him a massage in the bathhouse that very first night that they had met.

“I’d put every single one in my wallet,” Yoongi agreed, retrieving the bottle from the bed so that he could squirt some onto his hand and then reach over and start applying it to his upper arm.

“You mean it?” Jimin asked in a quiet voice, letting him knead at his skin with his thumbs as he rubbed the Shea butter into his skin.

“Mmm,” he hummed, breathing in the rich and nutty scent as he gently massaged at his inner and outer elbow. “I’d look at ‘em when I’m listening to your answering machine messages, yeah?”

“Oh, baby boy,” Jimin sighed, closing his eyes as he did. “That’s sweet. You’d look at my photos like that, and I’d probably just wank off to yours.”

“Jimin!” he scolded, struggling to not laugh as he got more lotion into his hands. But after a few seconds, he couldn’t help but guffaw, because the joke had really got him.

Yoongi applied the lotion onto both of his arms for him, from his shoulders down to the very tips of his fingers, massaging at his soft and rather small hands and then leaving a little kiss on his knuckles just to make his boyfriend smile. Jimin had already moisturised his legs, and so there was just his stomach, chest and back left. He tenderly massaged it into his back for him and then he let him finish the skincare routine by applying it to his chest and stomach.

Jimin moved to place the lotion bottle on the side table, retrieving two of the beers and offering him one.
Yoongi accepted it, and then he settled down comfortably on the bed, fluffing the pillows up to create a nice cushion between their bodies and the wall.

“So, how was the trip, darling?”

“Is this ‘darling’ thing going to be permanent?” Jimin asked him over the rim of his beer, squinting his eyes as he did so. “Because I really like it, Yoongi, and I wanna hear you say it a lot.”

“Mmm, it fits,” Yoongi agreed after his first swallow of the cold beer. “I’m glad that you like it, Jimin. You’re my, uh, my darling Adonis, ‘member?”

“Hmm, that made my stomach go all funny,” his boyfriend purred, his lips lifting to flash his teeth in a happy smile. “Well, my beautiful baby boy, I did the usual business, like always. In Seoul, the aftereffects of the flood were still pretty bad, as I’m sure that you know. Luckily, my partner lived in an area that wasn’t hit too badly, so, we were able to stay in his home for a couple of days before going to Kowloon.”

“You might be put on a break for a lil while, ‘cos of the flooding, but I’ll figure that shit out soon,” Yoongi mumbled, before lifting the bottle to take another deep swig. “Don’t you worry none, yeah? If it gets risky there, I’ll pull you and the other mules out. I can’t make profits on seized merch, better to circulate it somewhere else instead.”

“I won’t worry, I know that you’ll keep an eye on me,” Jimin confirmed, taking a quick sip of beer before he resumed talking. “Um, so, we did business and then went to Kowloon. We went sightseeing there, like usual, and found some bar that had, like…karaoke right out in the open. It was fun drinking there, had a nice light atmosphere, but I couldn’t help but think about you after a couple of beers.”

“Oh yeah?” Yoongi asked, all the while thinking about how often that his boyfriend had crossed his mind when he had been doing such mundane things too.

“Yeah, which’s why I’m so glad to be back here to see you again,” Jimin said with a nod. “I didn’t expect you to come here tonight, not at all. I, um, I thought that we’d be on the phone right now, talking to each other. I didn’t think that tonight I’d be lying in bed beside you, baby boy.”

“Mmm, I never thought that I’d be sharing this bed right now with you either, but I couldn’t ignore
“How was business when I was gone, hmm?” Jimin asked, taking advantage of the question to carry on drinking his beer.

“Uh, I’ve been sorting out the damages from the flood mostly,” Yoongi replied, swirling his own beer around the bottle. “I’ve been keeping an eye on Namjoon’s turf to make sure that the speedball don’t pop up again, just to piss me off, but that’s it really.”

“Did anything nice happen for you when I was gone? Did you have a ‘good’ day?”

“Not really,” Yoongi mumbled. “I listened to your answering machine messages and started taking your advice though, ‘bout trying to not let the bad thoughts and stress upset me. I, uh, I started drinking chamomile tea that a…a friend advised to help me sleep better, and I’ve been relaxing with hot baths to treat myself. It helps sometimes, helps stop me from getting tension headaches. I-I also ordered waffles at Mickey’s Joint one morning.”

“You ordered waffles?” Jimin repeated, before making a soft noise under his breath. “Baby boy, that’s... that’s so cute.”

“I felt funny after eating ‘em though, ‘cos I thought ‘bout you, y’know?” he admitted in a whisper. “I thought ‘bout how I really wished that you were there to share ‘em with me, and I spent the whole day wanting to puke.”

“Well, you know what that means, right?” Jimin asked with a soft smile. “Next time that you want waffles, you’ve got to take me there to share them with you.”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment, and then he shifted to give Jimin a quick peck on his cheek.

“Oh, don’t be a tease,” Jimin whined, pouting his lips out to request a proper kiss. “I owe you kisses, remember?”

Yoongi relented and he gave him said kiss, deepening it with a slip of the tongue so that he could taste the beer on his breath. It was only a brief kiss, but it was enough to satisfy his boyfriend.
“What’d you collect, hmm?” Jimin asked, as he pulled his head away and he rolled onto his side to look up at him more intently. He folded one arm under his head so that he could get comfortable, giving him a sweet smile as he did so.

“Huh?” Yoongi hummed, rolling his head to look down at him and still nursing his beer.

“You know, when you were a kid, or even now: what’d you collect?” Jimin explained. “Namo used to collect comics as a kid, I used to collect records. You collect things, right, so, what kinda things? I’ve been thinking it over, and I just thought that I’d ask you.”

“…My grandmother’s letters and cheap gay Japanese pornography,” Yoongi muttered, before taking another deep sip of beer.

This made Jimin start giggling, but he was telling him the truth. He had all of her letters saved in his wooden box, and the shelves in his bedroom were filled with copies of cheap imported gay pornography. His walls were also covered in erotic shunga art prints, but he felt no need to explain this to his boyfriend right now.

One day, when he invited him into his mansion, he would get to discover that this was the truth.

“What’d I collect when I was a kid? I, uh, I used to collect books,” Yoongi said, looking at his beer bottle for a moment. “Encyclopedias, mostly, the bigger, the better. If they had pictures in ‘em, photos or illustrations, it was even better. Dunno why, I just used to love reading ‘em and learning everything I could. I guess that that helped me learn how to memorise all of the shit that I need to know for business, y’know?”

“Hmm,” Jimin hummed softly, and when he glanced at his face, he saw that he was eyeing him intently, hanging on to every single word.

“I, uh, I’d one ‘bout butterflies,” Yoongi added, studying his face instead of his beer bottle, because it was most certainly more beautiful - especially in the faint blue glow from the lava lamp on the side table. “I’d one for a lot of animals, actually; but the butterfly one? I loved it, ‘cos it had so many pages of colourful illustrations in it. Back then, I liked to look at ‘em and sometimes, when I was out in the big mansion garden, I’d try looking for some butterflies. I never found any of the good ones though.”

“That’s so…you, Yoongi,” Jimin said in a quiet voice. “I can picture it right now, even when I
Yoongi moved his empty beer bottle onto the side table so that he could settle down on his side too, getting eye to eye with him.

“Like I said, I’d spend all day in school and then come home to spend most of the remaining hours reading those books before I went to bed. I wasn’t allowed to go out with friends, I’d to wait ‘til my friends were brought to the mansion instead, ‘cos that way I was safe from any associates that might’ve had a grudge to settle with my father. That meant that I’d plenty of time to read, in my room, all alone.”

“Oh, baby boy, kids are supposed to play,” Jimin remarked in a soft voice, shifting to place his hand against his face so that he could stroke at his thumb along his cheekbone as he spoke. “It’s healthy for kids to play like that.”

“Did you?” Yoongi asked in a whisper.

“I didn’t have friends,” he replied with a shrug. “But if I’d have had them, my dad wouldn’t have let me play with them like that either.”

“You said that you collect records. Are the ones in that box your collection, huh?”

“Um, I used to have so many more records,” Jimin explained, his gaze flickering so that he could break eye-contact and look across the room instead. “When I was younger. That’s not my collection, it’s my…replacement collection.”

“You left it behind when you ran away, right?” Yoongi asked, already knowing the answer but doing so just for the sake of it.

Jimin hummed in agreement at this, deciding to not expand upon this fact. Yoongi didn’t want to push him, should the topic be in anyway upsetting for him, and so he just let the bedroom fall silent again instead.

“Do you wanna listen to some of them, hmm?” Jimin offered after a minute, breaking their temporary silence.
His boyfriend moved to climb off of the bed, and so Yoongi shifted to sit up and he wriggled to the edge of the mattress. Jimin hunkered down in front of the table that the device was on, so that he could pull the plastic box out and check the dozens of cardboard sleeves to find something to place on the deck.

“What kinda music do you like, hmm?” Jimin asked, glancing back over his shoulder at him.

“Uh, I don’t really listen to music that much,” Yoongi replied, getting off the bed to hunker down beside him too. “I’m too busy, and when I’m driving ‘round I’m doing business and I gotta talk to my man or use the car phone. So, I can’t listen to the radio often.”

A quick look inside of the box showed him colourful sleeves, some covered in illustrations and emblazoned with band logos and names, other with photographs of the artists on them that revealed to him rather eccentric-looking people that were so covered in makeup and unusual clothing that he struggled to figure out if some of them were men or women.

“How can you not listen to music?” his boyfriend asked in a scandalised tone. “Yoongi, baby, music is, like, one of the best things in the world. It makes everything better, especially memories. I can still remember the exact song that was playing on the radio the first time that I climbed into Namo’s car.”

“My grandmother, she likes The Beatles, said one of ‘em was cute or something,” Yoongi explained, as he watched him rifling through the records. “She likes Elvis too, he had some good tunes, I guess? That’s the kinda music I heard a lot when I was a kid.”

“Elvis?” Jimin repeated, as he looked at him, giving him a rather sweet smile. “Can you do a good impression, huh?”

“Ha, nah, I can’t sing. You should play some music that you like,” Yoongi replied, sitting down on the flooring and feeling the cool wood against his bare behind and upper thighs. “Lemme hear the kinda stuff that you listen to, yeah?”

“Listen to me, baby boy,” Jimin said, as he shifted to get onto his knees and he assumed a rather authoritative stance that made him have to look up at him to hold his gaze. “Because you don’t listen to much music, your palate has yet to be…refined. Yeah? Don’t listen to any of that Deadhead shit
that Namo plays in the car twenty-four-seven. No one needs psychedelic hippie rock. What you need…is a little new wave and new romantic. OK?”

“‘K…” Yoongi mumbled, completely clueless as to what any of that had actually meant.

“Well, post-punk is good too, but I’m talking more of the British scene than the American scene. Everything’s much more…flamboyant, you know?”

“Flamboyant?” he repeated, eyeing the sleeves again and finding that that described the musicians perfectly.

“Yeah, like these guys for example,” Jimin explained, pulling a record free and showing the cover to him. “Culture Club, they’re very flamboyant, and they make some good tunes, baby boy. I’ve got a few singles and their album too. You’ve gotta have heard this song on the radio - it’s called ‘Karma Chameleon’.”

Jimin retrieved said single so that he could drop the needle and start playing it.

Yoongi found himself staring at the case as he listened to the song, completely taken aback by the sight of so much makeup on the singer’s face. It was like that receptionist that had been in Fair Oaks Hotel, the one that had worn vibrant blue eyeshadow. He struggled to believe that someone could be so open and comfortable in their skin to wear such flamboyant clothing and makeup, when he personally struggled to wear a blouse without fearing that other men would realise that he was gay and treat him differently.

Yoongi wanted to feel like that, even when he had no desire to dress up and wear makeup. He just wanted to be comfortable and carefree, but he doubted that he would ever feel that way.

As a result of his staring, Yoongi didn’t really listen to the song, but he could sense that it was a catchy tune regardless. Yes, he had a feeling that he had heard this song playing on the radio in the past whenever he had escorted Hoseok around the city, and it might just have also been blaring from the stores inside of the boutiques and malls that he had taken him to.

When the song finished playing, Jimin proceeded to remove the vinyl and slip another one onto the deck. This record casing had a photograph of a man lying on a mirror, washed in a dull sepia tone so that it had a rather nostalgic feeling coming from it. The sleeve declared that this band was called ‘The Smiths’, and he had most certainly not heard of them before.
Yoongi thought that the vocalist had a funny voice, and he couldn’t decide if he loved or hated it. The song had a strangely upbeat rhythm to it, even when it seemed to sound somewhat blue to his ears.

Jimin moved to retrieve two fresh beers from the side table, the sound of him singing under his breath carrying under the song playing from the vinyl, so that he heard him softly crooning about a “charming man”.

“Jimin?”

“Yeah, baby boy?”

“Is this…is he singing ‘bout another man?” Yoongi asked, as he looked up at him in wonder; finding that his ears were suddenly a lot more sharply tuned to the lyrics than they had been a moment ago.

“Yeah, he’s singing about two men,” Jimin explained, dropping back to the floor beside him and holding the beer out to him in offering. “It’s very flirtatious, very suggestive and- what, you look a little confused?”

“I didn’t know that…that you could do that,” Yoongi mumbled, accepting the beer from him and furrowing his brow deeply. “I didn’t think that you could sing ‘bout other men like that, not on the radio. I thought it’d get banned, for being guh-gay.”

“Some songs are banned,” Jimin stated with a soft shrug, before snorting hard. “Oh, baby, you should listen to ‘Relax’, now that was banned countless times and it caused so much shit, and the video is just…well. Don’t watch the video, you might get uncomfortable with the whole…leather bar fetish shit. Just know that it was the most outrageous gay spectacle imaginable, the kinda ‘queer’ shit that scares the heteros so much, and it was genius.”

“There’s love songs for men by men,” Yoongi said in complete surprise, finding that this fact stunned him to his very core.

“Hmm, there is,” Jimin hummed, shifting to drop his head on his shoulder. “Don’t you think that’s amazing, baby boy?”
“Yeah…it’s amazing,” he agreed, having to take a sip of beer because his mouth had suddenly turned dry on him.

The song was rather short, and so his boyfriend had to change the record again. Jimin grabbed another case, which was black and had a black and white photograph of a statue on the front. He slipped the vinyl free from the cardboard sleeve to set it up on the record player, before settling back down and using his shoulder as a pillow.

“This is my favourite song, it’s called ‘Love Will Tear Us Apart’,” he explained in a quiet voice. “I used to have this in my old collection, and it was in pristine condition - not a single crease in it. But now…the sleeve has creases and tears around the edges.”

Jumin sighed wistfully at this, rolling his wrist so that the remains of his beer sloshed around the bottle.

Yoongi had always imagined that Jimin’s favourite song would be something upbeat, something cheerful and sweet, and yet this song was gloomy. From the lyrics, to the bass and haunting synths, there was a sense of cold and dark emotions coming from the vocalist’s crooning and mournful voice, and he found himself reaching down to find Jimin’s hand so that he could entwine their fingers and give it a soft squeeze. Just because he knew that he liked it so much. Then he turned his head to press a soft kiss against his still damp hair, closing his eyes and keeping his face there as the song played through to the end.

“You kinda like sad songs, sad and…and gay songs,” Yoongi mumbled, as he lifted his head up and held his gaze.

“What a surprise, the sad gay boy likes sad gay songs,” Jimin remarked, giving him a soft smile as he planted his chin on his shoulder. “The kinda songs that just beg you kiss your boyfriend over and over under the covers, and then make tender love to him as you whisper sweet things in his ear. You know?”

Yoongi shifted to give him a kiss on his brow at this, and then he turned his attention back to the box. He couldn’t help but start rifling through it because he was so curious as to what was hidden away inside of the countless records. He glanced at the covers just for the sake of it, not really recognising the bands or song titles, but eventually one stood out to him as he rapidly flicked through them.

“Oh, I know this one,” Yoongi remarked, as he flicked back several records to pull the vinyl out of the box. “‘Give It Up’ - it used to play a lot on the radio, right?”
“Of course you know it, everyone knows this song, Yoongi,” Jimin replied with a grin, moving to accept the record from him. “It’s ironically enough the gayest record that I own, and I regret nothing. I’m not a big fan of disco, of that funky vibe, but this is a good record. It just makes you wanna get up and dance all night long. So…”

Yoongi watched him slipping the record free from the case, moving to place it on the deck and pushing the needle in place. It moved to settle down on the record, making a slight scratching sound before the song started playing. As the first keyboard notes sounded out, Jimin turned back to him and he gave him a wide smile.

“So, we’re gonna dance,” Jimin stated, as he got to his feet and he held his hand out to him in offering.

“But, dance?” Yoongi repeated, his eyes sliding to stare at the record deck as his boyfriend pulled him upright again.

When the drums and bass kicked in underneath the synths, Jimin started to gently sway his shoulders and hips as he waited for the song to really start.

Yoongi stuck his tongue out to wet his lips, also softly swinging his arms at his sides as he anticipated what came next.

As the saxophone burst into the song, blending in with the upbeat synths and bass, Yoongi could only stare dumbly as his boyfriend really started moving to the song, because he didn’t know what to do.

“You know the dance, right?” Jimin asked over the song, his feet moving in a quick rhythm as he sashayed to the side and then back again, his arms sweeping in sync with his steps.

“Nuh-no, I ain’t seen the video,” Yoongi explained with a head shake, trying his very hardest to watch his footsteps to see what he was doing. But Jimin was stepping far too fast for him to really copy his actions, leaving him no choice but to sweep his arms back and forth because that was the easiest step. “Shit, Jimin, how’re you doing that?!”

“Just feel the song, baby boy,” Jimin replied, as he carried on doing the sashaying sidestep move; moving to the right then to the middle, and then to the left and back to the middle. “Don’t get
embarrassed, everyone looks stupid when they dance! That’s what makes it fun!”

At least when the singer started singing the verse, the dance became more simple. Yoongi was able to replicate his rocking hips and arms with ease, though he was a little stiff with embarrassment, but he couldn’t possibly do that funny stepping motion at all. He just listened to the man’s deep and rich tone, backed up by the soulful and sweet female backing vocals, and he hoped that he didn’t look as stupid as he felt.

When the chorus came on, Jimin at least stopped moving his legs to instead lift both hands and point at him in turn, each point following the beat.

Yoongi was able to copy this step, albeit a little offbeat.

“Na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na!” Jimin sang, the syllable rolling off his tongue smoothly as he first pointed at him, and then placed his hands on his waist.

“Um,” Yoongi hummed, slowly copying his actions and watching him spreading his thighs so that he could rock his hips to the beat.

“Baby give it up, give it up, baby give it up! Come on, baby boy, move those hips!” Jimin exclaimed with a grin, and Yoongi tried his very hardest to copy the sharp little rocks and not stare too much at his crotch as he did so. It was very hard ignoring it when he was wearing those tight briefs, after all.

Jimin sang along with the song, lifting his hands to repeat the two steps because the line repeated itself to complete the chorus.

Yoongi managed to copy this part, awkwardly laughing to himself as he dropped his head and tried to hide his flushed cheeks from view.

How his boyfriend not only danced to it so easily, but also sang along without a hint of embarrassment, was beyond him. His entire face was on fire and yet he could feel himself smiling regardless, because it was fun in a way that he couldn’t seem to understand right now.

Just like that, the song looped sections again, meaning that the dance also repeated itself. It was a rather simple formula, made dancing to it incredibly easy, except for the fact that some of the steps were too hard for him to copy. Yoongi couldn’t possibly hope to do the quick sidesteps to the
instrumental break like Jimin could, and so he just had to awkwardly flail his arms to try and cover his offbeat steps.

“I can’t dance!” Yoongi declared, hating how no matter what he tried to do, his limbs wouldn’t move like Jimin’s did. He couldn’t find the rhythm in the song, it was just too upbeat for him and his sluggish steps. “Ah, I look so stupid, Jimin!”

“Then sing along!” Jimin suggested, as he smoothly bounced to the beat. “Singing really helps you dance, trust me!”

“I can’t sing either!”

“Can you do anything, baby boy?!?” Jimin cried out in exasperation, before laughing giddily as he watched him trying his very hardest to dance.

The short verse came on again, giving them time to slow down and move in their own way - his boyfriend bopping perfectly and his body…still flailing around uselessly.

“Listen,” Jimin said, preparing himself for the upcoming chorus. “You don’t even need to know the words, you can make them up!”

Yoongi stopped moving to lift his hands up, repeating that funny pointing motion as the singers started chanting the word ‘na’ over and over like a drum roll.

“Na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na! Baby give it up! Baby boy! Baby give it up!” Jimin sang, purposefully changing the lyrics so that they both burst out laughing.

“Jimin!” Yoongi exclaimed around his laughter, his hips still awkwardly rocking as he tried to get the beat right.

“Na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na! Yoongi, give it up! Baby boy! Jimin, give it up!” Jimin ad-libbed, so into the song that he was adding his own flourishes to the dance steps.

The song switched up suddenly for an instrumental section, which was still as upbeat as the rest of
the song. Jimin threw his arms around in rhythm with the sharp snare drum crash, twisting and turning on the spot as he did so, and Yoongi slowed down as he found a rather genius line coming to mind. So he waited for the swelling synths to signal that the chorus was going to repeat, and when it did, Jimin resumed singing to the song.

“Na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na! Baby give it up! Baby boy-”

“Darling, give it up!” Yoongi sang back, his entire face scrunched up from not only embarrassment, but because he was grinning so much.

“You got it!” Jimin cried out happily, clapping his hands against his cheeks in shock and almost missing the next dance step.

“Na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na!” they sang in unison, stabbing their fingers at each other as they bounced their hips. “Baby give it up! Baby boy! Darling, give it up!”

Yoongi could see Jimin laughing, his head thrown back from the force of his giggles as the song moved onto the end section. Because the rhythm and lyrics had changed, they were unable to sing along, but they could still sloppily dance by making their own steps up.

Everything seemed to have…slowed down, save for the music. The way that Jimin’s chest swelled from each breath, rising and falling completely out of rhythm with the music; Yoongi’s own swinging arms and stepping feet, which he seemed to have no control over right now; even his racing heartbeat, that had started skipping like an erratic hiccup until he felt his head filling with a soft roaring sound almost as if he was going to collapse.

Yoongi couldn’t seem to breathe right now, but not because of fear; because of anxiety.

No, Yoongi couldn’t breathe because he was laughing so hard, sweat beading on his brow from their dancing, and his limbs shaking and swinging as he moved closer to his boyfriend.

Jimin started shimmying at him, his shoulders wriggling as he leaned close enough for their faces to almost touch. His damp hair bounced from the movement, his cross earrings dangling and catching the blue glow of the lava lamp perfectly.

Before he could help himself, Yoongi pouted his lips out to give him a quick kiss. Then he repeated
the dance move, shimmying forward to get closer to Jimin as he leaned back and teased him.

As the song started fading out to the end, Yoongi found himself kissing Jimin more than dancing, his swinging arms slipping around his neck so that he could keep him in place and stop him from shimmying away. His hips and feet were still moving to the song, accidentally stepping on Jimin’s toes in the process, and it was only when the song finished that he managed to get himself under control and stop dancing.

“Baby boy,” Jimin almost panted, reaching up to brush his hair back off his brow for him. “I thought that you couldn’t dance?”

“You call that dancing?” Yoongi retorted, as the next song started playing; a funky bass line and synth section coming from the record player before a saxophone joined in and spiced it up.

Before he could move away and sit down on the bed again, Yoongi felt Jimin’s arms slipping around his waist, so that he could drag him close. He leaned back into his hold instinctively, following the softest sway of his hips so that they were lazily rocking in rhythm with the next track. His boyfriend’s breath was warm against his throat, so warm and soft, and the rhythm was uneven from their hectic dancing. The song might just have been another upbeat disco track, but they moved soft and slow rather than bop to the smooth rhythm.

Jimin nudged at the back of his knees with his, guiding him to start taking steps in beat with the song. They didn’t move across the bedroom, but rather just stayed close to the record player, his boyfriend helping him dance by nudging his knees and slowly swaying their bodies.

Yoongi closed his eyes, moving purely under Jimin’s guiding touch so that his hips rocked in a smooth rhythm, so that he was no longer flailing around in the hopes of finding the beat. He rolled his head back with a soft sigh, exposing his throat just so Jimin could press soft kisses against his skin between each sway and gentle swing of his arms. He much preferred the first song, not only because it was easier to dance to, but because he knew the words, and he let his boyfriend take complete control for the duration of the track.

The vocalist sang about how it was ‘too hard to say goodbye’ over the funky beat and saxophone; and wasn’t that the truth?

The second song was rather short, for the final track on the vinyl started playing rather suddenly. This one was much smoother, with a prominent bass line that pleased his ears as they gently bopped to it, and when he heard the line about staying the night, it made his lips lift up in a lazy smile.
“Oh, baby won’t you spend the night?” Jimin repeated, making a soft noise under his breath that sounded like a giggle. “Hmm, baby boy, I can’t believe that you’re actually gonna spend the night here with me.”

When the vinyl stopped playing, the needle lifting as the record carried on slowly spinning, the bedroom plunged into silence that was only broken by their soft and rapid breathing.

Yoongi lifted his head up off his shoulder, opening his eyes and rolling his gaze over to study the record player for a moment. Then Jimin let go of his waist so that he could remove the vinyl, hunkering down and slipping it back inside of the cardboard case.

Yoongi shifted to sit down on the bed at last, reaching up to dab at his brow because there was a slight hint of sweat beading on his skin. The room suddenly felt too warm to him, even when the window was open, and as he dropped to lie on the bed, he couldn’t help but notice the broken fan above him.

“Shit…why don’t your ceiling fan work?” he asked, eyeing the dead fan.

“Oh, that thing’s been bust for so long now,” Jimin replied, as he pulled a final record free and he set it on the deck, moving the needle in place.

Yoongi had no clue what song he was playing, but the saxophone sounded so familiar to his ears that he found his breath catching in his throat.

Jimin moved to get onto the bed beside him, lying down but shifting so that he could prop his weight onto one elbow and hover over him.

“Jimin?” Yoongi mumbled, reaching up to brush a stray lock of hair back behind his ear for him.

“Mmm?”

“What song’s this?”
“Careless Whisper; why’d you ask?”

“This’ the song from my dream,” he said in a quiet voice, his fingers skipping down along his jawline. “The one I told you ‘bout.”

“Hmm? What dream, baby?”

“Uh, I mean, I told my answering machine ‘bout it,” Yoongi corrected, before laughing to himself. “I’d had a dream that we were cruising ‘round the city, and this song was playing on the radio. Ain’t that kinda crazy?”

“Yoongi, did you seriously talk to your answering machine?” Jimin asked, unable to keep his surprise off his face.

“Ohuh,” he confirmed, nodding softly. “I told you earlier, I listened to the messages so many times, and I talked to you too, ‘til I-”

Jimin lowered his head and he pressed a kiss against his mouth before he could finish talking, and so he cupped his neck in his hand as he returned it.

“‘til I fell asleep,” Yoongi finished against his lips.

As the record played, Yoongi felt his body becoming heavy underneath Jimin’s kisses and touch. His teeth and tongue nibbled and licked along his jawline to his throat, found the sensitive spot behind his ear so that he trembled and moaned into his hair; and his fingers snagged hold of his borrowed tee-shirt to tug at it. His own exploring mouth discovered that Jimin loved it when he peppered kisses against his biceps and the ball of his shoulder, and he shivered with a gasp whenever he kissed his neck.

Jimin dropped his head onto his chest with a soft sigh, kissing the bumps of his collarbones through the thin cotton as he stroked at his damp hair; his nose rubbing against the fragrant cotton. His fingers slipped under the lengths of his tee-shirt, finding the sharp jut of his hipbone so that he could massage at it with his thumb, his touch edging just close enough to his lower stomach to be teasing rather than arousing. Yoongi let him keep it there rather than move it away, because his own hand had settled on the full curve of one of his buttocks and he didn’t want to move it away just yet.
The song faded out into silence after several minutes, no more smooth music filling the bedroom, and Yoongi closed his eyes with a soft sigh.

As a mixture of working all day long: filling in dozens of spreadsheets and punching calculations into his calculator, whilst also juggling countless phone calls, he was rather tired, and the beer and dancing had just added to his exhaustion. But he knew that Jimin was still adjusting to his sudden time-zone change, and that he was going to likely stay awake all night long as a result.

“You tired?” Yoongi asked in a soft voice, cracking his eyelids open a slit to look up at him. He could just about keep his eyes open long enough to hold his gaze, because he was so tired.

“No, sadly not. But, if you hold me in your arms all night long, I might just fall asleep and dream about you.”

When Jimin shifted to lie down, he rolled onto his side and he silently bade that he settle down too, that he hold onto him.

Yoongi slipped his arm over his waist, tugging him close so that he could bury his face into his hair and slot right up against his back. Jimin curled back into his embrace so naturally, his spine curved and his behind pressing against his crotch, and he reached up to take hold of his arm and start stroking his thumb over his skin. The position felt so comfortable to him because he was the one getting to cradle him in his arms, rather than the other way around.

When Jimin had first pulled him into his arms that night in the hotel, Yoongi had felt small, had felt somewhat trapped in his soft and warm hold: naked and vulnerable. But now that he was able to hold him in his arms, he felt strangely…powerful. Yoongi felt powerful in a way that he had never felt before, even after everything; the singing, the kisses and soft swaying.

All of the intimate things that he would have been terrified of just a few weeks ago in favour of quick sexual satisfaction, were now the kind of things that made him feel strong, even when there was a lingering tenderness in his chest.

“Oh, Jimin?” Yoongi mumbled, lifting his head to balance it in the crook between his neck and shoulder. “You’re so soft and warm, mmm, I think I’m gonna fall asleep any second from now.”

Jimin sighed when he kissed his shoulder, right on the little freckle, and then he tightened his hold on his forearm.
“Go on, sleep, baby boy,” he suggested, as he pressed several more kisses on his skin. “I’ll still be here when you wake up, OK?”

Yoongi placed his head down on the pillow, and he closed his eyes, and he found himself slipping into a light slumber within a mere minute. Listening to Jimin’s soft breathing made him think of the ebb and flow of the tide, and as he sank down into the blackness behind his eyelids, the last thing that he saw was the deep blue glow coming from the lava lamp casting over his golden skin and black hair.

Yoongi’s rest wasn’t entirely perfect, for there were fractured moments in which he found himself waking up and fumbling to keep hold of Jimin, only to find that he was still lying in bed beside him. Sometimes, he heard himself mumbling in his sleep, but he had no clue what he said, or what Jimin said in response to soothe him back to sleep. He kept getting flashes of the bay in his mind, of thrashing waves and thick curds of frothy foam, but he eventually managed to settle down and sleep properly.

In his dreams, Jimin was floating in his swimming pool, diving down deeply only to break the surface again moments later; shaking the water from his hair and raking it back as he rapidly blinked it from his eyes. He waved at him to dive into the water too, calling out to him sweetly until he ended up doing so, diving into the cool and clear water. Yoongi cupped his boyfriend’s face in his hands to wipe at his cheeks, and splashed water at him; he dived under the surface and tried to kiss him whilst holding his breath; and they floated lazily in the cool water until Jimin’s voice finally cut through the tranquility of his dream and woke him up.

“…still asleep, baby boy?”

Yoongi breathed out a series of noises at this, hoping that they would formulate into words, but finding that they didn’t. Because his eyes were still tightly squeezed shut, he could only listen to Jimin giggling as he dragged his heavy limbs over the mattress and he tried to ascertain if he was still holding him in arms.

After discovering that he was indeed still in his hold, Yoongi pulled himself as close as possible and he tried to open his eyes.

The first thing that he saw was black, complete blackness, and so he closed with eyes again with a breathy sigh. It took him considerable effort to open them again, fluttering several times until he managed to peer through Jimin’s hair and catch a slight hint of the bedroom wall. Judging from the current brightness, it was now morning, but he was unable to see out of the window to gauge what time that it might just be.
“...mmm, awake,” Yoongi hummed, pressing his tongue against the roof of his mouth to force the words out. “Awake, darling, I’m awake.”

Jimin rolled over to face him at last, slipping his arm over his waist in a loose embrace. The movement disturbed him, made him move his head away and bury it against the pillow for a moment instead. Yoongi could smell various scents on it that were completely different to his own pillows.

“...time’s it?” he slurred into the white cotton, wondering if Jimin could even understand his words.

“It’s 9:30am, baby boy, you’ve been out for, like, nine hours,” Jimin explained, his palm settling in place so perfectly on his waist to stroke at his side through the thin cotton. “Hmm, you’re still so sleepy though. Look at that little face, so sleepy.”

Yoongi turned his face away from the pillow to look at him, struggling to keep his eyes open, and the younger man shifted to press two soft little pecks on his slightly swollen eyelids. Then he peppered kisses down the slope of his nose to his mouth, and so he pouted his lips out just in time to return the kiss. The gentle brush of their lips made him hum contentedly, and then he reached up to rub at his eyelids roughly.

“Have you got any business to see to?” Jimin asked, settling back down on the pillow and watching him intently. “Any calls to make, Yoongi?”

“Mmm, not now, no,” he mumbled in reply, his voice a dry and husky whisper.

Yoongi had already notified Seokjin in advance the previous evening, had told him to fax him business details later in the day rather than expect a phone call because he would be ‘busy’ today. His friend hadn’t asked him what he had meant by this, but had just promised to do so. That meant that he didn’t need to worry about missing his morning phone call at least, which was lucky because he had already missed his usual window.

“D’you sleep, huh?” Yoongi managed to sigh out, still blinking languidly as he tried to get his eyes to stay open.

“I got a nap in, here and there,” Jimin replied, lazily shrugging as he carried on stroking at his waist. “You kept waking up, Yoongi, randomly throughout the night. You muttered a lot too, but I can’t really remember what. It was just sleep talk, Namo does it sometimes too.”
“Sorry, did I keep waking you up?” Yoongi apologised, moving to bury his face against his hair. He had been trying to kiss him, but his sleep-heavy body was still not fully operational and had decided that burying his face in his fragrant hair was a much better idea.

“It’s fine, baby boy,” Jimin reassured, moving his hand up to arm instead, settling it on his biceps and giving it a soft squeeze. “I’m just glad that you got plenty of sleep, after working so hard. Getting to lie beside you the entire time, not exactly asleep and still kinda awake? It felt nice, it felt like I was dreaming, and I had to keep touching your arm to make sure that I was awake. A part of me kept thinking that you might be Namo, but when I heard those funny little mumbles, I knew that it was you.”

Yoongi wet his lips at this, his tongue dry and likely tasting like beer. He knew that they should get out of bed now, before he ended up falling asleep again. It would be easy to do so, on account of Jimin’s warm skin against his. The house was also incredibly quiet, the silence permeated by the occasional soft roar of car engines rolling down the street coming in through the open window, or the rustle of the sheets against their skin as they moved on the mattress.

But a part of him didn’t want to get out of the bed, because he was so comfortable and content, and he knew that Jimin was too.

“So, Jimin?”

“Mmm?”

“This is nice, right?” Jimin remarked in a whisper-soft voice, wriggling on the bed so that their bare legs brushed together. “This feels good for you too, doesn’t it? You’re comfortable with this?”

“Ji…Ji…” Yoongi replied, moving his face from his hair so that he could press their brows together. “Just wanna…stay like this, feels good, feels right. It’s just like…when I’m with you, like this, I ain’t gotta think, y’know?”

“None of that shit matters, right?” Jimin agreed, his breath puffing out against his face. “It’s like the whole world around us just doesn’t matter for awhile. It’s just you and me, and it feels so good.”

“My world’s just…just you, right now,” he mumbled, shifting to slip his arm over his neck. “Shit, can’t…explain, mmm too tired, but it feels…”
“It feels like what, baby boy?”

Yoongi tried to think of the right words to say, tried to explain his feelings to him, but he couldn’t seem to do so.

How could he put into words the sensation that being in Jimin’s arms created: that blend of vulnerability and calm that he had never felt before, not since he had been a child and had been enveloped in the warm embrace of Hoseok’s mother?

How could he tell his boyfriend that he had found himself now starting to fear being away from him, instead of being close, even when his touch still managed to set his heart racing in his chest?

How could he possibly tell Jimin that dreaded word that he had never said aloud before, not outside of the boundaries of friendship and familial affection?

Yoongi just settled on nuzzling his face against his, hearing Jimin giggling softly at the contact. Maybe, he didn’t actually need words to let Jimin know what he was feeling. Maybe, his kisses and touches said more than they ever could, because at least they couldn’t catch in his throat and choke him.

“Jimin?”

“Yeah, baby boy?”

“D’you wanna, uh, d’you wanna make breakfast together?” Yoongi grunted, rolling onto his back and stretching out on the small mattress as he did so. He turned his head to look at him, seeing something that looked like surprise on his face. “What?”

“Breakfast? You wanna…wanna make breakfast with me?” Jimin asked, shifting his weight onto his elbow to look down at him.

Yoongi knew that Jimin had wanted to share something like that, ever since he had promised to do so that morning they had last seen each other. He had promised to try and cook him breakfast, just so he would spend more time with him and let their tentative relationship strengthen. He had mentioned
it in the hopes that he would say yes, so that he would give him the opportunity to spend that little bit more time with him.

“Yeah, d’you wanna give it a shot, huh?” he replied, before giving him a lazy smile.

“…OK,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, his lips twitching at the corners as he tried to not smile too much.

After going in the bathroom to relieve himself and splash water on his sleepy face, Yoongi followed Jimin down the narrow staircase to get downstairs.

Upon glancing into the living-room, he saw no sight of Namjoon, but the other man had left his mark - mostly in the fact that he had actually tidied up most of the mess. The room looked much neater, not a trace of drug paraphernalia on display and not a hint of rubbish present. The kitchen also looked very clean, though there were dishes left on the sideboard to signal that he had eaten breakfast, or even supper, at some point.

“Coffee?” Jimin offered, stretching his arms up over his head with a grunt. “We’ve got coffee, got a couple of things, um, I’m not sure what we can make for breakfast though…”

“I’ll make it,” Yoongi offered, seeing a small but useable kettle and cafetière placed beside the oven. “Where’s the, uh, the coffee, huh?”

Jimin had to grab a jar in which the coffee was kept, a cute Bakelite jar that was white and had ‘coffee’ emblazoned on it in deep blue. Yoongi proceeded to fill up the kettle and let it boil as he scooped two deep spoonfuls of grinds into the glass cafetière.

“I know how to cook a couple of things,” Jimin replied, as he watched him. “Not breakfast food though, I usually just eat Pop Tarts with coffee and call that a healthy start to the day.”

This made Yoongi snort under his breath as he glanced around the kitchen, hoping to locate cupboards of some kind that he could check to see the kind of ingredients he had to work with. He saw a large cupboard set on the wall above the counter, the wood painted the same deep green as the walls.

“But, you seem to know how to cook,” Jimin added. “Because you offered to make breakfast for us,
even when you know that I can’t cook too good.”

“What? You think I got maids to cook me food every day, huh?” Yoongi asked with a wry smile, getting up onto his tiptoes to try and grab hold of the cupboard handles. “Well, I don’t. It’s why I go to Mickey’s Joint for breakfast, and why I don’t eat much else. I got maids to clean my house, yeah, but that’s ‘cos it’s so big and I’m busy.”

“Wow, just housecleaning maids?” Jimin remarked sarcastically, raising his eyebrows at him. “I feel so sorry for you, Yoongi, we all deserve the full maid treatment.”

“I can cook, I’m just too busy working to really get the time,” Yoongi clarified, finding his boyfriend’s sharp wit as amusing as always. “It can be nice when I get the time to do so, but the kinda food I grew up on - Korean food, that shit takes a long time to prepare. So, I cook it sometimes as a treat, but mostly I just end up making things like steamed fish with rice, or salad. It ain’t exactly fancy, but it fills a hole.”

“I know how to fill holes, just not with food,” Jimin joked, giggling as he did so because even he found this puerile remark funny.

Yoongi grunted as he tried to reach the cupboard, his fingertips grazing against, but sadly not snagging hold of, the decorative handles. He had never realised just how high the ceiling in the kitchen was until just now, especially when the shelves were built so high on the tall walls. Even when his own mansion had a nice high ceiling, at least his kitchen had been built to be accessible. It made him feel shorter than he was, not that that was a hard thing to achieve.

“Grab the chair, baby boy,” Jimin suggested with a smirk, dragging a rather rickety-looking chair over to him that seemed to have the sole purpose of being used to reach the cupboard. “It really comes in handy, because I don’t have a ladder.”

“Very funny,” Yoongi muttered, moving to grab the back of the chair so that he could place it in front of the counter. “Why’re your cupboards so fucking high?”

“See, when I tell Namo that he tells me that I’m just a shrimp, but I’m glad that you too have to jump to reach them. It fills me with relief knowing that my baby boy is a shrimp too,” he said, holding the chair steady for him as he climbed up onto the padded seat.

“Jimin, I know it’s been awhile since I threatened to smack you, but just know, it’s always hanging
in the air,” Yoongi intoned, reaching down to ruffle his hair roughly before opening the cupboard.

The sight that he was greeted by was rather dire, for he could see a lot of boxes of junk, but nothing fresh. The freshest ingredients on offer was a bag of still sealed flour, that he checked just to ensure that it wasn’t three years old.

“D’you have eggs? Bread? Staples like that?” he mumbled, furrowing his brow in concentration.

“Oh, there’s a whole carton of eggs in - fresh, Namo bought the groceries yesterday before picking me up from the airport. We’ve got eggs, bread, milk, fruit and vegetables, the rest of the stuff is just a random mix though. Why?”

Yoongi handed him the bag of flour down, before rifling through the cupboard to find various packets of instant ramyeon, Pop Tarts, jars of jam, boxes of cookies and tins of soup and noodle-based concoctions that made him grimace. Then he closed the cupboard and he got down off the chair to collect other items. The loaf of bread was shoved into a matching Bakelite bread bin, missing a couple of slices, and the milk was in the refrigerator with the eggs.

“Eggs and toast, side order of pancakes,” Yoongi declared, moving the various ingredients onto the counter. “You got meat? Bacon or anything to go with the eggs?”

Jimin retrieved a packet of bacon from the fridge, even adding a ripe tomato just for the sake of it, which made Yoongi smile to himself. He might not know how to prepare breakfast too well, but he knew the best ingredients that went into a hearty meal.

“This is just like what we ordered at the diner,” Jimin pointed out, adding two little condiment shakers to the counter just as Yoongi found a bottle of vegetable oil hidden away inside of the fridge. “Did you do that on purpose, baby boy?”

“Maybe,” he retorted with a lazy shrug. “Maybe, I just really like this meal, or…maybe, it’s a good memory. Like, how you ‘member music, maybe I ‘member food instead? Tastes and scents, they linger with you the most.”

“Hmm, that’s true, I can still taste your lips on mine right now,” his boyfriend said, drawing a heavy sigh from him that made them both smile.
When the kettle finished boiling with a series of low whistles, steam billowing out from the spout, Jimin moved to go and retrieve it.

“No, leave the coffee, brew it right before finishing the cooking, not before you start the cooking,” Yoongi advised, and so Jimin moved away from the steaming kettle. “Gotta let the water cool a lil anyway, to brew it just right.”

“OK, I’ll do it when you tell me to. So, what goes with the pancakes?” Jimin asked curiously. “We don’t have any whipped cream or syrup, just fruit.”

“Fruit’s fine, looks like you’ll have to do without the cream,” Yoongi joked, nodding at said bowl of fruit. “Wash it and cut it up, peel the skins and shit whilst I cook the rest, yeah? Be a good boy and help me out.”

“Gladly, baby boy,” Jimin hummed, giving him a quick peck on the cheek before he crossed the kitchen.

Whilst Yoongi heated up the pans, he mixed up eggs, a splash of milk, and lashing of salt and pepper in a bowl for the omelette, and then he started on the pancake mix. He was suddenly aware of how much work it actually was preparing breakfast, for the meal seemed so simple whenever he sat down to eat it in the diner. He tried his hardest to mix up the two batters well, to stop any lumps from settling in the thick mixtures, and then he poured the eggs into the hot pan.

When he spared a quick glance over at Jimin, Yoongi found himself pausing in the act of retrieving a spatula.

Jimin was just sitting there on the counter with his back to the window, in a pair of tight briefs, his thighs spread wide so that he could kick his feet back and forth comfortably. He had a small knife in hand, with which he was cutting up bananas, skinning and dicing apples, and scoring at kiwis. His skin was glowing in the morning sunlight, beams of it falling through his dark locks of hair so perfectly and reflecting off of his eyes to turn his deep brown irises a honeyed shade. Yoongi couldn’t help but stare at him as he cast aside a chunk of kiwi skin, and that was when he caught sight of his staring.

Jimin sucked a dribble of fruit juice off his thumb with a mischievous smile, his eyes crinkling at the corners as he nibbled at his thumb.
“What?” he asked, as he pulled his thumb away and he hesitated in the act of grabbing another kiwi.

Yoongi placed the spatula down to move and slip his arms around his waist, shimmying his way between his open thighs just so he could place his face on his bare chest. His boyfriend laughed softly at this, clearly finding this sudden moment of affection surprising. His skin was so warm against his cheek, so warm and soft, that he couldn’t help but press his face into it. The faded scent of Shea butter was still present, and when he breathed it in, he held it in his lungs for a moment before exhaling again.

“Oh, baby boy,” Jimin sighed, his hand settling on the back of his head to hold it in place. “You’re being so affectionate today. What’d I do, huh? What’s making you this sweet? I gotta know, so that I can get this level of snuggling all of the time.”

Yoongi didn’t reply because he felt no need to, and he just kept his face in place against the soft swell of his breast muscles as he let his boyfriend play with his hair.

It was just like how he had fantasised it that morning in the diner, even with some differences. Jimin wasn’t sitting on his kitchen stool reading a newspaper, clad in his wrinkled blouse and drinking coffee. No, he was sitting on a rather scratched-up wooden counter in a cramped kitchen in his tight briefs, his fingers sticky with fruit juice; but it was still so perfect to him. It was perfect in its imperfections, in the way that it was so natural and raw.

Yoongi shifted to plant his chin against his chest, so that he could look up at him.

Jimin held his gaze unblinkingly, his fingers moving down to his neck so that he could trace his jaw with his thumb. It was only as his boyfriend went to kiss him that he realised that he had left the eggs cooking, and then he let out a gasp as he moved his head away.

“Shit, the eggs!” Yoongi cursed, quickly untangling himself so that he could dart over to the stove and lower the heat before the mix ended up burning.

Yet, he quickly discovered that the omelette was ruined, for when he tried to flip it over, it broke up into several large and still gooey chunks. At least it was golden, rather than burnt, and so he just stared at the fluffy mess for a moment before looking over at his boyfriend.

“Well, scrambled eggs are just as good,” Jimin remarked, before giving him a wide grin that showed that he found the disaster hilarious.
Yoongi quickly scrambled the mess with his spatula and then he moved the eggs to the back of the stove, letting them settle in the still hot pan and finish cooking off the heat.

Though he had never made pancakes before, Yoongi knew that it was a basic recipe. Therefore, he just poured some of the batter into the buttered pan to cook the first one, letting it heat up on one side first. Then he flipped the pancake over as it started bubbling to let it cook on the other side, repeating the process until the pancake was golden and thick. He dropped it onto a plate and then he poured the next dribble of batter into the pan, leaving his boyfriend to finish preparing the fruit.

Jimin sidled up behind him to watch him cooking the last of the breakfast, slipping his arms around his waist and setting his chin in the crook between his neck and shoulder. Yoongi just resumed cooking without much thought at all, pouring the last of the pancake batter into the pan to let it cook and then preparing the final large pan with a dribble of oil.

Yoongi was in the act of frying the bacon when Jimin’s fingers trailed down from his waist to find the end of Namjoon’s borrowed tee-shirt. He gave it a teasing little tug as he gently pressed himself up against his bare behind.

“Don’t,” Yoongi said, laughing as he knocked his hand away. “I’ll burn the bacon, and you don’t wanna waste bacon like that. This shit’s the blow of the meat world, yeah?”

“I like my bacon crispy,” Jimin argued, his hands once more getting adventurous enough to tug at the lengths of his tee-shirt and cheekily expose him.

“Mmm, and I like my dick free from third-degree burns,” he retorted, slapping at his hands until his boyfriend relented with a burst of giggles.

“Baby boy, I can’t believe how…cute that you look making breakfast,” Jimin sighed against his neck. “It’s just so weird to me, because I’ve never had a boyfriend, never mind a boyfriend cook breakfast for me. I can’t help it, I just really wanna show you how much I appreciate it. You know, by bending you over the counter and fucking you nice and deep.”

Yoongi gulped hard at this, finding his tongue slipping free to lick at his lips as he flipped the rashers of bacon over. He just knew that Jimin was aware of the fact that his face had flushed with heat, because he just seemed to know how to make him blush.
“Show me how much you appreciate it by eating it,” Yoongi retorted, flipping the pancake and the bacon over again whilst his boyfriend nuzzled against his shoulder.

As soon as the bacon was cooked, he dumped the chopped tomato into the residual grease, lowering the heat so that he could quickly fry them too whilst the bread toasted in the pancake pan. The breakfast was so close to being finished that he told Jimin to brew the coffee, and so he filled up the cafetière and then he stacked the cooling pancakes onto a plate to drop the chunks of fruit on top and the side.

Yoongi buttered the toast, shovelled out fluffy chunks of scrambled egg and fried tomatoes on top, and then he added the bacon to the side. Satisfied that it both looked and smelled great, he dumped the pans into the sink and then he proceeded to retrieve the plates.

“Breakfast’s served,” Yoongi announced, holding the two plates out only to recall that there was no kitchen table present. It was enough to make him stop dumbly, running his eyes across the room as he tried to figure out where they were supposed to eat. “Uh, Jimin?”

“Join me up here,” Jimin suggested, patting at the counter whilst he grabbed two mugs to prepare the coffee. “Me and Namo usually eat on the sofa.”

So Yoongi placed the plates down, and then he awkwardly pulled himself up onto the counter. He felt so immature sitting up on it like this, his bare legs dangling and almost begging that he kick them back and forth like a child. But it was strangely comfortable slouching on the counter as he waited for Jimin to finish making the coffee and drag himself up beside him.

His boyfriend made sure to add only a hint of milk and no sugar, sliding his mug over to him as he retrieved cutlery from a drawer, and then he moved to sit up on the counter too.

“This looks delicious, baby boy, but-”

“Not as delicious as you,” Yoongi finished for him, just knowing what he was going to say because it was too predictable.

“Actually, I was gonna say “but not as delicious as your lips” but, thanks, Yoongi,” Jimin retorted, as he gave him a wink.
Whilst they ate breakfast, the younger man held his tongue rather than attempt to make conversation. Yoongi was glad to see that he was enjoying his cooking, for he had been rather worried that he would mess it up. But the toast was golden and not burnt, the disastrous omelette that had turned into scrambled eggs was moist and fluffy, and the bacon was crisp just how he had joked about liking it. Even the pancakes tasted pretty good to him, not as light as the ones from the diner, but good enough for a first attempt. Yoongi was sure to avoid the kiwi chunks, however, leaving them just for Jimin.

When they were finished with the meal, the sink was filled with stacks of dishes, and Yoongi felt like he needed to wash them. Being a guest didn’t mean that he could leave the house in a mess, for he believed that guests were supposed to show thanks for hospitality by assisting in such minor tasks.

Yoongi filled up the sink with hot and soapy water and he proceeded to start scrubbing them clean, Jimin sitting on the counter beside him to dry them with a bright blue dish towel.

“So, what’s the verdict, huh?” Yoongi joked, scrubbing at a layer of grease to try and wash it free. “Can I cook or can I cook?”

“You can cook, Yoongi,” Jimin agreed with a fond smile, hastily drying at a plate. “I can’t wait for you to cook me dinner too, you know, because you’re so good at it.”

“Oh yeah? What’re you gonna cook for me?” he retorted, rinsing suds free from the pan and dumping it onto the sideboard. Then he drained the sink, the dishes all stacked to the side for his boyfriend to dry.

“Hmm, dope?” Jimin joked, the wisecrack making Yoongi guffaw as he grabbed the dry knives and forks and he dropped them into the drawer. “OK, I can cook you, um, gukmul tteokbokki, if you like that? My partner showed me how, and I can make fried rice and kimbap, and I can also bake a mean cake from those instant mixes. You know the ones I’m talking about, right?”

“Shit, I know ‘em, yeah,” Yoongi agreed with a nod. “My friend, his mother used to let us bake those things when we were kids. They had brownies and-”

“Fudge cake,” Jimin added.

“and that, and they also had cupcakes too,” he finished, grinning widely as he watched him grabbing a plate from the metal rack. “Yeah, I know what you mean, darling.”
“Yoongi?” Jimin asked in a quiet voice, his feet kicking back and forth from his counter perch as he slowly dried the plate with the towel.

“Mmm?” Yoongi hummed, watching him curiously.

“Um…never mind, it’s nothing.”

“What? Y’know I ain’t buying that, right? It ain’t nothing if you thought of something, ‘member?” he argued, moving to grab the dry mug from the counter. “What’s on your mind?”

“Is it…is it too soon to say that I love you?”

Yoongi felt his fingers twitching around the mug, so that it slipped out of his grip and it hit the kitchen floor. It made a shockingly loud noise in the silence of the house, shattering into countless pieces that flew across the kitchen and made them both jump in surprise.

“Oh!” Jimin exclaimed, almost dropping the plate as he tried to place it down on the counter. “It’s OK! Just a little slip of the fingers, I do it all the time, just let me clean it up, I-”

“Nuh-no, it’s ‘k!” Yoongi argued, lifting his hands and shaking them at him. “I got this, I- aw, shit!”

Yoongi felt a shard of porcelain catching right in the pad of skin just below his big toe as he moved to try and grab the broom, digging in deep as he staggered backwards and he tripped over his own feet in shock. His bare ass connected with the floor with a jarring thud, making him cry out in mingled surprise and pain and luckily not bite his tongue.

“Yoongi! Oh, baby!” Jimin cried out, diving down off the counter and then dropping to his knees. He managed to not catch himself on any of the porcelain, saving his soft knees from being cut to ribbons. “Are you OK?!”

“Duh-don’t touch me!” Yoongi cried out, dragging his injured foot away before Jimin could hope to grab hold of his ankle and check the damage. “There’s buh-blood! Don’t touch me!”

Jimin flinched at this, dragging his hand away and clapping it against his chest with a soft gasp of
surprise.

Yoongi could see that there was blood pouring from the wound, puddling out onto the light wooden flooring, and it was shockingly bright against his skin. Almost too vivid, for it reminded him of those vibrant bathhouse lights, and he felt a sickening wave of nausea washing over him that made him gag.

“Yoongi, it’s OK,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, holding his hands up placatingly. “It’s just a little blood, I’m not gonna get infected. You don’t even have AIDS, right? It’s OK.”

But when Jimin shifted to try and touch his ankle, Yoongi pulled his foot away again with a harsh whine, reaching up to grab at the front of his tee-shirt. He smeared blood across the flooring, which looked almost black on the dark wood, and he heard the younger man gasping in horror at the sight of his injured foot.

“Jimin, I tuh-told ‘em that I’m clean, I told ‘em, but they don’t buh-believe me,” Yoongi sobbed, his fingers worrying at the neckline of his tee-shirt roughly. “I got tuh-tested, I’m clean. I don’t huh-have AIDS. But he duh-don’t believe me!”


“I duh-did it to show ‘em that I’m clean. But it didn’t wuh-work! My dad says that all guh-gays have it, and that I’ve got it too, no matter what the tests suh-say,” Yoongi hiccuped, balling his fists up to rub at his eyes roughly. He could feel it all spilling free even when he didn’t want it to, his fear taking over. “He duh-don’t care ‘bout what I tell him; ‘bout me being clean and not having suh-sex. The last time that we had dinner together, he-he had the plates and glasses I used trashed right in front of muh-me, ‘cos he said that they couldn’t use ‘em after I tuh-touched ‘em.”

“Oh, Yoongi…”

Jimin slowly crawled over his splayed legs so that he could lower himself onto his lap, his own thighs spread wide as he did so.

Yoongi felt his weight settling on his lap, and then his hands ran up his arms to grab hold of his face. His touch was so cool on his burning cheeks that it was unbelievable, and he craved the sensation of his thumbs brushing across his skin.
“Yoongi, baby, I don’t care what he says: that’s bullshit,” Jimin told him in his firmest tone, his thumbs gently wiping at his damp cheeks. “It’s complete bullshit, and that’s the truth. Read the fliers down in The Castro, follow the news, listen to the facts. You know how AIDS is spread, you do. The only way that you’re born with it is if your mother has it; that’s it, that’s what the government-issued advice says.”

“I nuh-nuh-know, but—”

“Gay men aren’t certified carriers of the virus, that’s bullshit. You, me, we don’t have it, and we never have. The tests said so, baby, and they don’t lie to us.”

“I know, it’s juh-just—”

“It’s just what, Yoongi?” Jimin asked, cocking his head and holding his gaze unflinchingly.

“I dunno!” he sobbed, dropping his head and blinking even more tears down his cheeks that his boyfriend hastily wiped free. “I dunno, Jimin! I dunno anymore!”

Yoongi took several gasps for breath, hiccuping on his sobs as he squeezed his eyes shut. His fingers were tugging at his tee-shirt, clenched so tight that his fists were aching. He was so thankful for the wall being behind his back, for it stopped him from trying to push Jimin away so that he could curl up into a tight ball on the floor and block him out. He wanted so badly to not let him see his tears, to see him crying, but Jimin was holding onto him so tightly that he couldn’t hope to knock his hands free.

“It’s OK, baby boy, it’s OK,” Jimin said in a soft voice, moving to press a kiss against his hairline. “You don’t have to understand it right now. You just need to calm down, OK? Take nice deep breaths and calm down. Can I touch you now, huh? Can I get that nasty piece of porcelain out of your poor foot? Please?”

“Uh-‘k,” Yoongi hiccuped, letting go of his tee-shirt to wipe at his eyes again.

Jimin pressed several more quick kisses against his brow, and then he got up to quickly leave the kitchen, his bare feet padding on the staircase as he presumably entered the bathroom. When he stepped back into the kitchen, he did so with several objects in hand: a roll of bandage, a packet of band-aids, and something that looked like a small tube of antiseptic.
Yoongi blinked away more tears that were clinging to his eyelashes, hating how they stung so much, and he tried his very hardest to get himself under control for Jimin’s sake.

Jimin didn’t need to see him like this. He already put up with so many problems of his, that he shouldn’t have this burden dumped on him too. But Yoongi couldn’t seem to stop crying. Even when he felt disgusting, when he felt like a child, he could do no more than softly sob as he rubbed at his eyes with his fists and he hiccuped for air.

“Shush, it’s OK,” Jimin whispered, hastily sweeping the broken mug to the side so that he could kneel down in front of him again. He had the dish towel in hand, and he lifted his injured foot up to place it down on his bare lap. “It’s OK, baby boy, I’m here. Hmm? Just take slow and deep breaths, it’s OK.”

Jimin took hold of the edge of porcelain, quickly pulling it out. Yoongi winced at the slight sting as the shard slipped free from his skin, and he saw that it was quite a large chunk of porcelain. He cast it aside without a care, grabbing hold of his foot instead so that he could press the towel against the wound and stem the bleeding.

“There, it’s out,” Jimin cooed, and Yoongi stared at the bloody chunk of porcelain as he took another uneven gasp of breath. “It can’t hurt you now, so, just let me take care of this nasty cut.”

Jimin kept the towel in place for a moment, applying pressure to the slice in his foot, and when he pulled it free, it was no longer bleeding. The wound was a rather jagged slice, an inch or so long and deep enough to have cut into several layers of skin, and it was still dully stinging.

Jimin shifted to drop his head and he pressed a soft kiss right against the cut, the action making Yoongi gasp in shock because it was so tender, so loving in a way that he couldn’t believe was all for him. Then he uncapped the little tube of antiseptic to squirt some of the white cream onto his fingers.

“Juh-Jimin, it ain’t too soon to say it,” Yoongi said, as he took a deep breath and he held it; willing his racing heart to slow down. “It ain’t, I…I liked hearing it, and that’s why I puh-panicked. I panicked ‘cos it felt good, like it ain’t ever felt before. It scared me feeling that good. I’m suh-sorry.”

“Oh, baby boy, don’t say sorry,” Jimin cooed, gently massaging the cream into his skin for him, which made the wound sting even more. “Don’t do that, I understand. I expected that it might’ve scared you, after everything. I’m just glad that your poor little foot is OK. Yeah?”
“I duh-don’t want you thinking that I hated it,” he gasped, reaching up to rub at his eyes again because he could feel the last of his tears welling on his lash line. “I didn’t hate it, Jimin, I swear I didn’t. I luh-luh-luh- shit.”

“It’s OK, Yoongi, you don’t have it say it right now.”

“No! No, I can do it! I can duh…do it, Jimin,” Yoongi argued, swallowing hard and then taking a series of rapid breaths. “I can do it, you just gotta…gotta lemme try.”

“You’re trying right now, baby boy,” Jimin stated, retrieving the band-aid from the little box to peel the back free. “If it’s hard to say right now, I’d rather you wait until it doesn’t scare you as much. I don’t want you getting upset again, because of me.”

“I know, but if I can’t suh-say it now, I’ll never be able to say it,” he sighed, sticking his tongue out to wet his lips. “The first time’s always gonna be the-the hardest, right?”

Jimin pressed the band-aid in place on his sole, gently rubbing his thumb over it to stick it in place. Then he retrieved the bandage and he started wrapping it around his foot, giving him enough time to collect himself as he gently wrapped it in place and knotted it, just to keep the band-aid secure.

As soon as he was done, Yoongi reached over to grab at him, to pull him back onto his lap so that he could wrap his arms around his neck in an embrace. The younger man grabbed at his waist, holding onto him tight.

“Jimin, I…I love you,” Yoongi sighed against his hair, tightening his hold around his neck as he did so. “You’re my boyfriend and I luh…love you. I’m-muh scared and I dunno what it muh-means, but I do: I love you. See? I can say it, I cuh-can. I can say that I luh-luh-luh-love you, ‘cos I do.”

“Oh, Yoongi,” Jimin whispered, his own voice taking an uneven breathlessness to it that seemed to hint that he might just start crying too. He pulled his face away to look into his eyes. “Say it again, baby boy, just for me. Please?”

“Jimin, I love you,” Yoongi said, managing to not hiccup this time as he roughly wiped at his cheeks with the heel of his hand. “Say it for muh-me too.”
“Yoongi, I love you so much, so fucking much,” Jimin, said as he squeezed at his cheeks; his own eyes wet with what looked like tears of happiness. “I just- I’ve wanted to say it since that night I left the answering machine message, but I was scared that I’d scare you away. It’s a big word, trust me, I know, it’s such a big and scary word, especially for guys like us. But I needed to tell you, because I do love you.”

Yoongi closed his eyes at this, moving to bury his face against his hair again. His foot was still stinging horribly, and his stomach was loose under his ribs in a way that he hated, but he knew that it would pass.

The pain would pass, as would the fear, because Jimin was still here with him, and he could make all of the bad feelings go away in time.

“Jimin, can we just…just stay in bed for a lil while,” Yoongi mumbled into his hair. “Just me and yuh-you, just-”

Jimin moved to slip his arms around his waist again, and with a little effort, he hefted him upright and he cradled him in his arms. This time, Yoongi managed to wrap his thighs around his hips, allowing him to carry him across the kitchen and out into the hallway. It took his boyfriend a lot of strength to get him up the stairs, but he did so with just the softest grunts of effort until he was able to lower him down onto the bed.

Yoongi curled up into a tight ball, and when Jimin dragged him into his arms, he felt his breath escaping him in a whisper.

“I love you, darling.”

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics taken from KC and The Sunshine Band's "Give It Up"
*Writer(s): Deborah Carter and Harry Wayne Casey
Copyright: Epic Records
22nd September, 1984, 7:21am: Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco, United States of America

Upon stepping out of the airport at last, the first thing that hit Jimin was the fact that it was almost sunset - the skies filled with clouds in shades of pink and orange that he loved so much and always instantly reminded him of home. He glanced up at the sky as he walked around the outer walkway that ran around the airport, squinting from the brightness of the floodlights that were placed here and there to illuminate the place. They might just be in place for safety and security reasons, but goddamn they were so blindingly bright in a way that always made him wince if he focused on them.

As he stepped into the parking lot, a sudden gust of wind hit him. It blew his hair across his brow, and it made his loose shirt billow and cling to his body annoyingly. Jimin couldn’t help but shiver slightly from the breeze, because it was so cool that it caught him by complete surprise. He instinctively rubbed at his bare lower arm with his free hand, his carry-on holdall swinging from his other fist and weighing him down considerably.

Just like always, the parking lot was filled with a great assortment of vehicles.

There were the long-term and daily parked cars, which would remain stationary until their owners returned from their holiday or business trip. These vehicles were parked quite the distance away from the airport in rows of dozens of colours and models.

The short-term parking spots were never that busy, however, for they were only used by visitors that were dropping off and collecting people, and so they were much closer to the building for convenience. It was the zone that Namjoon always used for their transactions, and yet…Jimin couldn’t seem to see his car parked on the front row of parking spots like usual.

“Huh…where the fuck is he?” Jimin muttered under his breath, moving away from the building just so that he could draw close to the edge of the walkway and resume scanning the parking lot.

Maybe, his friend had been unable to park close to the entrance earlier in the evening, because the lot had been too busy, and so he had parked a little further away and had quite simply forgotten to roll into a free spot? It made sense, but Namjoon always found a way to park in the front three rows for convenience. Not only so that he could locate him with ease, but so that he didn’t have to walk too
If his car wasn’t parked in those rows, then it meant one thing and one thing only to Jimin.

Namjoon wasn’t waiting for him.

“No…no, he couldn’t have forgotten about the deal,” Jimin muttered to himself, as he paced up and down on the very edge of the walkway anxiously, his bag hitting against his knee with each step.

Namjoon never forgot about deals, nor was he ever late for them either. His friend might just like to get stoned every now and again, and he could be clumsy and forgetful about the small things, but a deal was most certainly not a small thing. Hell, he wasn’t even late picking up envelopes of cash from his men, and so there was no possible way that he had forgotten about picking up both him and half a key of heroin.

Jimin stuck his tongue out to wet his lower lip nervously, and he had to fight the urge to start gnawing on it as he stopped pacing. He forced himself to take a deep breath and hold it as he ran his eyes over the short-term lot again; this time doing so almost painfully slow to ensure that he hadn’t accidentally missed his friend’s car. He was in the act of doing so when a nondescript car rolled out of a spot in front of him suddenly, so he turned his head to watch it go without much thought at all. That was when he noticed that there was a vehicle parked behind it in another section of the lot.

Unlike usual, however, the car waiting for him was not the one that he was expecting to see…not at all.

There was no sign of Namjoon’s blue Datsun Maxima in sight, but rather the very familiar sight of bright cherry red body that gleamed in the strong floodlights that ran all of the way around the airport lot.

It was a BMW M1.

Yoongi’s car.

Jimin found his feet propelling him forward the very second that he laid eyes on the glossy square hood, even when he didn’t understand why the vehicle was in the parking lot. He was moving completely on instinct, slipping between parked cars and cutting across the tarmac spaces until he
was able to see inside of the vehicle.

Yoongi was sitting in the driver-seat of the car, one arm folded on the window rest and his other hand holding onto the steering-wheel loosely. Jimin could see that he was looking right at him, because he was clearly waiting for him for some reason. Though he could only see a hint of his upper body through the window, he knew that he was wearing that Valentino blouse of his, the white one with the red seashell print and wide collar and billowed sleeves, and he was likely wearing his fitted jeans and sandals too.

“Yoongi? What’re you doing here, huh?” Jimin asked him, as he hovered beside his open window and he made no move to go around the front and climb inside. He was still far too confused by the sight of his boyfriend waiting for him in the parking lot to even think to do so, and he couldn’t help but wonder if he was in fact still asleep on the plane right now. “Where’s Namjoon?”

“I’m here to pick you up, darling,” Yoongi replied, as he looked up at him. He was stating the downright obvious and seemingly unaware of the fact that that didn’t answer his questions in the slightest. “C’mon, get in.”

Jimin hesitated for a moment longer, studying his boyfriend’s face and then straightening up to check the parking lot one last time. Namjoon was most certainly not here to collect him tonight, for no amount of scanning could locate his car, and he didn’t know how to feel about that exactly.

On one hand, Jimin was overjoyed to see Yoongi tonight, and to be collected by him personally for a transaction as if he was highly important to business. It meant that he didn’t need to phone him when he and Namjoon got back to his house, or hope that the other man would show up on the doorstep again, and it was also so very relieving to see him again.

Seeing Yoongi meant that his boyfriend wanted to see him too, so that they could talk and spend time together and keep all of the bad thoughts and feelings at bay for a little while longer.

But the fact that Namjoon wasn’t here put him on edge for some reason that he couldn’t quite seem to figure out. Was Yoongi here to collect him because his friend was unable to make it tonight? Had Yoongi personally requested that Namjoon let him collect him instead, even when his boyfriend had much more important business to see to and really shouldn’t risk collecting him for a drug deal?

None of it made sense to Jimin right now, and he was going to have to get in the car to find out what was going on.
So Jimin went around the hood of the car and he pulled the door open to duck inside, twisting in the passenger-seat to shove his holdall onto the backseat so that it wasn’t in the way. Then he grabbed his seatbelt and he tugged on it hard, dragging it over his body and snapping it in place just for the sake of it.

“OK, so, now I know that you’re here to pick me up,” Jimin said, rapidly twisting the window handle to roll it down and let the evening breeze bleed into the car. “Where exactly are we going, baby boy? Your place or mine, hmm?”

“We’re going for a drive,” he replied, as he disengaged the parking clutch.

Yoongi’s reply caught him by complete surprise for a few seconds, because Jimin had actually been joking around with his question. There was only one place for them go right now, and that was the old and musty apartment block over in Haight-Ashbury, so that he could finalise his transaction for the night and be free from work for a couple of weeks at least.

“But…the heroin, Yoongi?” Jimin pointed out, staring at his boyfriend dumbly as he reversed the car and he slowly curved it out of the spot to roll across the parking lot. “I can’t go anywhere right now, I’ve got a deal to complete and…”

“There ain’t any heroin, Jimin,” Yoongi interjected, without even taking his eyes off the front window.

It was then that Jimin realised that there was no lingering ache in his body like always, deep down in his thigh and stomach muscles from gripping hold of the baggie of heroin for over fourteen hours.

If there was no pain then…then there must have been no drugs either, even when that didn’t make a goddamn bit of sense. Nothing seemed to be making sense to him right now, however, and so this fact wasn’t as shocking as it should have been.

“There ain’t a deal either, so, relax; yeah?” Yoongi suggested, sparing a quick glance over at him as he sailed out of the lot and onto the main road. “We’re just gonna go on a nice drive, just cruise for a lil while. Relax, darling, you ain’t gotta worry ‘bout a thing tonight.”

“We’re going for a drive? Where exactly are we going, baby boy?” Jimin asked curiously, as he shifted to settle back in the passenger-seat comfortably.
“Do we gotta have a destination, huh?” the other man asked rather cryptically, giving him a quick smile as he did so to let him know that he was just playing around. “I got an idea in mind, but I ain’t telling you. Wait and see, yeah, it’s gonna be a surprise.”

“Hmm, I like surprises,” Jimin replied with a wide smile, reaching over to place a hand on his thigh so that he could keep it there for the duration of the ride. “Almost as much as I-”

“As much as you like me, right?” Yoongi finished for him with a knowing look, catching him by surprise and forcing him to think of something else to say instead.

“I was gonna say-”


Each suggestion was so perfect that Jimin couldn’t help but laugh, and the sound of his giggles made Yoongi smile as he turned his attention back to the front window.

“Baby boy! Let me finish!” Jimin complained, throwing his head back from the force of his laughter and reaching up to cover his mouth with his hand. “I was gonna say “almost as much as I like kissing you”, OK?”

“Mmm, sure you were,” Yoongi agreed in a mumble, keeping his eyes on the road in front of them.

“Well, I do,” Jimin pointed out, shifting on his seat to get a little bit closer to him. He had to lean over the gear stick panel to do so. “And speaking of kisses…”

Even though Yoongi was driving, and he most certainly should have refused to give him a kiss, he turned his head to give him a quick and chaste kiss.

The sensation of his lips, warm and soft, made Jimin’s own lips curl up at the corners in a smile as he settled back in his seat and he looked out of the front window.

Yoongi guided the car along the freeway for quite some time, the sight out of the front window highly boring, and so Jimin moved to lean on the window rest instead. He enjoyed the cool breeze
hitting his face and playing with his hair, and the sight of the distant hills all around them.

At some point, Jimin moved to turn on the radio, his boyfriend not stopping him or switching it off. The song that started playing from the speakers was none other than ‘Careless Whisper’, the smooth saxophone filling the car and making Yoongi laugh under his breath.

After finally getting off the highway, they started drifting through the city itself. Jimin found himself wondering where they were even going, starting to grow impatient because the other man refused to tell him. Clearly, he was trying to keep it a surprise of some kind, though he didn’t really know why.

The residential areas, packed with mansions and busy commercial buildings, turned into streets packed with crowds of people and glowing neon signs, and then they started to enter the northern parts of the city. It took him a few minutes to figure out that they were in Presidio, because by the time that they were rolling down the streets of the neighbourhood, it was dark outside.

When Yoongi finally killed the car, Jimin could do no more than stare out of the front window for a few seconds as he processed the sight in front of him.

Yoongi had taken him to Baker Beach.

Jimin twisted to look out of his window, seeing a stretch of concrete barricades running along the road to separate it from the beach. But beyond that slight wall of stone, there was so much pristine sand spreading out across the horizon, until it turned into the waters of the bay.

In the current evening, the sand was blue instead of golden, and the water was black all over save for curds of foam that were deep blue in shade, and the orange reflections of the Golden Gate Bridge lights casting over the shoreline. The scent of the brine on the air was intoxicating, in a way that made him let his breath out in a soft sigh.

Yoongi climbed out of the car first, and so he copied his actions. As he slammed the door shut, Jimin breathed in the scent of the sea and held the scent in his lungs as he stretched his arms up over his head.

“Oh my god…you actually remembered,” Jimin remarked, coming to a stop in front of the stone wall. “I told you about that dream, and you actually brought us to the beach.”
“Yeah, I’ve been thinking ‘bout it a lot too,” Yoongi replied in a quiet voice, moving to stand beside him.

As they both stared out across the sand, Jimin felt his fingers brushing against his, and Yoongi gently took hold of his hand without a single word. His palm was so soft and cool against his warm skin, his fingers tightening around his so that his thumb could rub against his knuckles.

“You always go on ‘bout the beach and the sea, y’know?” Yoongi continued. “I can’t stop thinking ‘bout it ‘cos of you, darling. Whenever I sit at my desk and see the bay, or I’m eating at Mickey’s Joint, I think ‘bout you. D’you, uh, d’you think ‘bout me like that too, huh?”

“All of the time, literally,” Jimin replied with a sheepish smile. “I can’t even begin to explain what makes me think about you, baby boy, I just find myself pondering about you all of the time. But-”

Jimin gently pried his hand free from his, because he had had the most sudden and mischievous thought come to mind.

“Race you to the water!” he hollered, as he dived over the slight concrete barricade to drop down onto the grassy and sandy slope.

Yoongi made a surprised noise at this that turned into a laugh, and he heard him moving to give chase. That was a surprise, for he hadn’t thought that he would do so. It seemed immature in a way, though his boyfriend might just have a bit of an immature streak in him whenever he felt that it was safe to indulge in such antics - like singing and dancing to songs on his record player in a borrowed tee-shirt and then showering him in kisses.

Despite everything, Yoongi was actually a sprinter, and he overtook him after just seconds, much to his complete surprise.

Jemin almost slowed down in shock as he watched his boyfriend kicking up great sprays of sand, his footsteps faltering and costing him a precious second or two that he couldn’t afford to lose.

“Go, baby boy, go!” Jimin shouted, his voice uneven not only because he was running so fast, but because he was laughing too. “You can do it!”

Yoongi reached the edge of the shore first, slowing down to a stop on the damp sand and almost
sliding right onto his ass from the wetness. Though he wasn’t technically in the water, Jimin decided to let it slide (though Namjoon or Taehyung most certainly wouldn’t have gotten away with it). His boyfriend’s sandals had left deep imprints in the sand, and as he dropped to remove his loafers, he saw that Yoongi was also taking them off. His exposed feet had gotten coated in grains of sand already, and so it seemed pointless to carry on wearing them.

Even though it was nighttime, Jimin found that the sand was still pretty warm against his bare skin. The dry sections were warm and gritty, getting between his toes in a ticklish way that he loved. When he stepped onto the damp sand, he found that it was cold and mushy, so exquisite against his soles that it made him start giggling.

“You won, baby boy,” Jimin said, as he crossed the damp sand to get closer to the water. “I honestly dunno how, but you did.”

“Mmm, shit, I’m outta breath though,” Yoongi wheezed, as he hunkered down and he hugged his knees against his chest - his sandals cast aside.

Jimin moved to the very edge of the damp sand, waiting for the water to lap up and hit his feet. There were no waves gathering yet, just a lazy lick of foamy water, and when it hit him, he felt his heart almost skipping in his chest from the sudden coldness. He had to jump back a few steps, turning back around to see that Yoongi was sitting on the sand.

So Jimin decided to sit down beside him, dropping onto the dry sand and cocking his legs up in front of him to rest his arms on his knees.

“I missed the beach so fucking much,” Jimin said after a moment of silence, staring at the rippling waters in pure wonder.

“Goddamn, it’s beautiful though, ain’t it?” Yoongi sighed out, as he ran his eyes over the sea slowly and he soaked up the sight in front of them.

“The most beautiful.”

“Nah, that’s you, darling,” Yoongi retorted, gently placing his head down on his shoulder to get comfortable.
“Seriously?” Jimin asked around his snort of laughter. “Yoongi, baby, you’re starting to sound like me, and I dunno if I love that or hate it.”

“You love it, just like-”

“You love me,” they both declared in unison, before bursting out into laughter.

For a few minutes, Jimin held his tongue just so that they could sit there and soak it all in: the warm sand heating up their skin through the seats of their jeans and the soles of their feet, the cool breeze that blew in directly from the sea and brought with it the scent of brine, and the distant glowing lights of the bridge making it seem like civilisation was miles away. It was when he noticed that they were currently alone that he finally decided to break their silence.

“Hey, baby boy?”

“Mmm?” Yoongi hummed, lifting his head up off his shoulder so that he could plant his chin on it instead and hold his gaze.

“Did you know that Baker Beach is actually a nudist beach?” Jimin asked him, struggling to keep his expression straight because he could feel giggles already bubbling away in the pit of his stomach.

“...It’s a what?” Yoongi asked, his eyes growing rounded with surprise.

“A nudist beach,” he repeated, before biting down on his lower lip to suppress his laughter. “You know what that means, right?”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment, and then he shifted to get to his feet and he started unbuttoning his blouse.

This caught Jimin by complete surprise, and it took him a few seconds to reach up and start unbuttoning his own shirt too, doing so at a slower speed so that he could watch his boyfriend. He hadn’t expected him to start getting undressed like this, but he might just remove his blouse and leave it at that - getting to a comfortable level of undress rather than full nudity.
Yoongi stripped his blouse off and he placed it down on the sand, folding it up rather than simply dumping it. As he unbuckled his belt, his fingers moving dexterously even in the darkness, Jimin shrugged his own shirt off his shoulders without a single care. Then he jumped to his feet to remove his jeans and underwear, kicking them free from his feet as his boyfriend dropped his own jeans to his ankles.

The moonlight played off Yoongi’s exposed skin so perfectly that Jimin felt his breath catching in his throat as he looked at him. He was almost blue from it, the light casting a tinge over him just like the neon lights in the bathhouse had. It clashed so wonderfully against his black hair and dark eyes, which were gleaming wet.

Oh, seeing his supple and thin limbs and his tiny waist flaring out into his hips and gently curved behind were one thing - a beauty that could be observed even if he had been wearing swimming trunks. But seeing the light thatch of his pubic hair, and following it down to his manhood, made Jimin feel the most sudden urge to wet his lips.

Yoongi glanced off across the beach for a moment before turning back to him. A few seconds passed and then he suddenly started laughing, most likely in embarrassment and amusement from their actions.

“What? What’re you laughing at?” Jimin asked, finding his lips curling up into a grin too just listening to his guffaws.

“Cute, and you call me ‘baby boy’,” Yoongi remarked, as he stared at his crotch shamelessly.

“Shut up, it’s cold!” Jimin retorted, fighting the urge to cover himself with his hands because it was both childish and pointless. “The sea’s even colder too! I really wanna go for a swim, but I don’t wanna freeze to death afterwards.”

“There’s a blanket in the car, I packed it just in case. We could use it after a swim.”

It sounded like a great idea, because they could both dive right into the water and then use the blanket as a way to dry off their skin and dripping hair.

Jimin could already vividly imagine huddling close to him, the blanket wrapped around their shoulders so that they could share warmth and kisses - which would start against lips and then trail along their necks and the curved balls of their shoulders. It would be even better holding Yoongi
down against the dry sand, fucking into him soft and slow with the blanket still tossed over his back like bed covers; until the heat was maddening and Yoongi kicked it free. That wasn’t going to happen, of course, but it was still nice to imagine.

Jimin moved to get to the shore first, waiting until the water lapped back up the sand again. It hit his feet and shins, as freezing cold as it had been earlier, and he saw Yoongi moving to join him.

“Ah, shit! It’s fucking freezing!” Jimin cried out before diving away from the water, the act making his boyfriend start laughing. “Oh! Oh, it’s freezing, baby! I dunno if this was a good idea!”

Yoongi dipped his foot into the water, pulling it back with a sharp gasp a second later. Then he tried wading into the shallow water to join him. The temperature was enough to make his shoulders shoot up, his body tensing up from the chill as he instinctively hugged his arms against his chest.

“Maybe, we should go for a dip and nuh-not a swim?” Yoongi suggested, his voice hitching as he shivered from the next cold splash of water.

When the wave lapped against their knees, Yoongi darted through the shallow water with a series of cries to latch onto him. His thin body was shuddering from the cold, demanding to be enveloped in his hold to share his warmth, but before Jimin could try to do so, Yoongi threw his arms around his waist and he dragged him into a back embrace.

Jimin couldn’t help but start laughing at this, dropping his hands down to hold onto his forearms as Yoongi buried his face against the curve of his shoulder. He could both hear and feel his breath escaping him in a whine; the hot puff of his breath almost burning his chilled skin.

“You know, the best way to get used to the cold is to embrace the cold,” Jimin suggested, turning to press his face against Yoongi’s warm and fragrant hair. “Maybe… I should dunk you and-”

“Dunk me and I’ll kill you, Juh-Jimin,” Yoongi threatened, nuzzling his face against his shoulder blade and pressing his body that little bit closer to him. “Shit, why’s it so cold?!”

“Do you wanna get out, hmm?” Jimin offered, turning his head to try and look back at him. “We can just watch the waves instead, baby boy.”

“Mmm…” the other man hummed, thinking this suggestion over.
After a moment, Yoongi loosened his hold around his waist and he hugged his arms against his chest instead. It was an attempt at fighting the chill, but the freezing cold water combined with the breeze coming in from the bay meant that it was a rather pointless attempt.

“I’ll be right back, OK?” Jimin said, as he turned to start walking away from him.

“Jimin?”

“Yeah, baby bo-”

Which was exactly when Yoongi dropped to cup a handful of water and he splashed it right at him.

Jimin cried out from the splash of water, twisting away and spluttering to try and get it out of his eyes and nose and hearing his boyfriend guffawing happily. Oh, Yoongi was laughing like it was the funniest thing ever, like he wasn’t at all scared that he was going to dunk him in retaliation.

After wiping his hand down his face to clean the seawater away, Jimin lifted his gaze to look right at him.

“You’re so dead, Yoongi.”

“Ah, no! Jimin! No!” Yoongi cried out, instinctively shrinking away from him before dancing back a few steps to increase their distance.

When Jimin took a few steps closer to him, it just made him dart backwards again, splashing water around their shins and leaving deep footprints in the soaked sand.

“Don’t, Jimin! I’ll fucking kill you!”

“Is my baby boy really begging me to not dunk him? Huh? Is my baby boy really-”
Jimin managed to snag hold of him, tossing an arm around his ribs and wrenching him close. Yoongi let out an almighty cry at this, weakly tussling with him. He clearly wanted him to pull him closer and cradle him in his arms, because he didn’t put up much of a fight at all.

“really gonna kill me, hmm?” he continued, as he buried his face against Yoongi’s neck and he heard him laughing from the ticklish contact. Then he planted his chin on the prominent ball of his shoulder, the other man turning his head and rolling his eyes to hold his gaze. “You know how to get me to behave, Yoongi…”

“Be a good boy,” Yoongi almost purred. “Be a good boy for me, mmm?”

Jimin made a noise in agreement at this before pressing their mouths together, feeling Yoongi’s lips pouting out to return the kiss. The first quick kiss turned into another, and then another, deepening until the heat of Yoongi’s breath and tongue brushing against his almost chased away the freezing chill in his toes and fingers; until Jimin felt their chests connecting to further spread the heat.

When the next wave struck them, it hit up high enough to spray foam against their thighs. It most certainly ruined the kiss, for Yoongi broke it with a sudden gasp and he pulled his face away.

“Shit, grab the blanket!” Yoongi cried out with a shudder.

Jimin let go of him so that he could go back to the car, struggling to keep himself from shivering from the cold now too.

Sure, the spontaneous trip to the beach this evening was a great idea, but maybe next time they should come in the daytime. It wouldn’t be as cold, though it would mean being far more reserved - in more ways than one.

“Backseat or boot, baby boy?!” Jimin called out, as he twisted to look back over his shoulder at him.

“Oh, boot?!” Yoongi replied in an uncertain tone, as he hunkered down to pick something up from the sand that might just have been a seashell.

Jimin saw another wave cresting, but before he could possibly warn his boyfriend to move away from the tide, it came crashing forward suddenly.
The wave hit Yoongi hard and by complete surprise, the force of it making him cry out as he stumbled forward and he landed on his knees. The cold water washed right over him as a result, soaking him through to the bone and making him yelp and then splutter.

“Yoongi? Are you OK?!” Jimin called, freezing in the act of crossing the beach.

“Fuck! It’s cuh-cuh-cold!” Yoongi cried out, as he tried to get to his feet, but he was shaking so much that he could only drop back down again; his thighs shuddering weakly.

“Hang on, I’m coming!”

Rather than retrieve the blanket for them to use, Jimin turned on his heel and he darted across the sand to get to his boyfriend. The blanket could wait, because right now, Yoongi needed some assistance to get out of the freezing cold water before another wave buffeted him and knocked him down again.

As he reached him, Jimin hunkered down to grab at his upper arms for him. Yoongi was so cold that it was shocking, and when he tried to pull him upright, he found that he was also limp and heavy.

“It’s OK, it’s OK, baby boy, I got you, I got-”

“Don’t let go!” Yoongi shouted over him, as he struggled to blink stinging seawater out of his eyes and he spluttered rivulets of it out of his mouth.

“I’m not gonna let go, Yoongi, but you’ve gotta help me,” Jimin explained, as he slipped his hands under his armpits and he tried to drag him out of the shallow water. “Push yourself, help me get you outta the water, OK?”

Jimin was so distracted trying to help his boyfriend that he didn’t even notice that there was another wave heading right for them until it was too late. The quick glance that he managed to get showed him something unbelievable, for the wave was so high, so powerful. He had never seen a wave of such tremendous height before, and when it came crashing down on them, they were powerless to fight its strength.
The wave should have only dragged him down to the sand, choking and frozen to his very bones. Yet Jimin felt it sweeping him up like flotsam, dragging him and Yoongi back with it so that they were sucked from the shallow waters right into the deep. He could feel Yoongi tugging at him hard, pulling him through the water by the hand even when he couldn’t open his eyes to see him.

Jimin felt like he was drowning, the crushing weight and freezing chill of the water too powerful for him. But he could also feel himself being dragged upwards, pulled up towards the surface. It must have been Yoongi doing so, because he could feel his hands holding onto his arms - strong, yet warm. His face managed to break the surface of the water after several dreadful seconds, and as he took his first choking gasp for air, he-

“Huh?!”

Jimin was woken up by a series of rather rough shakes to the shoulder, which jolted him to consciousness in the most jarring of ways.

Over the last few days, he had been waking up at random morning hours whenever he had wanted to, but not this morning. No, this morning, he had been woken up in the most disorientating of ways, and he jerked his head up off of his pillow in complete shock.

For several seconds, his vision was so blurred that he couldn’t see much more than a mess of colours. But after a series of rapid blinks, Jimin could make out the vaguest hint of Namjoon standing right beside their shared bed.

“Hey, Jimmy?”

“Nnn, yeah?” Jimin grunted, as he balled his fists up and he rubbed at his heavy eyelids roughly, trying to get them to stay open. “Huh? What?”

“Phone,” Namjoon explained, moving said phone away from his head so that he could hold the receiver out to him in offering. “It’s a call for you, from Prince Min.”

“Oh?” he exclaimed, dropping his hands down onto his ribs and staring up at said device in complete surprise. “Right now? Huh?”

“You aren’t even awake right now, are you?” his partner remarked, shaking his head in disbelief.
“Yeah, right now, for you; answer the goddamn phone.”

Jimin had no choice but to accept the receiver, because Namjoon moved to force it into his hand. He stared at the cream plastic dumbly for a moment, before lifting it to his ear. He heard the softest crackle down the line that sounded like static feedback, and something that might have been an exhale of breath.

“Um, hello?” he asked in a quiet voice, not entirely sure if he was awake or asleep right now. As soon as he heard a certain voice down the line, however, he would know the truth. “Yoongi?”

“Hey, did I wake you up, huh?”

The sound of Yoongi’s voice, warm with something that might have been amusement or even just happiness, made Jimin let his breath out in a heavy sigh of relief. He was pretty certain that he was awake right now, because the way that his heart skipped a beat in his chest was far too vivid for a dream.

“Hey, good morning, baby boy,” Jimin mumbled, rolling onto his stomach and holding the receiver against at his ear so that he could get more comfortable. “What’re you calling me for this early in the morning, hmm? Aren’t you busy working?”

“Yeah, I’m ‘bout to start working soon, but I just thought to phone you first. Y’know, to get the day off to a good start?”

“Yeah, I know,” he replied with a smile, finding this little hint of sweetness incredibly pleasing. “That’s so sweet. No wonder you don’t take sugar in your coffee, when your tongue’s that sweet.”

“Look who’s talking.”

“As a matter of fact, you did wake me up, and I’m a little bit grouchy right now,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, sparing a quick look back over his shoulder when he heard one of the floorboards creaking.

Namjoon had just left the bedroom to get a shower, and so that meant that he could be that little bit more shameless with his words. There was no need to worry about his partner overhearing any embarrassing nicknames or sexually suggestive jokes now.
Jimin felt his lips curling up at the corners as he turned back to his pillow, eyeing the wrinkles in the white cotton. The pillows sadly didn’t smell of Yoongi, hadn’t retained his cologne for some time now, but he so greatly wished that they had.

“If you were here right now, I’d give you another nibble on the ear for waking me up,” he joked, hearing his boyfriend laughing down the line in response. “Hmm, don’t giggle, baby boy. I’d pin you down on your bed and nibble you all over. Your ears, your nose, your fingers; all of you.”

“That sounds nice.”

“Oh, yeah? Does it sound nice when I tell you about the part where the nibbles turn to sucks instead, hmm?” Jimin asked, shifting on the bed and hearing it creaking softly under his weight. “Is it nice when I suck little nibbles behind your ear and against your jaw? How about your nipples, or your thighs?”

Yoongi coughed down the line at this, a shy and rather awkward cough, and it made Jimin grin to himself. It seemed that he had gotten him all flustered again, and he just loved it when the other man got all hot and flustered because of him.

“Yeah, it’d still be nice,” Yoongi mumbled, as he presumably fiddled with something. “You, uh, you kinda did it that night and, uh - I think it’s nice when you do that.”

“When I do what, baby boy?” he asked on purpose, wanting to see just how much he could play with his boyfriend like this on the phone.

After all, it seemed like only yesterday that Yoongi had first phoned him and had quickly ended the call not long after out of complete fear. It was strange thinking about it now, seeing as the other man was a little bit more confident talking to him. Sure, he still had a rather funny habit of mumbling so that he lost some words underneath the static on the line, or leaving his sentences unfinished so that his words hung in the space between them. But mostly, he was getting more confident, and Jimin hoped that he would one day break down that little barrier just like he was starting to break down their physical and verbal barriers.

“Y’know, when you kuh…kiss me like that,” Yoongi confided, his voice almost a whisper as if he didn’t want to be overheard. “I like it, it’s ticklish, sometimes, but it’s nice.”
“Hmm, well, you know how much I love neck kisses. Where’d you like to be kissed the most huh, Yoongi? For future reference?”

“Uh…”

Yoongi fell silent on the line for a moment, because he seemed to be thinking this question over intently. He clearly wasn’t messing around and had taken it very seriously.

“I guess that I really like, uh, a lot of kisses.”

“Oh yeah? Like what, baby boy?”

“Nose kisses, forehead kisses, kisses against my fingers, my stomach too; maybe?”

“Oh, I gotta go for that next time!” Jimin declared with a happy grin. “Tummy kisses! It’s even better if I decide to blow raspberries on it, until you punch me in the head to get me to stop!”

Yoongi laughed at this joke, any tension or discomfort almost washing away with the sound and letting him know that his boyfriend was enjoying their phone call.

“But wait, if it’s this early, you haven’t eaten breakfast yet; right?” Jimin asked, reaching up to rake his fingers through his messy hair. “Are you going to Mickey’s Joint, hmm? Want me to meet you there? We could share some waffles again?”

“I’m too busy for breakfast this morning, but we can go there again soon; if you wanna?”

“Sure thing, you know that I’d love to go there again. But, baby boy, be sure to eat something today, OK? Business is important, I know it’s the most important thing for you, but food’s important too, yeah?”

“It’s important, but it ain’t the most important thing to me,” Yoongi remarked, and judging from the slight burst of static down the line, he had just shifted on his bed or possibly his sofa. “Y’know what’s the most important thing, right?”
“…Coffee?” Jimin joked, earning himself a series of wheezy chuckles from his boyfriend. “Um, that sweet ride of yours? Or your Rolex? No, wait, I got this - it’s your credit card!”

“Darling, I was tryna to say something sweet,” Yoongi groaned, yet he could hear just how happy that he was regardless of the teasing. “It, uh, it’s hard for me to say, so, I was hoping that you’d say it for me. Yeah? Jimin, y’know what’s the most important thing to me right now, right?”

“Is it…me, baby boy?” Jimin asked in a whisper-soft voice, feeling his stomach flooding with a heat that made him feel funny.

Yoongi let his breath out in a soft laugh at this, the kind of laugh that he just knew he made when he was a little shy or nervous. It was kind of laugh that he would do when he was rubbing at his neck and trying his very hardest to avoid his gaze. But after a moment, he managed to quietly agree that that was the case.

Just hearing the older man whispering those three words: “yeah, it’s you”, made Jimin suck his lower lip in to nibble at it.

Oh, Yoongi could be a real charmer when he wanted to be, for he could make the occasional quick remark that made him sound so very confident. But mostly, Jimin knew him to be bumbling and awkward, knew him to struggle with saying little affectionate things because they made him nervous. The fact that he had needed him to say it for him was the perfect example of that blend of smooth charm and shyness coming together full force.

“You been taking good care of yourself, Jimin? Getting rest and shit?”

“Uhuh, I’m sleeping the days away right now. I’ve got no jobs because of the flooding and all that. I’m trying to not eat too much junk food too, but goddamn, it’s hard and-”

“Eat all the junk food you goddamn want,” Yoongi interrupted. “Junk food is better than being a junkie, yeah?”

“Good point. So, how’s your foot, hmm? Have you been taking care of yourself too, baby boy?”
It had been several days since the incident in the kitchen, in which Yoongi had sliced his poor foot open on the broken chunk of mug and had had something close to an emotional breakdown right in front of his eyes. Just thinking about what had happened that morning still chilled Jimin to the core, for it had been just four days ago that his boyfriend had been sitting on the kitchen floor - blood smeared all over the wood and words spilling out of his slack lips as he had sobbed in a mixture of fear and pain.

Yoongi, who had been tugging at Namjoon’s tee-shirt with so much force that it was a miracle that he hadn’t torn the thin cotton; his face scrunched up in his effort to try and fight the tears that had been rolling down his cheeks as freely as the blood had been flowing from his sliced skin.

Yoongi, who had almost choked on his sobs as he had told him that he had gotten tested just to let his father know that he wasn’t AIDS-positive, only for the man to have manipulated him into believing that he was actually a dormant carrier and that he would never be clean of the virus.

Just thinking about the look of complete horror on Yoongi’s face when he had tried to touch his injured foot, of what he had told him during his hysterical moment, was enough to make him tighten his hold around the receiver involuntarily.

Jimin had heard of these lies, had heard about how religious and conservative organisations had tried to claim such outlandish things despite the official government-issued advice contradicting it all. But Yoongi had been duped into believing it by his father, up until the point that he had finally broken down and told him about his fears. At least he had been able to alleviate some of that ignorance for Yoongi, but Jimin had a strong feeling that his boyfriend was still carrying around so much internalised homophobia as a result of his father’s hatred, that he was just touching upon the surface of his mistaken ignorance.

Jimin had expected that the situation would have driven Yoongi right back into his shell, would have frightened him into another spiralling lapse into his self-hating ways. But despite everything, Yoongi had resumed phoning him in the late evening hours the following days, almost as if what had transpired between them had been nothing at all.

Or maybe, Yoongi thought that the breakdown was in fact something that had strengthened their relationship? Instead of pushing him away in shame, maybe the other man was clinging to him to keep him afloat instead?

Jimin had since come to the conclusion that Yoongi was indeed using him as a barricade of some sort, to try and protect himself from the bad thoughts. It was almost as if his boyfriend understood that distancing himself away from him would make him more vulnerable to having a relapse in his struggle for acceptance, and so he had decided to turn to him in times of need instead. Jimin had never had someone depend on him for emotional support like this before, and though he was scared
of making a mistake, he was also so very certain that he could do it.

Jimin knew that he could teach Yoongi to love himself just as much as he had started loving him, and hopefully, Yoongi would find himself loving him just as much during the process.

“Uh, it still hurts a lil, mostly when I’m getting showers or bathing. The wound’s still open, but in a day or two, it’ll close up,” Yoongi explained, to which he made soft noises to let him know that he was listening. “But it’s ‘k, Jimin, I’m fine. Don’t you worry none ‘bout me.”

Namjoon stepped back into the bedroom, clad in a pair of shorts but still topless. He moved over to his dresser to tug one of the drawers open, quickly searching to locate a tee-shirt to tug on. Most of his tee-shirts were cast across the floor because he had been wearing them for the last few days whilst lounging around the house, and he felt his partner’s gaze falling on him as he no doubt noticed that he was wearing the exact one that he had wanted to wear for the day.

“Goddamn,” Namjoon muttered under his breath, before turning back to the drawer to resume his search.

“Good, that’s good, baby boy,” Jimin said, as he moved out on the bed; sighing softly as his muscles finally got stretched to their full extent. “Here’s hoping that it doesn’t scar, but if it does, you’ll still be beautiful.”

“Pft, Jimin-”

“It’s true, you’ll still be beautiful and I’ll kiss it every single day,” he continued, even when his boyfriend was still laughing at him down the line. “Forget a kiss on the tummy, I’m gonna kiss your feet instead.”

“There’s something wrong with you, Jimin.”

“Uhuh, that’s what my dad said too,” Jimin joked, the retort slipping free before he could possibly hope to curb it in. He actually reached up to press his hand against his mouth after he realised what he had just said, running his fingers over his lips anxiously. “Shit, I didn’t mean that, it just slipped out, I’m sorry, I-”

“You don’t gotta apologise, Jimin.”
“It was stupid, though. It was insensitive too, I—”

“My daddy said it too, so…” Yoongi said in a quiet voice, shifting again so that his clothes rustled. He was probably wearing a tee-shirt tucked into those loose trousers of his, or maybe his jeans. “I didn’t think it was stupid.”

“OK…OK, Yoongi.”

“By the way, have you gotten your mail yet? There’s something that I sent to you, I think it should reach you today.”

“The mail? You sent me something in the mail, huh?” Jimin repeated, furrowing his brow in confusion at this statement. Then he turned to look back over his shoulder at Namjoon, but his friend was too busy knotting a pair of sneakers to notice his lingering gaze. “Um, I don’t think so? I mean, it’s still really early, so, I don’t think that we’ve gotten the mail yet, Yoongi.”

Namjoon got to his feet to suddenly leave the bedroom, his sneaker soles softly thumping on the stairs as he descended. Jimin thought nothing of it, until he heard him seemingly coming back upstairs again a moment later.

“Um, just give me a second, Yoongi,” he said, as he shifted on the bed to look at the open doorway.

“This actually came for you earlier,” Namjoon explained, as he came back into the bedroom and he held out a box to him. “I heard you talking about it on the phone just then, and you reminded me.”

Jimin saw that he was holding a small cardboard box in hand, over which there were layers of brown paper and a thin knot of twine to keep it all secure. There was a stamp on it and an address scribbled in rather neat and small characters. It was his name on the front rather than his partner’s, which meant that it must have been from Yoongi. He moved the receiver into the crook between his head and shoulder to free up his hands.

“Anyway, I’m gonna go get the stuff, yeah,” Namjoon said, as he accepted the box from him and he hefted it curiously from hand to hand. “I’ll probably be back in, maybe, half an hour?”
“OK, I’ll be here when you get back,” Jimin called, hearing his friend’s feet on the stairs as he finally left the house for good. “Guess what, baby boy, I just got a parcel…”

“*You did?*”

“Uhuh, and you’ve got real neat handwriting,” he remarked, as he hastily tugged on the twine to pull it free from the box. “Do you write a lot of letters?”

“No, not really. *I send faxes, mostly, but I occasionally write letters to my grandmother. They’re filled with mistakes though, I end up scribbling lots of words out.*”

Jimin cast the twine aside so that he could rip the brown paper free, and then he had to tear tape off the cardboard box so that he could lift up the flaps and open it up. At first, he saw plenty of foam pellets that had been shoved inside of it, but after he stuck his hand inside and he pushed them aside, he saw a gleam of something glossy and white.

There was a coffee mug in the box.

Jimin pulled it free and he looked at the mug for a moment, and then he felt a burst of giggles escaping him that he couldn’t hope to suppress.

“*Yoongi! Did you seriously buy me a replacement mug?*” Jimin asked, still giggling to himself because he couldn’t believe what he was holding in his hands right now.

“Yeah, *I figured that I owed you one,*” Yoongi replied, his own amusement evident in his light tone. “*It could be your mug, or maybe, it’s mine. For when I come over, yeah?*”

“Oh? So, it’s *your* mug right now?” he joked, gently placing the mug back down in the box so that he could take hold of the receiver again. “*What if I go downstairs and make a nice big cup of coffee in it, huh?*”

“*Mmm, coffee, shit, I need to make some myself before I go,*” Yoongi mumbled to himself. “*You can do whatever you want, just don’t break it.*”
“That’s more you, baby boy,” Jimin retorted wittily, before taking the telephone wire in hand to play with the kinked length. “Are you really gonna come over again? Like, for another night like that?”

“D’you want me to?” his boyfriend asked in a quiet voice, a series of noises sounding down the line that seemed to hint that he was moving around the room with the device in hand. “I, uh, I didn’t know if you liked it that much, ‘specially after I’d the…uh, accident.”

“Youngi, I had so much fun, seriously, so much fun,” Jimin replied, abandoning the cord so that he could nurse the receiver in both hands. “I can’t believe how good it felt to just…be with you like that, you know? When we were singing and dancing, and you were grinning from ear to ear, I think that’s when it hit me that I…that it wasn’t just a crush. I think that moment, that was what made me realise that I love you. Of course I wanna spend more time with you like that. There’s still so many records that you need to listen to, and one night, we could put the music channels on so you could learn all of the dances.”

This made Youngi sigh softly down the line, presumably in relief.

“I wanna fall asleep like that again, Youngi. You and me, in a bed that isn’t in a hotel or a bathhouse - the both of us so comfortable together,” Jimin continued in his own whisper. “I wanna be there for you when you wake up every morning, so that your day gets off to a good start. I, um, I just wanna show you how much that I love you, Youngi.”

“I woke up this morning, Jimin, and I swear, I almost thought that you were gonna be there in bed with me,” Youngi confided, and Jimin could just picture him in his mind - his eyes squeezed shut and his free hand nursing his brow. “I-I actually said something to you when I rolled over, but you weren’t there, and I just- it’s why I’d to phone you, Jimin, I just had to. I’d to talk to you, even if just for a few minutes.”

“It’s funny, I had another dream with you in it just before you phoned me, Youngi,” Jimin said, as he shifted to sit upright and he folded his arm over his bare knees. “We went to the beach again, you picked me up from the airport and we went there in the dead of night. We played around in the water, but a wave hit us and it kinda…dragged us into the deep. I thought that I was gonna drown, like, I could feel this freezing cold pressure on my chest and I really thought I was gonna drown. But then you pulled me up to the surface, and that’s when I woke up.”

Jimin paused for a moment, collecting his thoughts together and giving Youngi enough time to process this. It was a lot to take in, but Youngi had already heard about plenty of his dreams on his answering machine.
“What’d you think that means, Yoongi?”

“…Trust?”

“As in I trust you to be there for me? Because you saved me when I needed you to?”

“Yeah, I think that it means that you trust me, Jimin,” Yoongi said, before making a series of noises down the line. “I, uh, I’d a dream ‘bout you once, and I think that it meant that I trusted you too. I was lost and scared, but I found you, just when I needed you. That’s trust, ain’t it? Knowing that someone’d save you, that they’d be there when you need ‘em?”

“Yeah, it’s trust, but it’s also love; and I love you, Yoongi,” Jimin said in a whisper.

“I…I love you more, Jimin,” Yoongi replied, before quickly adding. “Listen, I gotta go, my man’s here for me. But I’ll see you soon; yeah?”

“Yeah, in my dreams probably,” he joked with a smile, hearing his boyfriend laughing in agreement. “See you soon, baby boy - stay safe. Bye bye.”

Jimin listened to the droning line for a few seconds, and then he dropped his own receiver in the cradle. He reached up to rub at his eyes roughly again, before sniffing hard and dropping his hands into his lap. He ran his tongue around his dry mouth as his gaze focused on the box beside his thigh - the one with the gift mug in it.

Yoongi might just have bought him it as a replacement for the one that he had accidentally broken, but he was going to have to keep it safe for him. Namjoon might just accidentally break it too, or at least chip it because he had a bit of a habit of slamming his cups down without thought. That meant not using it for coffee, and instead keeping it hidden just for his boyfriend’s visits.

Jimin decided that there was no better way to wake himself up than a shower. He had fallen asleep last night without freshening up, and he really wanted to just jump under the hot spray. So he knocked the covers aside and he swung his legs over the side of the bed, stepping over the fresh mess that Namjoon had left all over the floor: dirty clothing, smoked-down roaches and bites of food. He was going to have to lecture his friend on how to tidy up his mess, but it would never stop him for long at all.
It was as Jimin was standing under the hard shower stream, the water rolling down his upturned face and his hands massaging at his stiff neck and shoulders, that a sudden idea crossed his mind.

Jimin felt immature for thinking about such a thing, but he was also pretty bored. What better what to pass the time until Namjoon returned back home than to masturbate? He had had a habit of doing it before meeting Yoongi, after all, because it had been one of the only ways that he had gotten sexual satisfaction - even if he had done so in the company of other men, and in public, for cheap kicks.

Had Yoongi masturbated whilst thinking about him too? It seemed unlikely, all things considered, but he knew that his boyfriend had at least dreamed about him, and that was good enough for him.

Jimin didn’t think that anyone had had dreams about him, save for Namjoon perhaps. His partner would probably tell him that any dream with him in it instantly turned into a nightmare, he just knew it.

As he pondered on the possibilities of Yoongi touching himself and thinking about him, Jimin ran his hand down the curve of his neck to his chest. His palm glided over the slight swell of muscle, his fingertips brushing against one of his nipples and giving him a funny little ticklish sensation that made his shoulders lift up before dropping again. He stared at the droplets of water that were clinging to the wall in front of him, searching his mind for some kind of image, some fantasy, that would be worth delving into.

Jimin had countless thoughts about Yoongi’s body float through his mind: his narrow waist, his thin but soft thighs that had no hint of strong muscle under the skin, the curve of his stomach and his biceps. He thought about how wet that his tongue was, and how his breath never stunk of tobacco like other men that he had kissed; and how tightly he had clenched around his fingers at first, that taut little heat inside of him.

Jimin tried to hear his voice in his head, saying sweet nothings to him and whispering little words of love before laughing breathlessly, until he finally stumbled upon a vivid mental image.

Yoongi in the driver-seat of his BMW, his legs up in front of him so that his knees were close to his chest, his feet drumming against the dashboard and his fingers sinking into the plush leather; his body crumpled in the seat just shaking as his climax started swelling from the powerful build-up of pressure deep inside of him.

The mental image was enough to make Jimin gulp hard, his tongue slipping free to lick at his lips even when it suddenly felt dry. He wasn’t at all surprised to feel a stirring between his thighs, a growing tightness starting to blossom in the pit of his stomach as his cock started twitching to full
Jimin would be holding him against the leather, of course, supporting him up off seat so that he could slot himself between his thighs and help Yoongi stay comfortable. It would be cramped on the single seat, a tight fit, their bodies pressed together and their breaths intermingling - a wonderful heat building up inside of the vehicle until the windows would fog up.

Yoongi would still be tangled up in his clothing: his trousers cast aside but his pretty designer blouse still mostly on his body. It would be almost entirely unbuttoned, probably little more than the last two buttons still fastened so that the cream material was shrugged down to his elbows and hanging off his thin frame. It would reveal all of his throat and chest to him, would mean that he could drop his head and suck little kisses and bites against his lightly tanned and sweat-soaked skin.

Jimin found his tongue actually moving around his slack mouth at this, so caught up in his fantasy of licking whorls around the hard nub of Yoongi’s nipple that his body was moving on instinct. He could feel the tip of his tongue tracing circles against his lower lip as he finally shifted his hand down to his erection, wrapping his fingers around himself so that he could start pumping his fist.

Oh, Jimin would just smother him in kisses. He would plant them all over his face, from his lips to his nose, all along his cheeks to his ears. He would press them into his hair and taste the sweat starting to gather at the corner of his temples.

Sweat would start gathering on the leather too, so that their skin would glide across it with less friction; so that it would run down the dip of Yoongi’s back until his buttocks and thighs were starting to grow slick. It would roll down Jimin’s neck and chest like how the water was doing so, the heat of the shower just like what would be trapped inside of the vehicle.

Jimin didn’t even try and gently build up his pleasure, to toe his way slowly into it, rather he pumped his fist in a fast and rough stroke until he could feel the friction starting to burn, to tingle and cause gentle waves of heat to spread up into his stomach and down into his thighs. Then he slowed his rhythm down, so that he could stretch these little moments of pleasure out and edge his way up to his climax.

If only Yoongi was here right now. If only he could wrap his arms around him and kiss him deeply, just touch him and taste him and feel the way that he would move in his hold. The squirms when he found a sensitive spot with his mouth; the way that his back would curve after a particular thrust rubbed his prostate just the way that he was craving and made his muscles tremble and breathy noises escape his slack lips. He would get to feel Yoongi’s blunt nails sinking into his back when the pressure was getting too much and sinking them into the seat just wasn’t enough.
“Mmm, huh, fuck,” Jimin gasped, his fist instinctively slamming down to his base hard enough to elicit a hard throb of pleasure in his belly.

Jimin would guide his body for him, his grip firm around his hips so that he could lightly bring him down to meet his upward strokes. He would be completely malleable, following Yoongi’s whispered guidance and little gasps of mingled pleasure and pain to bring him to the very cusp of his climax.

Just thinking about how the car would softly rock and creak from their lovemaking caused a shiver of excitement to plummet down into Jimin’s belly. He shifted his fist to his head so that he could stimulate it, catching it in his palm to knead at it as he dragged his fingertips up his shaft.

Yoongi’s thighs would shudder so much, wanting to squeeze around him tight but then loosening with a spasm whenever a jolt of pleasure coursed up into his belly. He would twist and turn, his head brushing against the seat as he struggled to control his body and the whimpers that were escaping his lips.

Jimin could feel precum leaking free against his palm, which would provide a much better glide than the shower water. When he started pumping his slack fist again, the wetness made his breath catch in his throat. He could feel the most powerful want to pick up speed, to jerk his wrist faster and harder, but he wanted to try and drag the pleasure out that little bit more first.

Yoongi liked edging, after all. He liked prostate massages that would flood his body with heat and gentle throbs of pleasure, until his body was crying out for release and he had to achieve his shuddering and powerful finish.

Jimin wanted to try and feel that too, but he had very little experience with it, and he was going to need to learn. Yoongi was going to have to teach him how to not rush - not only in receiving prostate massages and masturbation, but with giving too.

The thought of Yoongi guiding him through a massage, whispering words of encouragement with his fingers buried deep inside of him and calling him ‘a good boy’, was enough to cause a sudden surge of pleasure to course through him.

“Oh, fuh-fuck,” Jimin whined, struggling to keep his rhythm steady. He could feel himself picking up speed, his hips almost twitching in anticipation. “I’m a good boy, fuck, I’m so good.”

Jimin was so caught up in his pleasure that he couldn’t even hold onto his fantasies. They tangled
into a blurred mess in his head: from fucking Yoongi in the driver-seat, to having his face pressed against wrinkled bed sheets as Yoongi relentlessly rubbed his fingertips against his prostate and patted at his buttocks encouragingly. He saw Yoongi dancing with him again, their fingers entwined and his hair bouncing around his smiling face, and then Yoongi lying in a tight ball in the bed beside him, as he reached over to brush his hair back off his sleeping face.

The throbs of pleasure were getting so strong that Jimin could feel his jaw clenching, his climax fast approaching. The roar of the shower water could no longer hide the rapid slap of his fist pumping around his cock, or the soft groans and hisses that were escaping his clenched teeth.

The first corkscrew of pleasure made Jimin slump forward against the wall with a sharp gasp, his fist stuttering for a second before he resumed his frantic pumping. As he ejaculated, his orgasm washed over him - an explosion of heat spreading upward into his stomach until he could see the throbs through his eyelids. He sloppily jerked his wrist through his climax and then he brought it to his head, squeezing and massaging the very last second or two of pleasure out.

Jimin dropped his head forward against the cool tiles, his breath escaping him in a hard grunt as he squeezed his eyes shut. The heat from bathroom just mingled with the ebbing waves of pleasure, made him feel almost dizzy as his knees wobbled.

When Jimin opened his eyes several seconds later, the shower stream ran straight into them. He had to rapidly blink it free before reaching up to slick his soaked hair back off his brow with his free hand.

“Hmm, shit,” he sighed, before letting out a brief laugh.

That was most certainly the best masturbation session that he had had in a long time. He guessed that having someone to think about, and recent sexual intimacy to recall, really had increased his satisfaction.

Jimin hastily finished cleaning up, and then he hopped out of the bathtub and he wrapped the towel around his hips. He was in the act of vigorously brushing his teeth when he heard something coming from downstairs - the dull thump and click of the front door being pulled shut. He paused in the act of brushing his teeth, twisting to eye the bathroom doorway, and then he turned back to the sink and he spat a foamy mouthful of toothpaste out before hastily rinsing his mouth with more pilfered mouthwash.

Namjoon had returned back to the house at some point whilst he had been in the shower, which was a sign of just how long he had been in the bathroom. It made Jimin struggle to not snort laughter as
he crossed the landing and he stopped to stand in the bedroom doorway.

His partner was sitting on the bed currently, his long legs crossed up in front of him so that he could use his thigh as a decent surface to keep his notebook balanced on. Jimin could see a rather massive baggie of marijuana sitting on the end of the bed, around which there were several other items: more sealed and fresh baggies, rolling papers, and a weight scale.

“What’re you doing, Daddy-o?” Jimin asked, as he roughly towel-dried at his hair.

“What’re you doing, Daddy-o?” Jimin asked, as he roughly towel-dried at his hair.

“Working; what do you think?” Namjoon retorted, hastily erasing something with the nub of his pencil because he had clearly made a mistake. “Just got the next shipment of pot from Kim, so, I gotta do some mad calculations and shit to figure out the best way to get a profit on the deal. It isn’t that easy slinging this stuff, OK, not at the prices that I charge.”

“Well, a good way to keep up a profit is…”

Jimin left the towel around his shoulders, crossing the room to get to the bed. He shifted to look at the notebook, lazily throwing an arm around his friend’s neck so that he could lean in close and eye the scribbled lines of graphite. He made a series of noises at this, as if he was thinking it all over intently, and he saw Namjoon glancing up at him curiously; no doubt wondering what he was going to say.

“Don’t smoke it all,” Jimin finished with a mischievous smirk, hearing his friend sighing heavily in response. “What? I’m telling the truth, Namo, we both know that I am.”

“Yeah yeah, well, how about you stop smoking it too?” Namjoon suggested, as he wriggled on the mattress to get more comfortable. “Don’t exactly see you volunteering, Jimmy…”

“Hmm, maybe one day, Daddy-o,” Jimin suggested in a soft voice, dropping his head on top of his comfortably. His friend’s hair was short, but still soft against cheek, and it smelled like faded shampoo. “What’s the problem, huh? You know you can ask me for maths advice, if you need it.”

“OK, so, I kinda lied, it isn’t that hard, but the problem’s allocating pusher and dealing merch, right? You never wanna dip too much into dealing merch, but pushing pot isn’t as easy as pushing coke. Sometimes, people wanna bum another gram before paying, and I’ve gotta stamp that habit out.”
“Bumming a gram, how cheap,” Jimin remarked, as he ran his eyes over the massive baggie.

“Jimmy, you literally bummed a gram off me that one time, don’t act so cute and innocent,” Namjoon pointed out, making sure to give him his best disapproving look.

“Hey, it wasn’t a gram! It was two joints, two, that’s not even a gram!” he argued pedantically, lifting his head up to annoyingly dig his chin into his hair instead.

“Still bummed it,” his partner argued pedantically.

“Well, whatever you’re doing, you’re doing right, because we’ve never dipped below profit once since we started working together.”

“Yeah, but I’ve got you to thank for that, Jimmy.”

This made Jimin smile to himself as he lifted his head up off his. He kept his arm around his neck, however, just to stay close to him for a moment longer and study his scribbled notes and calculations.

“You look…flushed,” Namjoon remarked, as he gave him a quick glance.

“Hmm?” Jimin hummed, raising an eyebrow at him languidly as he dragged his gaze away from his notebook.

“I said you looked flushed, your cheeks are all pink and dewy.”

“Oh? Probably because of the heat or something - I turned the shower up nice and high.”

“…Did you wank in the shower again, Jimmy?” his friend asked in a low voice, narrowing his eyes at him in suspicion.

“Huh? No, what-” Jimin made a blustered sound at this, before rapidly adding. “Don’t give me that look, Daddy-o, don’t.”
“Well then, please tell me that you cleaned up at least, because the last time that you did that it was all over the wall, man, and you know that shit’s nasty,” Namjoon continued, making a disgusted tsking sound out of the corner of his mouth as he shook his head.

“It wasn’t all over the wall!” Jimin argued indignantly, feeling his apparently flushed cheeks growing even more hotter. “Shut up!”

“Looked like a Pollock painting,” Namjoon finished with a wicked grin, showcasing just how much fun that he was having teasing him.

Jimin groaned theatrically at this, moving across his bedroom to get to the dresser and dragging it open. He grabbed one of his fresh tee-shirts from the drawer and he tugged it on first, the lengths skimming his bare buttocks as he rolled the short sleeves up his biceps. Then he retrieved his wrinkled jeans from the floor and he stepped into them.

“I’m hungry, but…there’s no leftovers. We ran out last night, remember? I’m too lazy to make anything. Namo, make me some food.”

“No,” his friend replied without missing a beat.

“Huh? Why not?” Jimin asked, making sure to add a whine into his voice just to try and gain sympathy. “Yoongi made me breakfast; why won’t you make me some?”

“I don’t wanna cook, I’m working right now. Besides, I’m kinda feeling like McDonald’s,” Namjoon mumbled under his breath, as he carried on writing something down on the page, not even glancing up at him as he did so.

“McDonald’s?” Jimin repeated, as he tugged his jeans up, before snorting hard. “Seriously? You want McDonald’s for breakfast? What was that about us starting a healthy eating regime, Namo?”

“Hey, we all need a treat day,” his friend argued, sparing a quick look up at him. “I’m busy right now, and fast food is just that: fast. It’s fast, cheap, greasy, and it’s so bad for you, so, I really shouldn’t - but goddamn, I want a cheeseburger right now!”
“Calm down with the cravings, Daddy-o, you’re not pregnant,” Jimin joked, as he finished tucking his tee-shirt lengths into his jeans and he buttoned them up. “You’re not stoned either, so, no need to get the munchies.”

“Pft, like you’re not craving a burger right now.”

“As a matter of fact, I’m totally craving one. Listen, I’m going out for a skate, yeah? I won’t be long, maybe thirty minutes? I’ll bring up back some nice unhealthy breakfast, OK?” Jimin said, crossing the bedroom and ruffling his hair hard with a wide grin. “So, just sit tight and work out all of that hard stuff with that big ole brain of yours.”

“Have fun, don’t get hit by a car like a dumbass,” Namjoon retorted, as he turned his pencil around to erase yet another mistake.

Jimin quickly knotted his sneakers up before grabbing his skateboard and skipping down the stairs. He made sure to grab his key before leaving the house, shoving it in his front pocket just to save his friend from having to answer the door when he returned. He went down the steps, jumped onto the board, and then he kicked off hard so that he could start sailing down the street.

As a result of travelling around the city so much on a daily basis, and his personal habit of skateboarding around several neighbourhoods for fun, Jimin knew the precise locations of several McDonald’s close to Namjoon’s house. It therefore meant that he should go for a skate first, before heading to one of them and returning back to the home with hot and fresh breakfast. That meant that he could go absolutely anywhere that he wanted to, but there was only one neighbourhood in mind right now.

Jimin guided his skateboard up the gently sloping drives of Western Addition so that he could enter Pacific Heights. He passed the usual flow of morning pedestrians and traffic, sticking close to the curb as to not cause an accident and freely skate up and down the streets.

The weather was still warm this morning, but it was a marked decrease in temperature from the previous couple of weeks. It was starting to reach that wonderfully mild temperature that meant that he didn’t need a jacket, but the occasional breeze was chill enough to make him shiver in delight. He did regret not bringing his sunglasses though, and so he had to squint and shade his eyes with his hand whenever a strong ray hit him from over the tops of the buildings, or reflected off the passing chrome of cars.

As he sailed past Mickey’s Joint, Jimin was sure to glance through the window, just for the sake of it. There was no sign of Yoongi through the window this morning, signalling that he really had skipped
breakfast in favour of working. That meant that he was going to need to phone him again tonight, just to check up on him and make sure that he had eaten a proper meal like he had promised, and to ensure that he got enough rest too.

Supposing that Yoongi didn’t show up on their doorstep again that was; to stay the night with him and make breakfast the following morning whilst wearing one of Namjoon’s tee-shirts, with a bandage wrapped around his still injured foot.

Jimin noted that there was someone waiting around outside of the diner, however, which was completely unexpected.

A young-looking Asian boy was sitting on a jutting piece of concrete underneath one of the far stretches of window beside the door. There was a dog lying at his feet, napping in the current morning heat - a brindle puppy that had its legs curled up and its pink belly on display. The sight made Jimin stick his foot out behind him to slow his skateboard down to a stop, jumping off of it and moving over to him.

There was no telling if this boy was Korean, Chinese, Japanese or possibly Vietnamese, but Jimin still found his curiosity piqued enough to get him to approach him.

The kid looked to be all of sixteen, judging from his face. He had massive eyes that were almost hidden underneath a messy mop of dark hair, which caught the sunlight to show rich brown nestled in the black depths, along with a prominent nose and soft and small mouth. Because he was sitting down, he couldn’t see much of his body, but he looked to be taller and wider than he was just by looking at his shoulders and long legs. The boy was wearing denim dungarees over a green tee-shirt, along with white sneakers that seemed to be no-brand - a cute, but rather immature look, which just heightened his youthful appearance.

“What’s a cutie like you doing hanging around here, huh?” Jimin asked with a friendly smile, shifting to lean against the wall of the diner and getting his skateboard in the crook of his elbow.

“I only know little American,” the boy replied, sparing quick glances up at him out of the corner of his eye. “Sorry, man.”

“Oh yeah? Well, what if I just…” Jimin paused for a moment, before switching to Korean fluidly. “What if I ask you again like this, hmm? Is this better?”
This made the boy’s jaw almost unhinge in surprise, and rather than give him quick and discreet glances, he twisted to stare up at him without a hint of reservation. Yes, it seemed that he had caught his attention with this revelation, and it was enough to make him snort laughter under his breath as he looked down at the boy.

“I asked you what you were doing hanging around the streets, kid, especially this one,” Jimin repeated for him.

“I’m waiting for big brother,” the boy mumbled in a rather sullen tone, shifting on the slight jut of concrete as he did so and dropping his hands into his lap so that he could play with the leash.

“Big brother? Someone’s been reading too much Orwell, huh?” Jimin joked, as he hunkered down close to the boy. He made sure to keep his distance, just to stop him from getting uncomfortable by his sudden attention, because he didn’t want to scare him with his well-intentioned friendliness.

“Why aren’t you in class, huh? You ditching because you’ve got maths today?”

“I’m not ditching, I don’t go to school, I just-”

The diner door swung inwards suddenly, and when Jimin looked up at the sound of the bell, he saw that the waitress was standing in the gap. The pretty young black waitress, whom his brain was telling him was called…Annie - no, Annika. Yes, that was her full name, and she was looking down at them both from the slight step.

“I told him that he can’t come inside with his dog, but I don’t think that he understands me, honey,” Annika said, as she leaned against the door frame and she looked down at the boy. “Look at that little face; I think that he thinks that I’m some kinda big bully or something.”

“No, I don’t think that he understood you. His English isn’t that great,” Jimin agreed with a soft nod. “I’ll explain for you, I’m sure that he’ll understand why you kicked him out then.”

“If he ties that leash up around that post over there, he’s more than welcome to come inside for pancakes and bacon,” she suggested, before giving the boy a warm smile. “Tell him that, and if he gives me a nice big smile, I’ll give him an extra rasher.”

Jimin laughed at this remark, watching her going back inside of the diner again, and then he turned back to the boy. He saw that he had been looking at the waitress whilst she had been talking, but his round eyes showed that he didn’t really understand the full depth of what she had said.
“What did she say to you?” he asked in a quiet voice.

“She said - and this is a universal rule, by the way - that you’re not allowed to bring your puppy inside of the diner,” Jimin explained for him. “A lot of places don’t allow you to bring animals inside of them, especially food joints. OK? So, if you’ve got a puppy with you, you get no service.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that,” he mumbled, as he looked between the door and him rapidly. “There was no sign or anything on the door. She’s just a puppy though, so, it’s not like she would make a mess.”

“Just a puppy? No mess? Kid, you clearly don’t understand puppies,” he joked with a fond smile. “But, she does look well-behaved.”

“Uhuh, she’s really good, my daddy’s been helping me train her, and big brother too,” the boy almost bragged, his expression brightening from that rather sullen pout into a sweet smile.

“Are you gonna wait here all morning for him?” Jimin asked, as he shifted to give the puppy a tummy rub. Her stomach was very warm from the sunlight that she was basking in, and he gave her a teasing tickle that made the puppy wriggle from side to side of the paving flag, her little legs kicking around. “I wouldn’t advise it, kid. I don’t think that you really know where you are right now, but you shouldn’t be hanging around these streets. It’s a hot cruising spot for the more affluent gay guys looking for cheap coke and even cheaper ass.”

“Huh?” he hummed, raising his eyebrows again in that funny way of his.

Jimin realised that what he had just said had flown right over the boy’s head, and that he was had been speaking literal nonsense to him. He could always try to explain it to him in more simpler terms, but that seemed like far too much effort right now.

“Um, let’s just say that cuties like you shouldn’t hang around these streets, OK?” Jimin suggested with a quick smile, as he moved his hand up to the puppy’s head and tickled her neck. “There’s strange men around here that might offer you money and drugs to get in their cars, yeah, and they’re dangerous. So, you’ve gotta be more careful with finding places to hang around in this city.”

“Oh? Oh, thank you,” the boy said in a quiet voice, dropping his gaze to watch him playing with his dog.
Jimin felt her little teeth nipping at his fingers, and so he shifted his hands back down to her tummy instead.

“Who’s a good girl, huh?” he asked the dog in English, placing both hands on her ribs and giving the dog a massage with his palms. “It’s you! You’re a good girl!”

The puppy let out a funny yipping bark at this, which made them both start laughing. The boy had a cute little laugh, a giddy giggle that made his nose wrinkle up and flashed his rather sweet buck teeth.

“How about this, kid? You come with me right now, I’ll buy you some breakfast, and we can talk a little more?” Jimin offered with a friendly smile. “I was just about to grab a bite to eat from McDonald’s, and I’ve got plenty enough cash on me right now to buy you a treat too.”

“Mac…dough…nul?”

“Close enough,” he joked, reaching over to give him a quick pat on the knee. “What’d you say, cutie? Do you wanna come with me and grab a free burger and fries? A milkshake too? My treat?”

“Um, OK, that sounds cool,” the boy agreed with a soft nod, as he shifted to get to his feet.

“Whoa, you’re a tall cutie!” Jimin exclaimed with a laugh, as he also straightened up; shocked to find that the boy was a couple of inches taller than he was already. He looked to be shorter than Namjoon though, but only time would tell if he caught up with him. “You must’ve drank all of your milk as a kid, huh?”

This remark made the boy snort laughter again, as he gathered the leash into his hand and he gave it a gentle tug to get his puppy to get up off the pavement. She did so only after he clucked out of the corner of his mouth, lazily getting to her feet and shaking off hard to knock any grit from her short coat.

Rather than head back to Haight-Ashbury, Jimin decided to take the boy to one of the McDonald’s down in Western Addition instead. That was because it would take them a long time to get back to the other neighbourhood, and he didn’t want to drag him everywhere like that. Not only because he had promised him food, but because he didn’t want the boy to think that he might actually be lying to him.
Worryingly enough, Jimin really didn’t think that the boy had a clue about how dangerous that the streets could be for kids like him. Traffickers that were always looking for someone to grab, for both prostitution at home and smuggling across the globe back to Asia; dealers that were eager to befriend youngsters that they could palm ‘candy’ MDMA onto to get them hooked on cheap and deadly rushes; older men that were on the hunt for girls and boys that they could lure into their cars. If a kid wasn’t smart enough, they could be ensnared in so many traps, and a kid that could barely speak English was even more at risk.

That was why Jimin was hoping to talk to him about a couple of things, maybe find out how long the boy had been in the country for and where he was calling home. He was sure that he and Namjoon could educate him about the city in a friendly enough way, and maybe make friends with the kid.

Jimin still had a tidy stash of cash from Yoongi’s increased pay packet floating around instead of safely stored in his bank account. He didn’t need to worry about paying for a taxi in the slightest, or buying the kid some food. No, he could easily escort him back to his partner’s house and they could all share breakfast with each other.

“So, why were you hanging around the diner again? Waiting for your big brother?” Jimin asked to break their temporary silence, glancing over at him. “Was he supposed to pick you up or something, hmm?”

“He’s not my real big brother, I just call him that,” the boy explained with a sheepish smile. “I don’t have a brother, but I’ve always wanted one.”

“I get you, kid, I think of my partner that way too, sometimes,” Jimin said with a soft nod. “I wish that I’d had a brother sometimes too, so, I’d have had a friend growing up.”

“Didn’t you have any friends when you were a kid?”

“Not many, not any that I think really count as friends,” he explained with a soft shrug. “There was a lot of bullies, of course, but not many friends.”

“That’s crazy, I mean, you seem really nice and stuff,” the boy mumbled in a quiet voice. “I don’t understand why you didn’t have any friends.”

“That’s very sweet of you, kid. I’ve got a couple of friends now, and they more than make up for
those hard times,” Jimin said with a quick smile. “Why didn’t your big brother show this morning, huh?”

“Um, he usually visits my parent’s restaurant to see me, but he’s been busy recently and so I thought that I’d come and meet him at that food place. But he must be busy again, he’s always so busy.”

“Sorry, cutie, I know how it feels to wanna see someone like that, even when they’re so busy.”

“Do you wanna hold the leash?” the boy offered suddenly, holding it out to him. “She’s a bit crazy today. I’ve tried exercising her, but she’s still really hyperactive.”

“Sure thing,” Jimin said, moving to accept the leash from his hold. Their fingers brushed together as he did so, revealing the boy to have slightly callused fingertips that meant that he must have a creative hobby or two. But his hands seemed soft otherwise. “Let’s go for a walk, huh?”

“Tigger,” the boy added for him.

“Let’s go for a walk, Tigger.”

At her name being called, the puppy found a new burst of energy, and she darted ahead of them. She pulled the leash to its full extent, pulling it taut and then actually applying enough force to drag Jimin forward a couple of steps.

“Wow, she’s a tough girl!” he exclaimed with a laugh, pulling back on the leash to tug her back in so that she didn’t wrench him down the street. He had to dig his sneakers soles into the pavement to ground himself for a moment, until Tigger calmed down and let the leash grow slack again. “Settle down, Tigger!”

Jimin had made the mistake of saying her name again, because it made her let out a series of excited yips and then she had another burst of energy. She caught him by complete surprise and she wrenched him forward again, made him stagger with a cry of surprise as he tightened his hold on the leash.

“Don’t say her name!” the boy suggested between his laughter, giving him a hard tug to pull him back and stop him from falling right on his face. “She gets excited when you say her name!”
“And you thought that she wouldn’t make a mess!”

Luckily for Jimin, Tigger settled down again just a few seconds later, unable to get very far at all on her limited leash length. It took him quite an amount of strength to keep her reeled in, and when she finally relented, Jimin wasn’t surprised to find that his upper arm had had quite the workout. He shifted the leash into both of his hands just to try and give his sore arm a break.

It took just a couple of minutes for them to reach the closest fast-food restaurant, and so Jimin had to hand the leash back over to the boy. He saw that he was studying the exterior of the building with those rounded and curious eyes of his, eyeing the trademark logo that was twirling around on the tall pole: the one that advertised opening and closing hours, breakfast times, and free parking in the lot.

“Order anything that you want, kid,” Jimin said, as he stopped beside the revolving door. “Seriously, I don’t care, just don’t order the whole menu. Yeah?”

“Um…”

“You dunno what’s on the menu, do you?” he asked with a quick smile, to which the boy let out a rather embarrassed laugh. “OK, well, first there’s the burgers, and there’s a couple of different kinds, like…”

When Jimin entered the fast food joint a couple of minutes later, he ended up ordering quite an amount more than he had originally intended when he had left Namjoon’s house.

First, there was a quarter-pounder with cheese, a cheeseburger and a hamburger, along with two servings of large fries - as they were cheaper than three orders of small fries. Then he added a side order of six chicken nuggets, and two pies for dessert: apple and cherry. Finally, there were two large coffees and a large strawberry milkshake for drinks.

Yet, despite the size of the order, he only needed a single bill to cover the cost.

Jimin slid over a $10 bill to cover the $8.45 cost for the meal, wondering just how much it would cost to buy the same thing in Kowloon City, or how much it might come to when a restaurant finally opened in Seoul. It was no doubt more than the relatively cheap price that he had just paid for three meals with sides, and he thought that the kid would probably find the price shocking.
Jimin had to carry two large paper bags in one hand, and a cardboard drinks trays in the other. He tried to shove the door open with his body, shoving his hip against the glass, but it was pretty heavy and he struggled to do so. So the boy moved to grab at it, tugging it open for him.

“Here you go, cutie,” Jimin declared, as he held the drink container out in offering and he let him take his milkshake out of it. “Is this the first time that you’ve eaten McDonald’s, huh? They don’t have it in Seoul, I know that much.”

“You’ve been to Seoul before? Did you grow up there too?”

“No, I was born and raised here, but I go there for business reasons,” he explained. “It is your first time?”

“Uhuh, it’s my first time eating this. They don’t have it in Seoul, or a Burger King either,” the boy said, his lips twitching up at the corners in something that looked like a brief smile before he took a sip of his milkshake.

It was this sudden mention of Burger King that made Jimin feel something coursing through him. It was as if a hook had suddenly latched itself onto a thought at the very back of his mind and was tugging at it. After a few seconds of mentally grappling with it, he realised what the sudden thought was.

“Wait…what’s your name, kid?” Jimin finally asked, slowing his walk down to a stop to stare at him because he couldn’t believe that it had taken him this long to do so.

“My name is Jungkook Jeon, I’m eighteen years. What’s your name?” the boy replied in near perfect English, looking rather smug as he did so.

“I’m Jimin Park and- wait, your name’s…”

Jimin felt his fingers loosening on the drink container, and it was a miracle that he didn’t end up dropping it onto the sidewalk in his shock. Luckily, he managed to recover, but the obvious flinch was noticed by the boy.
“Huh? Are you OK, Jimin?”

“Holy shit! Kid, you-you’ve gotta come with me, OK? Like, right now,” he declared, his mind racing with so many thoughts that he couldn’t seem to get his words out right.

“Why?” Jungkook asked in surprise, staring at him with those massive eyes of his.

“I can’t believe this, I can’t- listen, this is gonna sound crazy,” Jimin explained rapidly, thrumming with a sudden rush of excitement. “I know it’s gonna sound crazy, but my partner over in Seoul is Taehyung, OK, and-”

“Taehyung?! You know Taehyungie?!” Jungkook exclaimed in complete shock, before cursing in English. “What the fuck?!”

“Exactly! What the fuck?!” Jimin repeated, before he burst out laughing, unable to help himself. “I can’t believe this! I’ve got his letter! I’ve got all kinds of photographs that he gave me, just for you! They’re in my house right now, I promised to send them in the mail for him when I got back here, but I completely forgot! This is- ah, this is the craziest thing that’s ever happened to me!”

“Wait…” Jungkook said in a quiet voice, his drink straw hovering in front of his parted lips. “How can I believe you, Jimin?”

Jimin stopped laughing at this, his excited giggles trailing off into soft sighs as he looked up at the boy. It took him a moment to realise what he meant by this, because it had been so long since he had witnessed ‘stranger danger’ being utilised. He himself had never really been good at remembering this fact, even when it was drilled into children’s brains from the very moment that they started walking and talking.

No, Jimin really hadn’t learnt to not climb into strangers’ cars as well as he should have back then.

Sure, Jimin had just pulled Taehyung’s name out of the blue like that, in a way that showed that he must have known the other young man in some way. It wasn’t exactly a common name, after all, but Jungkook was just trying to stay safe and smart. That meant that he needed to think of something to say, or do, that could prove to the boy that he really did know his best friend.

“You gotta trust me, kid, I just…no, wait-”
Jimin hunkered down to put the coffee container and paper bag on the pavement for a moment, so that he could retrieve his wallet again. He rummaged through the random notes until he found the one thing that he was looking for. He tugged it free and he held the Polaroid out to him in offering.

“Here,” he said in a quiet voice.

Jungkook moved to tentatively accept the snapshot, turning it around to stare at the front. Jimin saw his expression shifting at this, growing slack with dumb wonder as he studied the photograph. It was in his eyes mostly, for they were so very expressive, but it was also evident on his softly pouted lips.

Jimin had just handed him the Polaroid from the day of the protest rally, the one that Taehyung had taken of them together.

In the snapshot, they were both grinning in excitement from the event, a picture perfect moment if there ever was one. Taehyung was on the right, holding the camera up with his longer reach, his other arm slung around his neck to tug him close; his hair that usual mess of dark locks that was spilling free from his ‘liberty’ hair scarf. There was no possible way of mistaking him for someone else, not with that massive grin on his face.

“Oh, wow…” Jungkook sighed, checking the scribbled message on the back just for the sake of it. “You really do know Taehyungie. I should have believed you, but mama and big brother told me to be careful around strangers in this city. In case they, um, they kidnap me or hurt me, or something. I dunno, they never said why, they just said to be careful.”

“It’s good advice, kid, I’m actually glad that you asked me,” Jimin said, as he accepted the photograph back and he shoved it into his wallet again. “That way, I know that you’re street smart, yeah? You’ve gotta be street smart here, it’s not like Seoul. Trust me. But you’ve probably figured that out already, right?”

Jungkook nodded enthusiastically at this, the action making his mop of hair fly around his face messily.

At his feet, Tigger was sniffing around the McDonald’s bag because she could no doubt scent the greasy and salty beef inside of it and she wanted to sample some for herself.

“Like I said, Taehyung’s my partner over in Seoul. I know for a fact that you know what I’m talking
about, because he told me that much about you.”

“He…he told you about me?”

“Yeah, look, I can explain all of that when we get back to my place. You’re gonna come with me, right? To get his letter and photographs?”

“Of course,” Jungkook agreed, not a hint of hesitation present in his voice. “I trust you. You know Taehyungie, and you’re nice too. You bought me food and everything, so, I trust you, Jimin.”

“…OK, good,” Jimin said with a smile, shoving his wallet back into his jeans. Then he grabbed the paper food bag and drink container, straightening up again to eye the road. “Here’s hoping a goddamn taxi shows up. We can’t share my skateboard.”

“Tigger could ride on it,” Jungkook joked, taking another deep sip of milkshake.

“Shit, time’s like these, I wish I could drive,” Jimin muttered, as he moved to the curb and he scanned the incoming traffic for any signs of a taxi. “I wish I had a fucking sports car or something. Red, sexy.”

“Red’s a nice colour for a car,” the boy agreed from the sidewalk behind him.

It took them several minutes to hail a taxi, but those minutes weren’t wasted. It would take them almost an hour of walking to get back to the other neighbourhood, whereas a car ride took roughly ten minutes. Jimin knew which one that he preferred, even if he had to pay for the ride.

Upon reaching the house, Jimin unlocked the door with his key. He saw that Jungkook was eyeing the exterior with a curious eye, no doubt finding the row of vibrant Painted Ladies incredibly fascinating. That was a sign that he most certainly didn’t live in this neighbourhood, but it didn’t mean that he hadn’t been through the area before.

“This is my friend’s house,” Jimin explained, as he applied pressure to shove the door open and he stepped over the slight step. “Don’t worry about it though, we pretty much live together; you know?”
Jungkook dragged his gaze away from the houses to look up at him, still standing at the bottom of the front steps below him.

“Can Tigger come inside too?”

“Sure thing,” he said, gesturing for him to follow him inside. “Let’s hope that she doesn’t tear up the sofa cushions up, huh?”

Jungkook made a noise in agreement at this, guiding his puppy up the high stone steps into the house.

Jimin closed the door behind him, and he watched the boy hunkering down to remove his own sneakers. He placed the food bags and drink container on the table by the door so that he could do so too, slipping out of his white sneakers to get comfortable.

As soon as they were out of their shoes, Jungkook unclipped the leash from around Tigger’s collar and the dog trotted off down the hallway as happy as could be.

Jimin saw her sniffing at the floor with a great fascination, following all of the different scents and trails that would be all over the house. She pottered into the kitchen to resume her curious searching, and so he moved to pass the food bags to Jungkook.

“I’ll be right back. I’m just gonna tell my friend about the food, OK?”

“OK,” Jungkook said with a nod.

“The living-room’s just through there, Tigger’s in the kitchen, and if you need the bathroom, it’s upstairs,” he explained, as he quickly went up the stairs and he heard the dog yipping again because he had said her name.

Jimin found Namjoon still very much sitting on their bed, a set of electronic scales in front of him as he portioned out a variety of baggies of marijuana for ease of sale. There was quite a lot already covering the bed, which he had filled with varying quantities, but the massive bag was still pretty full. It was his usual monthly supply, though sometimes he burnt through it and he needed more merch from Kim to keep his buyers sated.
“Hey, Daddy-o, food’s downstairs,” Jimin said, leaning against the door frame and watching his partner sealing up another baggie.

“Oh? Great, I was just about to take a break and-”

There was a series of yipping barks from downstairs, followed by the softest sound of what seemed to be Jungkook giggling at something. Jimin rolled his eyes as if to track the sound, listening to it for a few seconds, and then he looked back at Namjoon.

“Jimmy? Did I just hear a…a dog?” Namjoon asked dumbly, squinting at him as he placed the baggie down on the bed.

“Uhuh, there’s a dog in the house,” Jimin replied, quickly adding. “No, I didn’t rescue a stray, no, I didn’t buy or steal a dog. It belongs to a, um, a friend.”

“A friend, what friend?” Namjoon asked, before snorting hard. “You don’t have any friends, I’m your only friend.”

“He’s a new friend, Namo. Listen, you know my partner, Taehyung? Well, one of his friends moved to America, like, last month, and he happened to settle down right here; in San Francisco. Tae wanted me to look out for him, and you won’t believe it, but I literally crashed right into him this morning out on the streets.”

“No shit?” Namjoon said in complete shock, genuine surprise on his face instead of something sarcastic. “What’re the fucking odds of something like that happening, Jimmy? It’s gotta be…what, one in a million at least? Something like that. You’re the maths whiz, you tell me.”

“Give me your notebook and, like, five hours and I’ll give you the answer,” Jimin joked, as he crossed his arms over his chest and he cocked his head. “Seriously, it’s the kid. We were talking for about ten minutes or something before I even thought to ask him his fucking name, Namo. It was just crazy. When he said it to me, I damn nearly shit myself. Jungkook Jeon, came all of the way from Seoul and ended up right in our backyard.”

“That’s some crazy shit right there, man,” Namjoon said with a head shake.
“Anyway, like I said, the food’s downstairs, if you wanna join us,” Jimin said, as he stepped through the doorway again. “Quarter-pounder with cheese with your name all over it, and an apple pie too.”

“For breakfast? Goddamn. I’m gonna go look at that dog,” Namjoon mumbled to himself, completely abandoning his marijuana in favour of getting to his feet and crossing the bedroom. “But also, grab that pie too; you know?”

Jimin grinned at this whilst his friend pushed past him to step out of the bedroom and cross the landing. He followed him downstairs, their bare feet lightly thumping on the floorboards, and he saw that Jungkook had not only went into the living-room, he had also carried their drinks inside too rather than leave them on the table by the front door.

Jungkook was sitting on the floor by the coffee table rather than on the sofa, likely because he thought it was more respectful to not sit on the single item of furniture. He hadn’t opened the bags of food, but he was nursing his strawberry milkshake and staring at the Atari games console that was hooked up to the television set with a great interest.

“Namjoon, this is Jungkook Jeon, and he doesn’t speak a lot of English, so, it’s time to break out your Korean,” Jimin explained, as he gestured over at the boy. Then he switched to Korean so that he could address Jungkook. “This is my other partner, I’ve got two. That’s kinda funny, now that I think about it. Anyway, this is Kim Namjoon and he owns the house, so, try to not break anything in front of him. He breaks enough shit on his own.”

“Very funny, I understood all of that,” Namjoon muttered with a glare, before shifting to the other language. “So, uh, you only speak Korean? Mine isn’t that great, so…yeah.”

“It’s OK, I understand you perfectly,” Jungkook said with a friendly smile, his straw caught between his teeth. “This is a really big house, um, Namjoon. It’s really big and nice, and the outside’s really cool!”

“Oh, yeah, you know what they call these houses? Painted Ladies,” Namjoon replied. “I haven’t got a goddamn clue why, they just do.”

“Huh,” Jungkook hummed, his lips moving in a way that showed that he was contemplating repeating the English words. But he decided not to, maybe because he might get it wrong and get embarrassed. “I’d like to live in one of these houses.”
Jimin was in the act of moving to sit down on the floor with Jungkook when he saw Tigger bounding out from behind the sofa. She was having a great time exploring the house, and she had hopefully not decided to leave them little steaming presents behind.

“Look at that dog, that is a cute dog,” Namjoon declared, as he dropped to sit on the floor; crossing his long legs in front of him and curving his back so that he could try and get on eye-level with the animal. “That’s a Great Dane, right? What’s its name?”

“Tigger.”

“What? Like the storybook character?” Namjoon asked curiously, before laughing. “Jimmy, he called his dog Tigger. Christ, the poor thing’s gonna have one hell of an identity crisis when it grows up.”

Jimin snorted at this, seeing that Jungkook was eyeing his friend curiously and no doubt trying to understand what he had just said. But with his limited skills, he knew that he was completely clueless.

“He thinks that it’s funny that you called a dog that name, because it’s named after a tiger,” he explained for the boy, as he retrieved his coffee container. “It’s cute, I think it’s cute.”

“Stripes,” Jungkook said, gesturing at the puppy’s brindle coat. “She has stripes.”

“Yeah, she has stripes,” Namjoon agreed with a nod. “Not exactly a tiger, but so what, huh?”

Jimin decided to empty the food bags onto the table, seeing as Jungkook was too busy watching Namjoon to do so, and Namjoon was also too busy giving Tigger tummy rubs. He opened the bags and he dropped a bunch of napkins onto the surface, so that he could dump the cartons of fries and chicken nuggets onto them. Then he pulled the burger and pie boxes free to place them aside too.

“I didn’t know that you liked dogs so much, Daddy-o,” Jimin remarked, hastily brushing salt off his hands.

“I love dogs, man,” Namjoon said, as he resumed stroking the puppy, the wide smile on his face showing him just how much that he did. “We had a dog when I was a kid and I loved her to death. Literally. She died when I was twelve and we just never got around to buying a new dog to replace
her with. Figured a new dog just wasn’t her, you know?”

“I prefer cats,” Jimin remarked, lifting his coffee container to take a sip. “What a surprise, I just had to be the different one in the room.”

“Um, I’m kinda scared of cats,” Jungkook said in a rather soft voice, as he looked between them both. “I find their eyes kinda freaky, the way that they stare at you from across the room? Sometimes, their eyes go all black too and then they dive on you; it’s so scary.”

“I love the way that cats look at you like that. I love how they look like they’re always on the prowl, always on…the hunt,” Jimin said, as he shifted to get onto his hands and knees and he discreetly edged closer to the boy. “They’re hunters, after all. So, when they start creeping around like that, you know that they’re getting ready to just… attack!”

Jimin pounced at this, going straight for the back of his neck so that he could tickle him.

Jungkook burst out laughing at the contact, bringing his shoulders up defensively to knock his tickling fingers free from his neck. His cheeks had also turned pink in a way that reminded him of Yoongi, and Jimin found himself smiling at the sight as he leaned back on his wrists again.

“Ah! That scared me too!” Jungkook said, reaching up to touch his neck before dropping his gaze down to the table; coming over all shy.

“Anyway, time for breakfast,” Jimin declared. “Stop playing with the puppy, Namo!”

Namjoon managed to fit in several more tummy rubs and even an ear scratch before he decided to join them at the table. He went straight for the coffee, sipping at it and making a pleased noise at the fact that it was still hot.

Jimin handed Jungkook the hamburger box first, the boy thanking him and opening it himself to study the content with a great interest. Then he gave Namjoon his quarter-pounder cheeseburger and he opened his own cheeseburger box.

“This is Jungkook’s first McDonald’s,” he said, as he grabbed a handful of fries. “His very first one, isn’t that kinda crazy?”
“When will Seoul ever be taken over by crazy American consumerism, huh, Jimmy?” Namjoon joked sarcastically, which made Jimin snort laughter and surprisingly brought a wide smile to Jungkook’s face. It seemed that he really did know a lot about politics and social issues, just like Taehyung had told him about. “What does Jungkook think of it, huh?”

At this question, Jungkook decided to take the plunge and sample a massive bite of the burger. He cheeked the mouthful before chewing it, his expression changing into one that revealed that he really liked what he was eating.

“It’s really good!” he said around the burger. “It’s, um, so tasty!”

“Hey, his English isn’t that bad,” Namjoon said, as he placed his coffee container down on the table. “Good accent, pretty neutral.”

“If you think that the burger’s good, try one of these babies,” Jimin declared, as he held one of the chicken nuggets out to him. “Seriously, you won’t believe how good these things are, Jungkook.”

Jungkook accepted the chicken nugget and he eyed it curiously, no doubt wondering what was hidden underneath the golden skin. He took a bite and slowly chewed it, before making a noise around the chicken that made Jimin start laughing. Within seconds, he was devouring the rest of the nugget and chewing it enthusiastically.

“Wow, those taste nicer than my mama’s chicken,” Jungkook said, as he grabbed his milkshake to take a quick sip. “I didn’t think that anything could taste nicer than that!”

Jimin took that as a hint to move several more of the nuggets closer to him, and then he started eating his own breakfast whilst it was still hot.

Tigger decided to investigate the table with her curious nose, sniffing at the boxes and spread of fries and then edging along their thighs. She received a couple more ear scratches, but not chunks of burger, much to her clear disappointment. So she decided to settle into Jungkook’s lap and she looked up at him with her large chocolate eyes, begging for something at this point.

When Jungkook took another bite of burger, a dribble of tomato and mustard sauce spilled free onto his chin. Tigger jumped up and she licked the blob of sauce off his chin eagerly, the sight of it making them all start laughing as the boy gently pushed the puppy off his lap.
Unsurprisingly, it took them just a couple of minutes to finish the burgers, fries and nuggets. Jimin decided to share his cherry pie with Jungkook, on account of him not ordering anything for dessert. In the time that it had taken to eat most of the breakfast, they had been rather quiet. But Jimin could sense that the boy was wanting to speak to them, he just didn’t really know what to say, or how to say it. His apparent shyness was probably partially responsible too.

“Do you two work for Moon Tiger Mob? You must, if you know Taehyungie, right?” Jungkook remarked, slowly chewing a mouthful of the cherry pie.

“Yeah, like I said, I’m his partner,” Jimin explained, licking particles of sugar off his lips. “I get the goods to him, he and his guys move it around, and he travels with me to collect more goods over in Hong Kong. It’s a good system, and he’s a good partner, Jungkook.”

“Of course he is, he’s a good friend,” the boy said with a slight smile. “I, um, I never asked too much about what he did, but I just knew that he worked for…for anti-government men, and that’s really all there is to it - it means gangsters.”

“Tae told me a lot about that too, and I think that it’s a good thing that he didn’t tell you about what we do,” Jimin said, hovering the cherry pie in front of his mouth, but making no move to take a bite. “You really don’t wanna get accused of knowing the wrong kinds of people over in Seoul, and you had enough trouble with your family, right?”

“Mmmhmm…”

“Jungkook’s dad was a politician,” Jimin explained for Namjoon, watching the boy playing with his milkshake straw. “They pretty much had to seek political asylum over here.”

“Jesus Christ,” Namjoon breathed out in a soft voice. “Your dad sounds like a good man, Jungkook, a decent man, and I’m sorry that the political climate over there’s so bad that you had to flee your homeland like that. No one should ever have to leave their home behind through circumstance and not choice.”

“Um, it’s OK, I mean, I like it here too,” Jungkook said with a soft shrug, avoiding their gazes as he did so. “My family are safe, that’s all that matters.”

Jimin thought this over for a few seconds before looking over at his friend.
Namjoon returned his look, and then he shook his head softly, silently telling him that they should drop this particular subject for now. There was a chance that it might upset Jungkook, and so they both fell silent for a moment and they left him to decide if he wanted to talk about it with him.

“Oh, I think that someone’s hungry,” Namjoon remarked, watching Tigger avidly sniffing at the empty burger boxes with a wagging tail.

“I fed her this morning, but she probably wants more food - she’s greedy.”

“There’s a store just at the end of the block, they sell dog food there,” Namjoon said, as he shifted to get to his feet and he grabbed the remains of his apple pie. “Hang on, Tigger, I’m gonna go get you the good shit.”

“Oh, um, thank you!” Jungkook called as he left the living-room, and Namjoon just called something back around a mouthful of food that sounded like “no problem”.

“You OK?” Jimin asked around a bite of cherry pie. “Talking about your family, it didn’t upset you; did it?”

“Huh? No, it didn’t upset me,” the boy replied with a soft head shake. “It’s OK, Jimin.”

“I was there when Tae got your letter, you see, and he read quite a lot of it out to me,” Jimin explained. “He told me about you before then, when we went to a student protest together, and so when your letter arrived, he decided to read it to me too. I know about the journey in the boat, and your mum being sick, I know about how you were given a home and a restaurant through the mob, Jungkook, and that’s a lot of things to know about someone that you’ve only just met today.”

Jungkook didn’t say anything in reply to this, just studied him from across the table as he stroked Tigger on the head.

“I just wanted you to know that I understand what it’s like to be going through hard times, you know? It’s not the same, but I know what it’s like because I grew up in poverty and my parents couldn’t really speak much English at all. I had to try to fit in, and it was hard, but you’re a smart kid according to Tae, and so I think that you’ll find a way of fitting in here. Also, you’re a great artist. I saw the drawings, they look just like Tigger. I can’t believe that I didn’t recognise her from the drawings back at the diner.”
“Thank you,” Jungkook said with a soft smile.

“So, the letter,” Jimin declared, as he quickly wiped sugar and jam off his fingers with his wrinkled napkin. “It’s upstairs. I’ll go get it, OK?”

When he got to his feet, Jimin saw that Jungkook also copied his actions. He probably wanted to follow after him, to explore the rest of the big house that he thought was really cool. So he exited the room and he went up the staircase, the boy right on his heel.

Upon stepping into the bedroom, Jimin realised that Namjoon had left the merch on display on his bed. The scales were still set up, the marijuana and all of his portioned-out baggies right there for them both to see. He twisted to see that Jungkook was stepping right into the bedroom after him, which left him with little choice but to hide the product.

“Just ignore that,” Jimin muttered, quickly moving to snatch up the baggies of marijuana and dumping them inside of the side table. Just to stop the kid from staring at it too much and realising what it might just be. “It’s nothing, yeah?”

Jimin gave a quick laugh, but it sounded rather awkward to his ears, and he knew that the boy would find it forced too.

“Um, that’s drugs, isn’t it?” Jungkook asked in a quiet voice, his gaze shifting between the open drawer and the electronic scales.

“Ah, don’t worry about it, OK?” he reiterated, waving his hand as if to brush away this suggestion.

Jimin moved over to the dresser so that he could open the top drawer and root around inside of it to find the letter. He saw the old camera, the one that Yoongi had pulled free and had asked if he had any film for, and so he placed it on the top of the dresser so that it wasn’t cluttering the drawer.

A quick glance back over his shoulder showed him that Jungkook was eyeing the lava lamp with a great fascination. Then he turned his focus onto his record player instead, moving to stand beside him and then hunkering down to start looking through his box of records.
“Wow, you’ve got a lot of records,” the boy said in wonder, as he started rifling through the different vinyls with a great interest. “I don’t have any, but it’d be really cool to start collecting them now that I live here. There’s so many songs that I’ve never heard before playing on the radio, just waiting for me to listen to them! Isn’t that kinda crazy?”

Jimin thought about how Yoongi didn’t really listen to music as he watched the boy flicking between his records for a moment. Then an idea crossed his mind that made him smile warmly.

“Then you’ll have to visit me like you visit your big brother, so that you can listen to all of these records,” Jimin suggested, as he finally located the letter at the bottom of the drawer.

“I’d like that a lot, Jimin,” Jungkook replied, looking up at him and shooting him a happy smile.

“Where’d you live, huh?” Jimin asked, turning the envelope over to check the address again.

“Um, The Bayvuuh…view? Bayview,” the boy said, enunciating the word very clearly on his second attempt.

“Oh, yeah?” he mumbled to himself, eyeing the envelope to see a very familiar street name scribbled on the front. “Here you go, kid.”

Jungkook straightened up to accept the envelope from him, looking at the front and then turning it over to look at the sealed back. He made no move to open it, as he seemed uncertain as to whether he should do so right now or leave it until later.

“I helped him take some of the photos, so, if they suck that’s all my fault,” Jimin joked. “I saw your photos though, and they were really good, Jungkook. You’ve got an eye for photography too, because some of the shots were fantastic.”

“I’ve got a lot of new photographs, but my album is back at home,” the boy said, before sighing heavily. “I can’t show you them.”

“Do you want me to escort you back to your home, huh?” Jimin offered, cocking his head and studying the boy. “Jumping a bus can be pretty hard on your own. How’d you get all of the way up here? Did you seriously walk?”
“My parents work in Western Addition,” Jungkook explained, pronouncing this neighbourhood to perfection. “Every morning, they bring me with them and I’m allowed to go out, but I’m not supposed to not wander too far. I’ve go to the help clean up the restaurant before it closes in the evening, so, I go out with Tigger and take photographs, and buy food and stuff.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Uhuh, today’s the first time that someone wanted to actually talk to me,” Jungkook continued, as he fiddled with the edge of the envelope. “Usually, I only talk to Tigger, because my English isn’t that great and I get nervous around strangers.”

“Well, how about this? We go back to your home for a little while, to look at your photographs, and then I can escort you back to the restaurant before you get in trouble with your parents; hmm? And then, when you’ve got your letter all prepared and ready to send to Tae, you know where to find me. I can pass it to him when I go over to Seoul for business, no problem, and you’ll never have to worry about it getting lost in transit.”

“Um, OK,” Jungkook said after a moment of thought. “That sounds like a really good idea, Jimin.”

Namjoon had returned back to the house at some point whilst they had been talking, with a bag of kibble that he had poured out into an old chipped food bowl. He had even added a bowl of water for Tigger too, and she was happily lapping it up when they went back downstairs. After she had had her fill, Jungkook clipped her leash back onto her collar, and they left the house to jump a bus to go to The Bayview.

Jungkook had to keep his puppy on his lap for the duration of the bus ride, just to keep her from getting under anyone’s feet and causing mischief. She didn’t seem to mind at all, for she just shoved her nose right up against the crack in the window and she watched the city streets blurring past with her ears cocked and her tongue lolling free happily.

It was funny, Jimin thought, how both the dog and her owner were watching the sights out of the window with their large and curious eyes.

By the time that they finally reached The Bayview, it was nearing the early afternoon hours. Jimin had to follow Jungkook down the streets, eyeing their surroundings and finding a funny sensation starting to grow in his belly. It was almost like anxiety, something that made him fiddle with his thumb ring as they both strolled down the sidewalk.
Jimin saw people of every colour imaginable sitting on house steps: fanning at themselves to keep cool, listening to music, watching their kids playing, or drinking and talking with one another. It was a friendly atmosphere that clashed against the more worrying crime incidents that occurred of a night. He had heard enough police sirens in the middle of the night, combined with shouting people, banging doors, shattering windows and gunshots, to know the kind of place that The Bayview could sadly become for some families and desperate people.

It was only when he glanced upon one of the more taller blocks of housing that Jimin realised what was causing the anxious feeling in the gut.

These streets and packed housing blocks were his childhood. These boarded-up and mesh-covered windows were the exact same ones that he had gazed out of as a kid, searching for his dad down on the streets as he had made his way back home from work so that he had been able to try and find a way to hide from him for a while. These poor people were his neighbours, even when they didn’t have the same faces as they had used to.

Jimin had ran away from home, but he had also ran away from The Bayview. Now he was finally coming back to it again after so long, and he didn’t like what he saw.

When Jungkook moved to shove the door of a housing block open, Jimin found himself freezing on the spot for a few seconds. He didn’t know if he could enter the block right now, but after a few seconds, he managed to take a deep breath and he plucked up the courage to follow him inside.

The interior of the block was so much like the one that he had grown up in that Jimin felt his breath catching in his throat, threatening to choke him. He wet his lips with his equally dry tongue, squinting in the dim shadows of the ground-floor area to see that the carpet was torn and peeled away from the edges of the walls, and the painted walls were stained yellow and greasy with tobacco.

“Come on, Tigger,” Jungkook said, as he hunkered down to pick the puppy up and carry her under his arm. “Jimin?”

“Huh?”

Jimin looked away from the carpet to see that Jungkook was standing on the stairs a few feet away, his puppy in his arms and the leash wrapped around his elbow. That was a sign that he should follow him up the stairs, and so he moved to do so.
The narrow and dark stairwell was just like the one that he had grown up using. It smelled damp, an unpleasant mouldy scent clinging to the air that he hated breathing in. There was probably black and grey fuzzy mould growing on the walls and ceilings in here too, because the block was so old and decrepit.

Jimin followed him up several flights of stairs, until the boy was unlocking a door to let them inside. The door was painted red, but it had started cracking and peeling away in parts from wear.

“Um, welcome to my home, Jimin,” Jungkook said, stepping inside first and looking back over his shoulder at him.

The home might only contain three rooms, but it was still clean and organised, rather than the mess that Jimin had grown up in. With the exception of a couple of dog toys, the room was in a very neat condition. There was a plastic box of shoes by the door, and a mounted hook on the wall for coats, jackets, hats and ties. More clothing was left drying on a clothes maiden across the room, a wooden one, and Jimin could see a small bucket, washing board and wringer placed in the corner that his parents used to clean the clothes. There was no furniture in the main-room, save for a slim mattress, a small table and several battered floor cushions.

There was no kitchen, just an area at which a kettle and stove were placed. He wondered if the Jeon family prepared all of their meals in their restaurant to combat this fact, for he saw next to no cooking utensils present on the hooks on the wall over the sink.

One of the other rooms was clearly a bathroom, the other a bedroom for his parents, which meant that Jungkook slept on the battered mattress. He probably shared it with Tigger, the mental image making a funny twinge spread through Jimin’s chest that made him start play with his thumb ring again.

Oh, this little box home brought back enough memories to make Jimin feel almost nauseous.

Right where Jungkook’s mattress bed was? That was where the sofa had been, the one that he had been pinned down against countless times as a boy, so that his dad had been able to beat him without him fighting back or wriggling free to run into the bedroom to get to his mum and hide behind her.

The kitchen counter, that looked just like the one that his mum had stood beside when she had wept almost every single night; and that she had been cowering against when she had drawn a kitchen knife on his dad and had screeched at him to never lay a hand on him again. When Jimin had woken
up the following morning, she had had a black eye, and the beatings had continued just like always.

Jimin could recall dancing around the home to music from the radio like a ballerino - a home that should have been as clean and welcoming as this one was and not the stuff of nightmares. He had to close his eyes and take a moment to collect himself, sinking back against the front door because his legs suddenly felt so terribly weak.

Luckily for him, Jungkook was so busy removing the collar from around Tigger’s neck that he didn’t even notice his slight swoon. It gave him enough time to fight the sudden wave of dizziness and open his eyes again, and then he slowly hunkered down to remove his sneakers.

Tigger trotted off across the room to grab one of her toys, shaking it and throwing it around for fun. Jimin watched her for a moment, before looking over at Jungkook.

“Should I sit on the mattress, hmm?”

“Um, yeah, that’s the only place that you can sit,” Jungkook replied, before letting out a rather embarrassed laugh. “I’ll go get my album, it’s in a box in my parent’s room.”

Jimin moved to sit down on the mattress, except he accidentally sat down on something that was hidden underneath the covers. He shifted so that he could pull them aside, discovering that there was a Tigger cuddly toy nestled under the blankets. He pulled free to stare at dumbly for a few seconds. Then he placed it down on his pillow, giving it a soft pat almost as an apology for sitting on it.

At least Jimin knew where Tigger had gotten her name from, for it seemed that the boy had a great love for the storybook character.

Jungkook re-emerged after a minute or two, carrying a large leather-bound photo album in his arms. He lowered himself down onto the mattress beside him, quickly blowing and wiping dust off of the cover to try and clean it.

“You know…I grew up in a home like this, Jungkook,” Jimin confided, hugging his knees against his chest tightly. “Unlike my home, yours is clean, warm, seems very loving - it’s nice.”

“What was your home like, Jimin?” Jungkook asked curiously, pausing in the act of cleaning the album.
“Broken,” he said in a voice barely above a whisper. “It was so fucking broken, Jungkook, and I dunno why. I dunno what I did, what my mum did to deserve it all. It was just broken and toxic, and nothing could fix it.”

“…I’m sorry,” the boy said after a moment of silence.

“Don’t be, kid,” Jimin said, as he sniffed hard and he turned to look at the photo album. “Are you gonna open your letter now, huh?”

“Oh, oh, yeah, the letter,” Jungkook mumbled under his breath, shifting to pull it free from his pocket and eyeing the front. “I almost forgot about it.”

This made Jimin laugh softly, as he watched the boy gently tearing the envelope open so that he could slip the letter free. It looked to be multiple sheets of paper, which had been folded to fit inside of the envelope, and when he opened them up, a dozen or so Polaroid photographs dropped right into his lap.

“Do you want me to read it to you, Jimin?” Jungkook asked, holding the sheets of paper up in front of him.

“No, keep the letter a secret, cutie,” Jimin said with a soft head shake. “That’s for your eyes only, and your letter should’ve been for Tae’s eyes only too.”

Jungkook didn’t read the letter thoroughly, but rather just scanned it, his lips twitching at certain lines that must have amused him or made him happy, and his brow furrowing at other things that might be more serious.

Jimin assumed that Taehyung would have based most of his letter on things that had been happening politically in the country, on account of them both being protesters. Therefore, it seemed pointless getting Jungkook to read out the letter when he might not understand quite a lot of it. Better to keep it private and special, than to pry into their friendship more than he already had.

Maybe, it wasn’t prying if he was in fact helping them keep in contact even over this long distance?
Whatever the case, Jimin just left him to scan his letter and he watched Tigger sleepily gnawing on her own cuddly rabbit toy for a moment until the boy folded the letter back up.

“Did you see what Seoul was like after the flood, Jimin?”

“I did, I went to Seoul for business shortly after it happened, but by then, a lot of relief effort had already sorted out most of the disaster,” Jimin explained, turning to look over at him again. “Some parts of the capital were worse than others, some had no electricity and had even lost homes and lives. Tae’s house was almost untouched though, just a waterlogged lawn filled with sandbags and exterior staining to the walls.”

“He’s so lucky,” Jungkook breathed out in relief. “Taehyungie’s the kinda guy to avoid so much trouble and then get caught doing nothing at all; you know? I’m so relieved that his house wasn’t destroyed and his dog’s safe too, because the flooding was so bad.”

“Hang on,” Jimin said, shifting to retrieve the Polaroids from his lap so that he could rifle through them. “Ah, here they are - look.”

Jimin handed him two snapshots that Taehyung had put inside of the letter. One of them was of his bungalow after the flood, showing several deep inches of water that had since been soaked up when he had arrived in the country. The other was one of the army relief tanks and trucks that had been rolling down the streets to assist the civilians, which Taehyung had caught on a picture perfect photograph - his focus a young soldier that was gazing off across a square standing in front of a massive truck.

“These were the only photos that he had of the flooding, and he put them in the letter for you,” Jimin explained, as Jungkook looked between them both. “You won’t believe me, but he actually had to help the soldiers out with the relief effort.”

“Seriously?” Jungkook asked in shock, unable to stop a snort of laughter from escaping. “That’s so…so fucking crazy, Jimin, he hates the army!”

“Yeah, well, he wanted to help out, and the army needed volunteers to drain the streets and shit. So, Tae put that hate aside to help,” he said with a soft smile. “Like you said, he’s a good guy, but he’s just a little headstrong; I guess?”

Jungkook made a noise in agreement at this, as he placed the two photographs down on the letter and
he eyed the rest. So Jimin quickly checked the pile before pulling several more free.

“I took these ones at the protest rally in Jung-gu,” he explained, passing them to Jungkook so that he could put them on his thighs and study the different Polaroids. “Tae was giving a speech that morning, so, he asked me to take some shots to show you. He was so powerful on that soapbox, Jungkook, he’d make a good politician.”

“Not in Korea,” Jungkook disagreed with a grin. “Maybe here, where politicians can believe in the truth and speak with their hearts, but not there, Jimin. Can you remember what he said?”

“He, um, he thanked the students for being there, because they had been there for such a long time, and he said that they were all representing the people that were too scared to stand up for change,” Jimin said slowly, searching his mind to try and remember as much of the morning as he could. He saw the boy picking up the snapshot of Taehyung in the middle of his speech, his arm up in the air and his red megaphone in hand. “He mentioned the seeds of change and, um, Samchung?”

Jungkook let his breath out in a disgusted sound at this, which just furthered Jimin’s assumption that it was a horrible thing.

“Then he asked me to get up on the box and give a speech too, Jungkook, and I did this silly little chant - oh god, it was so embarrassing!” Jimin said, as he cupped his face in his hands and he made a string of flustered noises.

“What? What did you say?” Jungkook asked him, with a mischievous smile on his face. “Ah, you’ve got to tell me, Jimin!”

Jimin groaned theatrically at this, but he knew that he was going to have to tell the boy the stupid chant. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and he lifted his fist so that he could pump it in rhythm with his words.

“Fucking-A! Listen to what I say! Freedom in Seoul, Chun’s an asshole! Democracy! Give it to me!”

For a few seconds, Jungkook just stared at him as he tried to process what he had just said to him. He probably recognised quite a few of the words and he was trying to connect them all together.
“Oh my good, Jimin! That was so good, so good!” Jungkook exclaimed, his excitement and mistake making Jimin laugh and reach over to thump him on the back. “It was, Jimin, it was a really good chant! Ah! It rhymed, it flowed so smoothly when you chanted it! It was a great rallying chant!”

“Thanks, cutie,” Jimin said with a fond smile. “But you’re the true speech writer here, right?”

“I’m pretty good,” Jungkook bragged with that same cheeky grin, as he gathered the Polaroids up and he put them with the others. “What’s on the other photographs, Jimin?”

“Um, we took this one in Kowloon Walled City. You know where that is, right?”

Jungkook shook his head at this, leaning close enough to plant his chin on his shoulder and study the shot that he was holding between his fingers.

“Well, it’s an enclave within Kowloon, where all of these people live. It’s this tiny kingdom of apartment blocks just like this exact one that were inside of right now, Jungkook, and they’re all built close together and connected by walkways. The people that live there, they say that they don’t really get to see the sun, but I dunno about that. I do know that it’s enchanting there though, and a little bit scary.”

“It sounds scary,” Jungkook agreed, his throat vibrating so that Jimin felt his words through his shoulder. “I’ll bet that Taehyungie likes it there though, because there were bars and women there, right?”

“Tae loves it there,” Jimin declared with a wide grin. “You know him too well.”

“Is it filled with neon signs like that? Do they have any streetlights?”

“It’s really dark inside, when you’re on the ground, because of all of the tall buildings,” Jimin explained. “You can barely see a thing if you aren’t standing close to a sign, but on the upper layers, there’s much more light. There’s bars, shops, brothels and drug dens all over the enclave, because two Triads own most of it - it’s pretty much ruled by gangsters, according to Tae.”

“Oh, wow…” Jungkook breathed out, his eyes growing round with wonder. “Have you ever met a Triad member?”
“We have, me and Tae have met several members and…”

Jimin found that he actually enjoyed talking to Jungkook about the photographs, because there was so much that the boy didn’t know about the world. It made him feel so much older than him, even when there was really just perhaps two years difference, and it also made Jimin feel mature and educated.

Just holding the Polaroid of a glowing Chinese sign hanging from a graffiti-covered wall was enough to get them both avidly discussing the Triad and the kind of things that Jimin had witnessed whilst working as a mule in the country. Jungkook was horrified to find out that he had had a gun pointed right in his face, enough to actually cover his mouth with his hand and grow somewhat pale as he described the harrowingincident with Chow.

Showing him the snapshot of the market stalls in Kowloon brought upon deep discussions about the markets back in Korea, and how much Jungkook missed them already. Jimin told him all about his own love of food markets, and the kinds of things that he and Taehyung had found there, and in return, Jungkook told him about the best ones in Seoul that they should both go to.

Jimin found it so much fun looking at the Polaroids with him, and as soon he had finished doing so, Jungkook also broke out his photo album.

“I’ve been trying to take a lot of photographs here, but it’s hard because of film,” Jungkook explained, as he rapidly flicked through the pages. “Mama can only buy me so much, so, I get big brother to buy me some. He bought me my new camera, and Tigger too.”

“He did?” Jimin asked in wonder, turning his head to glance at the puppy to see that she was napping on her side with her chew toy still in her mouth. “Big brother sounds like a very nice guy to me, cutie.”

“He’s so nice, Jimin,” the boy said with a vigorous nod. “He said that he’d take care of me and keep me out of trouble for my mama, because she’s scared that I’ll get hurt here. Whenever he’s around, she’s so much happier, and my daddy likes him a lot too.”

Jimin thought this over for a moment, wondering who the hell this enigmatic but kind-hearted big brother could possibly be. He was in the act of considering asking him his name when Jungkook finally stopped flicking through the pages and he came to a stop, and a very colourful snapshot caught his eye.
“Whoa, you’ve been to The Castro?” he asked in surprise, looking up from the Polaroid of the rainbow flag to study the boy. “What were you doing there, huh?”

“Big brother took me there,” Jungkook explained, reaching down to grab the corner of the album page. He turned it so that he could go back to the previous double page. “He took me to lots of different neighbourhoods. Like, this one. This neighbourhood is filled with important buildings for important things. Like the government, the law, and there’s also a famous opera house.”

Jimin could see quite a lot of photographs of Civic Centre filling up the double pages; recognisable instantly because of the architecture and historical buildings.

“I’m gonna teach you some facts,” Jimin said, as he scanned the double pages to find a photograph. “See this building here: City Hall?”

“Uhuh, it’s a nice-looking building, right?” the boy remarked, eyeing the Polaroid that he was gesturing at.

“Well, two men were murdered in this building by another man. Did big brother tell you about that, huh?”

The way that Jungkook’s expression shifted into that of complete shock showed him that his ‘big brother’ had most certainly not told him this fact. His already rounded eyes grew even larger in size, his pupils floating in a sea of white the same colour as his sneakers. He looked down at the photograph of City Hall before looking back up at him again.

“The men that were murdered were Supervisor Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone,” Jimin added, just for the sake of it, even when the boy would have no clue who he was talking about.

“When did this happen?” Jungkook asked, as he glanced between the photo album and his face rapidly.

“The year was ‘78, so, you would’ve been what? What year were you born, Jungkook?”

“1966.”
“’66? Wow, you were twelve! Twelve! You weren’t even a teenager! I was fourteen when it happened, because I was born in ‘64.”

Jimin found himself pausing for a moment, a sudden thought coming to mind that made his words trail off as he stared at the boy.

Yoongi had been seventeen years old when that had happened, younger than Jungkook was now and so very closeted and suppressed. Had he lost his virginity at that point? Jimin seemed to recall that he had mentioned being around that age when he had, however brief and upsetting the experience might just have been for him.

Had Yoongi cried when he had seen the news? Had he shed tears because the man that had been brave enough to stand up and fight for their rights, even at the risk of being ridiculed and hated, had been murdered in cold blood?

Jimin had, he had cried so many tears that his eyes had swollen shut and it had been hard to breathe; so very scared that the man’s murder would have caused a relapse in rights for the gay people in the city. For kids like him, that had been still fighting their own wars in their homes every single day with nowhere else to turn to.

But had Yoongi? Or, had the boy been so disgusted and scared with himself back then that he hadn’t followed Milk like an idol? Had he watched his campaign as a young teenager with a bitter and heavy heart; secretly pleased that he was doing the right thing, but wishing that he wasn’t one of the kids that the man had been fighting for?

Had Yoongi hit the streets to riot the following year when the verdict had been announced, just like thousands of others that had been angry and had needed to vent it somehow? Probably not, it seemed uncharacteristic of him, but Jimin could recall that night vividly too: the chaos, the raw pain, the fear and anger all balled up inside of them all.

Jimin found it rather strange that he could recall the case so vividly, even when he had been just a teenager back then. It was strange to think about how much things had changed in the city in that short time. He no longer needed to worry about police barging into gay bars down in The Castro and arresting every single person present; of being hit by their batons and having the shit kicked out of him. Oral sex was no longer illegal, though it had been when he had been a child.

Yes, the times had started changing already, and it had just started looking a little brighter for the gay
youth of the city.

Until AIDS had reared its ugly head, that was.

“Do you remember it?” Jungkook asked, jolting him out of his temporary daydream with the question.

“Yeah, I remember it.” Jimin said in a quiet voice, reaching up to give his earring a little tug as he did so. “I remember it vividly, it’s not the kind of thing that you just forget. I cried so much that day, when I saw it on the news. I cried so much, I thought that I was gonna die or something.”

“I’ll have to keep this a secret,” Jungkook mumbled in a quiet voice. “If my mama finds out that people were murdered in these places, she’ll never let me go back there.”

Jimin thought about how Jungkook had bragged about his mother’s cooking in his letter to Taehyung, and now he was whispering to him about how she would never let him leave the housing block if she thought that he might be in any kind of danger. It made Jimin smile to himself as he looked back down at the photo album.

“The reason that I told you about this was because Milk was very important in The Castro, and he was very important in this city because he helped make things better for so many people. We owe him and Mayor Moscone, and the people that they worked with, our humble thanks,” Jimin explained, just so the boy would understand why he had told him such a grisly fact. “He was a very brave man, Jungkook - a politician with more heart than the rest.”

“If he was important in The Castro, then does that mean that he was gay?” Jungkook asked, as he leaned closer to him; whispering the word as if he didn’t want to be overheard.

“Yeah, he was, but how’d you figure that out, Jungkook?” Jimin asked in complete surprise.

“The Castro is the gay place,” Jungkook said in a matter of fact voice, as if he was actually the kid that had been born and raised in this city and he was the immigrant that was ignorant to the culture. “So, if he was important in The Castro, he must be gay.”

“Who told you about that, huh?”
“Big brother told me about it, he told me about many things like that. Like, about being gay, about being lesbian, and, um, being bisexual?”

“Bisexual,” Jimin corrected, trying his very hardest to not smirk at the boy’s attempt at pronouncing the word. “Wait, so, your big brother took you to The Castro and he told you all about that, and you’re not…confused? Freaked out? After coming from Korea all of the way here and learning about all these new and strange things, aren’t you frightened of it?”

“Frightened? Not at all, no, I don’t care about anything like that,” Jungkook replied with a soft head shake. “I like that place, it’s colourful and happy; I like it a lot. I mean, all of the posters about that virus are kinda scary, but I still like The Castro. Jimin, are you, um…are you gay?”

Jimin looked up from the photo album to see that Jungkook wasn’t looking at him, but rather studying his sneakers laces intently instead. There was a wave of nerves coming from the boy that was impossible to ignore, for he seemed to be nervous about asking such a personal question.

“Yeah. How long have you been trying to figure that out for, cutie?” Jimin remarked with a mischievous smile, hoping to put him at ease.

“Oh, oh…wow, I don’t know any gay people. You’re the only gay person I know, Jimin. My, um, my first gay friend,” he declared in English, his lips lifting up at the corners in a rather surprising fashion.

“Yeah, well, we’re just like you, Jungkook,” Jimin said, as he turned the album page, hoping to not sound too dismissive of the kid’s excitement. “We’re nothing special.”

"I know, I know, I didn’t mean it like that. We’re all different: different languages, different skin colours, different, um, sexualities. When you think about it, everyone’s different in some way to someone else. I love it."

“You do?” Jimin asked in surprise.

“Yeah! I love how different we all are,” Jungkook said with a vigorous nod, that same smile still present on his lips. “I can’t really explain how it makes me feel, but I just love it. I just wish that other people felt the same way, because then there would be no war or hate. The world would be so much better like that; don’t you think?”
“Hmm,” he hummed in agreement, as he turned the album page. “That’s the real shit, Jungkook, and I couldn’t agree any more.”

For a boy born in a country that had been damaged by the disease of war for such a long time, that was sheltered from so many things, Jungkook was so unlike the close-minded kid that he had been expecting to have accidentally clashed heads with.

Jimin knew that he had been a part of the protest movement with Taehyung when he had been living in Seoul, but it was as if Jungkook had been born to be a part of the protests in this city instead. He was optimistic, open-minded, and best of all, smart, and it was these attributes of his that made him start to feel a wonderful connection forming between them both.

When Jimin looked back down at the photo album a moment later, he saw a rather surprising sight on the new pages.

“Wait, this is… Did your big brother take you to Haight-Ashbury, Jungkook? Or, did you go there yourself, huh?

“Hey…berry, huh?”

“Here, this place, this colourful place,” Jimin said, rapidly pointing at the Polaroids of the Painted Ladies in front of them. “That’s my neighbourhood. We went there earlier, remember?”

“Oh, yeah, he took me there too,” Jungkook confirmed with a nod. “I like it a lot too, like The Castro.”

Jimin found something starting to unravel at the back of his mind at this, something that made his mouth suddenly turn dry and his fingers twitch on the page.

Jungkook’s big brother had taken him to The Castro and Haight-Ashbury and had educated him about the gay culture of the city. He had bought him a brand new camera and a puppy, which would have cost a lot of money and were most certainly the kind of purchases that someone with money would make.
It was part of Moon Tiger Mob culture to call superiors ‘big brother’, and Jungkook had connections to the mob through his family’s illegal immigration into the country.

Jimin furrowed his brow as he thought it all over, seeing all of the pieces in front of him, but unable to put them all together.

On the next page, Jimin found a random mixture of photographs: from that of Tigger, to snapshots of food that looked to have been from a birthday party. Well, in Taehyung’s letter, he had told him that the dog had been a present, so it seemed that his big brother had given him the puppy as a birthday present rather than just a simple gift.

Jimin was about to turn onto the next page when he found his gaze being drawn back to a photograph of Tigger. He paused and he took a few seconds to study it, and that was when he realised what had caught his eye.

There was a golden Rolex visible in the Polaroid, sitting on the thin wrist of a very familiar-looking hand that was holding onto the puppy.

Jimin felt a sudden jolt of energy coursing through him, his fingers tightening around the photo album as he stared at the photograph. He knew that watch, there was no mistaking it for anything else, and he was so very certain that he recognised the set of hands too. He managed to grab hold of the corner of the page to turn it onto the next double spread, and there, in the very first slot, he could see it. He felt his breath escaping him in the most softest gasp.

There was a photograph of Yoongi in the album: one in which he had his head thrown back as he laughed because Tigger was trying to kiss him on the mouth with her wet black nose.

“Jimin?”

“That’s such a beautiful photograph,” Jimin sighed, as he slipped the Polaroid out of the slot to hold it up for closer study. “So, this is your…your big brother, Jungkook?”

“Oh, that’s him,” Jungkook said with a nod. “Big brother’s really handsome and funny, but he’s pretty short.”

Jimin couldn’t help but start laughing at this, his shoulders shaking from the sudden burst of giggles.
“Oh, Yoongi would kill you if you said that to his face, Jungkook.”

“Wait, how do you know his name? Do you know him, Jimin?”

“Hmm, I know Prince Min, cutie. He’s my boyfrie- I mean, we’re good friends,” Jimin explained, rapidly stammering over his accidental slip to try and disguise it. “Me and Yoongi have known each other for a month now, give or take. We’re good friends though, even when we haven’t known each other that long.”

Jungkook looked up from the photograph to glance at him, his eyes round with something that looked like curiosity. After a moment, his lips lifted in a rather knowing smile, even when he didn’t have a clue what was he was smiling about.

“It’s funny, when you were talking about him, this entire time I was thinking about Yoongi in my mind and everything - because it all fitted him so perfectly,” Jimin said with a soft head shake, as he slipped the Polaroid back into the page. “Now that I know, it makes perfect sense that he’s your mysterious big brother. Do you like him, Jungkook?”

“Uhuh, I like him a lot. Do you?”

Jimin thought this question over for a moment as he studied the photograph. Just seeing Yoongi laughing like that, looking so free from burdens and responsibilities and fear, just like he had looked when they had been dancing together that night, brought a smile to his face. He reached down to give the snapshot a soft stroke with his fingertip before replying.

“I love him, Jungkook.”

Jungkook looked between him and the photograph slowly. Then he moved to pull the Polaroid free from the page again, catching Jimin by complete surprise.

“Here,” he said, as he held it out to him. “You can have this photograph.”

“Huh?” Jimin hummed, taken by complete surprise as he dropped his gaze to stare at the photograph.
“I want you to have it,” Jungkook reiterated, gently waving his hand at him as if to get him to accept it from his fingers. “I mean, I already have a couple of photographs of him, so, you can have one too.”

“But, this is a beautiful photograph,” Jimin argued, refusing to take it from him. “It’s beautiful, kid, and I don’t want to accept it. Surely, you’ve got another one, one that’s not as beautiful to give to me instead, yeah?”

“Hmm, nope,” Jungkook said, shrugging his shoulders lazily. “That’s the photograph that I want to give to you.”

“Why?”

“Um, because you’re his friend and you said that you love him,” the boy mumbled, sticking his tongue out to wet his lips. “That’s why I want you to have it.”

Jimin lifted his hand to accept the photograph from him, turning it around to study it again more intently. Then he shifted his gaze up to look at Jungkook, watching him flicking through his album pages so that he could start adding Taehyung’s Polaroids into the slots.

A sudden recollection of Jungkook telling him that he was his first gay friend came to Jimin’s mind, and yet…he had known Yoongi this entire time.

Yoongi had educated him about the city, about The Castro, even when he hadn’t had the best knowledge on the neighbourhood prior to meeting him. He hadn’t even known what The Meat Rack had been until he has explained it to him, and yet he had still educated the boy on the basics. Had Jungkook wondered about how Yoongi had known that much about the gay neighbourhood, or had he just assumed that everyone knew about it?

Whatever the case, Jungkook seemed to be completely unaware of Yoongi’s sexuality, and so Jimin was going to keep quiet on the matter.
23rd September, 1984, 8:12am: Pacific Heights, San Francisco, United States of America

The bed in front of him was covered in countless piles of faxes, which Yoongi had been poring over for the last hour or so.

The notebook on his thigh had dozens of calculations all over the two pages, all neatly placed in grids so that he could read his work cleanly, and the calculator situated beside his right knee was truly a blessing. Though he could work out most of the sums without assistance, the tool really helped him calculate percentages at a much quicker speed, and as a result, he was almost finished with his current workload.

His telephone was also sitting on the bed beside his left knee, because he was waiting on Seokjin’s usual morning call before he could possibly think of leaving his mansion for the day.

So far this morning, Yoongi had already drained his first mug of coffee and he was onto his second serving. It was still hot currently, wafts of steam floating off the black surface as he worked. It wasn’t the best idea to drink so much of it on an empty stomach, but he hadn’t even showered yet and he had no plans to prepare himself breakfast.

Yoongi really didn’t have a clue what was going to happen today. After finishing his profit calculations, and speaking with Seokjin about any potential issues within his ranks, he might just find out that he had a busy day of business ahead of him. He might also discover that there was little for him to do, save for finalising any transactions and checking in on several men that he was having Go keep tabs on during the course of the day.

The phone suddenly started ringing from just beside his knee, and so he moved to grab the receiver and he shoved it against his ear.

“Speak to me,” Yoongi instructed like always, cocking his head to hold the receiver in place so that he could nurse his coffee mug in one hand and still use the calculator with the other.

“Oh, Yoongi, how I miss dealing in Seoul right now,” Seokjin declared in a theatrical tone, which made his lips twitch upwards at the corners in a wry smile. “Easy money, easy smuggling, easy everything!”
“Yeah, well, sometimes we gotta work hard, Seokjin,” Yoongi retorted, before taking a quick sip of his coffee. “No slacking off, it makes us get weak and lazy. I gotta say though, what you’ve been faxing me…it ain’t looking so bad right now.”

“Oh, yes?”

“Mmm, I was expecting shit to hit the fan, but…so far, my men are pulling through,” he explained, as he hit another series of buttons on the calculator and then he scribbled the numbers down in his notebook. “Hoseok’s pulling in just fine, and you, Seokjin, you’re handling this pretty fucking well.”

“It’ll take more than a flood to stop me, Yoongi,” Seokjin bragged, confidence dripping from his voice. “I’ve lost mules, I’ve had 35,000 dollars worth of blow vanish out onto the streets and still managed to make you a profit from the same deal. I’m good at my job.”

“Buy yourself something nice, Seokjin, you deserve a treat,” Yoongi joked, quickly moving several faxes aside so that he could scan another sheet of earnings. “Speaking of treats, as soon as we’ve sorted out this fucking mess, I’ll be sure to increase your monthly cut; yeah?”

“As soon as we’ve sorted out this mess, Yoongi, I think that I’ll host a dinner party for the three of us,” the other man retorted. “Not that Hoseok requires much reason to throw a party these days…”

“I much prefer dinner parties to drug-fuelled orgies,” Yoongi muttered under his breath. “But, if you do so, I’ll be sure to bring a good vintage with me.”

“Anyway, enough about fun, back to business,” Seokjin said, and from down the line, Yoongi could hear the sound of what seemed to be a fax machine printing out documents. “Well, we’ve been just about making even on the deals in Thailand, as you can see from the documents that you’ve been receiving. The flooding in Seoul has caused damage to our profit margins, but nothing worryingly substantial. Your father is more than aware of the trouble, and so I doubt that we should expect any discipline as a result.”

“No, I’m taking full responsibility for any profit losses, Seokjin,” Yoongi replied, as he finished crunching the sum on his calculator and he eyed the screen. “But as you said, we’re breaking even, and that’s good enough for now. Anything important you wanna inform me ‘bout, huh?”

“Everyone seems to be behaving right now, but I’ll be sure to keep a close eye on that; I can never trust good behaviour for too long.”
“Good behaviour just means someone’s tryna get away with trouble. All of the ongoing deals in Thailand are going without issue so far, mmm?”

“Yes, we haven’t lost a mule so far over the week. I’m awaiting calls from several men over the next couple of hours, but everything seems to be on track for today. Just like always, if anything’s wrong, you’ll be the next one to know after me, Yoongi.”

“Good; keep up the hard work, Seokjin, and I’ll be sure to contact father for updates on the Seoul situation,” he said, before shifting to drop the receiver into the cradle and ending the call.

Yoongi turned back to his notebook so that he could jot down his last calculation, and then he studied the double pages intently.

Yoongi was satisfied with what he saw, though he was still rather irritated to see that his current monthly profits were pitifully low in comparison to the last three months. It was still good to be making that little bit more than even on the foreign trades despite some major complications. But as a result, the earnings out on the streets just weren’t decent enough to make the profit margin look impressive to his father.

Sure, Yoongi had months of consistent profit under his belt to prove to the man that he was more than capable of controlling his districts, but that wasn’t the point. His profit was never good enough, and now that it was set to be significantly lower than usual, he had a gut feeling that his father would be sure to comment about the matter during their next face-to-face meeting.

“So fucking what?” he muttered under his breath, as he closed the notebook and he reached up to massage at his stiff neck. “He’s gonna treat me like shit anyway, at least he’s got a reason this time…”

Yoongi sniffed hard at this, before lifting his mug and taking a deep swig of coffee. It was bitter on his tongue, almost as bitter as his muttered words, and he had to swallow hard to stomach the mouthful.

The next time that they saw each other, his father might just decide to blame the floods in Seoul on him too. Why not? He blamed every other bad thing that happened on him, after all.

Yoongi found his gaze shifting to look at the telephone for a moment, a thought playing at the back
of his mind. Then he glanced at the clock on his bedside table to see that it was 8:18am. It was still pretty early, but not as early as he had phoned the other home yesterday morning.

Should he maybe leave it and phone in the evening instead, when he knew that he wasn’t going to be disturbing Jimin?

Or should Yoongi just phone him right now, because Jimin hadn’t seemed to have minded that much yesterday; had actually seemed pretty happy to talk to him again?

Yoongi weighed the two options up before deciding that it was for the best that he not phone his boyfriend right now. There was still something that he had to see to first, and if he was able to keep a track on business throughout the day, he might just be able to visit Jimin in the evening again. He was just going to have to be patient, even if that was rather difficult these days.

After collecting all of his faxes together and storing them in a file in his study on the first-floor, Yoongi took a quick shower to get ready for the morning. He got dressed in his usual choice of black trousers and a matching loose shirt, rolling the sleeves up to his elbows for comfort, along with his sandals and baseball cap. Then he retrieved his Rolex, wallet and keys from his bedside table, and he left his mansion with a brisk skip in his step.

As a result of the countless business troubles over the last week, Yoongi had been unable to find any time to visit Jungkook. He had promised to not only help the boy take care of his new puppy, but to also keep an eye on him for his mother, and he was currently failing on both of those promises.

Which was why he was going to visit the Jeon clan restaurant and check up on Jungkook this morning: to take him and Tigger to the park for a little while and catch up with the boy. There was no doubt going to be a lot of things that Jungkook was going to want to show and tell him about, and Yoongi was actually looking forward to it.

Spending a little time with Jungkook always made a Yoongi feel better in some way - less burdened from stress and anxiety - and it caused a warmth in chest that was so very comforting. If he couldn’t see Jimin, then seeing Jungkook was the next best thing.

Just like always, it took him just a couple of minutes of driving to reach Western Addition; his car sailing along the wide and hilly streets and a wonderful cool breeze ruffling at the loose collar of his shirt.
Yoongi was smoothly guiding his car around a corner to get onto the right street when he saw something that caught him by complete surprise.

Jungkook was in the act of exiting the restaurant - easy enough to identify in his dungarees, white tee-shirt and bucket hat. Tigger was on her red leash, which was a sign that he was going to hit the streets and take her for a walk, or to go out exploring like always. The boy was facing away from him, and so Yoongi had to slow the car down to a stop and pull up to the curb right in front of the building.

“Hey, where’re you going, huh?” Yoongi asked, as he shifted to fold his arm on the window rest and he looked up at the boy.

“I was gonna take Tigger for a walk,” Jungkook replied, lifting the leash for emphasis. “I didn’t expect to see you this morning, big brother, but I’m glad that I did.”

“Sorry, kid, I’ve been pretty fucking busy these last couple of days. I know that ain’t an excuse, I should at least try and check up on you, but I’m free right now. I got a bag of dog food, camera film and candy with your name all over it; you wanna jump in and head over to the park with me?”

Jungkook didn’t even hesitate in his actions. He bent down to scoop Tigger up into his arms and he moved to pop the backdoor open and place her inside of the vehicle. Then he went around the front to climb into the passenger-seat, slamming the door shut and grabbing his seatbelt without even needing to be asked to put it on.

“Is there seriously all of that stuff in here, big brother?” the boy asked, after he had secured his seatbelt in place.

“Mmm, check the glove box,” Yoongi said, nodding at the compartment for emphasis as he pulled his car away from the curb again.

So Jungkook shifted to pop the glove box open, glancing at the contents before shoving his hand inside of the compartment. He pulled the packets of film free first, and they went right into his dungarees pocket - the item of clothing distended because his camera was no doubt shoved down the front of dungarees like always. Then he pulled free two different kinds of candy: a colourful cardboard box and a clear plastic tub.

“Neh…rrr…ah, big brother, how do you say that word?” Jungkook asked, flashing the box of fruity
hard candy at him.

“Nerds,” Yoongi said, carefully enunciating the word so that he would be able to copy his lip and tongue movements. “It’s a funny word, ain’t it? Dunno why they called ’em that; makes no fucking sense to me.”

“And guh…me…gummy beh…oh, gummy bears! I know about these,” Jungkook said with a wide smile. “My friend told me all about these! He said that they’re so addictive, it’s crazy!”

Yoongi snorted at this very apt description, watching the boy popping the plastic tub open out of the corner of his eye. He didn’t even hesitate as he popped one of the red jellies into his mouth, as he was so eager to sample these addictive foreign candies.

“’K, I lied ‘bout the dog food, but I’ll buy it for you later,” Yoongi said with a quick smile, folding his elbow on the window rest comfortably as he stopped at a set of lights. “I dunno what she likes, so, I didn’t wanna buy it - I thought the decision’s up to you to make.”

“OK,” Jungkook said around a mouthful of gummy bears, seemingly more than content with the candy and camera film to care. “I can buy it myself, I know the stuff that she likes.”

“You being a good girl back there huh, Tigger?”

When the puppy let out a little yip, as if to say “of course I am!”, Yoongi found his lips curling up at the corners in a warm smile.

“Good, you better not shit on those seats…”

Alta Plaza Park was not only the closest place to take Jungkook and Tigger for the day, but also the best park in the area. There was a nice stretch of grassy field for Tigger to play and mingle with other dogs on, and it was clean, pleasant, and never too busy no matter time of day that it was.

Yoongi guided his car back through Western Addition and up into Pacific Heights. He was sure to steal quick glances at the rear-view mirror to keep an eye on Tigger, and in the passenger-seat beside him, Jungkook just happily sampled the different flavours candy: the Nerds sweets crunching loudly between his teeth.
Upon reaching the park, Yoongi got Tigger out of the backseat for the boy. The puppy was eager to be free again, jumping around his legs and tugging on the lengths of her leash excitedly because she could no doubt smell the lush grass. He had to exert a lot of strength on the leash as they walked across the block to enter the park, shocked by just how strong Tigger was for a puppy.

“Tigger, if I let you off the leash, you gotta be good, OK?” Jungkook said, as he squatted down beside him and he got as close to eye-level with the puppy as he could. “No running away - you’ve gotta be good.”

“How’s the training been going, huh?” Yoongi asked, as he shifted to sit down on the grassy knoll with a soft grunt. He handed the leash over to the boy so that he had control of the puppy once more, and so Jungkook placed the candy boxes aside to accept it from him. “You been teaching her any good tricks, or are you still too busy tryna get her to not shit all over the place, huh?”

“Watch this, big brother.”

“I’m watching, kid.”

“Paw,” Jungkook said in English, as he held his hand out, to which Tigger responded by lifting her own fore paw and slapping it right against the palm of his hand.

The action was so fast, so fluid, that it took a moment for Yoongi to realise that he had just shown him a trick. He watched Jungkook giving Tigger a joking little handshake, and then he shifted on the grass to get more comfortable.

“Wait, do that again,” Yoongi suggested, dropping his head and watching the dog intently.

“Paw,” Jungkook repeated, once more holding his palm out in offering to the puppy.

Tigger responded by giving him another quick slap of the paw, which made Yoongi let out a chuckle. She had given the boy paw like it was the most simple trick of them all, with hardly any effort. It looked like Tigger really was a smart puppy for sure.

“You try it, big brother, she does it for everyone.”
“Paw,” Yoongi said, as he held his hand out in offering to her.

Tigger didn’t even hesitate, didn’t give his hand a quick sniff or lick before she realised what he wanted. No, Tigger lifted her leg and she gave him another one of the high-five slaps, which made him shoot Jungkook a pleased smile.

“Told you so,” Jungkook bragged with a wide grin. “She’s a smart dog.”

“Yeah, let’s see if she’s real smart,” Yoongi joked, before holding both of his hands out to the puppy. “Paws.”

For a moment, Tigger just looked at both of his hands as if she was taken aback by this sudden twist. She had been expecting one hand, not two, and that was a bit tough for her puppy brain to understand.

But then she moved to slap her paw against his right hand, before rapidly slapping the left. It wasn’t exact, but it was better than what he had been expecting, and the sight made the both of them burst out laughing.

“Wow, that’s great, kid,” Yoongi remarked with a happy smile. “You actually taught her shit.”

“Well, daddy taught her that trick, but I’ve been watching other people in the park,” Jungkook explained, reaching up to brush the messy mop of hair that spilled free from his hat out of his eyes. “I’m trying to copy what they do. They play, um, they play ’fuh…fetch’, and they toss sticks for the dogs to bring back, and there’s other tricks too.”

“How’s fetch coming along, huh?”

“Not good, she never wants to bring the stick back to me…”

Jungkook unclipped the leash from her collar so that Tigger could run free in the park for a little while: to exercise, relieve herself in the grass, or just have fun sniffing around with her wet black nose as she investigated all of the strange new scents in the park.
“Does she come back when you whistle, huh?”

“Mmmhmm, Tigger’s really good with whistles. But, big brother, I’ve got something to show you,” the boy said, as he joined him on the grassy knoll. “It’s important.”

“Oh, yeah? What’d you mean, kid?”

Jungkook pulled the packets of camera film free from his pocket, and then he reached inside again to pull something free.

Yoongi could see that it was a piece of Polaroid film, but he couldn’t see the photograph because he was holding it on an angle.

After a few seconds, Jungkook glanced over at him, and then he slowly turned the Polaroid around to show him it.

When Yoongi dropped his gaze to study the snapshot, a surprised gasp escaped his lips, and this made the kid laugh for some reason.

Jungkook was holding a photograph of Jimin in his fingers.

“What the…the fuck, kid?”

“It’s a really long story, but we met each other yesterday, and I found out that Jimin knows my friend from back in Seoul, Taehyungie,” Jungkook explained rapidly. “I went to his home and met his partner, Namjoon, and we shared breakfast together, and then he escorted me back to my home on the bus. I showed him my photo album and he saw a photograph of you in it - and that’s how I found out that you two know each other.”

Yoongi reached over to take the Polaroid from him, holding it by the very edge because he didn’t want to sully the glossy surface with his fingerprints. He wasn’t at all surprised to find that his fingers were trembling ever so slightly, because his heart was also beating a little too fast in his chest.
Jungkook had hit the button right when Jimin had been laughing about something; his hand lifted to brush a lock of black hair back behind his ear so that he could see several of his silver rings and cross earrings glinting back at him. His eyes were crinkled at the corners, his full lips were lifted in a smile to flash his teeth, and he was positively glowing in the photograph.

To call the photograph a candid snapshot wasn’t exactly correct, because Jimin seemed to be aware of the fact that the camera had been pointed at him. That might not be the case at all, but there was something on his expression that seemed to hint that it was the case.

“Kid?”

“Uhuh?”

“Can…can I keep this?” Yoongi asked in a quiet voice, not even able to look over at him because he was so captivated by the Polaroid.

“Of course, I wanted to give you the photograph,” Jungkook replied with a vigorous nod. “Big brother?”

“Yeah?” Yoongi replied, retrieving his wallet from his back pocket and flipping it open.

“I’ve got a question that I wanted to ask you, but I’m not sure if I should ask you,” Jungkook said, as he rubbed his slightly grass-stained palms on the thighs of his dungarees. “It’s, um, it’s what people might call a personal question. I guess?”

Yoongi thought this over as he finished slipping the Polaroid inside of his wallet. The piece of film fit inside of the plastic compartment snugly, not too tight to wrinkle it but also not too loose so that it could slip free. It looked perfect there, and he studied it for a few seconds before looking up at the boy.

“What’d you wanna know, kid?”

“…Do you like boys?” Jungkook asked him in a whisper-soft voice.
Yoongi felt his grip tightening on his wallet at this, his body seizing up in complete surprise at the question. Of all of the things that he had expected the boy to ask him, he had not foreseen this question, and he found himself struggling to speak for a moment.

“Why’d you ask a thing like-like that, huh?” Yoongi asked, his question sounding more sharp than he had intended.

“Well, the way that Jimin talked about you yesterday, and the way that you looked at his photograph just then, it just had me wondering. I’m sorry if you don’t and I said something that upset you, I just-”

“No, you didn’t upset me, kid,” he interjected with a soft head shake, taking an uneven intake of breath as he tried to calm his racing heartbeat down. “You didn’t, it’s ‘k.”

“It’s just, big brother,” Jungkook wriggled on the grass and he restlessly fiddled with his dungaree buckles. “You looked so happy looking at that photograph - smiling at that photograph, that it made me want to smile too. You were looking at it in a way that I can’t even describe, and it’s the exact same way that Jimin looked at your photograph too.”

“Jungkook…”

“I like you a lot, Yoongi, I might even love you like an actual brother, if you keep treating me like I’m your little brother,” Jungkook continued over him. “I just want you to know that I’ll love you no matter what. Even if you like boys, I’ll still like you, so, you don’t need to keep it secret from me if you do.”

“Kid, I’ve done some bad shit,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice, watching Tigger toddling through the grass just a few feet away from them. “You wouldn’t love me like a brother if you knew what these hands had done; trust me.”

“None of that matters to me. You helped my family out, you keep helping my family out, and you’re the nicest person that I’ve met in this massive city. No matter what, I’ll still like you. OK? I understand if you don’t want to tell me, but I just had to tell you that anyway.”

Jungkook stopped talking at this, dropping his gaze to stare down at the boxes of candy sitting in the grass. Then he shifted to grab a handful of the gummy bears, slowly chewing them as he watched Tigger chasing after her own tail. It seemed like he thought that he might have said too much, or
might have upset him with his question, and so he had decided to just stop talking to save making it worse.

Yoongi dropped his own gaze down to his wallet again, studying the Polaroid of Jimin intently. He thought about what Jungkook had just said: about how happy that he had looked just seeing the photograph, and how happy Jimin had been to see the photograph of him in his photo album, and he found his thumb shifting to gently stroke at Jimin’s face through the protective plastic sleeve.

“Jimin…he’s, uh, he’s my boyfriend, Jungkook,” he admitted in a whisper. “He’s my boyfriend, and I-I like boys.”

Yoongi could sense Jungkook’s gaze on him out of the corner of his eye, as he could see his wide and rounded eyes staring right at him. He tried to think of something to say to him, anything that could break the momentary silence between them, but he found that he didn’t have to do so. The silence didn’t feel heavy or uncomfortable, just natural.

“I’m happy that you trust me enough to tell me that, big brother,” Jungkook finally said to break the silence, as he dumped the rest of the gummy bears into the tub. “It must be hard telling people something like that, and scary too. But you told me, and I promise to keep it a secret, just for you.”

When Jungkook shifted to wrap his arms around his neck in a loose back embrace, Yoongi felt his breath catching in his throat in a way that almost choked him.

Jungkook was one of the only people that he had told about his sexuality that hadn’t reeled away from him in disgust or burst into tears; that hadn’t given him a look that was as disappointed as it was disgusted.

There was just something so raw about the sensation: Jungkook’s chin pressing against his shoulder and his hands lightly snagging hold of the front of his shirt. Yoongi didn’t know why the embrace made his eyes start welling with tears, but he just couldn’t seem to fight the overwhelming surge of emotions that made his chest feel so tender.

“Um, I don’t really know what to say to you, but I’m proud of you, big brother.”

“Shit, kid, you wuh-wanna make me cry or something?” Yoongi joked, hearing his voice hitching as he rapidly blinked his tears away. “What’re you proud of me for, huh?”
“I don’t know,” Jungkook admitted with a soft shrug, his body gently shifting against his. “It just seems like the right thing to say to you. I guess it’s because it’s really brave of you to tell me that, and I’m proud of you for being so brave.”

“I don’t feel so brave these days, kid,” Yoongi whispered, closing his eyes and reaching up to touch the back of one of his hands. “You…you promise to keep it a secret for me?”

“I promise, Yoongi.”

Jungkook shifted to break their embrace, lifting his hand to his lips to give a sharp whistle.

Yoongi reached up to roughly wipe at his eyes with the heels of his hands, hoping to knock away any lingering tears before he noticed them.

Tigger was indeed trained to respond to whistles, because she bounded over to them the very second that she heard Jungkook’s whistle. There was grass stuck all over her short fur, which was also going to be damp with dew, and she dropped to lie right in front of the boy. She clearly wanted strokes and ear scratches, and Jungkook was happy to oblige.

“Hmm, I want to see the both of you together one day,” Jungkook said with a soft smile, his hands stroking along his puppy’s stomach. “Maybe, at our restaurant, or even in the park like this. I’ll bet that you’re both really happy when you’re together.”

Jungkook moved to search for a stick after lavishing Tigger with strokes and nose kisses, so that he could try and play fetch with her.

Yoongi stayed seated in the grass to watch him do so, discovering that his puppy really didn’t like bringing the stick back to him. Tigger much preferred catching it and gnawing on it instead, but she started bringing it back to him after Jungkook realised that he could use whistling to his advantage.

Yoongi couldn’t believe that he had told Jungkook that Jimin was his boyfriend just like that. It was something that he probably should have denied or played down, and yet he had openly admitted that he was in a relationship with him and that he was gay. Why exactly he had done so, he really didn’t know, but he found that his racing heartbeat started to settle down in his chest again after just a few minutes, and he didn’t even break out into a nervous and clammy sweat.
No, it didn’t feel that bad telling Jungkook such a thing, but that was probably because he did trust the boy a great deal. Jungkook was a funny boy, much more mature than what his mother thought that he was, and he was a good kid too. Yoongi knew that he could trust him with this secret, and he also knew that he could trust his honesty.

Yoongi didn’t keep track of how long that Jungkook tried to teach Tigger how to play fetch, but eventually, he joined him on the grassy knoll again. The boy sank into the grass with a heavy sigh, clearly needing a break from chasing after the rambunctious puppy, and his dark and too-long hair was plastered across his sweaty brow.

“Hey, kid, can I borrow your camera? Just for tonight? I’ll be careful with it, I’ll even buy you plenty of film to make up for it.”

“Huh? Of course, you can borrow it whenever you want, Yoongi,” Jungkook said with a vigorous nod, his chest rising and falling rapidly. “Are you gonna go on a date with Jimin and take photographs? I think that would be really nice.”

“Yeah…” Yoongi said, as he accepted the camera from the boy and he studied it intently. “That’s exactly what I’m gonna do.”

After leaving the park, Tigger was quick to fall asleep in the backseat of the car - finally out of energy at last. Yoongi decided to let her rest for a little while, taking Jungkook on a brief cruise through the city with the air-conditioning on max and the windows rolled down to their full extent.

By the time that he brought the boy back to his family’s restaurant in the early afternoon hours, Jungkook had gotten to sample ice cream from a vendor out on the streets of Hayes Valley, along with his boxes of candy. Yoongi could see that Jungkook had had a great time today, even if they had only spent a little while together. So he made a mental note to check in on him again as soon as he could, as he watched him carrying Tigger back inside of the restaurant.

On the drive back to his mansion, Yoongi kept finding his gaze shifting to look at the Polaroid camera on the dashboard. It was packed with fresh film that was just waiting to be used, and he had plans for just that.

Upon reaching his mansion and killing the car in the drive, Yoongi hastily unlocked the door. He stepped out of his sandals, crossing the ground-floor to get to the telephone beside his settee. He placed Jungkook’s camera down on the table so that he could grab the receiver and shove it against his ear, hastily dialling Namjoon’s number and hitting the buttons so hard that his index finger hurt.
Yoongi straightened up and he listened to the dialling tone, each droning ring getting under his skin until there was a crackle of the end of the line to signal that someone had just picked up.

“Hello?”

Just hearing Jimin’s voice was enough to make him let his breath out in a sigh of relief - all of his momentary worries dissipating like a puff of smoke.

“Hey, Jimin, it’s me,” Yoongi said in a soft voice, closing his eyes and shifting to sit down on the low arm of the settee.

“Oh, hey, baby boy,” Jimin replied in an upbeat tone, a sunny smile audible in his voice. “I was just thinking about you; isn’t that funny?”

Yoongi shifted to slip his wallet out of his pocket, flipping it open so that he could look at the photograph inside.

“Mmm, it’s real funny, Jimin,” he agreed with a smile, holding his wallet up in front of him. “How’re you feeling today, huh?”

“Today I’m...bored and horny,” Jimin replied, which made Yoongi laugh under his breath. “Don’t laugh, baby boy, I’m holding you personally accountable for that. But, what about you, hmm? What’s going on with you, Yoongi?”

“Oh, nothing much, I guess?” he replied with a soft shrug. “It’s just...uh, y’know...”

“Is everything OK, Yoongi?” Jimin asked in a soft voice. “It’s such a strange time for you to phone me, I mean, it’s 3pm in the afternoon. Is there something that you wanna talk about? Is it a bad day today? Do you want me to come and meet you; because I totally can?”

“Jimin, can I...can I come and see you tonight?” Yoongi asked, shifting his gaze to look down at the Polaroid camera beside the phone. “I really need to see you again, please, I-”
But before he could finish his rather desperate mumbling, Jimin spoke down the line and he caught him by surprise.

“Baby boy, you can come and see me whenever you want. Why wait until tonight? Come on over and keep me company, hmm?”
Chapter 12

23rd September, 1984, 3:24pm: Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco, United States of America

When Yoongi pulled his car up to the curb, he wasn’t at all surprised to see that Jimin had left the garage door open just for him.

The fact that Jimin was sitting on the front steps of the house was unexpected, however, and he found himself turning his head to look at the younger man as he slowly guided his car inside of the small garage.

Yoongi killed his car with a sharp twist of the wrist, the softly rumbling engine cutting off instantly. He slipped his keys free from the ignition, he grabbed Jungkook’s camera off the dashboard, and he climbed out of the vehicle as fast as he could. Then he slammed the door shut to quickly exit the garage, hearing the door slowly pulling down behind him as his boyfriend hit the button on the fob that was currently held between his fingers.

Jimin wasn’t even fully dressed, for Yoongi could see that he was wearing just a loose black and red striped tee-shirt and a pair of black briefs. But Jimin didn’t at all seem uncomfortable in his current state of undress, as he tossed his keys from hand to hand and he looked down at him from his perch on the front steps.

“Hey, baby boy,” Jimin said, as he shifted to get to his feet and he held his hand out to him offering with a welcoming smile.

So Yoongi took hold of his hand and he followed him up the steps. Jimin’s bare feet padding on the stone steps whereas his sandals lightly thumped. He could see little hints of grit clinging to the backs of his tanned thighs from the dusty step, which he just longed to brush free with his fingers.

Upon stepping inside of the house, Yoongi got out of his sandals as he reached behind himself to shut the door. He placed the camera down on the table by the door, and then he slipped his hands around Jimin’s waist so that he could pull him close without a single word.

Jimin didn’t even react to his touch by trying to pull away, by tensing up in surprise that he had
grabbed hold of him first. No, the younger man was completely ply to his touch, and he allowed him to pull him close enough for their chests to be touching. His expression just grew more brighter, his smile widening at the corners until his eyelids crinkled deeply. It was a smile of sheer delight, one that Yoongi could still hardly believe that he could cause like this.

Rather than say a thing in reply, Yoongi cupped his chin in his fingers so that he could angle his face and then bring their mouths together in a kiss. When his lips brushed against his, Jimin pouted his lips out to return the kiss with a pleased noise, as he had clearly thought that it was his way of saying hello to him.

But Yoongi just couldn’t seem to stop with that one kiss, even when he knew that he should. Before he could help himself, he was bringing their lips together again…and again…and again; barely even taking a breath between each one, until he could hear his boyfriend struggling to catch his breath from the fast and heavy slew of kisses.

“Yoongi,” Jimin giggled, throwing his head back to stop him from kissing him and exposing his throat to him so wantonly.

Yoongi couldn’t help but bury his face against his neck, planting open kisses against his warm and smooth skin that made his giggles take on throaty note. It felt so good feeling his throat working against his open lips, every quick gulp and breathless moan vibrating so that he could feel and hear it, so that he could get tangled up in the heated moment that little bit more and feel a kick of pleasure.

“What was the rule, hmm? The rule that we talked about that night, Yoongi?” Jimin managed to ask. His Adam’s Apple bobbed up and down hard as he swallowed a soft sigh when his lips found a sensitive spot around a freckle close to his jawline.

“Shit, I’m sorry,” Yoongi managed to say, pulling his face away from his neck so that he could hold his gaze. “Jimin, can I kiss you?”

“Hmm, it’s OK - I want you to kiss me all the time,” Jimin purred, before bringing their lips together again in another deep kiss.

Yoongi curved his back to let him pull him closer to him, their chests pressed together tightly and his weight shifting onto his tiptoes for a moment before he rolled back onto his heels again. His hands moved up from his waist, wrinkling tight handfuls of the soft cotton of his tee-shirt until he found the neckline. He fumbled to take hold of his neck before slipping his arms around it to trap him in an embrace. Jimin’s arms snaked around his ribs to keep a tight hold of him too.
“Don’t say sorry-” Jimin breathed out against his lips, his tongue finding his lower lip to dart out against it; wet and teasing. “I like it when-when you kiss me like that, baby boy.”

“Without-without asking?” Yoongi gasped against his mouth, just as Jimin’s teeth snagged hold of his lip and he gave it a hard and sucking tug. “Mmm, darling?”

“It means that you aren’t scared in that moment, Yoongi,” Jimin replied, pulling his face away so that he could hold his gaze. Yet, his eyes still flickered between his eyes and lips as he did so, showing that he was wanting to kiss him again. “It means that you wanna kiss me so much that you’re not even scared and—”

Yoongi brought their faces together again, cutting him off before he could even finish talking, but it didn’t seem to bother Jimin. No, he just stopped talking instantly, his lips falling still to pout against his as his breath left his nose in a soft huff.

Yoongi could feel his boyfriend guiding them both down the hallway, their bare feet bumping together as he blindly followed him by touch alone. He couldn’t open his eyes, he couldn’t break the contact between their lips for longer than a second or two. Jimin was feeling his way by way of the wall, his palm brushing against it as he took bumbling backwards steps. His other hand was holding onto the back of his shirt tightly, his fingers bunching the material so much that it was likely going to crease.

Jimin’s back connected with the door frame hard, hard enough to make him grunt and come to a sudden stop. It might just have hurt him, but he just felt his way around the frame in a bid at moving around it.

Yoongi let go of his neck so that he could reach down and grab at his lower body instead. After some fumbling, he managed to get Jimin to slip his thighs around his hips so that he could heft him up. He might just have a toned body, but his weight was still light enough for him to lift him up and get him to wrap his legs around his body so that he could carry him through the doorway and save him from another hard collision with a wall.

“Oh my god!” Jimin exclaimed with a sudden laugh, instinctively grabbing hold of the back of his shirt collar to keep himself steady. “No! Put me down, baby boy!”

Yoongi could only let out a breathless chuckle as he supported Jimin’s weight by cupping his buttocks and upper thighs in his palms. He felt his briefs against his fingers, so warm from his body
Jimin slipped his other arm around his shoulders, his fingers snaking into his hair to hold on tight as he carried him into the living-room and over to the sofa.

“Put you down, huh? What? You want me to drop you?” Yoongi teased, unable to help himself because he was just so caught up in the temporary childish moment with his boyfriend that he just couldn’t help himself. “Just drop you right on the floor, huh? Right on your ass?”

“No! Not drop! Gently!” Jimin cried out, laughing so much that he was struggling to speak.

When Yoongi let go of him, he felt Jimin tightening his hold around his hips, his toned thighs squeezing enough to catch him by complete surprise. He had a crushing hold, the thought making him swallow hard as he reached over to try and pry his thighs free from his body. His boyfriend realised what he was doing and he let out a string of nonsense noises as he clung onto him. He was able to knock his legs free, but Jimin was holding onto his neck too tightly, and he was dangling from him so that his toes were almost completely on the flooring.

“Big mistake, baby boy,” Jimin whispered against his ear, before he dropped his full weight back onto his heels and he dragged him down with him.

Just like that, they both toppled down onto the old leather sofa, Jimin’s back hitting it first before he dropped right on top of him. The item of furniture groaned so much under their sudden weight that Yoongi thought that it was a miracle that it didn’t collapse - the frame snapping and the cushions sinking inward to make them both cry out in surprise. The weight of his body dropping right down on top of his drove the air of Jimin’s lungs in a grunt, but when he caught his breath again, he went right back to laughing.

“I-I do that to Namo all the time when I’m drunk!” Jimin declared between his laughter, wriggling on the battered sofa underneath him. “It’s so funny!”

Yoongi shifted with him, his forearms settling on the cushions either side of Jimin’s ribs so that he was hanging over him. The sight of the younger man lying sprawled out beneath him was almost unreal, was like something that he might find himself daydreaming about as he slouched in the passenger-seat of Seokjin’s Ferrari and he stared out of the window, lost in his thoughts.

Jimin, with his hair spread across the dark leather and his brow in a mess, in a soft cotton tee-shirt
that was wracked up his torso to show off his dimpled stomach muscles and the elastic waistband of his briefs. Jimin, his stomach lifting and falling rapidly in waves as he laughed and gasped for breath; his face scrunched tightly and his mouth wide open that he could see his teeth with every exhaled giggle.

Unsurprisingly, Yoongi found himself lowering his head again so that he could plant kisses all over him: his lips, his cheeks, his neck and shoulders.

Jimin just stayed still underneath him and he let him shower him with kisses, some of which he returned. His giggles died down into more soft sighs and husky moans that he muted against his upper arm, his lips breathing hot breath onto his thin shirt sleeve.

Eventually, Yoongi stopped kissing him, but he still trailed his lips up his skin to bury his face in his hair: up his delicate nose, which he peppered with pecks, in the smooth space between his thick eyebrows and against the freckles on his brow until he found the fragrant and wispy locks right at the edge of his hairline. He pressed his lower face against his hair, hearing Jimin quickly catching his breath underneath him as he smoothed down the wrinkled back of his shirt.

“Hmm, that was nice,” Jimin sighed out softly, and he could just picture him closing his eyes as he did so. “Talk about a pick me up…”

This pun made Yoongi snort against his hair, his breath disturbing the wispy locks and making them almost dance.

“OK…so, now the heat of the moment’s over,” Jimin joked with a smile, reaching up to cup his jaw and give his lips a teasing brush with his thumb. “Why’d you coming running over here, hmm? Did you miss me, baby boy?”

“Mmm, just wanted to see you again,” Yoongi sighed, shifting to place his head on the cushion beside his and leaning into his touch. His eyes grew half-lidded as he settled down comfortably. “Yeah, I missed you.”

Jimin made a pleased sound at this, a content little hum as he carried on stroking his thumb along his cheek. He must have liked being told such things, like that he had missed him and that he wanted to see him again. It no doubt made him feel special, and he had every right to feel that way.

“I, uh, I feel strange whenever I start thinking ‘bout things like that, like, thinking ‘bout missing you,
Jimin,” he admitted in a soft whisper. “I ain’t ever missed someone like that, y’know? Not like this, not this strongly.”

“How does it make you feel, Yoongi; missing me like that?” Jimin asked him in a soft voice, as his finger found his ear and he gave the shell a soft stroke with his fingertip.

Yoongi could sense that Jimin was trying to get him to talk about his feelings with him again, to help him come to terms with them all and understand them, rather than bury them deep and constantly worry like he had once done so. It felt strange opening up to him, because it was still a new experience for him, but he had found himself growing bolder during their telephone conversations in a way that he had never quite imagined before.

Even if he couldn’t find the exact words to say, Yoongi knew that somehow, Jimin would know what he was struggling to say. He knew that in some way, Jimin also felt the same things that he was feeling, and that they could both come to terms with these emotions as a team if they shared their thoughts with one another.

With Jimin, Yoongi knew that he didn’t have to force words out just to fill up the silence; barking things out without much thought or care just so that he could get it off his chest and push it away. He could think, could find the right words even if it took him a long time, and Jimin would just stay there and not say a word until he was ready. There was nothing to be scared of - not his own emotions, not his inexperience with how to handle them, not that phantom voice at that back of his mind that hissed at him about how he was disgusting.

“At first, I felt…bad. I felt like it was pathetic to miss you like that, but then, I-I realised that it ain’t bad to miss someone. If you care ‘bout someone a lot, you should think ‘bout ‘em, and miss ‘em too,” Yoongi admitted in a whisper, as he smoothed down the wrinkles on the front of his striped tee-shirt for him. “That’s normal, right?”

“It’s totally normal to miss someone, baby boy,” Jimin agreed with a soft nod, his exposed hoop earrings glinting in the afternoon sunlight coming through the massive bay window. “I miss Namo whenever I’m over in Seoul and Kowloon, I miss Tae whenever I’m over here. I don’t have a lot of people to miss, so, I tend to get a little too attached to them. But it feels good even when I start missing them, because I know that that means that they’re my friends and that I love them, hmm?”

“Mmm…”

“So, if I’m missing you, and you’re missing me, then that’s a sign of something good,” his boyfriend continued, as he moved one of his hands from the sofa cushion to take hold of his hand. He layered
his fingers over his, giving his hand a soft squeeze. “Don’t you think so?”

“You don’t think it’s stupid that I missed you,” Yoongi asked in a soft voice. “Even when it’s only been a couple of days since we last saw each other? You don’t think I…I need to fight the urge?”

“Yoongi-”

Jimin shifted so that he could roll onto his side and face him, only able to do so with his upper body because he was still mostly lying on top of him. But it was enough for them to hold gazes, and Yoongi glanced between his eyes and lips quickly in turn.

“Remember our little talk about communication, hmm?” Jimin said in a soft voice. “I want you to tell me about these things, so that I can tell you my thoughts too, and here are my thoughts.”

Jimin paused for a moment as he gathered his words together, wanting to be as precise and eloquent as always. He stuck his tongue out to wet his still flushed lips, his eyes rolling up to glance at the ceiling until he was able to start talking again.

“Yoongi, baby, I’ve never had a guy care about me the way that you do. I don’t think you even realise just how fucking good it makes me feel just knowing that you wanna see me again and again. I’m not a one-night stand anymore, I’m not some rough fuck in a bathhouse for everyone to watch. It feels good being with you. If that means that you come driving down here every single day just to give me a kiss and say that I look beautiful - give it to me, baby boy, I want it, I’m so fucking greedy for it,” Jimin admitted, before letting out a sudden laugh. He reached up to cover his mouth with his hand, but Yoongi saw the way that his eyes looked more wet than they had just a moment ago.

“Don’t fight that urge, don’t try and push it away because you’re frightened that it’s too much for me to handle, OK? I can handle the affection, the love - I promise you that I can.”

“Yeah?” Yoongi asked in a soft voice, as he reached up to knock a lock of hair back off his brow.

“Hmm, can you handle it from me, baby boy?” Jimin asked him in return, his own voice a soft whisper as he turned his face to nuzzle it against his palm.

“I-I think I can, yeah, I think…I mean, it’s gonna be hard, I know it’s gonna be hard, but I feel like I really can do this,” he admitted, shifting his weight up onto one elbow so that he could lean over him. “I, uh, today I told someone that I was… was gay, Jimin. I told him that I was gay and that you were my boyfriend, and I-I didn’t feel bad. For the first time, I didn’t panic, y’know, or freeze up or
anything. I just said it, and that was it.”

“You did, Yoongi?”

“Yeah, I told him and he told me that he was proud of me, and shit, Jimin, I almost wanted to cry.” Yoongi said with a laugh, feeling the younger man’s hand settling in the dip of his lower back. “Did it feel like that for you, when you told someone? Like when you told Namjoon ‘bout being gay?”

“Oh, I cried, I totally cried,” Jimin replied with his own laugh. “Yeah, I was drunk, I was just a kid. I was sixteen and I was reeling from another night of being passed around a gang of guys in some shitty bar parking lot, and I called Namo to pick me up. I didn’t think that he would show up, but he did. He picked me up and he got me away from that place to take me back home. I just broke down on the ride to get to his home, Yoongi. I needed to get it out, and he was there to listen to me for the first time. No one else cared, no one else accepted me the way that he did. I used to make a big deal about it, being gay, you know? I was scrappy about it, I acted so obnoxiously so that I didn’t have to say it, because I didn’t even have the guts to just look someone in the eyes and talk about it until I met Namo.”

“It’s hard, darling,” Yoongi said with a soft hum, as he planted his chin down on his chest and he studied his face. “It’s crazy just how hard it is to say something like that, right?”

“Oh, but who did you tell, hmm? Who’s the guy that accepts you, that said that he’s proud of you?”

“Someone y’know - Jungkook Jeon.”

“Jungkook?” Jimin asked in shock, his eyes growing wide as he stared up at him. It took him a few seconds, but then he realised who he was talking about and he made a soft noise under his breath. “I bumped into him yesterday morning. He was hanging around outside of Mickey’s Joint, looking for you. He kept calling you ‘big brother’, like, “big brother’s so busy” and “big brother’s really handsome, but he’s kinda short” and-”

“Pft, the kid really said that, huh?” Yoongi asked, struggling to keep his expression straight because he wanted to laugh.

Jimin nodded at him with a grin on his face, taking great amusement out of this fact. It was almost as if he had forgotten that they were more-or-less the exact same height, that he might just be a tiny bit taller than him, in fact. They both had to use a chair to reach the kitchen cupboards, after all, so there
was little amusement to gain from laughing at his shortness.

“I like him, he’s a cute kid, Yoongi,” Jimin replied, shifting underneath him so that he could fold his arm under his head and get more comfortable. “I know his friend, he’s my partner over in Seoul, and they’re both very involved in politics and social issues. Jungkook was so excited to find out that I was gay, he called me his “first gay friend”.”

“Seriously?” Yoongi asked in wonder, languidly raising an eyebrow at him.

“Hmm, you’re actually the first gay guy that he befriended, but he made me number one, so-”

Yoongi snorted at this, unable to stop himself because the expression that Jimin pulled was just too funny; his chin jutting out obnoxiously at the brag.

“Jungkook’s a special kid, I guess?” Jimin continued with a soft smile, shifting underneath him again so that his bare feet knocked against his lower shins. The movement tugged on his tee-shirt lengths, stretched the soft cotton taut to flash a hint of his chest. “Seoul’s not a safe place to be for anyone right now, never mind gay kids. The persecution of gangsters is just a thinly veiled excuse to round up innocent people, that’s what I learnt through my partner in Seoul. They’ve been through so much and so many people have died over the last couple of years, Yoongi. The fact that Jungkook cares about the rights of people that he’s never came into contact with before, but he still thinks deserves decent human rights…that’s a one in a million thing right there; right?”

“Mmm, he’s a great kid,” Yoongi agreed, dropping his head so that he could press a quick kiss against his exposed chest. “I ain’t really talked to him ‘bout the protests that much, ‘bout any of that shit. I promised his mother that I’d keep him away from that kinda trouble over here.”

“Hmm, he mentioned his mum a couple of times. She seems overprotective,” Jimin remarked with a lazy smile, placing his hand down on his head to stroke at his hair. “It was nice hearing him talk about his family, seeing his home over in The Bayview. It, um, it stirred up a lot of feelings for me, not all of them good feelings. He’s not in school, you know?”

“I know, I’m gonna have to find a way to fix that,” he mumbled, bumping his nose against the smooth skin of his chest. “There’s a school over in Chinatown - teaches English and basic subjects for foreign kids. They might be able to help him, I guess? I ain’t had a lot of time to look into it. But he’s eighteen now, so, I dunno if they’ve got programmes for adults there.”
“It’d be nice if he could learn,” Jimin agreed with a soft nod. “He’s gonna need to speak the language if he’s gonna stay outta trouble - gang trouble, that is. That kid’s not a runner, he’s not a dope boy, Yoongi.”

“Mmm, I know, I’m gonna keep it that way.”

“Anyway, I was just about to make some coffee when you phoned me, and it just slipped my mind. You want some coffee, baby boy? In that shiny new mug of yours?”

Yoongi shifted to get up off him at last, getting onto his knees first before sitting back on his heels so that Jimin could sit upright too.

Before getting off the sofa, his boyfriend moved to give him a quick kiss again, his lips curling up at the corners in a pleased smile. Yoongi sat back on the cushion and he watched him crossing the room to leave the living-room, walking with that same great posture of his so that his shoulders were held up high and his back was straight.

“That’d be nice, darling,” Yoongi called in reply, as he folded his arm on the armrest and he got comfortable.

Whilst Jimin pottered around the kitchen to make coffee, he ran his eyes across the living-room.

Yoongi saw that it looked just like it had the last time that he had been here, which meant that it was far from neat and tidy. But there was much less rubbish present, for it seemed that one of them had decided to try and keep the home in a much cleaner state since his first visit. There were no takeaway food containers littering the place, but there were soda cans and empty beer bottles still placed here and there on the coffee table and floor. Most of the clutter came from the towers of books that Namjoon had no doubt collected, seeing as he doubted that most of them belonged to Jimin.

A quick glance at the closest pile showed him that that book about dreams that Jimin had told him about was currently placed on the very top - several pages messily dogeared for reference, perhaps. It made Yoongi smile to himself as he thought about Jimin trying to read it, big words and all, as he sprawled across this sofa with a smouldering joint perched between his full lips.

“Coffee’s brewing~” Jimin almost sang, as he moved to enter the living-room again and he perched on the sofa arm. He was holding Jungkook’s Polaroid SLR 680 in his hands, which he was slowly turning over and studying intently. “Baby boy, did you seriously bring this camera with you?”
“Yeah, it’s Jungkook’s; kid lemme borrow it for the night,” he explained with a nod. “Be careful to not break it.”

“I knew that I recognised it,” he mumbled, as he checked the back and examined the film. “Oh, it’s full…”

“Full of film just for the two of us.”

“Hmm, are you gonna take naughty photos of me with that camera, baby boy?” Jimin teased with a wicked smile, lifting one of his legs up and prodding at his thigh with his toes. “I’m down for that, you know how I feel about displaying myself.”

“Maybe?” Yoongi replied, as he returned the smile. “D’you want me to take photos of you like that, mmm?”

“Remember what I said? I wanna fill up a whole wallet for you with Polaroids of me. Some of them have gotta be sexy shots, baby boy, and I’d like to have a couple of you too.”

After some more study, Jimin gently placed the camera down on the arm of the sofa before leaving the room again to go into the kitchen and finish with the coffee. He returned with two mugs in hand, one of which was apparently the new replacement mug that he had sent him in the mail.

“How about it? Coffee in bed?” Jimin suggested, as he lounged against the door frame and he gave him a warm smile.

Yoongi followed Jimin up the stairs and along the hallway so that he could get into the bedroom. His boyfriend placed the mugs down on the dresser so that he could attempt to clean the bedroom up: gathering up the clothing from the floor and shoving it into drawers and a black bag in the corner of the room with an embarrassed laugh; neatening up the pillows and covers for them to lie on. The window was open to let a breeze bleed inside, but the ceiling fan wasn’t rotating for it seemed to still be broken. As soon as he was satisfied with the neatness, Jimin retrieved the mugs and he climbed into bed with a pleased sound.

“Plenty of room for two,” Jimin said with a smile, cocking his head at him.
Yoongi moved to get on the bed with him, accepting his mug of coffee and settling back against the mess of pillows that were balanced against the bed frame. He left the Polaroid SLR 680 on the mattress beside him; not entirely sure when it would be the best time to try and get a couple of shots of them with it. Probably when they were in a lot less clothes and caught up in another burst of excitement like before; so that he was so distracted by their laughter and enjoyment that he didn’t find himself getting nervous or self-conscious.

“So, how’s work been, baby boy?” his boyfriend asked, just for the sake of starting conversation.

Jimin shifted to get comfortable in bed, rolling onto his side and balancing his weight on one elbow so that he could nurse the mug close to his ribs. He cocked his head at him just like always, the act making a lock of hair fall free and dangle across his brow.

Yoongi had to reach up and fix it back behind his ear for him, tucking the soft and lightly curled locks right back in place where it belonged. The way that it framed his face just right, that perfect middle parting with the loosely tousled hair, it made Jimin look so composed even when he was wearing nothing more than briefs and he was shoving bites of pancake in his mouth. It was great because it meant that he could see his face perfectly, all of his forehead and strong brows on display, along with his little freckles and golden skin.

Yoongi could hardly believe that he would find something as simple as Jimin’s hair so worthy of his attention. But it just felt so nice touching his hair, playing with it and tucking it behind his ear for him, because that way it was the perfect step to let him cup his cheek and kiss him.

“Mmm, Seoul’s recovering,” Yoongi explained, after swallowing a hot mouthful of coffee. “It might just be ready to start smuggling into again in a few days, and the demand there’s gonna be fucking incredible. All those twitchy G.I.’s wanna get their hands on a line or three, so, that means heightened security on and ‘round the bases. It’s gonna be hell getting the keys to ‘em, our smugglers are really gonna have to watch their asses.”

“So, that means that I’ll be jetting off across the world soon enough, right?” Jimin asked him with a knowing smile. “It’s been awhile, can’t say that I really missed having parcels shoved up in my ass. But making cash is always a good feeling.”

“I wish you didn’t have to, darling,” Yoongi replied, running his tongue around his mouth as the bitter after-note lingered on his taste buds.

“Hmm, I know, but that’s my job, Yoongi,” his boyfriend pointed out, taking his own sip of coffee. “I make you cash, I make you a profit, hmm? I like making you a profit, like a good boy.”
“It’s gonna be risky over there, I’m just worried, Jimin,” he said in a soft voice. “I don’t want you to get caught, I’m fucking terrified that that might happen to you, if I send you out there again whilst it’s on high alert.”

“Only shit mules get caught, baby boy, I’m too good at my job,” Jimin declared with a confident smile. “You don’t gotta worry about me, OK? I’m good, I’m smart, I won’t get caught out at the airports. I haven’t been caught yet, and I’ve got a lot of experience under my belt. If you’re that scared, I can go back to running up in Pacific Heights and Presidio Heights for a little while, for Namo, until it all cools down? I’ve got strong connections since I ran the coke up there last month, I can keep the profits rolling in a little higher than usual. Maybe not at the inflated price of the burn deal, but higher prices for sure. Say…48 dollars a gram, 155 an eight-ball? That’s a great way to make a profit, even if it’s only a small one.”

“Maybe…maybe, I got an idea,” Yoongi suggested, as he ran his thumb over the lip of the mug. “Maybe, there’s something else that you could do to make cash and a good profit, until it all cools down?”

“Oh, yeah? Like what, Yoongi?” Jimin asked curiously over the rim of his mug. “I’ll do it, so long as it’s dealing drugs and not any other profession.”

“Mmm, I’ll get back to you,” he said, lifting his mug to take another deep sip of coffee. “Don’t worry, it’s drugs. I ain’t gonna make you do anything else, no way. You’re too fucking good at your job, darling.”

This made Jimin smile happily at him, his cheeks flushing with a hint of blush as his eyelids crinkled at the corners. He looked so pleased to have been praised by him, his bare feet brushing against the wrinkled covers as he wriggled against the stack of pillows with a delighted giggle. Just seeing how much that he liked it made him move to bring his face close to his neck.

“You’re a good boy, mmm, you’re my good boy,” Yoongi sighed, and his warm breath made Jimin’s shoulders lift up in a ticklish manner. He gave him a quick kiss on the throat right where he knew that he liked it, right on that gentle slope between his neck and shoulder where he had several tiny freckles.

“Oh, baby boy,” his boyfriend sighed, rolling his head back and closing his eyes. “I love it when you call me that.”
Yoongi moved his lips down to the neckline of his tee-shirt, planting more soft kisses against the cotton until he reached the ball of his shoulder.

“Speaking of Jungkook, he said that you’re always so busy,” Jimin remarked, turning his face so that he could nuzzle it against his hair. “Are you taking care of yourself, Yoongi?”

“Mmm,” Yoongi hummed against his shoulder, pausing in the act of peppering kisses against the hemline of his tee-shirt. “It’s like I tell you on the phone: I’m eating and sleeping better, as much as I can with my workload. I ain’t drinking too much of night to get to sleep, I’m savouring a glass or two of whisky every couple of nights and drinking tea instead. I’m following given advice, I’m taking care of my body, so that my mind can relax.”

“Good, that’s good, Yoongi,” Jimin said with a warm smile. “You’d be surprised just how good it feels when I get to take a hot shower and eat when I’m finally finished smuggling. Taking care of yourself can really make you feel better inside as well as outside - that’s something that Namo taught me. I never used to be that good at taking care of myself, but now I’m learning how to cook and everything.”

The coffee was now cool enough for them to drink without scalding their tongues, and so Yoongi took deep and slow swallows whilst he listened to Jimin talking about how he had treated Jungkook to breakfast from McDonald’s and how he had escorted him back home. His boyfriend told him all about how the kid lived in this tiny and cramped apartment block in The Bayview, just like the one that he had grown up in. It reminded Yoongi of the block that he had entered that one afternoon, when he had been trying to track down the source of Sacramento Snow, only to have found that pitiful addict Sooyoung Lee that had been dealing a knock-off drug for 14K. He couldn’t imagine living in a place like that, especially not growing up as a child in a broken home just like Jimin had.

But Jimin had described Jungkook’s home as a rather warm and homely place, even when entering it had made him feel uncomfortable and had given him all kinds of bad flashbacks. Yoongi could only reach over and give his bare thigh a soft knead at this, showing solidarity even if he couldn’t relate to the same experiences as him.

In turn, Jimin mulled over his own coffee whilst Yoongi told him about how he had went to the park with Jungkook and Tigger. He found it funny when he had explained how he was helping him learn to teach the puppy tricks - that he had gotten to him to give him ‘paw’ and that they were working on ‘fetch’ too. His boyfriend admitted that he liked cats more than dogs, but that he loved both animals a lot.

Yoongi pulled his wallet free to show him the Polaroid in his wallet, so that he could explain why he had brought Jungkook’s camera with him.
Jimin burst out into frothy giggles at the sight of the snapshot of himself, his expression coming over all shy because he seemed embarrassed. But when Jimin got out of bed to retrieve his own wallet from the floor, he showed him that he had a photograph stored inside of it too - the one that Jungkook had taken of him during his birthday party at the restaurant.

“Shit, the kid gave you that one?” Yoongi asked in wonder, taking his wallet from him so that he could look at the snapshot. He saw that he was caught in the act of laughing, Tigger kissing him right on the mouth with her wet nose.

“Yeah, he said that he wanted me to have it, because I told him that I love you,” Jimin replied, avoiding his gaze as he looked down into the remains of coffee. “It’s such a beautiful photo, I just had to have it, baby boy.”

“You really think that it’s beautiful?”

“Hmm, because you’re so beautiful, Yoongi.”

After studying the wallet photograph for a moment longer, Yoongi gave him it back and he retrieved the camera. Jimin placed the wallet and the mug onto the side table beside the lava lamp, shifting to get closer to him so that he could drop his chin onto his shoulder and also study the camera.

“I-I wanted to get a certain shot of you today,” Yoongi admitted, letting out an embarrassed laugh as he played with the camera. “I was thinking it over on the drive here, and there’s one shot I really need to get, darling.”

“Hmm? What kinda shot, baby boy?” he asked with a naughty grin. “Do you want shots of my ass? Maybe my dick?”

“No, I wanted a kiss shot.”

“Oh…” Jimin breathed out, his grin softening at the corners into a look that showed that he found this so very sweet. “Like a photo booth shots? Have you ever taken a photo booth shot before? I’ve met a couple of old guys in bars that had old booth shots with their lovers. Some of them were really beautiful photos, and they had them stored in their wallets as a remembrance because their lovers had died of…you know, AIDS. I’ve never taken any, because gay camera stores opened up and the trend kinda died out, but I’ve always wanted to take some.”
“I ain’t ever been in a photo booth,” Yoongi admitted. “What’re booth shots, Jimin?”

“Well, back before gay camera stores opened up, men and women couldn’t take photos with their lovers and get them developed or else they could get arrested in so many states,” Jimin explained for him. “I met a guy that got arrested for a single photo of a guy’s ass in a whole roll of film. It probably didn’t help that his boyfriend was black and he wasn’t. But once gay owners started opening up stores and developing film, it meant that couples could get photos together without risking being reported for indecency charges and other misdemeanours. Like I said, it died out when we were kids, but there’s still a lot of people that lived through that. Imagine not even being able to have a special photo of your lover in your wallet, or under your pillow?”

“So, they took kiss shots in these booths?” Yoongi asked in a soft voice, as he moved the camera from hand to hand.

“Kiss shots, hand-holding and hugging - anything and everything. Sometimes, they were just close together and smiling,” Jimin clarified with a rather fond smile. “Photo booth photographs develop instantly and anonymously - no need to worry about anyone reporting you to the police.”

“Huh…” he breathed out in wonder, finding the mere thought highly fascinating.

Jimin moved on the bed so that he could mostly sit up like him, leaning close enough to bring their faces together and bump noses with him.

“Are you good at taking photos, hmm?” Jimin asked, letting out a soft giggle as he rubbed their noses together in a way that made Yoongi’s shoulders lift and fall. “Do you want me to take some? I help my partner in Seoul take photos a lot, I’m starting to get pretty good at it.”

“I used to take ‘em when I was a kid, but it’s been a long time since I bothered,” Yoongi explained, as he moved to hold the camera out at arm’s length and he tried to angle it just right. “Lemme give it a shot though, I wanna try and get a good one.”

“Sure thing, baby boy,” Jimin said, before angling his face to bring their lips together.

Rather than hit the button right away to take the snapshot, Yoongi waited a moment so that his boyfriend would deepen the kiss with a slip of his tongue. He wanted something more than just a chaste peck on the lips, something that he could look at when he was alone at home and feeling
lonely instead of watching those toxic pink films, which just made him feel disgusting.

Yoongi was certain that looking at a photograph of him and Jimin kissing would make him feel better; would make him realise just how much better that he was getting at being intimate and help him think about just how hard that he had fought so far to not let his fears destroy something good.

When he hit the button, the piece of film shot out of the camera a second later with a crisp sound. Yoongi ended the kiss and he pulled the piece free to hold it by the corner whilst he waited for the sticky film to fully develop.

When it did so, Jimin took it out of his fingers to hold it up for them to both study.

“Ah, that’s cute,” Jimin cooed, his lips cracking open in a smile that flashed his teeth.

In the Polaroid shot, Yoongi could see both of their faces clearly because of the angle that Jimin had kissed him. Rather than his hair blocking the shot, the crown of his head angled towards the camera, Jimin had turned his head away from the device, and that meant that his profile was almost entirely on show; save for where Yoongi’s nose blocked his from view. It was on perfect display - their lips pressed together and caught in the middle of a tender kiss forever thanks to the camera.

“I want a kissing shot too, but I don’t want it to be that cute…”

Yoongi was still looking at the Polaroid when his boyfriend dropped it down on the bed, and then he moved to grab hold of him.

Jimin’s fingers snagged in his hair tight enough to drag at the roots, the sensation burning as he dragged his head back and he brought their lips together hard. It was a passionate kiss, a little bit rough, but in just the right way that made Yoongi moan into his mouth as his toes curled up to snag hold of the bed covers.

Yoongi almost dropped the camera in his fumbling efforts to take a snapshot of them both, his fingers uneven for a moment until he was able to steady his hand and hit the button. He had no clue if the angle was good, if he even caught the kiss or just a blurred hint of their dark hair and the wall behind them, but it was hard keeping his hand steady when Jimin was kissing him so deeply and he was caught up in the moment.
When the piece of film shot out of the camera, Jimin pulled his face away to break the kiss. He gave him another quick peck that made Yoongi’s lips curl up at the corners, and then he pulled the snapshot free so that he could look at it.

Just like he had wished, Jimin’s private kiss shot was much more passionate than his one - which seemed to suit him just fine. It seemed more him to want a passionate snapshot of them together, because his boyfriend was certainly more comfortable with the idea of being intimate, and displaying it in ways that others could see. Yoongi could see a hint of wet pinkness between their lips on the photograph: Jimin’s tongue having rolled free to dart out against his lower lip when he had hit the button, and the sight made him swallow hard.

Jimin retrieved both of the Polaroids, and he held them up in front of him so that they could both study them.

Yoongi didn’t know which one that he preferred, for they both looked good to him. But he still liked the chaste shot a lot because it was just…tender, soft in a way that made him smile just looking at it.

“Oh my god, baby boy, we’re so cute,” Jimin exclaimed in faüx wonder. “We’re the cutest couple ever! Look at us!”

“You look good on camera,” Yoongi agreed with a laugh. “It’s gonna be so easy taking good photos of you, darling. It’s gonna be harder with me though, I’m a lil awkward…”

At this, his boyfriend moved to place the two Polaroids down onto the side table so that he could free up his hands. He took the camera from him, putting it down on the bed for just a moment so that he could gently push him down against the mattress and thick spread of pillows.

Jimin moved to straddle his hips, settling down on top of him so that he could start unbuttoning the top buttons of his black shirt for him. He did so teasingly, just knowing that they were both enjoying the sensation immensely, until he reached the very bottom and he was able to slip it free from the waistband of his trousers. He spread it wide, giving his stomach a quick and ticklish stroke so that Yoongi breathed in sharply and made it clench, and then he grabbed the camera again.

“Come on, strike a pose, baby boy!” Jimin declared, as he held the camera up in front of him and he gave him a wide grin.

“I ain’t great with photos,” Yoongi retorted with a smile, lying with his arms and legs loosely spread
across the covers. “I’m a lil camera shy, Jimin.”

“You look good to me, you don’t look shy at all. Come on! Gimme a little pout, baby!” Jimin suggested with much enthusiasm, exuding his best camp artist persona as he moved to angle the camera.

“A pout?” he repeated with a laugh. “What, like…like this?”

When Yoongi brought his lips out in a soft attempt at a pout, it was hard holding the expression, for he found that he really just wanted to burst out laughing. After just a second or two, he couldn’t help but do so, reaching up to cover his lips and stifle the sound.

“Cute! But less cute, be sexy!” Jimin suggested, shifting on his hips in a way that made Yoongi pull his lower lip in to bite at it from behind his fingers. “It’s just me and you, baby boy, there’s no need to be shy. I think that you look really sexy right now.”

Even when Yoongi was a little bit unsure of himself, he decided to give it a shot because he knew that Jimin would laugh with him…rather than at him. There was no real reason to be embarrassed, it could be fun. So he stuck his tongue out to wet his lips first, shifting on the bed so that he could brush his messy hair back off his brow and pout up at Jimin again. This time, he tried to be more sexy, and he heard his boyfriend humming in approval as he snapped the photograph of him.

“Oh, such a pretty baby boy, with such a sexy pout,” Jimin said, quickly waving the Polaroid to help it develop and then placing it down on the covers. He lifted the camera up to his face again, shaking his head to knock his own hair back off his brow and moving to try and find something to focus on. “Play with your belt, play with it for me.”

“My belt?” Yoongi asked, watching the younger man moving down to straddle his lower thighs instead.

“I like belts. I don’t like being hit by belts, but I like opening them,” Jimin explained, letting go of the camera to tuck his hair back behind his ears. “I like knowing that when I tug it open and work the buttons and zipper, there’s a hard cock just waiting for me to play with.”

Yoongi slowly reached down to start unbuckling his belt just for Jimin, taking hold of the metal buckle and snagging at the strip of leather so that he could start opening it.
“Hmm, just like that,” Jimin hummed, snapping a photograph of his hands feeding the strip through the buckle. The leather rasped loudly in the silence of the bedroom, and Yoongi watched him placing the Polaroid aside so that he could move onto another angle. “Final shot…final shot, for now. Spread those trousers open, baby boy. Show me a little hint of that hard cock, hmm?”

Yoongi hadn’t been feeling much more than a slight hint of arousal at this point, a gentle stirring of warmth in his loins that he had felt many times in Jimin’s company. It was the kind of sensation that would last awhile before gently petering off on its own, or would result in an erection - should things get more heated and intimate between them.

But at the suggestion of him exposing himself for his camera, Yoongi felt a funny twinge in the pit of his stomach that was complete arousal. He found his fingers shaking as he popped the button open and he pulled down the zipper for him, seeing the way that Jimin angled himself by leaning back so that he could get both his body and his face in the viewfinder.

Yoongi spread the cotton trouser flaps wide, exposing his lower stomach and the thatch of his dark pubic hair in a way that made Jimin moan at the back of his throat.

“You look so good on camera, baby boy,” Jimin praised, snapping the last photograph of him and then lowering the camera. “You’re so sexy.”

“I-I feel sexy,” Yoongi admitted with a quick laugh, as he slowly shifted to sit up. “It’s feels good.”

Jimin handed him the camera so that he could examine the Polaroids more closely. His lips twitched at the corners as he did so, holding the three snapshots in front of his face.

“Oh, I can’t keep these in my wallet, they’re too naughty,” Jimin remarked, which was actually the truth considering the sexual nature of the photographs. “But they’re so good that I can’t leave them under my pillow. I’ll have to keep them hidden, so that no one else can see them.”

“Lemme get a shot of you taking your tee-shirt off,” Yoongi suggested, as he lifted the camera up to his eye to squint down the viewfinder at him. “You look good when you do that.”

“Oh? I look good?” Jimin asked in surprise, his eyes growing rounded as he did so. He moved to place the photographs down on the covers, giving Yoongi a quick glance at them to see hints of lightly tanned skin and black clothing.
“Uhuh, you stretch your muscles and it looks so sexy,” he explained, even when he felt an embarrassed flush diffusing across his cheeks. “I like watching you, uh, you getting dressed in the morning, and getting undressed too.”

“Hmm, you just want me to get naked, admit it, baby boy.”

Jimin snagged the bottom of his striped tee-shirt up so that he pull it up, his arms folded over his body and his fingers wrinkling the soft cotton. He peeked at him from over the bottoms of the tee-shirt, being cheeky, mischievous and sweet all at the same time. The position worked his muscles; his stomach and waist growing long and smooth from the stretch, his upper ribs and chest muscles clenching and hardening. His back was no doubt also rippled: the valley of his spine prominent and his muscles dimpled. Just seeing the way that his waist muscles ran up to the sharp wing of his ribs from the position, and down to the smooth expanse of his lower stomach, was something that he just needed to take a photograph of.

Yoongi moved around the mattress, wanting to get the perfect shot that showed him not only his body, but also his mischievous expression and ruffled hair.

After he had snapped the shot, Jimin pulled the tee-shirt off and he tossed it aside onto the floor. Now he was clad in only his black fitted briefs, and he reached down to catch the elastic waistband with his thumb to give it a teasing stretch before letting go again.

“Oh, what a surprise, I’m stripping,” Jimin declared sarcastically, as he dropped to lie back on the white covers with his arms to his side and his knees cocked up in front of him. “Bet you didn’t see that happening today, Yoongi. I’m full of surprises.”

Yoongi glided his free hand along the stirring bump in Jimin’s briefs, seeing the way that he silently parted his thighs that little bit wider to encourage him to touch him. When he slipped his hand inside of the tight material instead, stretching the cotton blend over the back of his knuckles, he felt the smooth skin of his pubis against his palm and fingers - just demanding to be gently stroked and dimpled.

“Hmm, are we gonna take some dirty shots, baby boy?” Jimin sighed, rolling his head back against the pillows just as he wrapped his hand around his stiffening cock and he gave it a soft knead.

“Take ‘em off,” Yoongi suggested, as he carried on stroking and kneading at him.
Jimin didn’t need much more encouragement than this, for he reached down to tug at his briefs until they were around his lower thighs. When Yoongi brought the camera up to his face again, squinting down the viewfinder to try and get the best shot of his boyfriend’s exposed lower body and his hand; which was still wrapped around his flushed erection, it made the younger man laugh.

“Hmm, I knew that you’d want a shot of my dick,” Jimin joked, his voice soft and husky with pleasure as he sucked his lower lip in to nibble at it.

Yoongi angled his wrist so that he could get the perfect shot, moving his hand to the side so that he wasn’t blocking any of Jimin’s cock or testicles from view. He gently kneaded at his base, feeling the heat and a hard throb of pleasure coursing up into his belly so that cock softly twitched in his fist. As he hit the button to take the photograph, the shutter snapped shut just as Jimin made a breathy noise of pleasure.

Yoongi let go of him to pull the Polaroid free, and then he reached down to take hold of his hip. With a soft nudge, Jimin rolled onto his stomach under his touch, and he pulled his briefs free from around his ankles for him to toss them onto the floor. Then he shifted to lie down beside him and try and get a full body shot of his boyfriend.

Jimin looked so good when he lay on his stomach like that - be he fast asleep with his arms folded under his pillow and the covers slung low around his hips, or he just be lying in bed drifting in his thoughts. The way that the morning sunlight would play off his golden skin, the dapples spreading across the dimples of his spine and sharp juts of his shoulder blades; or how the lava lamp would cast deep blue over his sweat-slick skin - it was just so beautiful to observe.

Right now, Jimin was lying on the bed in the mid-afternoon sunlight, completely naked with the covers wrinkled under his body. That meant that Yoongi could track the soft curve of his spine all the way down to his full behind, down his supple and toned thighs right down to his feet; which were lightly clenched so that the surface of his soles had soft wrinkles in his skin.

Yoongi got the best angle possible, staying low to the mattress so that he could take a photograph of his boyfriend just lounging on the bed: his head on his folded arms and his expression smouldering.

“Shit, darling, I could use up every piece of film on you,” Yoongi admitted with a sheepish laugh. He sat up and he pulled the piece of film free from the device to spare a quick glance at it. Just like he had thought, Jimin looked perfect on it, like something out of a piece of erotic art that he would proudly display on his bedroom walls. “I’ll need a photo album just for you.”

Jimin shifted to get onto his hands and knees, crawling over to him so that he could slip his arms
around his neck.

Between fast and deep kisses, Jimin slipped his shirt down off his shoulders for him and he cast it aside. He helped him out of his trousers too, dumping them down on the floor. His belt buckle made a soft clinking sound as it landed on the carpet; the cotton rustling. When he applied gentle pressure to his shoulders, Yoongi let him push him down onto the mattress, his fingers loosening on the camera so that it ended up dropping down onto the bed with a soft thump.

“Jimin, this…this feels so good,” Yoongi gasped, turning his head to the side and slipping his hands around his waist.

“When I kiss you?” Jimin asked, sucking several kisses against his neck.

“This, all of this,” he continued breathlessly, as he squirmed on the mattress. “It feels so good, I don’t want it to end, just-just-”

Yoongi found himself unable to finish this, closing his eyes as he tracked the hot and wet sensation of Jimin’s lips all over his jawline, neck and shoulder. His boyfriend’s weight bore down on him just right, holding him down against the mattress. The heat of his bare skin just begged to be touched, begged to be kissed and stroked, and so Yoongi turned his head so that he could kiss Jimin’s neck in return.

Eventually, Jimin stopped showering him in kisses and he placed his head down on his chest with a soft sigh.

Yoongi reached over to take hold of the camera again, wanting to check the amount of film that was inside of the device.

“Shit, we’re running low on film,” Yoongi sighed out with a laugh, as he snapped the compartment back in place. “Let’s leave the rest for later; yeah?”

Jimin made a noise in agreement at this, and so he put the camera back down on the mattress and he placed his hand down on his head so that he could stroke at his hair.

“Are you gonna stay the night again, baby boy?” his boyfriend asked, shifting to nuzzle his face against his chest.
“D’you want me to?” Yoongi asked in reply in a quiet voice, staring up at the broken ceiling fan above them.

“Please.”

The bedroom fell silent for a few minutes at this, neither one of them needing to say a single thing to break it. Yoongi ran his fingers through his hair to stroke and play with it, to tangle the lengths around his fingertips and let go again so that each lock was springy from his touch. Jimin just stayed still on top of him, his slow and steady breath brushing against his skin in warm puffs and his back rising and falling softly with every single inhale and exhale.

“Baby boy?” Jimin asked to break their silence, and so he made a noise to let him know that he was listening. “Do you feel comfortable right now? With me? Do you feel comfortable enough so…so we can touch each other tonight? Not sex, just touching, you know? It’s been so long since that night at the hotel, I’ve really been craving a little something from you.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah, I’ve really been fantasising about it a lot, Yoongi,” Jimin admitted, lifting his head up so that he could hold his gaze. “If you don’t, I totally understand and I’ll respect your decision, baby boy. But I just really need to know, because I-”

Before he could finish this, Yoongi moved so that he could roll Jimin onto his back. When his boyfriend’s back hit the mattress and his head bounced off the pillows, he let out a grunt that quickly turned into breathless laugh.

“D’you want me to touch you, darling? Like before?” Yoongi asked, settling down on top of him and cupping his cheek in hand.

“Yeah, Yoongi, yeah, I-I really want you to teach me how to receive massages,” Jimin replied. “I used to get so excited and rush to cum because guys used to fuck me so fast. If I didn’t rush I’d end up unsatisfied, so, I’m not used to good stimulation. But it’s not like that with you, and I wanna be able to enjoy every single second before I cum for once. I think that you can teach me, I know that you can make me feel good like that.”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment as he looked down at him, his fingers gently playing with
one of his hoop earrings.

Jimin wanted him to give him a prostate massage, just like the one that he had given him in the bathhouse, but much more extended and slow this time. Though he had much experience in receiving such massages and handjobs from massage boys, Yoongi had never really given another man such a massage before. He might not know exactly how Jimin would like it, but with some experimenting and guidance, he was pretty certain that he could make him feel good.

“I’m comfortable, Jimin,” Yoongi finally confirmed with a nod. “We can do it, if you wanna?”

Jimin had to retrieve a bottle of lube for him from the side table drawer, which had a decent amount of liquid still inside of it but looked to be almost half-empty. He placed the bottle down on the bed before pulling him close again, wanting to slowly build up to the massage by kissing and touching rather than rush straight into it.

Yoongi had lost track of how many kisses that they had already shared over the duration of the afternoon, but he was more than eager to share more to make up for the several days that they had been apart.

Yoongi was pulled back down on top of him again, and so he broke the kiss and he slowly moved downwards. He felt Jimin’s fingers tangling in his hair to hold onto him, tracking every nibbling and sucking kiss as his mouth ran down his chest and his ribs to his stomach; as he moved to suck a hard kiss against the wing of his hipbone that made his boyfriend gasp.

As he coated his fingers in lube and he left it to warm and run over his skin, Yoongi snagged hold underneath one of Jimin’s knees with his free hand so that he could part his thighs wide and trail his lips across his skin inwards towards his groin. He slipped his slick fingers across his entrance slowly, almost teasingly so that he could feel Jimin’s body tensing in anticipation, and then he applied pressure to let him slip his forefinger inside.

Jimin didn’t clench tight around him for more than a second or so, and then he loosened a little as he let his breath out in a sigh. Between the glide of the lube and the lack of clenching, there was barely any resistance, and so Yoongi was able to get his finger right in to the knuckle.

Yoongi applied pressure to his perineum with his thumb, kneading hard and slow clockwise whorls as he alternated anti-clockwise and lazy dragging strokes with his index finger against the bump of his prostate.
“Oh,” Jimin hiccuped, reacting almost instantly to the dual strokes. “That feels good, Yoongi.”

Yoongi was able to slide his middle finger inside after a few minutes of gentle strokes, his skin still slick with lube so that the stretch didn’t burn or sting too much for Jimin. Considering the fact that he was used to being stretched to smuggle parcels, he doubted that Jimin would feel any great discomfort unless he forced all of his fingers inside at once without slow stretching…or his cock. But he still did so carefully because that meant that he could start the massage off slowly too.

The stretch from his two fingers, combined with the slow rubs of his fingertips against his prostate, made Jimin moan softly. He shifted on the mattress, his legs folding up and his feet brushing against the covers as he no doubt felt the powerful urge to bring his thighs up to his chest. He managed to control the urge, his fingers seizing tight hold of his hair and the pillowcase under his head as he closed his eyes.


“I-I dunno,” Jimin gasped in reply, his brow furrowing as he squeezed his eyes shut tight. “I’ve never had a-a massage like this, except in the bathhouse.”

“Oh, that means that I gotta experiment…”

Yoongi quickly discovered that Jimin enjoyed thrusts, for just several experimental thrusts of his fingers had his boyfriend squirming and pulling his thighs up high. When he scissored his fingers to stretch him more, to let him slip in a third finger inside, he angled his wrist so that he could jab his fingertips against his prostate directly. That sensation made him twitch his hips with a sharp cry - the direct stimulation perhaps too intense for building up pleasure. But when he curled them to drag his fingertips along the bump of his prostate…oh, Jimin made it very obvious that he enjoyed that sensation the most.

“Huh-fuck,” Jimin moaned through his clenched teeth, his hips lifting up off the mattress in a rocking motion as if he could chase after his curling fingers and seek more stimulation.

Jimin went to reach down and clasp himself in his fist, but he managed to control the urge and he dropped his hand onto his stomach instead. His fingers twitched and his nails dug into his skin, however, because he was very much itching to touch himself.
“Not yet, darling,” Yoongi said, as he slowed his rhythm down to drag him down from the sudden rush of pleasure. He stopped curling and thrusting and instead just lightly rubbed his fingers against his prostate in soft whorls. “You can hold on a lil longer, just for me. You wanna feel it for a long time, don’t you? You wanna feel good and stimulated, mmm?”

“I know, but it’s hard,” Jimin almost whined, his thighs flexing as he dug his heels into the mattress and he squirmed. “The pressure, it’s so strong, nnn.”

Yoongi made a sympathetic noise at this, moving his free hand to his thigh so that he could knead at the muscle for him.

Between his soothing kneads and more soft kisses, Jimin stopped whining, but he was breathing much faster than he had been a moment ago. It meant that he was starting to feel that building pressure taking over, so that the throbs that shot up from the base of his cock with every hard jab or thrust were starting to burn and tingle in a way that begged for release.

“Good boy, see, you can do it,” Yoongi praised, giving his outer thigh a soft pat.

Jemin let out a soft whimper against his biceps, his fingers tightening around the pillow enough to wrinkle the fabric deeply. A little tremble ran through his body at his praise, which made him clench around his fingers with a soft liquid squelch.

“I’d fuck you like this, ‘member? You want it tender and slow?” Yoongi continued over his whimpers. “Morning sex, so gentle.”

“Yuh…yes,” Jimin softly moaned, his throat working as he swallowed hard. “Yes, baby boy. In your big soft bed, on silken sheets and-and-”

Yoongi felt a plummeting heat sinking down into his belly at the sight of precum starting to pool out onto Jimin’s toned stomach. There was a steady leakage of clear slick dribbling from his flushed head, gathering on his skin and almost demanding to be licked clean. He had to suck his lower lip between his teeth and gnaw on it, his fingers curling to make Jimin lift his hips up again almost desperately.

“I want you to fuck me, Yoongi, please- mmm-huh,” Jimin cried out, pulling his thighs up so that he could hold onto them and tuck them up against his ribs.
Yoongi shifted so that he could get up onto his knees, angling his wrist so that he quickly thrust his fingers into him and get him close to his climax. Each quick thrust had Jimin gasping for breath, husky moans escaping his slack lips as his toes curled up tightly and his fingers squeezed at the backs of his thighs. He wasn’t even wanting to touch himself at this point, was so fixated on being fingered because he was caught up in his fantasy about being fucked.

Just when Jimin was on the cusp of his climax, his thigh muscles growing taut enough to turn hard under his soft skin, Yoongi stopped thrusting his fingers so that he could jab them right against his prostate and apply pressure.

“Yes, baby boy, huh-uh!”

Jimin moaned deeply as he orgasmed, clenching tight around his fingers and rolling his head back against the pillow. His expression shifted to one of sheer bliss, his eyes rolling under under his eyelids and his full lips quivering as waves of pleasure flooded his body. Yoongi milked his prostate for him, pressing his fingers in deep so that several spurts of cum shot out onto his stomach.

“Hmm, Yoongi,” Jimin breathed out heavily, his body relaxing as he rode out the last waves of his climax. “Oh, that felt so good.”

Yoongi slowly slipped his fingers free, shifting so that he could retrieve a bunch of tissues from a box on the side table. He wiped his slick fingers clean before dabbing up the pool of semen from his stomach for him, and then he tossed the tissues aside.

Jimin stretched his legs across the mattress, his chest rising and falling rapidly as he tried to catch his breath.

Yoongi shifted to slip right between his still spread thighs, settling down on top of him so that he could trap his own stiff cock between their bodies. His weight boring down on his erection alone was enough to add to that wonderful pressure at the base of his cock, and he couldn’t help but wonder if Jimin felt the hard throb against the smooth stretch of his lower stomach.

“Oh, if you fucked me like that, Yoongi,” Jimin whispered against his lips, slipping his arms around his neck so that he could hold onto him. “It’d be the best fuck of my life.”

Yoongi balanced his weight on his forearms, taking hold of Jimin’s shoulders so that he could hold onto him as he kissed him again. He slowly ground his hips down against him, squeezing hold of
him as he rolled his tongue out to lick at his lower lip and deepen the kiss.

“Baby boy?” Jimin asked breathlessly, breaking the kiss and looking up at him with half-lidded eyes. His cheeks were flushed with colour, sweat beaded on his hairline that he hadn’t wiped free.

Yoongi wanted to kiss it off his skin for him, to breathe the scent as the tang of it settled on his tongue. Just like in the bathhouse, just like in the hotel when he had been caught up in his arms - that wonderful heat and closeness between their bodies that he loved.

“Mmm?” he sighed out, moving his lips up to his hairline so that he could kiss the beaded sweat free from his skin.

“If you want, I can massage you too, like this?” he said in a soft voice, his fingertips skipping down the dip in his spine to brush along the curve of his buttock. “I can just slip them inside and play with you for a little while. Do you want me to?”

“Yeah, I…I want that, Jimin.”

Whilst Yoongi kissed him again, softly grinding his hips down against him, Jimin retrieved the bottle of lube so that he could get an ample amount onto his fingers. The angle wasn’t ideal, but he was able to slip a finger inside; the lube cool and making him gasp against his lips.

Jimin’s finger seemed to know how to prod and rub him just right, shifting with his gently rocking hips and staying deep inside of him. Yoongi didn’t know whether he wanted to rut forward against their sweat-slick stomachs for the friction, or rock backwards and up into his finger, but he found his back curving that little bit more to try and get more stimulation.

“Fuck, Jimin, fuck- there, harder…”

“Baby boy, you really know how to move those hips,” Jimin teased, his voice husky and dripping with enough sensuality to make a shiver of delight run right down his spine.

“Shit,” Yoongi grunted breathlessly, dropping his head into the crook between his neck and shoulder and sinking his fingers into the bed sheets.
Jimin slipped a second finger inside so that he could stretch him more. He couldn’t curl them in their position, but he was able to scissor and thrust them quick and hard. It made him buck his hips faster, lifting them up just as his boyfriend thrust his fingers forward so that he could increase the impact and drag the pleasure out into a sharp throb.

“If you were inside of me right now, fuck, you’d be hitting the sweet spot over and over,” Jimin continued, his teeth flashing at him between his lips in a smile. His body was rocking underneath him too, because of the speed of his humping thrusts. “I’d be moaning against your mouth, I’d.”

“Do it,” Yoongi almost begged, moving so that he could bring their faces together again. “Please, Jimin, be a good boy.”

“Nnn, baby boy,” his boyfriend moaned weakly, his lips brushing against his with every word and his breath so hot that it almost burned. “It’s so good, oh, don’t stop, keep going-”

Jimin let out a coquettish little moan that was so unlike the ones that he constantly heard on his pornography videos - which were too loud to be anything but fake. It was soft, a gasp just like the ones that he had made when he had been giving him a prostate massage, and it was so perfect to his ears.

Just hearing him moaning like that was enough to spur Yoongi on, to make him curve his back sharply to get Jimin to thrust his fingers that little bit faster. The friction was so intense that he could feel his thighs trembling, hard and powerful throbs of pleasure coursing up into his belly. As he gasped for breath, he felt his climax fast approaching. He didn’t even want to edge his way around it like usual, to slow Jimin down so that he could come down from the heady pleasure and enjoy the build-up again - he just wanted to feel that rush of electric pleasure shivering through his limbs.

Jimin was right, it had been so long since the night at Fair Oaks Hotel, and Yoongi hadn’t even masturbated in that time. As a result, he really was desperate for something, anything that felt as good as the sexual intimacy that night.

“You’re so good at fucking me,” Jimin whispered, breathing so hard and fast that it was almost believable that he actually was fucking him. “Oh, baby boy, I love you, mmm-”

Yoongi orgasmed with a hard shudder, his fingers seizing hold of his sheets as his toes curled up tight. His hips stuttered sharply, weakly pounding down on Jimin’s so that the slap of their skin connecting mixed with his groans of pleasure. He could feel the liquid heat of semen spilling free and splashing all over their stomachs as he shoved his face into Jimin’s hair and breathed in his scent.
“Mmm, fuck, Jimin,” Yoongi hissed, his body so limp with pleasure that he couldn’t even hope to lift his head up off the pillow.

Oh, the way that his body shivered on top of his and the pounding throbs of pleasure in his loins that matched his racing heartbeat in his chest and throat, and the pulses of colour behind his eyes. There was nothing quite like those several seconds of complete orgasmic bliss and stillness, which seemed to drag on for so long as Jimin’s hands ran up his back to stroke down the valley in his spine.

“Hmm, we both really needed that,” Jimin almost purred, and he could picture the smile on his face. “It was worth the wait, yeah? That felt good for you too, right, Yoongi?”

“Jimin, every time that…that we touch each other like that, I…I think that it ain’t ever gonna feel better than the last time, but then you go and prove me wrong,” Yoongi whispered against his neck, tracking his boyfriend’s fingers as they skipped over the prominent bumps of his spine. “Shit, how’d you keep doing that to me?”

“It’s because you’re getting more comfortable, Yoongi, with me and yourself,” Jimin suggested, his fingers skipping up to the back of his neck to his hair. “Just think about how good it’ll feel for the first time, when we’re both ready for it?”

Yoongi couldn’t imagine such a thing, could only let out a soft noise against his neck as he slowly moved to get off of him. He settled down on the bed instead, stretching out across the wrinkled covers and slipping his arm around Jimin’s ribs so that he could hold onto him. He felt wetness against his skin, quite possibly sweat or semen. His boyfriend moved his arm so that he could place his hand down on his forearm, stroking at his skin softly.

For a moment, the bedroom fell silent save for the sound of their uneven breathing. Yoongi almost fancied that his heartbeat was pounding so hard that Jimin would be able to hear it, but he knew that that was just silly. He could feel his boyfriend’s heartbeat through his ribs, the beat slower than his own but still fast.

Jimin moved to retrieve some tissues from the box to wipe up the mess that was all over his stomach. Whatever had been on Yoongi’s stomach was all over the covers now, the smears of semen no doubt soaking into the cotton so that the bed would need to be made with clean sheets and covers tomorrow.

“You sleepy, huh?” Jimin asked him, as he tried to clean his skin; wiping and dabbing gently with
the tissues. “Are you gonna fall asleep on me, baby boy?”

“Mmm, just a nap, darling,” he mumbled in a heavy voice. “Just a lil nap, I promise.”

Yoongi rolled onto his side so that he could get closer to him, pulling him into something close to an embrace.

Jimin almost purred at this, tossing the tissues aside without a care so that he could roll over and tangle his arms around him too.

“Yoongi?” he asked against his lips, tangling their legs together on top of the covers to share warmth and physical contact.

“Yeah…darling?”

“Remember when you were too scared to let me hold you like this?” Jimin remarked, his arm cradling his body so securely. “Remember when you were so scared to be vulnerable with me? And now…now, you’re just so comfortable. You’re comfortable and relaxed and it makes me feel so good, baby boy.”

“I ‘member,” Yoongi whispered in reply, opening his eyelids a crack so that he could look at him through his eyelashes. “I still feel…raw, sometimes, but it ain’t a bad feeling. It makes me feel…good ’cos I know that you’re there for me, whenever I need you. You’re so…reliable, darling, I just hope that I’m there for you too, when you need me. I-I try, y’know, I-”

“Shush, Yoongi, take nice nap, hmm?” Jimin suggested, cutting him off mid-mumble because he was probably not making much sense at all. “We can talk about this later, OK?”

“M’kay,” he sighed out, moving to press his face into the pillow. “Don’t lemme…sleep all afternoon, darling.”

Jimin promised that he wouldn’t let him do so, moving to press a quick kiss against his nose and cheek that made Yoongi let out a soft laugh. His lips were so plush and warm, the sensation heightened because he was starting to fall asleep.
Yoongi wasn’t at all sure how long that he napped for, as he drifted in and out of slumber at least several times. Sometimes, he woke up to see that Jimin was awake and he looking at their Polaroids in bed beside him, the sunlight still strong enough to cast warm and glowing rays over his naked skin and the white covers. Once or twice, he opened his eyes with a soft rumble to find that Jimin was also in the midst of a light nap - his features slack and his breath leaving his lips in a soft sigh. At some point, he felt Jimin pulling the covers up over them to cover their bare limbs and trap some heat, and that made him drag his boyfriend into his arms to sleepily press kisses against his face and hair.

The sound of Jimin’s giggles almost cut through his sleepy and numb fogginess, even when Yoongi could just about feel where he was kissing: the sharp and narrow bridge of his nose, the thin and warm bump of his closed eyelids, the soft and smooth plushness of his full lips.

When Yoongi finally woke up again, he opened his eyes to find that the bedroom was starting to get dark. The sunlight was fading in a way that showed that it must have been drawing close to the late afternoon hours, and though he could lift up his arm to check his Rolex, he didn’t really want to move. The lava lamp was starting to glow, but it would be quite some time until it grew to full brightness. There was no noise coming from downstairs that he could detect, which was a sign that Namjoon must clearly still be out - possibly working.

Jimin was lying on his back right in front of him, still caught up in his arms with his hair across his brow in a soft tangle. When he reached up to brush the locks back off his brow for him, the younger man opened his eyes to look at him, and he gave him a lazy smile.

“Oh, I fell asleep too,” he declared with a soft laugh. “I usually nap a lot when I’m stuck without a job to do though. But that was a much better nap than usual. More warm, more refreshing, hmm…”

Jimin shifted to move underneath the covers, letting out a series of noises as he stretched his muscles to their fullest extent and he curved his back up off the mattress. He dropped back down again with a soft grunt, sticking his tongue out to wet his dry lips.

“I’m hungry. Do you wanna make some food with me, Yoongi?”

“Mmm, don’t you mean ‘d’you wanna make me some food, Yoongi’?” he retorted jokingly, as he rolled onto his back to also stretch his stiff muscles.

“No! We can cook together,” Jimin argued, rolling on the bed so that he could cock his folded arms underneath his chest and smile at him. “We can cook dinner together, baby boy. We can cook something nice and tasty, just like that breakfast.”
Now that Jimin had mentioned food, Yoongi was suddenly aware of the fact that he was actually hungry too. He had had nothing to eat all day long, had had nothing more than three cups of coffee and maybe a handful of candy that Jungkook had plied him with when they had been in the park with Tigger. He really should have at least a single meal today, even if that meal was just a shared dinner with Jimin.

“There’s a pint of ice cream and Music Television with our names all over it too,” his boyfriend added with a mischievous smile. “What’d you say, hmm?”

“…Help me up?” Yoongi replied, lifting his hands up at him to try and get him to drag him up into a sitting position.

Jimin giggled at this, getting up onto his knees and tugging him up too.

Yoongi let his breath out in a hard grunt, reaching behind to massage at his lower back as he moved to get to the edge of the bed.

After slipping into his black shirt, Yoongi loosely buttoned it up and he fixed the sleeves in place. It was just long enough to cover his nudity, though any sudden movements would cause it to shift and expose him. Well, it wasn’t like he could skip around in just a pair of tiny briefs like Jimin could, seeing as he hadn’t bothered wearing any today.

Yoongi followed the younger man into the bathroom, the pair of them relieving themselves and washing their hands in the sink. He collected Jungkook’s camera from the bedroom floor and he went down the narrow staircase after his boyfriend to get downstairs; Jimin going into the living-room, so that he could switch on the television and let music start filling the house at a decent volume. He didn’t recognise the tune in the slightest, but that was of no surprise to Yoongi, considering the fact that he didn’t know a lot of popular music.

Jimin entered the kitchen whilst he was in the act of drinking a glass of water, moving straight over to grab the rickety chair so that he could stand on it and pop open the cupboards. After some rummaging for condiments and herbs, he jumped down and he went over to the refrigerator instead, retrieving several things that he placed down on the dark wooden counter.

Yoongi saw eggs, a Tupperware container of day old rice, fresh chicken and vegetables, tins and packets of things that looked to be covered in red and black bold Hangul characters, which he studied from a distance before moving closer to look at the packets.
“I went to Chinatown just yesterday to buy some staples,” Jimin explained, knocking the drawer shut with a sensual bump of his hip. “I thought that it’d be nice for me and Namo to make some authentic Korean food every now and again, you know, instead of just whatever the fuck we can create from whatever’s in the cupboards and fridge. Anyway-”

Jimin dropped a random assortment of cutlery down on the counter too, before turning his head to look at him and give him a wide grin.

“Cheese tteokbokki, egg fried rice, chicken salad - there’s even some kimchi, Yoongi!”

“I ain’t had kimchi in forever,” Yoongi remarked, grabbing one of the tins to study it and see that it was authentic Korean kimchi - so authentic that there wasn’t even an English label stuck to it for native consumers to read. “That sounds great, darling. D’you know how to prepare all of that, huh?”

“Oh, he hummed, as he tore open the packet of tteokbokki. “Prepare to be amazed by my cooking, baby boy.”

Whilst the rice cakes soaked in the water, Yoongi washed and cut up a variety of vegetables and thin slivers of fish cake. He had to keep some of the cabbage and scallion aside for Jimin to use, the rest of the vegetables going into the chicken salad: chunks of cucumber, succulent tomato, lettuce, spring onion and bell peppers.

As he did so, Jimin cracked open the eggs to whisk them up,grabbing a decent amount of chopped scallion to sprinkle it into the mixture and into a lightly oiled pan. The scent of it frying took to the air almost instantly, an enticing and somewhat ticklish scent that made him wriggle his nose a few times.

“You need any help, darling?” Yoongi asked, gently wiping diced onion free from the knife blade with his fingers.

“I make a mean egg fried rice, baby boy,” Jimin declared, as he started spreading the scallion around the pan. “Leave it all to me, hmm? You can mix up the sauce for me though - oh, and the chicken should be boiled in a couple of minutes for the salad too.”

Following Jimin’s guidance, Yoongi mixed all of the different sauce ingredients into the stock: red chilli pepper paste and flakes, soy sauce, sesame oil, sugar and garlic. He had to heat the pan up on the small stove, but luckily enough, the chicken was finally finished boiling. That meant that he
could stand beside Jimin and gently stir at the mixture so that it would all dissolve and boil into a rich red sauce. Finally, he added the softened rice cakes and he lowered the heat, letting Jimin watch over the tteokbokki because he was in charge of dinner today. His boyfriend had already scrambled most of the egg and scallion for the fried rice, which was placed aside in a bowl whilst he toasted the rice in the pan.

Yoongi shredded the chicken and he left it to cool, watching Jimin stirring at the thick tteokbokki sauce so that the rice cakes didn’t stick to the pot and then quickly scrambling at the browning rice with a spatula. After the tteokbokki was thick and bubbling, he tossed the vegetables and fish cake into it. So Yoongi constantly stirred at it for him whilst Jimin finished frying up the egg and rice: the former breaking up into golden fragrant chunks and the latter going firm and browned from the heat of the pan.

It was funny just how nice it was preparing dinner with him like this: the television playing music at a low volume across the house, neither one of them really talking save to give each other tips and guidance during the cooking process. It was such a calm atmosphere, just like it had been that morning when he had made him breakfast, and he found himself savouring every little moment; from the lingering hand touches, to the quick and rather shy smiles that Jimin gave him when he noticed that he was looking at him.

Except this time, there would be no tears and accidental injuries; no fear and confusion. This time, Yoongi was able to sidle up right behind Jimin and slip his arms around his bare waist, peering over his shoulder and down at the bubbling and hissing pans of food on the stove. The scent of it all cooking away was amazing, made his stomach rumble in appreciation.

“Oh,” Jimin sighed out, leaning back into his hold and turning off one of the stove rings with a quick twist of the dial. “I see you’re still feeling very affectionate today, baby boy.”

“I like cooking with you, it makes me feel good,” Yoongi replied, giving him a quick peck on the bare ball of his shoulder. “My friend, his mother always used to say that food’s supposed to be shared, just like homes. Eating alone, in my home, I don’t like it. It’s why I go to Mickey’s Joint, ‘cos even if I ain’t sharing food with anyone else, I ain’t alone when I’m eating. But sharing dinner with you and Namjoon, or just eating breakfast alone with you - it feels good.”

“I hope that you enjoy my cooking.” Jimin said with a smile, as he moved to retrieve a bag of grated cheese and he tossed a liberal amount of into the tteokbokki. He lowered the heat, letting it melt all over the rice cakes and into the sauce until it would become a sticky and creamy mess of Parmesan and spicy rice cake.

“I ain’t ever had tteokbokki before,” Yoongi admitted, and this was enough to make Jimin gasp loudly and theatrically. “My mother said that it was fattening and cheap, that only poor people eat it.
So, I ain’t ever tried it.”

“It is fattening and cheap, Yoongi,” Jimin argued with a laugh. “That’s why it’s so good! Especially with the cheese, wait-”

Jimin shifted to grab a fork off the counter, spearing a fat and wet chunk of rice cake so that he could lift it up out of the pan. He held it up to quickly blow on it to try and cool it down, steam wafting off its hot surface as he held it out to him in offering to sample. It was covered in sauce and just a little hint of cheese, and Yoongi moved to accept the bite from the tines of the fork.

“Mmm, it’s spicy,” Yoongi said around the bite, cheeking it to find that it was both very spicy, sweet and a little salty on his tongue. The rice cake was soft, but firm enough to be chewy, the mixture of flavours highly pleasing on his tongue. “But it’s nice, it’s really nice, darling.”

Jimin made a pleased noise at this, moving to give him a quick kiss that resulted in sauce smearing between their lips, the pair of them laughing at the mess.

As soon as the cheese had fully melted, Yoongi finished mixing and tossing the salad with the chicken and some dressing. He left his boyfriend to portion out the food, seeing the way that he almost danced along the counter with a happy skip in his step and a smile on his full and sauce-covered lips. It was enough to make him pick up the camera, holding it up in front of him so that he could snap a photograph of Jimin working away in the kitchen: a spatula in hand and his hair lightly dangling over his eyes.

Jimin laughed when he realised that he had taken a photograph of him, the shutter shutting with a crisp sound as the piece of film shot out. It was just another Polaroid to add onto the list: erotic stripping and bedroom photographs, a sweet cooking photograph. There were so many more things that he could document with the camera, but sadly there was limited film with which to do so.

Jimin grabbed cushions off the sofa, so that they could sit at the coffee table instead of up on the kitchen counter like last time. The two plates of fried rice, salad, and a large bowl of cheese tteokbokki took up most of the small surface. He added two tall glasses of water onto the table, along with some cutlery, and then he sat down cross-legged on the floor.

“Dinner is served~” Jimin announced in a sweet singing voice, shooting him a wide grin as he tapped his fork and spoon down on the table in an immature fashion.
Yoongi moved to join him at the table, gently lowering himself down onto the cushion by his knee and collecting his own cutlery. The spread of food was more than decent, enough to easily fill up the hollow under his ribs for a good while. He really didn’t know what to sample first, but he decided to go with a spoonful of egg fried rice. He found that the scallions had given it a nice kick of flavour, and that Jimin had cooked the eggs perfectly. He noticed that his boyfriend was looking at him as he chewed his own mouthful of chicken salad, no doubt waiting for feedback of some kind, and so he quickly chewed and swallowed the bite.

“This’ gonna be the best dinner I’ve had in a long time, darling,” he remarked, moving to stab some salad and tender chicken onto his fork.

“Pft, ha!” Jimin snorted, dropping his fork so that he could reach up and try and disguise the sudden flush of colour on his cheeks. “You’re just saying that, Yoongi. It’s not that great at all, it’s-”

Yoongi placed the fork down on the plate so that he could reach over and take hold of his wrist, gently pulling his hand away from his face. Jimin let him entwine their fingers together to give his hand a soft squeeze, the sensation making him pull his lower lip in to nibble at it.

“It’s delicious, Jimin,” he reiterated, as he stroke his thumb over the backs of his knuckles slowly. “The dinner’s delicious, and the next time we go out for dinner, I’ll treat you to more lobster and Chardonnay, mmm?”

“And chocolate fondant,” Jimin added with a quick smile.

“And plenty of chocolate fondant,” Yoongi added, returning the smile as he gave his hand a final quick squeeze.

This seemed to make Jimin very happy, and not only because of the promise of another date at a high-class restaurant with plenty of expensive food that would make him feel special for the night. No, it was clear that just being told that his cooking was good had made him feel great deep down inside. Yoongi knew that he was still learning, that there were a lot of things that he was still teaching himself to do so that he could feel more independent and in control of his life, and so he was glad to see that his compliment had had such a positive effect on him.

After all, the dinner really did taste great, and he hadn’t even tried the cheese tteokbokki yet.

Yoongi grabbed his fork so that he could sample some of the dish, spearing rice cake and cabbage on
the tines only to find that the hot cheese stretched like rubber when he lifted the fork up again; refusing to snap and swinging back and forth. Jimin burst out laughing at the sight, moving to get his own chunk of tteokbokki, and Yoongi saw that the cheese snapped cleanly for him. He had to pull hard to snap the cheese, twisting the fork to try and wrap it around the rice cake so that he wouldn’t make a mess eating it.

“OK, so, kimbap is like the Big Mac of Korea, right? And tteokbokki is like the fries,” Jimin explained around his first big bite of cheese tteokbokki. “You get addicted to it so quick, Yoongi, I mean, you’re gonna be craving this shit like crazy in a day or two.”

Yoongi thought that he really might just start craving it, considering how good that it was. It might just be that Jimin had cooked it to perfection, but he doubted that he was going to taste something as good as this - not even if Mijoo made it for him in the restaurant. The added cheese just gave it that much more flavour, balanced out the spice so that it was more mild and creamy on his tongue, and it added to the chewiness too.

“Shit, it’s so good, Jimin,” he said after swallowing the first bite, moving to get even more onto his fork. “It’s gotta be bad for me if it tastes that good, right?”

“Oh, you know it, baby boy,” Jimin agreed with a giggle.

Whilst Yoongi got another large bite of cheese tteokbokki on the fork to shove it into his mouth, he saw that Jimin had retrieved the camera so that he could snap a photograph of him eating. The dangling blob of cheese decided at that very moment to slap against his chin, splashing sauce all over his skin. The mess made his eyes grow rounded in shock, Jimin snorting laughter just as the piece of film shot out of the slot on the front. Hopefully, he had gotten a photograph of him in the act of eating, and not covered in food.

Over the duration of their dinner, Jimin occasionally stopped eating so that he could hit the remote and increase the volume coming from the television to listen and sing along to a certain song that he clearly liked. It was nice listening to him singing, for he had such a sweet voice that showed that he might often sing along to the radio and music that would play in the car and bars - a confidence in himself even when he might hit every single note just right. There was a huskiness to it when he got deep, but otherwise, he sang in a light and higher register that was highly pleasing to Yoongi’s ears.

Yoongi didn’t sing along to music, didn’t even really listen to it that much, but with a couple of drinks in his system and with Jimin’s gentle nudging, he might just find himself singing along to something. Only the chorus of course, because that looped and he could learn the words listening to Jimin singing them first a couple of times.
“Jimin,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice, just as his boyfriend lowered the volume again when a Tina Turner song came on the station. “I, uh, I don’t really know what I was tryna say before. Y’know, in bed? I guess that I was just tryna say that I hope that I’m there for you too, when you need me.”

“Of course you’re there for me, Yoongi,” Jimin said around a mouthful of fried rice. “You’ve helped me feel so many new experiences already: you took me out on my first real date, you bought food for me that I could never even dream of eating; you phone me all the time to check up on me, and you take care of me so good when we spend time together. Even when you had those moments of self-doubt and fear, I could see just how hard that you were fighting against it, and that made me fall so hard for you. It was seeing just how much that you were fighting, just for me, for us; how could I not fall for you, huh?”

“Mmm, I thought it was my sexy good looks that made you fall for me?” Yoongi joked, stabbing at the cheese tteokbokki with his fork.

“Yoongi, you’re the sexiest, the most handsome-” Jimin shifted to place his cutlery down on the plate, so that he could move closer to him and slip his arms around his neck. “the most sweetest baby boy! When I first saw you, I wanted to just fall to my knees!”

Yoongi could only groan at this, even as his lips lifted up into a wide grin. Jimin could be so shamelessly embarrassing that it was unbelievable, somehow more shameless and theatrical than Hoseok in his own funny way. But it was nice, he liked how Jimin had that little immature and naughty streak in him, because it made him feel like he could let go of the serious and proper act that he had to put out for business every single day. He could let a little camp moment slip free and it would be perfectly safe to do so in his company - no constantly watching and strictly heterosexual eyes judging his every gesture.

“What made you fall for me, Yoongi? I mean, other than my gorgeous face and sweet ass, because that’s so obvious and-”

Yoongi cut Jimin off with a quick kiss to the nose, seeing his slight shoulders lifting up as let out a soft and breathy laugh.

“I, uh, I dunno, Jimin, I don’t really know. You captivated me from that very first night, I kept thinking ’bout you for days afterwards. I dunno when it went from sexual interest to me falling for you, but that day…when you came to Mickey’s Joint? You had your skateboard and you were wearing that white tee-shirt with those tight blue jeans, and the way that you just stopped outside of the window like something outta…a daydream. Shit, you just knocked me right off my feet, darling.”
“I was so scared that day, Yoongi,” Jimin admitted, as he settled to sit in his lap for a moment. “I thought that you would tell me to go away, that I’d piss you off by showing up like that when I knew that you were struggling and scared of your sexuality. I thought that I was gonna ruin everything by being impatient and rushing you, but when you gave me that kiss? That little kiss?”

Yoongi reached up to brush a lock of hair back behind his ear for him, cupping his jaw so that he could give him a chaste peck just like the one that he was talking about. It made Jimin’s lips curl up at the corners in the most softest of smiles, made him drop his gaze to look down at their laps.

“Oh, I think that you had me right there and then, baby boy,” Jimin finished against his lips. After they had finished eating dinner, Jimin sealed all of the leftover food in containers just for Namjoon, should he come back home hungry. It seemed like they both ate leftovers a lot of the time, which was a sign of just how much that the two of them tried to save cash and make sure that they didn’t waste a single thing. They could hardly afford to be so wasteful after all, not when Jimin was pulling in just $500 with every single muling trip that he completed, and Namjoon was making a decent, but still meagre amount of earnings from his dealing and pushing out on the streets.

It was nice, Yoongi thought that it was nice that the two of them had such a good friendship - sharing food with one another even if they didn’t share meals. It made him think about how he and Hoseok had been when they had been teenagers, when they had shared everything with one another…up until the point in which Hoseok had started changing from the disturbing things that he had witnessed in the gang, and he had turned into a hollow shell as a result of his internalised hatred of his sexuality and the constant emotional abuse from his father.

As soon as he had closed up the containers, Jimin left the plates and pans soaking in the kitchen sink, and he entered the living-room again with a tub of Häagen-Dazs. Judging from the colour of the tub, it was strawberry and cream flavour, which suited Jimin just fine. Strawberry and cream, salted caramel or chocolate - these were all flavours that seemed to personify his boyfriend. The sight of the tub made Yoongi think about how Jungkook had sampled soft serve ice cream today whilst he had taken him out with Tigger - the kid finding the light air-whipped vanilla ice cream absolutely amazing.

“Oh! Oh oh!” Jimin exclaimed, as he moved to place the tub of ice cream down on the table. “I like this one!”

When the banner on the bottom of the television screen popped up, Yoongi saw that the song was ‘Club Tropicana’ by Wham!, and he felt like he vaguely recalled the rhythm from the radio several months ago. He saw that the music video was set in some kind of pool party - filled with tanned and bleached blondes in bikinis and handsome men in tiny swimming trunks that left nothing at all to the imagination. He wondered if Jimin found the golden skinned singer attractive, because he had to
admit that he found his own eyes focusing on his toned body and the tiny white trunks that he was shamelessly lounged in.

“Their new song is a bit annoying, but this one is fun!” Jimin said, as he reached over to take hold of his upper arms. “Come on! Dance with me, baby boy!”

“Dance? Huh? Oh… ‘k,” Yoongi replied, letting him pull him up to his feet so that he could keep hold of his hands and lightly swing their arms. “What’s the dance for this song?”

“There isn’t one! That’s the fun part!” Jimin replied, as he started shaking his hips in rhythm to the summery and catchy beat.

Yoongi didn’t really know what he was doing because he couldn’t dance at all, but he gave it a shot anyway. Whether it be copying Jimin’s much more smooth and sensual moves - from his shaking and rolling hips, to the way that he waved and flexed his bare arms, to just simply stepping in rhythm to the song, Yoongi found that he wasn’t that embarrassed at all. He was much better at dancing to that other song - ‘Give It Up’, but this song was fun and kind of sexy. It made him want to sidle up to his boyfriend and bop with him, and so he did so.

Jimin moved close to him, turning around to press his back against his chest so that he could rock with him. Yoongi held onto his waist, placing his chin against his shoulder so that he could keep him close. He felt the warmth of his behind rubbing against him, brushing the cotton ends of his shirt between his buttocks and crotch as he playfully grinded back against him.

The songs on the television changed drastically, from sexy summer beats to soft ballads and upbeat funky pop. The sexy songs made Jimin grind against him, made him reach back to hold onto his bare buttocks as he teasingly rocked his body from side to side. When a soft ballad came on the channel, Jimin slipped his arms around his neck so that he could hold onto him; their dancing slowing down to an almost stop as they kissed and lazily stepped from side to side in circles around the living-room. But when the pop songs started playing, loud and silly and stupidly catchy, it was enough to make them both start dancing like crazy.

Jimin tried his very hardest to snap more photographs of him whilst they danced. It was hard, on account of them moving around so much, but they snapped a couple that went onto the table to develop - slightly blurred shots of them jumping around and laughing, the bright flashing colours from the flashing television screen cast across their bare skin in shades of blue, red, pink and purple.

It didn’t matter if Yoongi couldn’t dance if he was bouncing around without rest, if he was pumping his arms and shaking his hips hard enough to make his shirt ends flap around his thighs to expose his
lightly bouncing cock and testicles - which Jimin pointed at and laughed at breathlessly. His boyfriend’s excited laughter just spurred him on, just made him dance that more crazily until he was shimmying his way over to him.

“Ah, the shimmy! The shimmy!” Jimin exclaimed, as he copied his actions and he started shimmying his chest at him. “I love it, baby boy!”

Namjoon suddenly stopped in the doorway for a moment to watch them both dancing, his expression hard to read because he was clearly trying his hardest to not laugh at him in case he found it disrespectful. He must have just let himself into the home, drawn to the living-room by the sound of the blaring music and their excited voices.

Yoongi caught sight of him, slowing his dancing down to a stop as he let out a self-conscious laugh and he reached down to tug at the ends of his shirt. He was suddenly aware of how short that it was, and he hoped that he hadn’t accidentally flashed too much at the young dealer.

“You’re a very good dancer, Yoongi,” Namjoon remarked, his lips quickly lifting in a way that showed that he was amused. It made dimples appear in his cheeks, a rather handsome and warm smile.

“I told Jimin that I liked your honesty,” Yoongi said, reaching up to roughly wipe at his now sweaty brow. “That sounded like a big fucking lie to me, Namjoon.”

“No, really, you should see my dancing,” the other man retorted, which made Jimin burst out laughing. “You’re way better than I am.”

Namjoon moved to step out of the doorway at this, presumably going into the kitchen seeing as there was no soft thumping sound of his footsteps going up the staircase.

“There’s leftovers for you, Daddy-o!” Jimin called through the open doorway, as he grabbed the television remote to lower the volume to a more reasonable level. “Enjoy!”

“Nice! Thanks, Jimmy!”

Jimin moved to pop the lid off the ice cream at last, which revealed that it was soft enough to eat. It was a milky pink, liquid wet and very delicious-looking. He dropped to his knees on the cushion,
grabbing the spoons to hold one out to him, and so Yoongi accepted it and he sat down beside him.

“Is he really that bad at dancing?” he asked, scooping up a serving of the soft ice cream and holding it in front of his lips.

“Oh, he’s terrible!” Jimin said around his own mouthful of ice cream. “But he still tries really hard, and that’s all that matters. Dancing’s only good if you’re having fun; right?”

Yoongi made a noise in agreement at this, sampling the ice cream to find that it was thick and creamy. It was the perfect thing to eat to cool down after all of that dancing, and so he moved to scoop up more of it onto his spoon.

“You’re not that bad, baby boy,” Jimin continued, darting his tongue out to lick at the smear of cream that was caught in the corner of his lips. “You’re a little offbeat, but you’ve got a lot of energy. It’s adorable.”

Yoongi snorted at this, wondering if his movements could be considered ‘energetic’ or just plain erratic and silly. Whatever the case, he was starting to come down from his sudden excitable moment, his heartbeat slowing down in his chest as he got his breathing back to a regular rhythm.

“Hey, Jimin?” Yoongi suddenly said, as he hovered the spoon in front of his mouth and he ran a bite of ice cream around his mouth.

“Yeah, baby boy?” Jimin asked, scooping another massive chunk of ice cream out of the tub, but making no move to shove it into his mouth. His lips were covered in little smears that he had yet to lick free, the soft pink creamy substance flashing against his tanned skin.


“Seriously?” his boyfriend asked in a soft voice. “Cruising? Like…like in your dreams? Like, when we go for rides around the city and listen to music, and it just feels so good?”

Yoongi made a noise in agreement at this, swallowing the ice cream and then gathering more of it onto his spoon.
Just like Jimin had said, he wanted to go cruising with him like he had in his dreams - just the two of them drifting along the streets in the late evening sunset and the early night dusk; the windows rolled down to let in a cool breeze, and the radio playing whatever was popular right now at a low volume. It would be the perfect way to bridge those long hours between day and night, the ones that had used to drag on forever back when Yoongi had mulled over fingers of whisky in his bedroom and he had found that he had been unable to fall asleep. The hours that had been full of that dull ache in his chest that he had started feeling less and less of late, which in turn made him feel quite anxious even when it also filled him with relief.

“I’d love to go cruising with you like that, baby boy,” Jimin said with a wide smile. “I’ve got an end destination in mind, if you’ll take me there.”

“Good, we can cruise for a lil while and then go there. It’ll be just like a date, yeah? Another date?” Yoongi suggested, as he nervously returned the smile.

“Wait, I gotta get some things…”

Jimin shoved a final spoonful of ice cream into his mouth, before jumping to his feet to race out of the living-room - brain-freeze be damned. His footsteps pounded on the staircase as he ran up them, disappearing into the bedroom to presumably collect some clothing.

Yoongi stole several more spoonfuls of ice cream from the tub, just for the sake of it, whilst he waited for his boyfriend to come back.

Oh, what would his mother think if she saw him right now: with a belly full of cheese tteokbokki and cheap and fattening ice cream smeared all around his mouth? She would be so annoyed to see him acting like this, like disgusting poor Yankee trash that she had despised having to see through the windows of her limousine on the rare instances that she had taken him out of the home when he had been a child. It was enough to make him laugh under his breath, getting a childish kick of excitement from the mere thought.

When Jimin returned just a couple of minutes later, he was dressed in his one of his loose white tee-shirts and those fitted blue jeans; his black trousers and something that looked like a blanket slung over his forearm. He tossed the trousers at him, hastily shoving something into his back pocket as he ran into the kitchen.

Yoongi stopped eating ice cream so that he could get upright and slip into his trousers, shoving his
shirt ends down inside of them, comfortably arranging himself, and then and buckling his belt tight. He was in the act of tucking it inside of the trouser loops when Jimin moved to hover in the doorway again; a cardboard six-pack of Coors bottled beers dangling from his fist as he reached up to tuck his messy hair back behind his ear.

“I’m ready, baby boy!” he said with a happy smile.

Jimin made no move to get into a pair of shoes, but rather he followed him barefoot down the steps so that he could wait for him to get the car out of the garage.

Yoongi slowly reversed out onto the slight hint of drive, stalling the car so that his boyfriend could run around the hood and climb into the passenger-seat; the garage door slowly dropping to close behind them. He shoved the beers under the seat, tossed the blanket in the back, and then he rolled his window down and he snapped his seatbelt in place across his ribs.

As Yoongi steered his car back onto the road, his boyfriend moved to turn on the radio. He hit several buttons to get it at a low volume, just so that they would be able to talk to each other over the music and DJs without having to raise their voices too loud.

“Oh, feel that breeze,” Yoongi said, as a cool waft of air drifted in through the open windows to blow his hair back off his brow. “Shit, that feels so good, right?”

“So fucking good,” Jimin said with a shiver from the chill air, moving so that he could place a hand on his thigh and hold onto him as he turned his head to watch the streets rolling past. “When we get by the coast, we’ll smell the bay on the air too.”

The sky outside of the windows was that of the deepening sunset. It was deep purple washed over with wispy orange and golden clouds that lazily drifted across the horizon, the final beams of sunlight glowing deep red through them. The rays cast over the car and in through the windows, and Jimin looked so good bathed in that warm and hot shade; his eyes gleaming in the sunlight and his white tee-shirt contrasting against his glowing skin. The time on the dashboard clock told him that it was almost 10pm, which meant that the sun really would be setting any moment from now.

Though Yoongi loved cruising around the city of an evening, he had never passed through Haight-Ashbury for much longer than a minute or so to zoom along several roads and get into another district. The sight of so many people out on the streets, who were either homeless, addicts or prostitutes looking for clients, it was enough to make him drag his gaze away from the sidewalks and just focus on the front window instead. The area was still struggling from the influx of hardcore drugs flooding the streets, and sadly this once open and free love filled neighbourhood was now
dangerous, riddled with crime and poverty.

Jimin had escaped the poverty of The Bayview only to end up caught up in the midst of it all over again. Haight-Ashbury might not get too much coverage in the papers for its violent crime, not when The Bayview housed so many non-white and immigrant families that could be demonised to give the more affluent white folk of the city something shocking to read over breakfast every single morning. But Yoongi knew that it was still dangerous at times, especially of a night when muggings, carjackings and assault were more frequent.

Well, at least Namjoon’s home was on a better street, and it seemed like a secure and safe part of the neighbourhood.

From Haight-Ashbury, Yoongi guided the car through Upper Market and down into The Castro so that they could cruise around more brightly lit and busy streets. Bars and clubs were packed just like always - men and women hanging around on the streets in huge packs because the police had yet to roll through and break them up for loitering and taking up room. In reality, it was really just because they were still being treated like public menaces, and the current AIDS epidemic and gave them a legitimate reason to frighten people all over again.

The sight of drunken kisses and fondling wasn’t at all rare, and Yoongi found himself wetting his lips and tightening his hold around the steering-wheel as he glanced over at Jimin. His boyfriend was leaning out of the window and calling out to people that he no doubt recognised, a wide and happy smile on his face.

Yoongi was getting more comfortable with his lover, but the sight of such open displays of homosexuality still made him feel a little bit funny, like he should look away and refuse to acknowledge what he was seeing. It was stupid, he knew that it was so, but it still made him gulp hard and look away from the men and women out of the streets that were kissing on building steps and public benches.

Drag queens were out on the streets dancing and putting on a show, couples were out having fun even when a dark cloud had passed over the community for the last few years; a dark cloud that was refusing to pass any time soon.

Yoongi could see that these people lived for the night, for that one moment of excitement that made up for everything else: the boring 9-5 jobs, the secretive lives and hidden relationships, the fear and the pain. It was just like what Jimin’s life had once been like, when he had went from bars and bathhouses every night or so; chasing after cheap thrills, but unable to find a man that actually cared about him, that made him want to slow down and take things slow and steady and careful.
Yoongi knew that somehow, he had ended up being that man. He was the reason why Jimin stayed at home all night long, talking on the phone instead of drinking at bars with strangers. It was pretty funny how thinking about such a thing helped him to realise the true depth of just how much that Jimin cared about him, that he loved him.

Rather than continue travelling down south, passing through Diamond Heights or Glen Park to curve around and enter Bernal Heights, Yoongi ended up cruising through The Castro and looping back around to cruise through it again. He had no real destination in mind, just a tank full of gas and a need to cruise down the streets with Jimin’s warm hand holding onto his thigh.

Yoongi ended up heading north, passing through Upper Market again to get through Lower Haight, Western Addition and Pacific Heights, so that he could enter Marina. From there, he could drive along the roads close to the coast just for Jimin. He knew that he wanted to breathe in the scent of the bay and watch the waves, and so it would be the perfect scenic drive for his boyfriend.

The sight outside of the windows varied from packed commercial areas filled with restaurants, bars, comedy clubs and tourist hot spots, to residential blocks of houses and small apartments that were painted in a variety of colours: white cream, yellow, pink, and pastel shades of blue and mint. There was a lot of traffic out on the roads, not enough to cause gridlock or jams of any kind, but a constant and steady flow of countless vehicles and models in a rainbow of colours.

There were a lot of people out having fun, but Yoongi barely even looked at them for longer than a second or two, so that he didn’t even register the different faces and clothing. It was as if they weren’t even there, that he and Jimin were the only people right now, save for the phantom voice of the radio coming in through the speakers. It was because Yoongi had drifted off into that blissful state that cruising always brought him - his mind going wonderfully blank and his body moving on muscle memory alone to guide the car along the roads and stop at the countless sets of traffic lights. Except for once, he wasn’t alone and just listening to the white noise of the city bleeding in through his window, but rather listening to soft music and savouring the heat of Jimin’s palm kneading at his knee and thigh as he sang along in a sweet and breathy whisper.

“This’ where Jungkook’s family work,” Yoongi explained, as he rolled the car along the streets of Western Addition. “They run a front right here, a gambling den disguised as a restaurant. But his mother still makes amazing food, darling, so, if you find yourself craving something authentic…”

“I’d love to go there one time and try the food, and I’m sure that Namo would love to try it too,” Jimin said, perking up in his seat to run his eyes along the dark and shutter-covered restaurant and store exteriors that filled the street. “We should go there too, right? I’ll bet there’s plenty of things you haven’t tried, like tteokbokki.”

“Uh, Jungkook actually said that he’d love to see the both of us in the restaurant,” Yoongi admitted.
with a soft laugh. “We should go there, yeah? Probably make his fucking day to see us, the kid ain’t exactly got a lot of friends to talk to, y’know?”

“I like him, and I’d like that a lot, baby boy,” Jimin confirmed, turning his head away from the window to give him a warm smile. “Plus, he’s got that fucking adorable puppy. You’ve got great tastes, Yoongi, you picked a real good dog for him.”

“Pft, I’m just glad the kid loves that dog so much,” Yoongi agreed, as he returned the smile. “I like cats, well, I mean, I like both really. But my friend, he’s got the most beautiful cat you’ll ever see, darling. I think of her as, like, the supermodel of cats.”

“Oh, I love cats,” Jimin sighed out. “You need to introduce me to this friend of yours, I need to see that cat, Yoongi.”

When Yoongi drove up the hilly slopes of Pacific Heights, he noticed that Jimin was looking at him, and so he spared several quick glances over at him.

“Mmm? You ’k, darling?”

“This is where you live, right? Pacific Heights? I wonder which one of these massive mansions is yours?” Jimin asked with a cheeky grin, as they passed massive front lawns and mansion houses with large lawns and gardens, pools and grand balconies.

“I’ll take you there one night, Jimin,” Yoongi promised, as he gently curved around a corner to get onto a new road. “One night, we’ll share my bed instead of yours and Namjoon’s, mmm? It’s much bigger, as you might’ve imagined.”

“Is it King Size?”

“California King Size,” he replied, to which Jimin actually gasped, his eyes growing rounded with genuine surprise.

“Oh, baby boy, I can’t wait to fuck you in that bed…”
Upon reaching Marina, Yoongi guided his car onto Marina Boulevard and down onto Laguna Street and then Bay Street. They passed Gas House Cove, which was filled with black water at this late evening hour and the sight of bobbing white private yachts that hadn’t went out onto the bay yet; and the Great Meadow and Fort Mason parks, which were filled with lush green grass and trees. It was a gorgeous area of the city for sure, one that screamed extravagant cruises with business associates and glasses of wine.

Yoongi followed the curving road straight through Russian Hill, passing packed residential areas that spanned over hilly slopes and several small parks until he was rolling onto The Embarcadero. The wide road ran all of the way along the bay and countless piers, fringed by bustling restaurants and bars that attracted so many tourists from all over the world to the city.

Jimin loved riding along the massive road, for he shifted to lean against the window so that the tangy sea breeze blew his hair back off his face as he dropped his chin on his forearms.

“It’s so beautiful, Yoongi, look at the water,” he sighed out, his voice so soft that it was almost lost underneath the radio.

Yoongi drove into North Beach just to follow the road, before doubling back and driving along The Embarcadero once more. He still had no clue at all where he was driving, but he found himself drifting through Nob Hill and Western Addition again, heading south towards Hayes Valley. He knew that Jimin had an end destination in mind, and he could only assume that it was somewhere around the usual neighbourhoods that they both frequented, though he could be wrong. That was likely what guided him back down to those busy commercial and residential streets once more.

“Yoongi, let’s go to Baker Beach,” Jimin finally suggested, shifting to look at him and giving him a soft smile. “I had a dream about us going there, I really wanna spend the night there with you. I think it could be beautiful.”

“The dream that you told me ‘bout?” Yoongi asked, shifting in his seat to eye the street that he was on, so that he could figure out a route to get there. “The one when you thought you were gonna drown, but I dragged you back to the surface?”

“Uhuh, that exact dream,” he confirmed with a nod.

Yoongi guided his car along Fell Street and onto Lincoln Way, to go through Golden Gate Park and up into Richmond in the direction of Sea Cliff. The park was absolutely massive, a great place to take Jungkook and Tigger one day when the weather was great, maybe even with Jimin in tow. After driving across many residential areas filled with a random assortment of homes and food joints,
he was finally drawing close to Baker Beach - which was currently closed at this late night hour. Not that that would stop them or other couples from sneaking onto it, of course.

When he stopped the car right on the edge of a lot that stretched in front of the beach, Yoongi saw that it was midnight. They had been cruising for the best part of two hours now, and it had felt so good to just get out and breathe in the evening air and watch the sun disappearing beneath the bay waters.

Jimin had already removed his seatbelt whilst he had been killing the engine, and so he popped the door open and he grabbed the beers and blanket to could climb out of the vehicle. Now he realised why his boyfriend hadn’t bothered putting on any shoes, for they were rather pointless on the beach. His sandals wouldn’t serve much use either, would no doubt end up catching in the sand so that he would stumble and end up having to remove them.

Yoongi climbed out after him, shoving his keys into his pocket and breathing in the air of the first cool breeze that swept in from the bay. He ran his eyes across the beach in front of him to see that the sand was caught between gold and white, currently free from visible litter and uneven. The water lapped up quite the amount of sand, white foamy curds washing over it and then retreating to leave dark and damp sand in their wake. It was a constant and massive stretch of sand, running all the way along The Presidio Park, and it was beautiful.

As Yoongi moved to go down onto the sand, he saw where Jimin had already stepped, as he had left footprints behind. He followed along behind him, carefully stepping onto the sand and hearing it crunching dryly underneath his sandals. Yoongi watched his boyfriend almost skipping across the beach, trying to find the perfect spot for them to settle down and watch the waves. The soles of his feet were covered in sand, gritty white grains clinging to his golden skin just like it would cling to their clothing and hair.

“Here, baby boy! Right here!” Jimin declared, as he came to a stop and he dropped to sit down right on the sand. “This is perfect, this spot right here!”

“It looks perfect to me!” Yoongi called in reply, as he watched him spreading the blanket out across the sand for them to sit on. “The perfect spot, with you in it!”

Jimin giggled at this, glancing up at him through his tousled hair as he smoothed down the blanket and then patted at it invitingly with his palm. The pack of beers was sitting in the sand, waiting to be cracked open so that they could share them.

So Yoongi moved to join him on it, kicking his sandals aside so that he could place his feet down on
the sand. It was still slightly warm against his bare skin, not baking hot like it would be during the
day, but rather just a nice faded warmth that he greatly liked. It was nice, considering how chill that
the water would be, and how the breeze was cool on their skin as it played with their hair.

Yoongi could see the Golden Gate Bridge cutting across the bay to their far right, could see boats
floating way out across the horizon that were likely passenger ferries or cargo ships. As a result, the
water was lit up by the different lights and not just the reflection of the moon casting across its slow
and choppy distant waters. Both the sky and water were black, very few stars breaking through the
immense light pollution of the city to glint back at their eyes like that of the moving traffic on the
bridge. If he looked to the left, he could see that blackness stretching on far beyond the horizon to
erun straight into the Pacific Ocean. But the view right in front of them had the distant sight of the
rocky Marin Headlands and the city of Sausalito breaking up the vast expanse between the water and
sky.

“Mmm, this’ the best spot, darling,” Yoongi said to break the momentary silence. “Look at that
view…”

The sound of rustling came from right beside him, and when he turned his head, Yoongi saw that his
boyfriend was in the act of pulling two beer bottles out of the six-pack. He saw no bottle opener in
sight, and so he quietly remarked on the fact that he had forgotten to bring one with him. It made him
struggle to not snort laughter, just thinking about the fact that they had driven around for two hours
with beers in the car and no possible way of drinking them.

“I know a good trick, baby boy,” Jimin replied with a quick smile, moving closer to him and
reaching down to snag hold of his belt. “I learnt this in a bar. Watch this.”

Yoongi could only silently watch him using his belt buckle to pop open the beer bottle; catching the
corner underneath the scalloped edge of the metal cap so that he could pop it free with a hard tug. Air
escaped the neck in a harsh hiss, and Jimin lifted it up to show it off with a proud smile.

“Wow, that’s a great fucking party trick,” Yoongi remarked, accepting the beer from him to find that
it was still cool.

Jimin popped the second bottle open on his belt buckle, lifting it to his lips to swallow several deep
swigs. He knew that the younger man wasn’t a great fan of light beer, but it seemed like he would
drink whatever he could get his hands on - should there be no alternatives. He also preferred the
darker version that they had sampled in the Twin Peaks bar, but he would drink this one too without
much care at all because it would wet his throat perfectly fine.
“Look what I got, Yoongi,” Jimin sang, as he pulled a baggie free from his jeans and he held it up.

As Yoongi swallowed his first deep swig of beer, he eyed the dangling clear baggie to see that it contained two rolled and fat joints. He pulled the bottle away from his lips just as Jimin opened it up and he pulled one of them free, shoving it in his mouth. After patting down his pockets, he pulled a cheap lighter free and he sparked it to set the end alight; breathing in a quick pull to get it to smoulder that he coughed out a second later. Then he took a proper toke, holding it in his lungs as he stared out across the waves and then breathing it out of his full lips.

“Oh, I still dunno how I feel ‘bout pot,” Yoongi said with a quick laugh, as he eyed the smouldering end of the joint. “It was pretty fun, ‘til I woke up the next morning and my brain felt all dry and weird.”

“Hmm, I know, but it feels so good getting high on the beach, with all of the waves and the sound that they make,” Jimin sighed, taking another deep toke off the end and holding it into his lungs before breathing it out again. The smoke wafted around his face in a thin white cloud, curling up to dissipate until he inhaled it in again and exhaled it out of his nose. “Shit, getting high at the beach is the second best place to get high.”

“Where’s the best place?” Yoongi asked, taking the fat joint from his fingers to hover it in front of his own lips.

“In bed,” his boyfriend replied with a grin. “Getting high with you in that hotel, fuck, that was the best high that I’ve ever had, baby boy.”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment, before bringing the joint to his lips to take a hard pull off it.

Just like the first time that he had smoked a joint, Yoongi found the hot and itchy smoke burning his lungs so much that he choked on the drag and he coughed it out just a second later. The following small tokes weren’t much better, for he still coughed at the itching sensation in his chest, but it only took a couple of tokes until he started to feel it the effects of the drug. It was that funny woozy feeling that he kind of hated and loved at the exact same time, but he knew that the wooziness would soon pass and be replaced with a nice light feeling.

Jimin pulled the second joint free to light it for himself, shoving the baggie into his jeans rather than toss it away because he clearly didn’t want to litter on the beach. He breathed the smoke out of his nose hard, reaching up to get it between his fingers so that he could hold onto it.
“Remember when I told you about that little stretch of land down by the 101, the one by Bayview Park?” Jimin asked him, cocking his knees up in front of him and loosely folding his arm on top of them. When Yoongi made a noise in agreement after coughing a lungful of smoke out, he continued, “That was where I got stoned for the first time. Some hippies out on the sand, they let me take a few tokes off their joint and it was so wild, Yoongi.”

“How old were you?”

“Um…eleven, I think?”

“I got drunk for the first time when I was sixteen and you were getting stoned at eleven,” Yoongi remarked in a quiet voice. “Mmm, talk ‘bout self-destructive behaviour…”

“It was fun back then, getting stoned, you know? It was one of the only things that felt fun for me when I was a kid, Yoongi,” Jimin admitted, eyeing his joint for a few seconds before taking another deep toke off it. “I don’t do it that much anymore, only when I’m really bored or when I wanna have a lot of fun. Not like Namo, pft, he’ll get stoned whenever he can.”

Yoongi laughed softly at this, sniffing hard and glancing out across the water as he stuck his tongue out to wet his lips. He was starting to feel that lightness in his head now, that warm fuzziness that made his vision feel a little distorted and made everything that Jimin was saying sound a little out of sync with his moving lips.

“Hmm, I dunno why I thought it’d be a good idea to get stoned on the beach with you, but it could be pretty fun; right?” Jimin asked, rolling his eyes to give him a lazy and rather dopey smile. “You were so cute when you were stoned that night, baby boy. You were all giggly and sweet, I just wanted to play around with you like that again.”

Whilst Yoongi smoked his joint down to nothing more than a stub, he slowly drank his beer and he tracked the ferries across the water with a great fascination. He couldn’t help but do so, finding the way that they bobbed and floated across the black surface so weird that he could only stare at them; his eyes rounded and his lips pouted out around the fat joint. Were they ferries or were they actually really big birds? It was hard figuring out, no matter how many times that he blinked and squinted, but he was pretty sure that they were ferries.

Jimin was lying on the blanket right beside him, holding onto his free hand so that he could play with his fingers and plant little kisses on his fingertips - each one hot and making him twitch his fingers and toes from the sensation. His boyfriend was singing under his breath again, but he wasn’t singing a song that he was aware of, rather he just singing nonsense about the beach and how much that he
loved him; giggling every now and again and kicking his feet around to disturb the sand.

“Baby boy, I love you so much,” Jimin crooned, his voice husky from smoke and his eyes blown and glassy. “Guess…guess how much I love you?”

“How much?” Yoongi asked, dragging his gaze away from the choppy waves so that he could look down at him. He saw his boyfriend’s skin was glowing blue from the moonlight, his cheeks so flushed that they would be hot to the touch.

“This much!” Jimin declared, throwing his arm up for emphasis and dropping the stub of his joint down into the sand in the process. “It’s so much, baby boy, so much love. You love me that much, right?”

“I love you more,” he replied, seeing the way that Jimin’s lips split in the most happiest and widest smile possible. “I love you so much that, uh, that I feel kinda funny, sometimes. But in a good way. I think I’m addicted to you, darling.”

Jimin burst out into stoned giggles at this, and the sound was enough to make him start laughing too. He found himself unable to stop laughing after a few seconds, lifting his hand to his mouth as he started getting a little wheezy.

Oh, Yoongi both hated and loved how marijuana made him start laughing so much, until his stomach almost hurt and his cheeks were wet from his eyes welling with tears. It took him a moment to get himself under control, but he was eventually able to catch his breath and wipe at his wet cheeks.

“Mmm, the water’s calling to me, darling,” Yoongi said, as he got to his feet and he stumbled in the uneven sand. “It’s so…hypnotic, I gotta touch it. I gotta play with it, y’know?”

“The water’s gonna be cold, baby boy!” Jimin called out in a warning, as he lifted his head up off the blanket. “Don’t go swimming off and leave me behind, OK?”

Yoongi heard this perfectly clear, even when his head felt all foggy. But he still wanted to touch the water, wanted to feel it lapping against his bare feet because it just looked so funny right now. The way that it was moving like that, and the soft roaring sound that it made so completely out of sync with the waves - it was pulling him in, and before he could help himself, he moved to take a couple of bumbling steps forward when the tide retreated.
When the wave lapped forward again to touch his feet, it was so cold that it was unbelievable - the temperature piercing through the fogginess of the marijuana and beer almost instantly.

“Ah, shit!” Yoongi cried out in shock, racing away from the lapping water so fast that he almost stumbled over his own feet. “It’s so cold! Huh! Why’s it so cold?!”

“I told you so!” Jimin said with a wicked smile, holding a fresh bottle out to him. “Come on over here, baby boy! I’ll keep you nice and warm!”

When Yoongi joined him back on the blanket, Jimin popped open the bottle using his belt buckle so that they could both knock back two more beers on top of the marijuana. His feet were coated in damp sand as a result of the lapping water, which he reached down to knock free with his hand. But even as he nursed the two beers and he listened to Jimin singing more sweet nonsense with his head resting on his shoulder, he found himself staring at the water and longing to touch it again.

“I-I still wanna go for a dip,” Yoongi admitted, before giving an awkward laugh and reaching up to ruffle at his hair. “I know it’s fucking freezing, but I just really wanna do it, like, just this one time. Just once, yeah, just a lil dip.”

“Then let’s go for a dip,” Jimin suggested, as he moved to grab the back of his white tee-shirt and he wrenched it off over his head. The act disturbed his hair, made locks of it fall free over his brow. “Just a quick one, it’ll be fun, right?”

“Yeah, yeah, oh man, it’ll be so fucking fun,” Yoongi agreed enthusiastically, as he started unbuttoning his shirt too - amazed to find that his boyfriend also thought that it was a great idea.

After dropping their shirts down onto the sand, they had to strip down to nothing to save their clothes from getting soaked. Yoongi unbuckled his belt whilst Jimin dropped his jeans and briefs to his ankles with a hard tug, exposing his nudity to the cool ocean breeze without a single care. As he awkwardly stepped out of his trousers, he chased after Jimin to get close to the lazily lapping waves, and he grabbed hold of his hand to hold on tight.

Unsurprisingly, the water was absolutely freezing as it splashed over their feet and up to their lower legs. The foam was thick, splattering so that droplets of it flew up into the air to land on their chests and faces.

“Huh-oh!” Yoongi spluttered, twisting away from the waves and bringing his free arm up to hug it
across his chest. The plummeting temperature made his testicles almost pull right back up inside of him, tightening with a crawling sensation as his cock also shrunk to protect itself from the chill. “Oh! It’s suh-suh-so cold! Darling!”

Jimin was shivering and letting out little noises of shock at the freezing temperature too, but he was still kicking at the waves to splash water everywhere like a child. He pulled his hand free so that he could hunker forward and splash water up at him, laughing the entire time.

Yoongi splashed him right back, even when it meant squatting down and letting icy water lap all over his thighs and buttocks as he plunged his hands into the thick and foamy water and he threw them up to toss cupped handfuls at his boyfriend. He got a quick splash right to the face, the freezing cold water soaking into his hair and making him splutter as he blinked it free from his eyes and snorted it out of his nose.

“Oh! Oh, it’s too much, Juh-Jimin!” Yoongi cried out, getting back upright and almost waddling out of the water on his numb and cold legs. “Thank fuck you packed the blanket!”

Yoongi darted up the sand again so that he could drop onto the blanket and drag it over his cold body. The material soaked up a lot of the droplets of water from his skin, was an instant barrier between him and the cool breeze. He watched the younger man still kicking the water around for a moment, before he also raced out of the shallows to get to the blanket; letting out high-pitched giggles as he did so.

Jimin looked so beautiful splashing through the water like that, damp locks of hair plastered across his face and water beaded on his naked skin which was illuminated in the moonlight. It was like the bathhouse all over again, except this time, there was a carefree and happy aura coming from him that Yoongi found he enjoyed so much more.

After joining him on the blanket, Jimin towelled at his damp hair for him with the ends of the material. He got the wet locks between his fingers, gently massaging at them to try and get most of the water out of the lengths.

“Sorry, baby boy, I just had to splash you,” he said with an apologetic smile. “That was naughty of me, right?”

“Mmm,” Yoongi rumbled, sniffing hard as a bead of water dripped down onto his bare knees. He reached up to rub it dry, his hands flushed pink from the chill temperature just like his feet were. He could see that Jimin’s skin also had a pink flush underneath it, especially his cheeks. “That was so fucking naughty, but you’re still a good boy.”
Jimin finished drying his hair for him and then he settled down against his side, pulling the blanket tight around his body to cover his nudity and help keep him warm. He dropped his head down on his shoulder, the weight familiar and comforting. They would be able to share body heat and fight away the chill of the sea with ease.

Though the cold temperature of the water had shocked him back to his senses for a moment or two, Yoongi could feel that funny lightness washing over him again, the warm feeling that loosened his tongue and made him feel pretty good inside.

“It looks so nice, right?” Yoongi mumbled, as he stared at the glowing stretch of bridge that ran right across the bay. It illuminated the skyline in gold, the constantly moving traffic twinkling back at their eyes like stars. The black bay water all around it also reflected the light, the glistening surface hypnotic. “It looks like fucking paradise or something…I, uh, I can’t believe that I was lucky enough to be raised in a place like this, darling.”

“You do?”

“Mmm…”

“How come, Yoongi?” Jimin asked in a quiet voice, as he wriggled against his side and he sniffed hard.

“Cos this city’s so fucking beautiful, Jimin,” Yoongi explained, furrowing his brow deeply as he tried to find the right words to say. There was just this burning need inside of himself to say something, which might just have been the marijuana talking. He didn’t really know, but he just had to get it out somehow. “Even when I know the dark side, when I know ‘bout the seedy areas and the drugs and the crime, even when I’ve seen the protests and the addicts and victims all out lying in the gutters - it’s still beautiful underneath all of that. The…the world’s in a shitty place right now, that’s what I think. It’s shit all over, but it’s gonna get better. Y’know, ‘cos of kids like us, we’re gonna make a change somehow…”

“Kids like us? You mean, gay kids?”

“Yeah, like…like the gay kids, the minorities, the girls, the ones that are-are sick; I think that we’re gonna make a change,” he continued, sticking his tongue out to wet his lips and still faintly tasting salt from the sea foam. “It’s already started, with the protests and everything. I-I don’t take part in ‘em, but I read ‘bout ‘em in the newspapers and it seems like we’re changing lil by lil. Like, The
fucking American Dream might include us one day too, y’know?”

“Oh, that’d be so good,” Jimin whispered softly, his fingers squeezing hold of his side. “Do you think that we’ll see that much change? Do you think that we’ll be a part of it all? I-I go to the protests, I’ve been to the Gay Freedom Day Parade and anti-Reagan rallies dozens of times, and I feel like something’s happening too, you know, like…there’s something in the air. There’s something there and it just feels so magic, Yoongi. I can feel it, just like you said, and it feels amazing.”

“Mmm, ‘cos it’s changing, Jimin.”

“Yoongi, do you…do you think that kids like us could end up getting married in the future?” Jimin asked, as he moved to lift his head up off his shoulder and he looked at him with wide and hopeful eyes. “A gay marriage? Oh my god…imagine that.”

Yoongi found that he couldn’t think of such a thing, no matter how hard that he tried. It was a thing that just made no sense to him at all, the idea that the government would care about and acknowledge gay love enough to grant the rights to something like that - something that would completely change history. No, he couldn’t imagine it, but by god, did he want to be able to think of such a thing.

“Maybe?” he whispered in reply, as he gave Jimin’s bare thigh a soft squeeze underneath the blanket. “Maybe, if people keep fighting for it?”

“Wow…” Jimin breathed out softly, as he settled his head back down on his shoulder. “That would be amazing, baby boy.”

For a moment, they both stared out across the skyline at the sight of the Golden Gate Bridge, a sight more attractive than the half-hidden moon and faded stars that were scattered across the night sky. Yoongi found that he didn’t have to say a single thing at all to break the silence between them, because it just felt so perfect in its own way. It was a reflective and peaceful kind of silence, like the kind of silence that fell between them right as they reached the cusp of sleep and neither one of them could say another whispered word because their lips had grown as heavy as their eyelids had.

“I think it’s beautiful here too, I told you all about how much that I love the bay, but it’s something more than that,” Jimin said to break their silence. “Growing up, I used to wanna get as far away as I could from this place, because I wanted to get away from my dad and his abuse. But now that I’m a little older, I feel like I was wrong to wanna get away from the city. Seoul, Kowloon - they’re great and all, but they don’t feel right to me. The more I start to…to accept and love myself, the more I love this city too. It’s funny.”
“You grew up in a bad place, darling, it makes sense that you’d wanna get away from it like that,” Yoongi said in a soft voice. “Running away as far as you can seems like the only thing to do when you’re a kid, right? I, uh, I used to wanna run away too, but I couldn’t. I lived in a big home with even bigger walls and private security all over the place. The one time I did run away was moving outta that fucking mansion, and all that I did was move across a couple of roads. I can’t get away from my daddy’s shadow even now, so, I still don’t feel like I’ve ran away far enough yet.”

Yoongi reached down to sink his fingers into the sand, seizing a tight handful and feeling the gritty particles against his skin. He lifted his hand up to look at it, watching the grains slipping through the cracks between his fingers to sift down onto the sand with a soft rustling noise.

“Running away only solves half of the problem, right?” his boyfriend suggested. “We still need to recover, no matter what, and I think that we’re doing that just fine, baby boy.”

“Yeah?” he asked in a quiet voice, as he knocked sand off his palm onto the blanket. “You think so?”

“I feel like I’m recovering when we talk like this, when I find out that I’m not alone or lonely anymore,” Jimin admitted, as he lifted his cheek up off his shoulder and he planted his chin in place instead. “What does it feel like for you, Yoongi?”

“I feel like a kid all over again,” Yoongi replied, as he finished dusting sand off his palm. “But this time ’round, I’m learning and understanding, not running away and hiding.”

“Good, don’t run away and hide,” Jimin whispered, as he found his hand underneath the blanket and he took hold of it. “Run away with me instead, baby boy.”

Rather than leave the beach, they stayed on the sand for awhile longer: wrapped in the blanket sharing body heat and soft touches and kisses. Yoongi felt the horrible chill of the ocean finally ebbing away, his skin dry and no longer numb from the cold water thanks to Jimin’s warm body and softly kneading fingers. The distant sound of ferry horns rolled in from the bay, mingling with the faded sound of traffic coming from the roads close to the beach and the sweet gasps for breath from his boyfriend as he cradled him in his arms and just held onto him for awhile.

When it was finally time to leave, they got dressed and they retrieved all of their belongings; Jimin dumping the empty beer bottles and cardboard ring into a large dumpster right on the edge of the lot.
On the drive to get back to Namjoon’s home, Yoongi noticed that Jimin had fallen rather quiet. When he spared quick glances between the front window and him, he saw that he had his arms folded on the window rest and that he was lightly moving one hand to push against the wind resistance. His expression was that of serene comfort: his eyes half-lidded, his lips turned up softly at the corners and his back curved beautifully to allow him to slouch against the door. He didn’t look tired, not at all, but rather relaxed and content, and he found that he felt the exact same way.

Today, Yoongi hadn’t expected that he would feel this good. After racing across the city to get to his boyfriend in a rushed and slightly panicked state, he had thought that he might just have stayed in bed with him to enjoy the silence between them until that nervous moment had passed and he had felt like he could breathe again. Yet, he had spent the entire day laughing and smiling, joking and chasing pleasure without much rest or silence at all - and it felt good. It felt normal, like what relationships were supposed to feel like; a constant source of excitement and fun mixed in with deep and tender emotional bonding.

Yoongi couldn’t recall feeling this good for this long for years now, since he had been a young teenager, in fact.

Upon returning back to Haight-Ashbury just half an hour later and entering the house, they discovered that Namjoon had clearly left to go out dealing for the night. That was a sign that the bed was available for them to use, and that they didn’t need to worry about disturbing the young dealer with their antics.

Before entering the bedroom, they went into the bathroom so that they could get cleaned up: washing the sand and seawater from their hair and the light creases in their skin. The shower water was delightfully hot, chasing away any lingering hints of cold from their bones and flooding their bodies with heat. Jimin kissed at his wet neck and shoulders, his back against the glass partition and his hands roaming down his back as if he was tracing the lines of his tattoo with his fingertips.

Curling up in the small bed with Jimin, Yoongi found that he was coming down from his high so that he was exhausted. His body felt weak and heavy, and so he slipped his arm under his pillow and he settled down ready for sleep.

“Yoongi?”

Jimin’s voice broke the silence, a whisper that seemed so much louder in the quiet room. Even with the constant faded sound of traffic and sirens echoing through the gap in the window, it cut through the white noise static to make Yoongi stop drifting in that wonderful space between consciousness and slumber.
“Mmm?”

“I was just thinking about what you said before, about change and all of that and—” Jimin let out a rather embarrassed and drunken sounding laugh against his shoulder blade, “and gay marriage, and I thought of something funny.”

“Mmm, what’d you think ‘bout?” Yoongi asked him in a sleepy mumble, struggling to open his eyelids.

“I was gonna joke about us getting married, if we’re still alive by then,” his boyfriend said, before snorting hard and wriggling under the covers to bump their knees together.

“Maybe, it’ll happen when we’re…we’re both old men?” he joked in reply. “When we’re both old and fat?”

This made Jimin giggle against his shoulder again, which was a sign that his boyfriend really wasn’t going to end up falling asleep any time soon. It left Yoongi with no choice but to roll onto his back and then his side, so that he could face him and he could slip his arm around his waist.

“You’ll have to marry me then, darling, you’ll be too old for the bathhouses,” Yoongi added with a lazy smile. “Go to sleep, Jimin. Stop thinking ‘bout all of that, mmm? I gotta be awake early for work, I can’t spend all night talking like this, even though I wanna.”

“It’d be nice, I think,” Jimin said in a soft voice. “It’d be nice having something…stable. It’s so nice having a boyfriend already, I can’t imagine having a-a husband.”

Jemin laughed at this again, still very much coming down from the marijuana and seemingly unable to control the random bursts of giggles. The beer most certainly hadn’t help, for his cheeks were still flushed from the combination and the hot shower water.

Yoongi reached up fix a lock of drying hair back behind his ear for him, feeling some sand still clinging to the tousled lengths that hadn’t fully washed free in the shower.

“I love you, Jimin,” he whispered.
“I love you more, baby boy,” the younger man said after a burst of giggles, finally settling down on the mattress to stop his frantic wriggling. “Sweet dreams.”

“They’ll be sweet if you’re in ‘em,” Yoongi said, as he moved to press his lips against his in a chaste kiss. “Dream ‘bout that change, mmm? Dream ‘bout a better world or something, darling.”

“I’ve already got a better world, now that you’re in it,” Jimin whispered, his feet bumping against his underneath the covers.

24th September, 1984, 1:07am: Pacific Heights, San Francisco, United States of America

“Master Jung.”

Hoseok was jolted out of his hazy daydream by the sound of someone calling his name. He blinked rapidly for a few seconds, staring down at the sight in front of him to see that his lower legs were in the pool; his black pinstriped trousers having been rolled up to his knees so that they wouldn’t get soaked. He was sitting on the edge of the pool, an empty wine glass in hand and his mind so completely blank that he couldn’t seem to recall what he was even doing outside.

“Huh…” Hoseok breathed out, furrowing his brow as he lifted his gaze to look across the pool.

There were dozens of women currently flocked around the pool: standing in small groups in bikinis or tiny dresses with glasses in hand, lounged on the deck chairs or even floating in the pool in various states of undress. He could see men too, plenty of middle-aged and old rich men in boring suits that were ogling and shamelessly fondling his darlings as they no doubt negotiated deals with them; some pimp lingering around not too far away. The sound of constant conversation and pounding music from behind him made him realise that there was a business party going on in his mansion. That wasn’t at all a surprise, why it was just another normal night for him.

Hoseok must have left his mansion to sit out here in the cool air, to breathe it in and soak his feet in the pool. He found the pool highly calming, but he usually didn’t find himself drawn to it during a
party. Not when there was some rich young businessman that might just be eyeing up one of his male darlings that caught his eye and pulled him in; not when there was the potential for threesomes or more that he would be too high to even recall the following morning, when he found himself waking up with underwear still tangled up in his covers and an aching head and loose stomach.

Yet he had ended up sitting by his pool for some reason, and Hoseok really couldn’t figure out why. Maybe the noise had gotten too much, maybe he had been annoyed by something and he had wandered off in a huff only to space out as a result of too much wine and champagne and a couple of colourful pills.

Hoseok turned so that he could look over his shoulder, following the call to see that one of his men was heading straight for him. He recognised him through the sea of scantily-clad bodies as Wang, one of his more favoured bodyguards of choice at his parties and when he was out on the streets without a ‘chaperone’ like Yoongi or his sisters. He was a tall and wide man with a shaven head and facial hair, a neck tattoo peeking out from the collar of his white shirt.

“Phone call for you, Master Jung. It’s your father, he needs to speak with you,” Wang instructed, coming to a stop just several feet away from him and folding his hands across his stomach.

“Oh, what did I do now?” Hoseok asked jokingly, holding his free hand out to him so that his bodyguard could help him to his feet.

Wang moved to do so, taking hold of his thin wrist with his rather large and meaty hand so that he could drag him up to his feet.

Hoseok managed to get up without stumbling, his wet feet not sliding on the granite as he did so, and then he crossed the patio to get into his mansion.

The kitchen was crowded because of the assortment of food platters placed here and there around the large area. There were silver serving trays on hired catering trolleys that were covered in amuse-bouche and hors d’œuvre: canapés, slivers of charcuterie and other smoked and cured meats, devilled eggs with little spatterings of caviar on top. The food and the wealth of champagne and wine flowing like water was also what drew a lot of the men into the kitchen, along with the drugs - though they were only supposed to be purchased for later consumption and not snorted or swallowed. His darlings had already been tanked up before the party, tripping on MDMA and tranquillisers so that they were so happy to please with their big dopey smiles and hollow glassy eyes.

Hoseok had a strict anti-drugs policy towards his business clients when it came to parties in his home. He didn’t want anyone getting too hot under the collar and smashing shit up or getting violent
towards his men or darlings. They were his best darlings, after all, the ones that brought in a high price because they had no visible flaws: track marks, scars, bad teeth and such. He couldn’t have a coked-up executive producer smashing a glass across one of their beautiful faces because someone said something that had pissed him off, and so drugs were completely off-limits in these particular business parties.

But his regular parties?

Well, they were something different.

As Hoseok crossed the kitchen to get to the phone, a drinks server made a move to fill up his glass for him. He declined it with a wave of the wrist, just because it wasn’t wise to down another glass when he didn’t know why his father was calling. He picked up the receiver, moving to bring it to his ear as he leaned against the wall with a weary sigh.

“Yes, hello? Daddy, what are you phoning me for, hmm?” he hummed down the line, placing his empty glass aside on the counter so that he could fiddle with the kinked cord instead.

Hoseok ran his eyes across the floor as he did so, tracking a particularly attractive blonde darling as she walked across the floor and slipped through a gap in a crowd: her heels clicking on the marble and her bare breasts and buttocks softly jiggling free from the confines of her tiny denim shorts, just like how her curled hair bounced around her tanned shoulders. He saw that he wasn’t the only one that was tracking her, for she attracted a great deal of attention from a lot of the men in the kitchen.

A quick glance at the staircase to his left showed him that several of his bodyguards were standing there like sentinels. They were there to stop anyone from going upstairs to use his guest rooms and bedroom for transactions or to try and sneak some drugs into their systems. If they needed to use the bathroom, they were patted down for drugs and escorted up to the room by one of the men, just to be certain.

“Can you come home, son, I need to see you about something important,” his father said in reply.

Of all the things that Hoseok had expected his father to say to him, it had most certainly not been something like that. His reply caught him by complete surprise, made him pause in the act of turning to glance over at the main-area and tighten his hold on the receiver.

“Something important? Is everything OK, daddy? With mother and the girls?” he asked, feeling his
fingers tugging at the cord restlessly at the thought that it might be something personally important.

“Yes, everything’s fine in that regard, son. Don’t worry about that, it’s related to business, very important business.”

Hoseok let his breath out at this in a heavy sigh, closing his eyes for a moment as he stopped playing with the phone cord. At least his family were fine, so he didn’t need to work himself up into his usual hysteric at the thought of one of them getting hurt whilst he had been drunk at some stupid party like always.

“I really can’t stress the importance enough, Hoseok. But I really need you to come back to the family home tonight - within the hour, if possible.”

Hoseok could detect something in his father’s voice that revealed that he really did need to see him as soon as possible. It wasn’t nerves, not exactly, but there was an edge to his tone that made him sound a little bit concerned, worried even. That wasn’t a good sign, for his father was notoriously cool and collected when it came to business - seeing as he was the first leftenant that spent more time handling financial and legal matters than anything else.

“I can leave now, it should only take me ten…fifteen minutes to get to you, if the traffic’s bad,” Hoseok replied, checking his watch to see that it was just after 1am.

“Please, the sooner, the better.”

Hoseok ended the phone call and he dropped the receiver in the wall cradle. Then he bent forward to fix his trousers, unfolding them back down to his ankles and seeing that the material wasn’t too badly creased as a result. Then he straightened up to fix his shirt, finding that the buttons were mostly open that it was free from the waistband of his trousers. The sheer black silken fabric was covered in silver hints of glitter. It was the kind of ridiculously camp and extravagant shirt that Yoongi would scoff at and yet probably secretly wish to wear without worrying that he looked ‘gay’ in front of businessmen - whatever that was supposed to mean.

“Wang, make sure that no one touches a thing,” Hoseok instructed, as he finished buttoning up his shirt and he secured it down the waistband of his trousers. “If they try and steal anything, cut their fucking fingers off. That’s a real threat, not a joke.”

“Yes, Master Jung,” Wang replied with a slow nod.
“Also, make sure no one starts doing lines in the garden again. I don’t need that shit,” he added as an afterthought.

Hoseok glanced around the kitchen rapidly, hoping to spot a familiar thick and glossy head of Afro curls nestled away in the crowd of businessmen and darlings, as it was rather hard to not spot the woman considering her height when a pair of towering platform heels were taken into account.

“Chrissy?! Chrissy?!” he called, wondering if his voice would even be heard over the din of taking voices, pounding music and distant coquettish and flirtatious moans from somewhere within the mansion.

After a moment, Hoseok caught sight of her emerging through a small space in the busy kitchen crowd.

Chrissy wasn’t dressed scantily like the other darlings, for she was wearing a long and loose deep purple jumpsuit with a plunging neckline that revealed the swell of her ample bosom; a dangling pendant ensuring to catch the eye if her breasts weren’t attractive enough. She had matching violet eyeshadow on her eyelids, and a deep plum lip gloss that complimented her rich black skin tone.

Chrissy had been a popular darling not too long ago, a favourite amongst his rich clients. But then some bastard had chased her around the kitchen of his Hayes Valley mansion and had taken to her with a knife in the midst of a bad drugs freakout and had left rippling scars right down most of her stomach and thighs, which had rendered her unpalatable to most of the regulars. But Hoseok liked Chrissy in his own way, had liked her enough to see the man that had brutally attacked her suddenly go missing without warning, only for his battered body to be discovered in the rocky Marin Headlands across the bay a few days later.

That had been a real fun week for the police force, having one of their more lucrative private sponsors showing up brutally beaten to death in a rather…displeasing manner. In a way that had looked highly like gang activity to the press that had covered the story.

Chrissy might not be able to attract clients that well anymore, but she was perfectly suited to be a head bitch and keep all of his darlings nice and well-behaved. If that meant a little slap to the face here and there, if it meant threatening to have them dismembered if they started causing trouble or not earning enough cash, well, Hoseok would rather that she did it than him, and boy, was she good at it.

All of that pent-up rage from years of being a prostitute, all of the slaps and insults and threats, all of
the drugs and the abuse. Why, Chrissy was more than happy to skull-drag his darlings around to ensure that they followed her direct orders.

Power was a hell of a drug.

“Chrissy, keep an eye on my darlings for me; would you?” Hoseok requested, as he finished fixing up his shirt.

“Yes, Master Jung,” Chrissy said with a smile, her glossy lips parting to reveal white and straight teeth. “They’re being very well behaved tonight, I’ll be sure to keep them in check, just for you.”

“Good girl,” Hoseok said with a smile, reaching over to cup her cheek so that he could lean close and give her a quick peck on the cheek.

Chrissy laughed at this, a husky and sultry laugh that was highly familiar to his ears. Goddamn, Hoseok hated the bastard that had sliced her up like a fucking Thanksgiving turkey, but there was nothing to be done now, not when he had been put in the ground already. At least Chrissy sometimes got to brandish knives at unruly darlings and troublesome clients, which seemed to be highly cathartic for her.

Hoseok probably shouldn’t be driving right now, he knew that he shouldn’t because he was flying on a mixture of champagne and a cocktail of uppers and downers. Yet, he still left his mansion to enter the garage and climb behind the wheel of his car. It was only a ten minute drive, after all, so it was hardly like he was going to crash and kill someone.

After rolling his Porsche out onto the drive, Hoseok smoothly curved onto the gently sloping road to drive across the block.

As he drifted down the streets of Pacific Heights, which were filled with a steady stream of vehicles coming and going from district to district, but noticeably devoid of people out on the streets at this late night hour, Hoseok wondered why his father needed to see him about something business-related tonight. It might just been in regards to the ongoing Sacramento Snow situation, and he wanted to speak to him first before contacting Yoongi, but that seemed rather strange to him.

If anyone was important enough to be contacted about the drug crisis, it was Yoongi and not him. Hoseok wasn’t a dealer, though he had dealings with many suppliers across the city because of his pimps and darlings. He had great knowledge in regards to dens, high-ranked dealers and suppliers,
and he could provide assistance in tracking down men or information through his connections. But he still wasn’t Yoongi, with his district-wide webs of informants and spies out on the streets and his ridiculous memory, and so it would make no sense as to why his father would seek his advice on anything to do with Sacramento Snow.

But what else could it possibly be?

Hoseok couldn’t think of a single thing that his father had been looking into that would ever mean that he needed to contact him, for he was more than capable of running his own business without added assistance. No, he was pretty certain that it was related to that stupid drug in some way, and it was enough to make him shift in his seat in a fidgeting manner as he eyed the red light in front of him.

It took Hoseok roughly ten minutes to get to Presidio Heights, mostly driving along Jackson Street, which was packed with a ridiculous amount of nightly traffic. As he was pulling his car up at the road right outside of his family home, he saw that Miyoung was already outside waiting for him, having opened the gate to allow him inside of the home. She was wrapped up in a sleeping gown and a blanket to keep her warm, her hair pulled in a thick plait that dangled down past her ribs.

On the quick walk to cross the sidewalk and get onto the paved front path, Hoseok noticed that there was another car parked just a few feet in front of his own - a black Mercedes-Benz, from what he could discern.

Hoseok considered remarking on the vehicle to Miyoung, to ask her if anyone else was inside of the house, but he decided not to. Upon stepping inside of the home and slipping out of his loafers, she directed him upstairs and to his father’s study, where he was waiting on his arrival. Miyoung spoke in a very quiet voice, her expression that of complete seriousness.

It was this that finally made him feel a hint of nervousness, as he slipped into his house slippers and he moved to go up the staircase. He ran his palm over the metal banister rail as he did so, his slippers softly slapping on the wooden steps in an even rhythm.

Hoseok saw that his mother and two older sisters were currently awake and not in their rooms, Eunseok and Miseok huddled together along the long stretch of hallway in silk nightgowns; their hair hanging loose around their shoulders as they whispered to each other behind their manicured fingers. His mother was lingering close to his father’s office in her own nightgown and robe, her arms folded across her chest. Her expression was hard to read, but it was enough to make him pause on the top step and glance between the three of them.
Something was wrong, that much was abundantly clear. Something was very wrong, and he didn’t like this one bit.

“Oh, Hoseok, thank goodness you’re here,” his mother sighed in relief. “Quickly now, don’t keep them both waiting, honey.”

Them, Hoseok noted that she had said ‘them’ and not ‘him’.

“And you should go to sleep, queens need plenty of beauty sleep,” Hoseok remarked, giving his mother a quick kiss on her hairline. “You two too, go back to sleep.”

At this, Eunseok and Miseok moved to go back into their own bedrooms, softly closing their doors so that he was left in the hallway with his mother for a moment. He thought about asking her what was the matter, what was going on right now, but he knew that it would just be for the best to enter his father’s office and talk to him instead. He doubted that she would really know, on account of his father trying to shelter her away from most everything gang-related, but accounting and real estate ventures.

As he pushed the door open, Hoseok detected the heavy and pungent scent of cigar smoke lingering on the air. His father smoked just like most men that he knew and so the scent wasn’t at all confusing to him. It was rather the notes that he detected that were unusual, for they didn’t smell like the usual cigars that his father smoked, not even remotely. He had grown up inhaling the scent from his clothing and hands when he had picked him up and had rustled at his hair, and this wasn’t right at all.

Upon stepping inside of the office, Hoseok saw that his father was currently sitting at his desk, and there was someone else standing across the room. The man was turned away from him, his hands folded behind him as he seemingly observed the many framed photographs that were displayed on a large display cabinet in his father’s office. He didn’t need to see his face to know who he was, because the man had such a powerful and instantly recognisable aura around him.

Hoseok was stunned speechless to see the sight of Yoongi’s father standing in the office room.

Father Taesoo Min was fully dressed, his suit perfectly pressed and not at all wrinkled. His hair was slicked in place neatly, his entire appearance showing that he hadn’t been woken up in a rush like his family had, or he had been drinking and partying like him. As he stared at him, Taesoo turned on the slight heel of his calfskin shoes so that he could look back at him. There was a fat cigar perched right between his moustached lips, a thick plume of smoke wafting up that he squinted through to hold his gaze. His rounded eyes were heavily wrinkled at the corners from the squinting, the lines much more obvious than usual in his tanned skin.
“Good evening, Father Min, daddy.” Hoseok greeted, moving to close the office door behind him so that they could talk privately. He leaned back against it for a moment, finding that his legs weren’t the most steady underneath him.

“Good evening, Hoseok. It’s good to see that one of our sons is reliable,” Taesoo remarked, reaching up to pull his cigar free so that he could talk properly.

“Is everything OK?” he asked in a quiet voice, taking several steps to draw closer to his father’s desk so that he could appear calm and collected.

In reality, his heart was starting to skip unevenly in his chest, a funny cold wave of discomfort running through his body.

Did this have something to do with Yoongi? Was that remark something to do with him directly, or was it just the usual biting insult that he liked to spit about his son just to make a show of him in front of associates and make him feel that little bit more disgusting about himself.

“Son, do you have any idea as to where Yoongi might be right now? His last known whereabouts, should you not know his current location?” his father asked in a quiet voice, shifting in his wingback chair so that he could tent his fingers underneath his chin.

“Yoongi?” Hoseok repeated, reaching up to find his necklace chain so that he could fiddle with it and pull at the thin silver links. “You’re looking for Yoongi? Oh, I don’t know, Father Min, I thought that he was at his home like usual. He doesn’t go out at night, not unless it’s with me or business associates for evening dinners.”

Could Taesoo see the lie on his face? Probably, but he liked to think that he had long mastered the art of bullshitting well enough to hide the fact that he was lying through his teeth. But the fact of the matter remained - you can’t bullshit a bullshitter, and Father Min was a whole new playing field to what he was used to.

If Yoongi wasn’t home and he wasn’t with him, then that meant that he must have been with that so-called pretty boy mule of his. Maybe, they were out having dinner on a date and being all cutesy, maybe, they were holed up in some hotel hardcore fucking each other silly - he knew that that was what he would be doing with a sweet piece of ass like that. Yoongi, however, was probably still wanking off under the covers like a virgin and treating the mule like some sweet little prince; he knew his best friend far too well.
Hoseok knew that he couldn’t talk about any of this with them, no matter how urgent that the matter might just be. He wasn’t going to reveal the fact that Yoongi was smitten with a young, poor mule, that he might just have entered his first attempt at a serious gay relationship with him under the constantly watching and judging radar of his parents. It was wrong to reveal such private matters, especially when it would mean discussing Yoongi’s homosexuality with his homophobic father. He wouldn’t even tell his own father about the mule, because he was keeping it secret and safe just like he had promised Yoongi.

“Is he missing? Is everything alright with Yoongi?” Hoseok asked, hoping to distract away from his statement about not knowing where he was (even when that was still technically the truth). “He’s not in danger right now, is he?”

“Dukwon Lee was found dead in his home this evening, over in Glen Park,” Taesoo declared, enunciating every single word crisply just to make sure that he heard him loud and clear.

“…Dukwon Lee? What, the speedball dealer?” Hoseok asked in shock, turning away from him to look at his father - wide-eyed with his mouth agape.

“Suspected speedball dealer,” his father corrected in a quiet voice, just to be pedantic.

“Wait, he’s dead? How?”

“He was shot, shot multiple times, in fact,” Taesoo explained, breathing out a lungful of cigar smoke in his direction; pungent and unpleasant. “Upon hearing the news, I found myself unable to reach Yoongi in his mansion through his private landline. Funny that should happen, seeing as I refused to let him have jurisdiction in Bernal Heights…”

Hoseok thought this over for a moment, coming to the rapid conclusion that Taesoo was openly declaring that his son might just have been involved in this murder; that he might just have murdered Lee, in fact. The mere suggestion was enough to make him almost gasp, but he forced himself to swallow the sound just in case it sounded suspicious.

“Yoongi didn’t kill Lee, Father Min, if that’s what you’re suggesting,” Hoseok argued rather boldly, just because he knew that his friend hadn’t done such a thing. “Yoongi was leaving my daddy to sort out business negotiations over Sacramento Snow, specifically with Lee over Kwon because of Bernal Heights being so close to his jurisdiction. He wanted to stop the flow from getting into his streets as fast as possible, and brokering a deal with Lee seemed to be the best way to get directly to
“It’s true,” his father said, lifting his gaze up to look at Taesoo. “I was still very much attempting to…negotiate with Lee, he was proving to be quite troublesome, I’ll profess.”

“Yoongi wouldn’t kill Lee, he wouldn’t even attempt to kill him, not without telling me first. He told me about Choi, he needed to tell me about Choi, because I had to get info on the dealer for him through my connections to brown dens up in Chinatown and Nob Hill,” Hoseok continued, glancing between the two men rapidly as he did so. “Lee’s so off his radar right now, believe me.”

Hoseok wasn’t going to tell them both that Yoongi had once told him that as soon as he had what he needed from Lee and Kwon, he had promised to kill them both for being snakes. No, he was going to keep that particular little fact to himself and not breathe a single word about his threats to murder them, or just simply have them killed by one of his enforcers to save him the trouble.

God, he needed a Valium right now.

“Hajoon, what’s this talk about…negotiating with Lee? Negotiating with what exactly?” Taesoo asked, turning away from him to look down at his father.

Hoseok was relieved, because it meant that he didn’t need to awkwardly squirm under his powerful gaze for a moment.

“I looked into some things on behalf of Yoongi, Taesoo,” his father explained, folding his hands primly on the desk so that he could look up at him. “As a result of some concerning decreases in profit, I calculated that there could be around 1.8 percent decrease in monthly profits as a result of the drug that he was tracking down - this ‘Sacramento Snow’ variation of speedball. On his request, I looked into several dealers in the aims of finding the source of the drug in multiple districts, some of which weren’t even Yoongi’s jurisdiction. In short, I was willing to look into assisting Yoongi in tracking down the source of the drug, absorbing it, and eliminating our competitors through the deal.”

His father stopped talking at this, holding the other man’s gaze with a great amount of confidence that showed that he wasn’t worried about telling him about all of this. He had no need to be worried, after all, for his powerful position in the gang meant that he was freely able to pursue such things without Taesoo’s explicit permission.
But Hoseok still felt anxious just discussing the topic, because he knew that he and Yoongi were bordering on being troublesome as a result of their own relentless pursuing of men and answers. Seunghyun Choi had been one such difficult matter that he knew had pissed off Father Min, and he was hoping that their plans at absorbing the brand weren’t something that would anger him that little bit more.

“Yoongi is a very…volatile boy, a child, sometimes,” Taesoo said in a soft voice, breaking the temporary silence of the office. “He breaks things when he’s angry, he’s prone to…unpleasantly unstable behaviour when confronted by an issue that angers or upsets him. Why, he destroyed the entrance doors of Presidio Golf Course with an iron that very morning that I told him that I didn’t want him meddling in other districts.”

“I’m aware of Yoongi’s sometimes…unstable mental processes, Taesoo,” Hajoon remarked in a quiet voice, rolling his eyes to look at him and silently telling him to hold his tongue. “What can I say, the boy has some severe emotional issues. But I’ve no doubt in my mind that Yoongi didn’t murder Dukwon Lee because it’s so…uncharacteristic of him. He never acts outside of his jurisdiction, and if he had wanted Lee dead, he would have murdered him long before asking for my assistance on the matter. Involving me in everything, that adds another person into the ongoing crisis that would be able to accuse him of such an act. That’s sloppy, and Yoongi is far from sloppy in regards to business. Taesoo, I know that it seems like he might have done so, but I honestly believe that you need to not focus on Yoongi’s personal behaviour, and focus on his professional behaviour instead.”

“Yoongi’s professional behaviour resulted in him murdering Seunghyun Choi, a slight that was irritating at first, but has since balanced out,” Taesoo remarked, holding the cigar close to his lips but making no move to take a pull off the end. “I wouldn’t find it hard to believe that he would do it again in a moment of madness…”

“Choi was in his jurisdiction, Yoongi acted in a fashion that he believed was correct - whether or not that was the case,” his father pointed out, shifting to fold his arm and cup his cheek in his hand. “This murder - Dukwon Lee? Not his jurisdiction, not at all expected behaviour.”

At this, the office fell silent and Hoseok could only look between the two men slowly and wait to see what they would say. He didn’t want to break the silence first, just because he had no clue what he could possible say that would help with the current problem. He might just be aware of Yoongi’s ‘unstable’ behaviour, but it seemed that Father Min didn’t want to address the fact that his constant bullying, demeaning, and attacks on his son was the reason why Yoongi was prone to violent outbursts; both towards men that angered him, and his own physical and mental self. Therefore, he thought it would be for the best to hold his tongue and not talk about it.

The one thing that Hoseok did know was that Yoongi wasn’t at home, not because he had tracked down Dukwon Lee and had planted a dozen bullets in him, but because he was with his secret lover.
“Hajoon, I’ll trust you to follow up on the issue,” Taesoo said, slowly moving so that he could get to the office door. “Hoseok, if you have contact with my son tomorrow, make sure to let him know that if he was responsible for this murder, I will find out and I will see that he’s punished for it. Removing a district from his jurisdiction would be ample enough punishment, considering how desperately he wants to gain more.”

At this bold statement, Taesoo moved to exit the office and leave the both of them in the room.

Hoseok listened to him departing the home, his footsteps softly thumping on the stairs, and then he turned to look at his father. For a few seconds, neither of them could speak, and it was just as he was about to open his mouth and speak that his father talked right over him.

“Where is he?” he asked in a weary voice, reaching up to massage at his brow in a way that seemed to hint that he had a headache.

“Daddy, I told you, I don’t know,” Hoseok mumbled in reply, the innocent act about as believable as a porn star’s orgasm. “I thought that he was at home, drinking himself to sleep like always, and-”

“Son, I’m not buying that act for a second,” he spoke over him, moving to get to his feet so that he could retrieve a decanter of scotch from across the office. He moved to get back to his desk, pouring a liberal three fingers into a glass because he clearly needed a hard drink after that particular conversation. “You and Yoongi, thick as thieves. You know where he is, you’re just pretending that you don’t. Why?”

“Daddy…” Hoseok whined, dropping his gaze to look down at his slippered feet so that he could stub them against the carpeted flooring.

“Do you know about this? Was he involved? I very much find it hard to believe, Hoseok, but I’ve been proven wrong before,” his father said unflinchingly, each question as relentless as the last and making him almost squirm under his gaze. “Stop it with the little boy act, son. Stop it, please.”

“Daddy, I know that he didn’t do it. I’m so certain that he didn’t, but I don’t know where he is exactly.” Hoseok replied, folding his arms across his chest and wandering across the office so that he didn’t have to hold his father’s gaze. “That’s all I’m going to say, OK?”

“What does that mean, son?” he asked, hovering his glass in front of his face.
“I know something…private about Yoongi, daddy,” he said in a soft voice. “I don’t want to talk about it, I don’t have the right to. I promised to not talk about it with anyone, because it’s something incredibly personal, and I know that doing so could ruin it for him.”

Hoseok glanced over at his father to see that he was mulling this over, a sip of scotch on his tongue that he slowly swallowed.

Was he slowly figuring out that he was talking about Yoongi’s sex life; on account of the fact that his parents were more than aware of his homosexuality? Was he coming to the conclusion that he might just be alluding to him having a lover, or at least a fancy for another man that he might be visiting secretly, and that revealing this information to him might mean that Father Min would find out and potentially destroy it on him?

“You’re certain that he had nothing to do with this murder?”

Hoseok made a soft noise in agreement at this rather than speak, turning away from the display cabinet to look at him.

“Alright, thank you, Hoseok. You may leave, if you wish,” his father said in a weary voice, as he lowered himself back down into his armchair.

Hoseok left the office without another word on the matter, hastily going down the stairs so that he could exchange his slippers for his loafers and exit the home. He climbed back into his car, pulling away from the curb and doing a sharp u-turn so that he could drive back to his mansion.

As he rolled up the hilly slopes of Pacific Heights and he passed Yoongi’s mansion, Hoseok turned his head to eye it. He saw that the house was empty, judging from the lack of lights that were turned on inside of it, and the sight made him sigh under his breath.

“Goddamn, Gigi, you better be with your pretty boy toy right now…”
It was the curt sound of a series of knocks on the front door cutting through the air that suddenly woke him up. Rather than a constant hard bang, or even the ringing doorbell echoing musically, it was little more than a sharp rat-a-tat on the wood.

Jimin jerked with a surprised grunt, lifting his head up off the cushion as he did so. He dropped himself back down onto the sofa again a mere second later, reaching up with one hand so that he could rub at his eyelids and let out a weary whine because he felt a sudden wave of disorientation washing over him.

It didn’t feel like Jimin was in bed right now, because whatever was underneath him wasn’t as comfortable as the shared mattress was. The current brightness in the room was much stronger than the usual level of sunlight that came in through the small bedroom window too, and so that made him think that he wasn’t in the bedroom right now.

But if he wasn’t in his bed, where could he possibly be?

When Jimin turned his head to look across the room, he discovered that he was in the living-room. That explained the brightness, as there were strong beams of sunlight streaming in through the bay window behind him; illuminating the wooden flooring with a rich and golden hue. It meant that he was lying on the sofa, which was all bust-up and not as comfortable as Namjoon’s bed (though it was still nice to lounge on every now and again for naps).

Across the living-room, Jimin saw that the television was turned on with the Atari 5200 SuperSystem hooked up to it. There was currently a black game over screen on display, with a ‘continue’ and ‘quit’ option flashing up every few seconds to try and tempt him into picking up the joystick to resume playing. He studied it for a moment as he tried to figure out what was going on.

Clearly, Jimin had woken up at some point in the morning, he had gotten a shower, and had then stumbled downstairs to have some breakfast. He could see the remains of it on the coffee table right in front of him - half-eaten and now cold Pop Tarts with an empty glass to the side; nothing more than dregs of milk at the very bottom. He must have powered up the television and games-console at
some point out of boredom, only to have fallen asleep on the sofa whilst playing *Mario Bros.* in an attempt at beating Namjoon’s ridiculous high score.

Judging from the rather dismissal score still visible at the top of the darkened screen, Jimin hadn’t even gotten close to his score. One of the stupid fireballs had probably hit him again, flying out of nowhere at the speed of light; or maybe, it had been one of the spikey turtle-things, which he had landed on top of so that his character had taken a massive spike right up his overalls-clad ass.

Jimin suddenly recalled that someone had just knocked on the front door, and yet here he was - lying on the sofa, staring at the television with drool running down his chin and his mind completely blank of thoughts. He really should answer it in case it was important, even when the chances were that it probably wasn’t.

Jimin dragged himself off the sofa, stumbling out of the living-room so that he could go down the hallway and answer the front door. He had no clue at all who would even be knocking at this current time of day, and he could only hope that it wasn’t some stupid salesperson or scammer that he was going to have to shut the door on. He fumbled with the double lock system so that he could slide the chain back and twist the mechanism, before dragging the door back. He squinted at the sudden beam of sunlight that hit him right in the face.

There was a young-looking Asian man standing on the step, rakishly thin with black hair and a handsome face that Jimin had never seen before. There was no parcel in his hand to signal that he was bringing a delivery, no catalogue or clipboard present that meant that he was a salesperson or anything like that. No, the only thing in his hand was a pair of sunglasses that looked to be Ray-Bans *Wayfarer*, judging from the unmistakable design of the frames.

The first thing about the stranger that caught Jimin’s eye was his face, of course, seeing as they were more-or-less the same height, save for a couple of inches and their current close proximity. The other man had his black hair parted ever so slightly at the centre to reveal his forehead and most of his strong eyebrows, as the loose locks of hair across his brow were short, rather than long and tousled like his own hair. He had large eyes with defined eyelid creases, a long and pointed nose with a ridiculously straight bridge, and his upper lip had a freckle on it that was just like a beauty spot. His dark hair contrasted well against his tanned skin, for he looked to spend a great deal of time sunbathing in his garden pool or mansion balcony.

It was only after studying his face that Jimin noticed his clothing, and so he dropped his gaze to quickly examine his outfit.

The stranger was wearing a black turtleneck that clung to his svelte frame, the sleeves rolled up his forearms ever so slightly. There was a silver necklace chain dangling around his neck, free from the confines of the roll of black wool, and he had paired the turtleneck with a pair of blinding white
trousers. A glance down at his feet showed him fancy-looking black suede pumps that had tassels on
the front and a slight heel on the back.

Nice clothing, possibly designer and clearly worth a good deal of money - which just added to the
mystery of why the stranger was here today.

Parked on the curb right outside of the house, Jimin could see a sleek black car that he didn’t know
the exact model of, but he thought might just be a Porsche judging from the company emblem on the
hood. It was an expensive-looking car for an expensive-looking man, and that didn’t help alleviate
his momentary confusion in the slightest.

What was an obviously rich guy like this doing on the front step? Was he here for Namjoon,
perhaps? Was he a business associate or supplier like Kim, or was he just someone that he happened
to know? But if he was here for Namjoon, surely he would have met him in the past, even if only
casually?

No, Jimin was completely confused, and all that he could do was roll his gaze away from the
Porsche to look at the stranger again.

“Um, hello?” Jimin mumbled, reaching up to run his fingers through his hair to brush it back out of
his eyes. “Can I help you? Are you here to see Namjoon, maybe? For business?”

“Oh, Yoongi, you sly dog you…” the stranger said in a quiet voice, as he folded his arms across his
thin chest and he reached up to play with his silver necklace chain. “You just had to find a total babe,
didn’t you?”

“Huh?” Jimin hummed, staring at the other man openly because he had just suddenly dropped
Yoongi’s name into their conversation. “A total babe? Yoongi, what about Yoon-“

“Let me get a good look at you,” he declared, as he moved to grab at his head without a hint of
reservation and he caught Jimin by complete surprise.

The man’s grip was firm, but not painfully tight as he grabbed hold of his chin and he turned his
head this way and that. Jimin allowed him to do so, because he was so clueless as to what was going
on that he didn’t know what he was really supposed to do in this situation. Sure, grabbing hold of his
face wasn’t exactly a normal greeting, all things considered, but he detected no obvious sense of
threat coming from the stranger that he should be concerned about.
“Hmm, he’s got great taste, I’ll give him that,” he remarked with a wide smile that revealed many perfect teeth, as he let go of his chin at last. “A pretty boy, indeed.”

“Huh? Pretty boy? Did…did Yoongi call me a pretty boy?” Jimin asked in shock, not because of the nickname itself, but for a completely different reason.

If Yoongi had called him ‘a pretty boy’ then that meant that he had told the other man about him at some point. That was a sign that he had been talking about him to people other than Jungkook, and that he had grown much more confident in talking about their relationship to a degree.

It was enough to make Jimin’s lips curl up at the corners in a soft smile as he shifted to lean against the door frame.

This must be that friend of his that Yoongi had told him about, the one that he had had past sexual intimacy with as a young teenager; that seemed to have a thing for party drugs.

Jimin could easily understand why Yoongi had taken a fancy to him, because the other man was very handsome in a fascinating way. Yet, he had a feeling that Yoongi hadn’t been drawn to his physical attractiveness back then, but had rather sought intimacy from him because he had been his best friend and the only person that he had been able to turn to. When it came to his sexuality, especially back when he had been a teenager, Yoongi had told him that he had been so repressed that it made total sense that he would have turned to one of his only friends in his time of desperate need.

That showed a high level of trust, love, and understanding between the two of them - a potentially long history of friendship that he knew so little about right now.

If that was the case, Jimin could only hope that he and the other man got along well with one another. He didn’t want to meet Yoongi’s best friend, only to find that they were unable to stand each other, as that would be both awkward and unfortunate. If his boyfriend liked Namjoon and he seemed to get along quite well with him, and they were both awfully fond of Jungkook, then it would be a blessing if he could get along with Yoongi’s best friend too.

“He said that you were a pretty boy and that your lips were just…wow,” the other man added, giving him a smile that caused dimples to appear on his cheeks. “Goddamn, he was right, they are wow.”

Jimin let out a shy laugh at this, reaching up to cover his lips with his fingers in a rather flustered
attempt at hiding his embarrassment.

Yoongi thought that he was ‘a pretty boy’ and that his lips were ‘wow’, and these facts were going to keep a smile on his face for the whole day now.

Not only that, but Yoongi’s friend was saying such flattering things about him too. It was always nice when people complimented him and told him that he was handsome and that he had great features, especially if there was nothing inherently sexual behind their words. Sometimes, it just felt great to be told that he was attractive without it being followed up with a request for him to suck someone’s dick in a toilet stall.

“He just had to snatch up a babe like you before I could come along and entice you, ah!” the other man complained with a rather theatrical flair - a surprising level of campiness escaping him as he let go of his necklace and he reached up to jokingly nurse his brow in his hand. “I’m just going to have to accept defeat on this one, even if it stings. So, what’s Yoongi’s pretty boy called, hmm?”

“Jimin, Jimin Park,” Jimin said, holding his hand out to him in offering. “What about you?”

“Hoseok Jung - charmed,” he replied, taking hold of his hand to squeeze it, but not give it a firm shake like Yoongi had done so.

“Jung, wait, as in the Jung clan?” Jimin asked, dropping his hand back down to his side as he stared at the other man. “Are you being serious?”

“I’m never serious, but yes, as in the Jung clan,” Hoseok confirmed with a soft nod, reaching up to fix his sunglasses onto the top of his head. “Now, come on. We’ve got to go, Jimin, I’m taking you out for the day.”

“Go? Oh, um, but I’m not even dressed yet,” Jimin pointed out, dropping his gaze to stare down at his bare thighs and his exposed white briefs. Then he turned on his heel and he darted along the hallway, calling back over his shoulder as he did so. “Gimme a sec, I’ll be right back!”

“Be quick, I’ve got appointments to keep!” Hoseok called in return from the front step.

Jimin darted up the stairs as fast as he could manage without tripping up and injuring himself. He went along the hallway and into the bedroom to grab some clothes, seeing as he had already cleaned
up earlier in the morning before accidentally falling asleep on the sofa. He couldn’t actually remember doing so right now, but he could still smell the scent of lotion on his skin that meant that he clearly had gotten a shower.

After tugging his blue jeans on, Jimin dragged his borrowed striped tee-shirt off over his head so that he could wear one of his silk shirts instead - the black one with the embroidered koi fish on the front. He hastily knocked his hair back off his face, tugging the drawer open so that he could rummage through it until he felt the smooth silk against his fingertips and he pulled it free.

Jimin didn’t want to dress like he did so when he was muling, but he also didn’t want dress like some street kid either, on account of the fact that he didn’t really know where he was going right now. There was a chance that they weren’t going anywhere important, but he didn’t want to take that risk - because business was business, and there was no telling what Hoseok might require from him.

Jimin quickly tucked the ends of his silk shirt inside of his jeans, fastening them shut as he ran his eyes across the bedroom to locate his black leather loafers. He saw that they were on the floor by the windowsill where he had last kicked them off without a single care, and so he hastily retrieved them.

Namjoon was still deeply asleep right now, and so he decided to leave him in peace as he dropped onto the end of the bed to tug his loafers on and finish getting ready. There was very little need to wake him up, not after a night of hard work. He could always tell him about this when he got back home, like he had done so several times with all things related to Yoongi.

As soon as he was ready, Jimin raced out of the bedroom and back down the staircase so that he could leave the house; his shoe soles pounding loudly throughout the empty home. He stepped out onto the front step, pulling the door shut behind him and hearing the lock clicking a second later.

Hoseok had already went down the front steps whilst he had been waiting for him, and he saw him popping the back door open for them both.

So Jimin skipped down the steps to get to the vehicle, quickly crossing the sidewalk and dropping his head to duck inside. It crossed his mind that he hadn’t even asked Hoseok where they were going right now, but it didn’t seem like the right time to ask that question. Perhaps, when they were in the car and driving across the city, he should bring the topic up with him - just so that he wasn’t left in the dark until the very last moment.

As he climbed into the backseat, Jimin saw that there was a man sitting behind the wheel, a man that looked like a grade-A enforcer or maybe even a bodyguard. He was a big-looking man, beefy with a neck tattoo and an earpiece in place that might just be connected to a Walkie-talkie. In the rear-view
mirror, he saw nothing more than a pair of large sunglasses rather than his features, but he assumed him to have a very serious and menacing face.

Considering the fact that Hoseok was such an important member of Moon Tiger Mob, the son to the first lieutenant himself, it would be of no surprise at all to Jimin if he travelled around with bodyguards. That might not be the case, the other man might simply be a chauffeur, but he doubted that that was the case judging from his general appearance.

The fact that Yoongi didn’t use bodyguards might just be the unusual part, rather than having one present like Hoseok did so. But just because his boyfriend didn’t have any present when he was around, that didn’t mean that he never used them. In certain business transactions, Yoongi likely had at least one of his men or some enforcers present just for the sake of it - a nice hint of added security and threatening presence to make himself appear that little bit more powerful.

“This is a sweet ride, Hoseok,” Jimin said, as he settled in place on the plush cream leather window seat.

“A sweet ride”? Oh, Jimin, you sounded like a hippie just then,” Hoseok said, as he climbed into the backseat and he slammed the door shut behind him.

“Ah, I’ve got some hippie tendencies, but like I told Yoongi - I like money too much to be a hippie.”

This made Hoseok let out a sudden laugh, a rather infectious and funny-sounding laugh that Jimin thought that he could get used to hearing from him. It made him smile to himself as he pulled his seatbelt in place over his ribs, seeing that Hoseok made no move to fix his one in place.

“Hoseok, what exactly is happening right now?” Jimin asked him, just as the car pulled away from the curb again so that it could roll down the wide road. “Where are we going? What’s going on? I, um, I just climbed right into your car without even asking, and-”

“Do you do that often?” Hoseok asked, raising his eyebrows at him in a joking manner.

“I have a bad history with it, yeah,” Jimin retorted with a quick laugh, reaching up to rub at the back of his neck. “Has this got something to do with business?”

“It’s related to your new job role, yes,” the other man replied, as he lounged back in his seat.
comfortably; turning towards him so that he could rest his arm on the headrest. “Now, did Yoongi actually tell you what said new job entails, or…?”

“No, he mentioned it to me last week, but he said that he was still working over the specifics and that he would have to get back to me,” he rapidly explained. “I didn’t ask him any further, I just know that he said that it was related to drugs, and it’s because he doesn’t want me smuggling anything into Seoul right now after the recent floods - on account of the security around the military bases being on much higher alert than before.”

“What Yoongi wants is for you to run drugs to our most affluent clients across the city, Jimin,” Hoseok explained, shifting ever so slightly in his seat. “Now, we all know that you used to run to the suburban elite up in Pacific and Presidio Heights - housewives with a nose for coke, rich real estate men and whatever. But I’m not talking about that kind of affluent, sweetcheeks. By affluent I mean affluent - politicians, police sponsors, actors and models, fucking loaded engineers over in Silicon Valley with more money and gadgets falling out of their asses than a sci-fi film.”

“Seriously?” Jimin asked in complete shock, unable to curb his expression because he hadn’t expected this reply at all. “But, Hoseok, that’s a massive responsibility and I-”

“Are you kidding me?” the other man interrupted, before letting out another quick laugh. “Jimin, you’re used to smuggling drugs across international borders pass countless security checks; smuggling that could kill you or see you locked up in some disgusting prison cell for the rest of your life. Do you seriously think that exchanging drugs and cash with a bunch of rich addicts is harder than that?”

“Well, I dunno, maybe not harder, but I’ve got a reputation to keep. These clients are better than the rest, I can’t risk pissing them off or making a single mistake.”

“You don’t even have to haggle, hmm? You’re just exchanging the goods for the cash in their big penthouse suites and luxury mansions over glasses of mimosa and small talk,” Hoseok remarked, moving to glance out of the window beside him at the slow roll of traffic in the next lane. “It’s just running, Jimin, and you’ve done it all before.”

“I know, I just…do you think that I’ll be good enough for that level of responsibility?” Jimin asked in a quiet voice, as he reached up to fiddle with his earring anxiously.

“If you can make such a massive profit on inflated coke and move most of a key in just a couple of days; if you can smuggle, what, half a million dollars in and out of the country on your deals in Korea and Hong Kong in a single year - yes, I think that you’re good enough. Hell, I think that
you’re even better than what we need for that role,” Hoseok replied without a hint of hesitation, turning to look back at him and giving him a quick smile. “Besides, Jimin, running to such rich clients means a much better cut of the profits for you. No more twice a month trips around the world for just a tiny piece of the pie. No, you’ll be working daily - bringing in a constant flow of cash for the gang and Yoongi. Doesn’t that sound heavenly for a guy that loves money too much to be a hippie, hmm?”

Jimin thought this over for a moment as he studied the other man, finding that it did indeed sound heavenly.

When he had been running in the past, Jimin had been earning nothing more than a pitiful amount of the course of the month, nothing more than $400 some months considering demand and supply. With his muling trips, he was always guaranteed to get $500 minimum a month, and as much as $1,000, should he manage to fit two trips into a larger month. When Yoongi had given him that pay packet for $1,500, he had been so shocked to have earned so much cash, that was how used to the hierarchical system that he had gotten.

But if Jimin was running to the most affluent buyers that Moon Tiger Mob had in this region of the city; the richest men and women that Yoongi had connections to, then it seemed highly possible that he might just be able to make so much more money than either of his previous job roles. He might still be a little brother, and the lowest of the low on the gang food chain, but he might just be able to slip his way into the position and make some great money.

“It sounds fucking fantastic, Hoseok,” Jimin agreed, shooting the other man a wide and mischievous smile. “Is that where we’re going right now, to sort this business out or something?”

“No exactly, no. We’re going to get you prepared for the job role today. Now, Yoongi explicitly told me that I’m only supposed to get you fitted for some suits, but like that’s going to happen!”

Hoseok let out a rather high-pitched and shrill laugh as he reached over to give him a slap on the knee. His expression shifted completely when he laughed, for he seemed to have an incredibly expressive face - his eyes squeezing shut, his nose wrinkling up and his lips parting to reveal nearly every single one of his white and perfectly straight teeth.

“No, if today is the first day that I’m getting to meet Yoongi’s secret boyfriend, then today is a shopping day!” he added with a wide grin.

“Shopping day?” Jimin repeated, furrowing his brow severely as he looked at the other man. “We’re going…shopping today?”
“Look, you need some professional-looking suits for your new job role, so that you look the part. But that’s not all. You’re going to need cologne and accessories and jewellery and so much more!”

Jimin suddenly found himself wondering if Hoseok was in any way high, but it was hard to tell. Sure, he had glassy eyes and way too much enthusiasm coursing through his veins, but he couldn’t see any telltale signs that hinted that he might be cruising on uppers, Adderall, or maybe even a line or two of cocaine. He wasn’t twitchy, he didn’t have a flush to his skin and a constant need to wipe at his nose and sniff, and so he thought that Hoseok might not be high in the clouds right now.

No, but there was a chance that he was stoned on something like Valium - the American housewife’s drug of choice for banality, existential crises and cheating on their husbands with the pool boy. That might explain his glassy eyes and blissful expression, and the fact that he wasn’t driving his own car right now as his reactions were shot to shit and he would end up crashing at the first set of lights.

“So, I’m taking you shopping, Jimin,” Hoseok finished, giving his knee another quick squeeze and slap before dropping his hand back into his lap. “What can I say? I was bored out of my fucking brains, Gigi was busy, it seemed like a great idea to take you shopping. It’s not like I’ve got anything else to do - I’m not a big fan of…business, so to speak. I prefer to let my men handle all of that, not like Gigi.”

“Did you just call Yoongi ‘Gigi’?” Jimin asked, struggling to keep a straight expression as he repeated the nickname.

“That’s my nickname for him. I should call you ‘Jiji’, but then that would get highly confusing…” Hoseok paused for a moment to think this over, making soft humming noises under his breath as he did so. “I might just call you ‘Minnie Mouse’.”

“My partner, Namjoon, he calls me ‘Jimmy’,” Jimin suggested, hoping that he might be able to sway the other man away from that ridiculous nickname.

“I like ‘Minnie’,” Hoseok said, which was a sign that he wasn’t going to be able to change his mind on the matter. “I wonder what Yoongi calls you, hmm?”

Jimin didn’t reply to this statement because it was just that - a statement, and not a question. Had it have been a question, he still wouldn’t have replied, because he didn’t want to reveal too many details about their relationship to Hoseok without Yoongi’s express permission first, just in case.
Namjoon didn’t even know much more than the basics and what he had physically witnessed whilst in his home with the two of them - like their penchant for dancing to terrible pop music in their underwear, or the secretive hand-holding and back hugs when they were cooking in the kitchen and he happened to walk out to grab a beer from the fridge. If his best friend didn’t know some things because he was keeping secrets for his boyfriend, then it made sense to keep the exact same secrets with Hoseok.

After all, if Yoongi wanted to discuss their relationship in great depth, he was more than able to do so with his own best friend. That was why he was going to leave Yoongi to talk to Hoseok about it all, just to make sure that he didn’t say something that might upset his boyfriend, because he didn’t want anyone to know about such intimate moments that had happened between them.

Jimin turned his head to look out of the window, tracking a passing car as it rolled around the corner to go onto the next street whilst they carried on driving straight. They appeared to be heading right through a small section of Western Addition and into Richmond so that they could go to Presidio Heights - a journey that would take them only ten or so minutes, if the traffic was good. That was simply assuming from the fact that Hoseok had told him that he was getting fitted for some suits, as he doubted that they would be going to a tailors in any other neighbourhood, but the most affluent commercial one.

“Um, Hoseok…I don’t have my wallet on me right now,” Jimin finally said to break the momentary silence inside of the car. He turned his head so that he could glance over at him, trying to keep his expression as neutral as possible even though he suddenly felt like he had made a huge mistake.

Hoseok dragged his eyes away from the window so that he could hold his gaze, his own face rather blank of expression. It took him a couple of seconds to realise what he had said, and then he made an amused sound out of the corner of his mouth that ruffled at a short lock of his hair.

“Pft, look what I’ve got-“

Hoseok shifted so that he could slip something out of his trouser pocket - a black bifold wallet that was obviously real leather judging from the strong scent that was wafting from it. He flipped it open, revealing that it had a card, note, and coin compartment that were far from empty unlike his own wallet.

Jimin could see that there was quite a bit of cash stashed inside of the wallet, so that it was straining against the seams a considerable amount. There were several cards shoved inside of the slits in the leather, and he saw that two of them were American Express platinum cards. He doubted that they both belonged to Hoseok, for that seemed highly unusual, but he might just need another, should he
max out the credit first and need a backup.

Hoseok pulled one of the cards free to reveal it to him, and Jimin saw that the platinum front had a name embossed to the lower left of the printed image of a centurion and long digit code - Y Min.

That was Yoongi’s credit card, the exact same one that he had used to purchase the dinner for them in the restaurant that night.

“Yoongi gave you his credit card?” Jimin asked, staring at the luxury card with an awestruck expression.

“Correction - Yoongi gave you his credit card, and he told me to tell you to buy whatever the fuck you want with it,” Hoseok replied, getting it between his index and middle finger to hold it out to him.

“Oh, no, I can’t do that,” Jimin disagreed with a vigorous head shake, making no move to accept the card from him. “If Yoongi was here, if he bought the items for me, sure. But I can’t do that without him present, not with his credit card.”

“Jimin, I think that this is Yoongi’s way of treating you,” Hoseok pointed out in a quiet voice, as he moved to slip it back into his wallet again for safekeeping. “I think that he wants you to buy things for yourself, to treat yourself, because you’ve earned it. Maybe, he wants you to buy some new clothes so that you can impress him on your next little date and knock him dead, hmm?”

“I know, and I’m really happy that he would do such a thing, but…it’s too much money,” Jimin admitted, his own voice barely above a whisper. “I, um, I’m not used to having a lot of cash, Hoseok, and it doesn’t feel right spending someone else’s cash like this, you know?”

Hoseok was looking at him as if he found this entire thing inconceivable, and Jimin guessed that it would sound strange to someone born into money that was fucking loaded like he was. He doubted that the other man was thrifty when it came to spending cash, as he had never had a need to be so. Unlike Yoongi - who was a firm believer in treating oneself in moderation, he had feeling that Hoseok believed in indulgence every single day.

“Hmm, OK, then Yoongi can cover the costs for suits, and I’ll buy you everything else,” Hoseok suggested, perking up in his seat considerably and flashing him a happy smile.
“Huh?” Jimin hummed, his lips pouting out as he slowly processed the other man’s words. “But… but we’ve only just met, Hoseok.”

“Look, Jimin, I can’t spend my cash fast enough. I’m drowning in fucking unmarked bills - what else can I do with them? Use them to wipe my ass? Burn them as tinder and toast marshmallows over them?” Hoseok retorted with a lackadaisical shrug. “Retail therapy is my favourite kind of therapy; who needs Prozac, hmm? I came out today with plans to blow some fucking cash and that’s exactly what’s going to happen.”

“Hoseok, why’re rich people so weird?” Jimin asked him, somehow both half-joking and half-serious. He felt like the other man wouldn’t take offence at such a joke, that he might just find it amusing considering his rather humorous personality.

“We’re all insane, Minnie. Drugs, alcohol, complete neuroticism - take your pick.” Hoseok remarked with a smirk, and it was actually difficult to tell if he was joking or being serious too. “But, goddamn, we look good during our meltdowns, right?”

“You look really good,” he agreed with a nod, giving his outfit another quick look before focusing on the sunglasses on the top of his head. “Are those Ray-Bans? Namjoon’s always wanted a pair of those, and…”

On the remainder of the ride to get into Presidio Heights, Hoseok told him all about his favourite designers and fashion items, along with every other thought that seemed to pop into his rather hazy head. If it wasn’t so very obvious to Jimin that he was coming back around from some kind of stoned state, he would have noticed just how terrible his level of concentration was, as he didn’t seem to follow any tangible thread of conversation that made sense to him.

But regardless of this fact, Jimin liked listening to him, as the other man had a nice voice and fascinating way of talking and gesturing - the complete opposite of Yoongi, in a way. He was more animated for sure, though his boyfriend could get very animated when he was excited and having a good day.

What fascinated Jimin the most about Hoseok, however, was the fact that he knew nothing about him save for his name and face, and the fact that he was Yoongi’s best friend. He didn’t know his age, he didn’t know what his connections and influence in Moon Tiger Mob were (though he assumed him to have a very high rank through his family, as he knew just how important that his father was). In turn, Hoseok knew very little about him too, save for basic facts about how he worked in the gang as a drug runner and mule, and that he was Yoongi’s boyfriend.
But none of that seemed to matter to Hoseok. No, why would he care about such trivial things like that when there were designer sunglasses and underwear to talk about? What did it matter that they had only just met, when he could promise to splurge out a great deal of cash on him for a little rush of fun and a way to pass the time?

Jimin tried to imagine how Namjoon would react to him, but he found that he really couldn’t picture such a thing. His friend would be confused, fascinated and concerned all at the same time, and he would probably be stoned out of his brains too.

The man that was driving the car for them was called Wang, Jimin discovered. This was because Hoseok had to talk to him so that he could tell him which private parking lot to kill the car in. After rolling the car inside of the lot for them, Wang proceeded to climb out first and then he popped the back door open for them.

“I booked you in for appointments with several stores,” Hoseok explained after climbing out of the car, reaching up to hastily tug his sunglasses down onto his nose to block out the bright morning sunlight. “I hope that there’s no delays, just to not fuck up the schedule. But I think that we should be fine.”

When Jimin shifted along the backseat to climb out too, Hoseok surprised him by taking hold of his elbow - his grip firm, but not tight. Maybe, it was to guide him along the busy commercial sidewalks so that they didn’t get separated in a crowd? He didn’t know where they were going, after all, and so it would make sense that the other man wanted to escort him around, just so that they kept to his tight schedule without any unneeded wandering.

Whatever the case, Jimin didn’t find the close contact uncomfortable, and so he let Hoseok gently tug him to his feet; his hand moving so that he could slip his arm around his in a casually friendly manner.

“Usually, when I go shopping, I buy with people in mind - Gigi, my sisters, my parents,” Hoseok declared, as he pulled him across the parking lot; Wang right on their heels. “But today’s completely different, because I’ve only just got to see what you look like.”

“Have you got any ideas in mind for me? Any colours or styles?” Jimin asked him with a smile, actually highly curious because he wanted to know what his perfect style was like.

“I’m still thinking it over, but I’ve got some very strong ideas in mind,” Hoseok replied, as they stepped out onto the sidewalk. “You’ve got a great palette to work with, Jimin - I think that you’ll look great in warm and cool shades. But the cuts? Hmm, that’s tricky, and that’s exactly why
The tailors that Hoseok brought him to looked to be a high-class establishment, judging from the size of the building. It had many windows filled with displays that showcased the workmanship that went into their suits. The sign above the wall of windows declared “Blacks and Sons” in golden looping letters, the paint job around the glass panes a deep blue in shade.

Jimin saw display mannequins dressed in several styles of suits: from fitted to loose, lounge suits to dinner suits, and two or three-piece variations. The colour variation wasn’t too extreme, for the displays were in shades of black, navy, tan and grey; rather than blinding white, salmon pink and all of the other garish shades that he had seen out on the city streets. There were various accessories attached to the mannequins - from ties with tie pins holding them in place neatly to lapel pins, and cufflinks and belts.

Jimin thought that it was strange looking at those suits and thinking about the fact that he was going to be getting fitted for one any moment from now. He had never been professionally fitted for a suit before, and he really didn’t know what to expect at all. It might be a quick and simple process, or it might just be a more complex one.

Whilst they entered the tailors, Wang waited outside of the building - not even saying a word to either of them as he assumed his sentry-like position.

The interior of the store had light wooden flooring that matched well with the duck-egg blue walls, and there were some armchairs placed here and there that clients could use whilst waiting for their appointment. On several low coffee tables, Jimin could see catalogues and large books filled with material samples to examine and touch, and there looked to be a tea serving tray on the counter too. Did clients get served tea whilst they were inside of the store? Was that a thing, or was it just a decorative display to add a hint of class?

There was no music playing inside of the building, and so the bell attached to the front door rang through the air with startling clarity when they stepped inside. Just a moment later, there came a series of sounds from the backroom, followed by soft footsteps, which signalled that the ringing bell had attracted the tailor’s attention.

“Master Jung, the 11am appointment?” the tailor called, as he made his way through a doorway to enter the storefront. He was an elderly-looking white man with an accent that sounded vaguely European to Jimin’s ears, rather than American, and he had a full head of white hair. He was dressed very well: wearing a navy single-breasted waistcoat and fitted pants with a pressed white shirt underneath. “It’s a good thing that you came early, the fitting-room is available currently. We can start right away, if you wish?”
“That would be perfect, Mr. Black,” Hoseok replied, as he let go of his elbow and he placed a hand on his lower back instead.

Jimin let Hoseok guide him across the storefront so that they could enter one of several fitting-rooms, the tailor pulling a door across to seal them inside.

From somewhere else within the tailors, he could hear the faint sound of voices and whirring sewing machines, which meant that other clients were having appointments whilst an assortment of tailors helped with the fittings and seamstresses worked on adjustments and new items.

Inside of the fitting-room, there was a small podium in front of a large wall mirror. It wasn’t flat, but had two angled sides that came off the wall instead, so that he could see most of his body reflected back at him: his front, both sides and most of his back. The ceiling had many glass panels on it to let in plenty of natural sunlight, seeing as there couldn’t be any wall windows inside of the fitting-room for the sake of privacy. As a result, the room was brightly illuminated, but not in a harsh or sterile fashion.

To the right of the fitting-room, there were two armchairs placed on either side of a low coffee table. The table had a stack of catalogues and sample books on it, and the armchairs looked very plush and comfortable. To the left, there was a curtained cubicle for undressing in, should a client need to do so. With the exception of some metal railings on the walls to hang items of clothing, the fitting-room was bare of other decoration.

When Jimin turned on his heel, he saw that the tailor hadn’t entered the fitting-room with them. Hoseok moved to sit down in one of the armchairs with a soft sigh, lounging back in it as he folded one leg over the other to get comfortable. So he moved over to join him just for the sake of it, sinking down into the seat and reaching up to fiddle with one of his earrings.

“Have you ever been here before, Hoseok? Is this where you get your suits from?” Jimin asked curiously, as he watched him retrieving one of the catalogues from the table.

“The first time that I was fitted for a suit, my daddy brought me here,” Hoseok replied with a nod, placing the catalogue into his lap so that he could open it and start flicking through it. “It’s the best quality tailors in the city, according to him.”

Jimin saw that most of the images inside of the catalogue were photographs and illustrations of classically handsome-looking men wearing a great variety of suits. The images were annotated with
detailed descriptions of certain cuts and materials, along with quoted figures for each item that was on display. He couldn’t help but notice that the price tag for certain items were in triple figures, and that the more luxurious materials and evening suits were in the four figure range.

“I don’t wear suits that much, not if I can help it,” Hoseok continued, pausing to study a page that had clearly interested him. “But every man should have at least a dozen suits in his wardrobe, Jimin. Even Yoongi has suits, though he isn’t fond of wearing them that often either.”

“Why not? Why doesn’t he like suits?” Jimin asked him, as he thought about the suit that he had worn to take him out to dinner for their first date.

Yoongi had looked good in that suit, especially when it had been combined with his Valentino blouse. It hadn’t even been a particularly fancy cut, but it had been a great look for him, and he imagined that he would look even better in a properly fitted three-piece suit and shirt.

Oh, he would look so handsome, he just knew it. Just thinking about him letting himself into Namjoon’s house; casually carrying his suit jacket slung over his back by his fingers, his shirt sleeves folded up his forearms and his tie loosened after a hard day of work, was enough to make Jimin stick his tongue out to wet his lips.

“Gigi finds them stuffy and uncomfortable. He’s very particular about comfort, and if something doesn't feel right, then he gets so dramatic,” Hoseok explained in his own dramatic fashion. “Also, Father Min thinks that he should wear them for business, so, he refuses to do so just to be petty.”

Jimin found his lips curling up at the corners at this, finding that it sounded right for Yoongi. From his want of total comfort, to his rather childish pettiness just to vent his frustrations towards his father, it was completely accurate. Before he could remark on this fact, the door slid open across the fitting-room once again.

Just like he had assumed, Jimin saw that the tailor had actually brought a tea tray back into the fitting-room with him: a small porcelain teapot and two matching teacups set onto it. Though he had no clue about what counted for normal service in a tailors, he had a feeling that this was an exclusive service offered by this establishment and not a regular thing.

On account of the fact that Jimin wasn’t wearing a fitted and long-sleeved shirt, he had to take his silken shirt off, along with his jeans, for his first set of measurements. He was so very thankful that he had worn a pair of briefs this morning, or else he would have been unable to remove his jeans for an accurate measurement. So he folded his clothing over one of the metal railings, he slipped out of his loafers, and then he moved to get onto the podium so that the man could start measuring him.
First, the tailor asked him for his height and weight measurements, which he jotted down into a small leather bound notebook. Next, he had to take his body measurements, and so he started on his top half.

Mr. Black took the obvious measurements first: looping the tape around his chest muscles to check his bust, nipping it tight around his waist, and then shifting it down to his upper hips to check the bottom hem measurement for suit jackets. The tailor moved behind him so that he could measure his shoulders fully, the cool tape settling against his bare skin, and then he took the back length by holding the tape against the very nape of his neck to the dip of his spine. The final two lengths that he needed for his top half were his sleeve length, which he measured from the ball of his shoulder to his wrist; and finally the front length, which ran from the front of his shoulder to his hip.

After jotting these measurements down in his book, Mr. Black proceeded to check his bottom half. There were only four measurements that he needed for his trousers, and they were his lower waist, his leg length and inseam length, and his rise. Jimin stayed still on the podium while the tailor hunkered down ever so slightly to hold the tape against his outer leg from his hip to his waist, and then his inner leg from his crotch to his ankle. The rise was a rather funny measurement, for the man needed to hold the tape right over the slight bulge of his crotch to measure it up to his waist. But Mr. Black was an obvious professional, and it took him just a mere moment to get the measurement.

Whilst the tailor measured him, Hoseok remained lounged in the armchair with a sample catalogue in his lap; a steaming teacup in hand, as he turned from page to page slowly and he examined all of the different types of materials. The scent coming from the tea was fruity in a way, and Jimin thought that it might just be Earl Grey blend.

However, Jimin found that this wasn’t the only set of measurements that the tailor required from him. He had to have a loose suit fitted to him with large pins by Mr. Black, so that he could move around in them and allow the man to make some adjustments to his measurements. He even had to wear his loafers, just so that the slight heel could be taken into account for the leg lengths.

Mr. Black told him that it was essential that a tailor ensured that every single customer’s unique bodies were taken into account, rather than just a simple set of measurements. Like how his trouser measurements needed to be altered after he had worn a fitted pair and he had flexed in them to make the material grow taut and wrinkled around his crotch as a result of his muscular thighs, even after he had just been measured a mere moment ago.

It felt strange moving around the fitting-room in clothing that had been tucked and pinned into place around him, but upon catching sight of his reflection in the wall mirror, Jimin saw that the fit did look pretty good. The shirt didn’t hang off him in certain places like the shoulders, only to be tight around his chest and long in the cuffs; and the trouser lengths skirted his ankles perfectly because of the
tucked hem, whilst the waistband sat snug around his lower waist, thanks to more tucking and pinning. Even the suit jacket looked to be perfect, rather than swimming on his frame so that his fingers peeked out of the cuffs and the lapels were far too wide and low.

If this was what Mr. Black could do to a practice suit that hadn’t even fitted him properly, then he could only imagine what a fully made suit just for his body would look like.

After the tailor had taken all of his measurements, Jimin got undressed and he slipped into his clothes again. He moved to join Hoseok at the table, lifting up the other teacup so that he could breathe in the scent of the tea. It was a dark shade of brown with slight amber hints mixed in, and he took a quick sip of it to let the citrusy flavour linger on his tongue.

“Now, Master Jung, it’s time to discuss the order,” Mr. Black said, as he moved to stand close to them; his notebook and pencil still very much in hand. “You said that it was a large order on the telephone, but I assure you that we will meet the demand with quality and our usual time quota. First, what is the exact order size?”

“We’re going to need, what, seven lounge suits, five dinner suits - no, scratch that, seven dinner suits, we need a couple of high-class ones,” Hoseok corrected, and all that Jimin could do was stare at him dumbly as he tried to figure out how much such a thing would cost. “We must get you a tuxedo from the Valentino boutique, Jimin. The white jacket will look so good on you! The white and black contrast, and that tan? Yes, that’s sexy! I keep telling Gigi to buy a tuxedo but he can’t tell a tuxedo from a dinner suit, he’s useless with fashion.”

“OK,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, still struggling to process the fact that he was apparently getting fifteen suits today, instead of just two or three that he had been expecting.

It made sense that he might need a couple of suits, if he was going to be working everyday from now on. But it seemed that Hoseok hadn’t ever heard about wearing the same thing more than once a week, which might just explain why he was ordering seven lounge suits for him rather than three or four.

But fourteen suits without including the bonus tuxedo, when the items in the catalogue had been spanning from $500-$3,500, meant that the costs of this particular appointment could reach a shockingly high amount. He could only hope that most of the choices were on the low end of the price range, and that Hoseok might add a nice luxury one into the order just for the sake of it.

But deep down, Jimin had a feeling that he was going to do the complete opposite.
“Wait, I got distracted…ah, the suits!” Hoseok exclaimed, taking hold of his necklace chain to give it a teasing tug. “We haven’t gotten his shirts yet, but I’m thinking that we should stick mostly to white shirts, maybe some cool blue shades and black. That means that for the lounge suits, I’m thinking that we should select darker colours. There should be no white or creams for him, let’s stick to a more classic look. I think that black would suit him just fine, fitted and not loose. I don’t care if it’s in style right now, it’s not in style for his height. I’ll leave the exact materials and shades up to you to decide, but I think that there should be two glen check lounge suits, just to add some variety to his wardrobe.”

“A deep or light grey suit with a contrasting black shirt could be very flattering for his skin tone - in herringbone or glen check,” Mr. Black suggested, as he jotted down everything that Hoseok had just said. “For the sake of variety, that is.”

“Oh, that would be very flattering,” he agreed with a nod.

“As for the cut, perhaps the British cut? The inner padding can strengthen his shoulders, along with the nipped waist. It can give him a much better silhouette than the Italian and American cuts.”

Jimin found himself consciously checking out his reflection in the massive mirror across the fitting-room, his gaze focusing on his narrow shoulders that were now hidden underneath his loose silk shirt. He knew that he didn’t have the largest of frames, on account of his height, but he thought that he filled his frame out pretty good because of his build. Sure, his weight was constantly fluctuating as a result of his muling, but his usual healthy shape was athletic - with thick thighs, shapely calves and biceps and a firm and full behind.

“I think that the British cut is much better for him, the American cut only really works for overweight businessmen,” Hoseok remarked, to which he and the tailor laughed heartily; giving a dry chuckle. “When it comes to the dinner suits, I’m thinking that an all-black ensemble would be a good look for him. Black cotton shirt, a silk suit and trousers with satin lapels?”

Mr. Black made a noise in agreement at this, jotting it down in his notebook.

“Black is certainly a good colour for him, but might I also recommend red?” the tailor suggested. “I think that a deep red or burgundy would suit him very well. It could be worn with a black shirt and trousers, and feature a contrast lapel for effect.”

Over the duration of the fitting appointment, Jimin had sample swatches held up against his cheek, so
that Hoseok and the tailor could discuss what exact shade or style of pinstripe was perfect for him. All that he could do was sit in the chair and sip at his tea whilst he perused one of the catalogues, listening to them both talking, but not really understanding the complex terms for lapel styles, shirt collars and different varieties of Italian wool and silk. There were just so many different styles in the catalogues that it was hard focusing on them all, for some of the different suit jacket cuts had just slight variations from each other instead of anything obvious, and the trousers were even harder to tell the difference between.

Jimin managed to find a style that he liked a lot in one of the catalogues, which Hoseok told him was a dinner suit. He might not be an expert at identifying suit styles, but the fact that the jacket was made from velvet had already made him believe that it was a dinner suit rather than a casual lounge suit. After looking at the different kinds of velvet samples, they settled on a rich sapphire blue, which would apparently be worn with a white cotton shirt and black wool trousers.

Somehow, Mr. Black talked Hoseok into entertaining the idea that he might actually suit a white dinner suit with a black shirt - in the form of a double-breasted dinner jacket with shawl lapels. It wasn’t exactly too hard persuading the other man, for Hoseok agreed with the tailor after just a quick discussion about materials.

By the time that the order was complete, Jimin found that all of the suits had been decided upon. His lounge suits were mostly black, grey and navy, with some patterns and pinstripes added to break them all up from one another. They weren’t daring, because that would look tacky and cheap, according to Hoseok, but they were all still high quality because of the materials and cuts. The dinner suits certainly added more variety of colour and materials, for there was burgundy, white, sapphire and black selections in wool, velvet, satin and silk varieties.

Jimin had no clue at all about what the price tag for it all was, as he watched Hoseok charging Yoongi’s credit card and signing a receipt that he stashed inside of his wallet. He also had to keep an order slip for collecting the suits when they were ready, which could be in the frame of two to three weeks, should the luxury material for the evening suits need to be ordered.

According to the tailor, the lounge suits should be prepared within a two week frame for him. Mr. Black offered a basted fitting service prior to completing the suits, which Hoseok agreed to without even telling him what it was (though Jimin assumed that it might be another round of fitting just to ensure that the suits were fitted correctly and that he liked the colours and styles). He also told Hoseok that he could alter the shirts for him, should they need some adjustments to work with the suits and complete the tailored look, which might just be the case, considering the arm lengths and shoulders of most shirts that Jimin tried on.

Two weeks was a long time to wait, and Jimin found himself wondering if he was going to be unable to work until then. That didn’t sound good at all, but he would have to contact Yoongi and ask him about it just to be certain.
Just like that, Jimin had been fitted for his suits and the appointment was complete. It had been surprisingly easy and not that stressful at all, though he had been unable to really participate through his lack of knowledge. Maybe, in the future, after much reading of male magazines that had articles on fashion instead of dirty magazines, he might just be able to go for suit fittings and select his own choices - the thought making him snort under his breath as they left the tailors and hit the street again.

Hoseok escorted him across several blocks of the neighbourhood, Wang right on their heel just like a bodyguard. He was taking him to a boutique in which multiple designer clothing, cosmetics and perfume stores were located. Apparently, that was where they were going to buy some other items that he needed - even when the only item that Jimin really thought that he needed were some good shirts to wear with his suits; maybe a tie or two.

But like that was going to stop Hoseok, who had already set his sights on multiple stores that he wanted to take him to.

Upon entering the boutique, Jimin saw that it was a large building with multiple floors all connected together with escalators. The exterior and interior storefronts were almost entirely made from glass, save for support beams, which meant that everything was on perfect display to window-shopping customers. The windows were filled with mannequin displays and massive colourful posters; music coming from dozens of different places, so that it all clashed together underneath the dull drone of conversation that was hanging in the air.

“Wow,” Jimin muttered under his breath, as he craned his head back to look up at the floors above him; watching crowds of people moving around in a sea of colourful clothing.

This boutique made every single mall that he had ever been inside of as a teenager look tiny, most likely because the stores were much bigger on average. Everything was just so shiny, so clean and modernistic, and he could only turn this way and that to take it all in as Hoseok gently tugged him across the sweeping ground-floor.

The first store that Hoseok took him to was Calvin Klein, just to fill the time between the next appointment. The store spanned two floors, the ground-floor dedicated to women and the first-floor for men and lingerie. The walls were covered in mostly black and white shots of tanned white models; display racks situated evenly around the wide floor on which shirts, jackets, coats and pants were hanging from, and low display shelves on which folded jumpers, scarves, hats and jeans were placed.

Jimin had to try on several shirts to find the right size for him, leaving the changing-room so that
Hoseok could examine them all too. The other man played with the collars, made him spin on his heel so that he could smooth at the backs of the shirts and ensure that it fit him correctly. It seemed that there would need to be some slight alterations to the cuffs and shoulders, but otherwise, he was able to find the right size for him.

So Hoseok went from rack to rack, collecting shirts in shades of white, light blue and black with different kinds of collars, which he folded over his arm as he flitted around the store. He didn’t do much more than glance at the price tags, leaving Jimin behind as he stopped to curiously check the costs of what he was buying.

As they were walking through the store, they passed a large underwear display that had massive black and white photographs of men and women wearing their iconic underwear; posing in highly provocative ways to ooze sex appeal.

Hoseok ran his gaze over them, before coming to a slow stop and turning to look back at him.

“Do you own any Calvin Kleins, hmm?” he asked, despite the answer being pretty obvious.

“Nope. I don’t wear underwear a lot of the time, not in these jeans,” Jimin replied with a quick smirk. “Yoongi’s started going commando too, it’s kinda funny. I think that I’m having a bad influence on him.”

“No, I think that you’re having a great influence on him,” Hoseok disagreed, as he moved to look between the different packs of briefs. “Maybe, he’ll start loosening up soon, in more ways than one?”

Jimin didn’t need to ask what he meant by that, as it was rather obvious that he was talking about sex. He was using a joke about him being reserved and ‘tight’ about the little things, whilst also highlighting his refusal to have penetrative sex. It was quite a cutting joke, which was a sign that Hoseok might just be prone to the occasional sarcastic moment and biting remarks that might just border on rude or mean.

“What size are you?” Hoseok suddenly asked, glancing up from the briefs to look at him.

“Huh?” Jimin hummed, dragging his own eyes away from a photograph of a well-muscled and well-endowed male model so that he could return the gaze. “What size?”
“Yes, what size are you? I would peg you as the same as Yoongi, but I could be wrong and - oh my god, look at that pair!” Hoseok declared, as he moved to gesture at a display mannequin that was wearing tiny low-rise black briefs.

Unlike the classic style, which covered the hip bones so that the waistband was around the lower stomach and sat snugly around the very upper thighs, these briefs had much slimmer sides to them. The waistband skirted low, the sides exposed all of the thigh area and sat right on the hip bones, and the back hugged the buttocks snug and tight.

“They’re so tiny! If you wore a pair of those, Gigi wouldn’t be able to look away from your ass, Jimin!”

Jimin couldn’t help but burst out laughing at this, just thinking back to how Yoongi had stared at his briefs when he had first stayed the night at Namjoon’s home. They hadn’t been as daring as these ones were, hadn’t even been sexy in the slightest, and yet he had stared at them so openly until he had realised that he had caught sight of him.

Yes, if he wore a pair of those briefs, Yoongi’s eyes would probably roll right out of his head.

Just like that, Hoseok was picking up packets of briefs to carry them in the crook of his elbow over to the tills, ignoring Jimin’s little protestations about how he had just bought some new briefs and that he didn’t have to buy him any.

As if that excuse would have worked on him.

The next appointment that they had to keep was on the next floor of the boutique, in Valentino. According to Hoseok, there was no official Valentino store in the city, but the large-scale boutique had a booth that stocked imported items from across the country and even Europe. It was where he got quite a lot of items that he bought for Yoongi as gifts, and so Jimin turned his head to glance inside of the booth as they passed it.

That pretty blouse of Yoongi’s, the one with the red seashells on it and the nice voluminous sleeves, that was Valentino. It was a really nice item, and he wondered if Hoseok often bought him such pretty blouses on shopping days just like this one, and how many of them were hidden away inside of his boyfriend’s wardrobe.

Most of the display mannequins that were visible through the glass windows were outfitted in
clothing for women: from fancy evening dresses of silk and satin with sparkling clutch purses and dainty heels, to cashmere wool turtlenecks, daringly short miniskirts and towering boots. A lot of the accessories were for women too, but there were some male displays nestled further back inside of the boutique booth: wearing lounge suits, wool coats, and casual shirts and slacks combos with leather loafers and Oxfords.

The interior of the booth had smooth white flooring, matching walls, and a lot of the display shelves were made from glass to make everything look clean and fancy. The ceiling light fixtures were dangling cut-glass chandeliers, there were cream sofas placed here and there for clients to sit on, and across the booth there was also a small hallway that looked to lead to changing-rooms and possible a fitting-room.

There were several styles on hand stocked in the store, and a catalogue to place orders for goods that weren’t currently in stock - the sofas suddenly making sense to Jimin. The suits and shirts were on display on racks on one of the walls, the former stored in clear dust covers to keep the expensive materials clean and the latter organised in rows of colour - from white all of the way along to black.

Jimin had a horrible feeling that Hoseok was going to make him try on everything just for fun, but the other man located the exact item that he was looking for - a bimaterial tuxedo of fine Italian wool with smooth silk lining. There were two styles currently available, and he hesitated over them for a moment before putting one back on the rack. There were several other items that he had to locate to go with it, from a shirt and waistcoat, to a bow tie and pair of pumps, and accessories like suspenders and even a cummerbund.

Just like at the tailors, Jimin had to get professionally fitted in the store so that the pre-made shirts and suits could be altered to fit him with the personal tailoring service that the company offered for tuxedos, cocktail dresses and much more.

That meant slipping into a white shirt with a wing collar that stuck up at the edges, which was tucked in place here and there with large pins, before adding a pair of black silk trousers that he had to wear high on his waist with a suspender belt - hooked up around his shoulders and back to keep them perfectly straight. The seamstress had fun rolling several inches of the trouser lengths up, which she pinned in place as soon as he had slipped into a pair of pinched bow opera pumps that had a heel on the back.

Next, came the single-breasted white waistcoat with the high v-lapel and the black cummerbund that wrapped around his stomach and hips. Hoseok decided to remove the cummerbund because he didn’t think that it went well with the cut. The waistcoat only needed slight alterations made to the waist to tuck it in, for it looked to fit him well otherwise.

Hoseok knotted his bow tie for him as Jimin didn’t know how to do so, which was a semi-butterfly
that matched the collar much better than the other available styles. Finally, he pulled on the white dinner jacket, smoothing down the black contrast silk shawl lapel and jetted pockets and then standing still, so that the woman could tuck it here and there for him.

Whilst the final item of clothing was fitted, Hoseok proceeded to flick through one of the catalogues to locate a tuxedo for Yoongi. He had an exact style in mind that he was searching for, but he had to make an order list of alterations to the lapels, buttons, shirt collars and more because he couldn’t find what he was looking for.

Jimin couldn’t understand how Hoseok could visualise these things so vividly in his mind, because he couldn’t even imagine what he could look like in a tuxedo - never mind find the perfect one for himself.

“Hoseok, if we ordered all of those suits back in the tailors, then why’re we getting a tuxedo too?” Jimin asked, hoping to not move around too much on the slight stool as to not make the seamstress’ job more difficult. “And how come you’re putting so much effort into getting one for Yoongi? I thought the one that you were looking at before was pretty nice, it might suit him. This one too, I think that he’s look really handsome in a waistcoat.”

“Jimin, you’re getting fitted for this tuxedo for special events only,” Hoseok explained in a slow fashion, as if this fact wasn’t already incredibly obvious. “By special events, I mean events that Yoongi will be taking you to on his elbow…assuming that he gets over that nasty little hurdle sooner, rather than later. That means that I’ve got to ensure that you both look completely different. You can’t both go waltzing into a gala or charity event wearing the exact same tuxedo!”

Jimin could only laugh at the absolute horror in Hoseok’s voice, as the seamstress moved to stand in front of him and she examined the lapels.

“Besides, Yoongi’s body and face don’t work well with your cuts, Jimin. He needs different collars, different bow ties and such to flatter his face, and he needs different jacket styles and waistcoats to accentuate his frame and make him look taller. Honestly, I’m doing you both a favour to stop you from looking like complete idiots.”

“Thanks, Hoseok.” Jimin said with a grin. “I’m probably gonna look like an idiot in it anyway.”

“Oh no, no no no,” Hoseok disagreed, moving to place the catalogue aside so that he could get to his feet and move closer to him. As soon as the seamstress had made the last adjustment and had stepped away, he held out his hand to him in offering, and so Jimin took hold as he stepped off the stool and he let him pull him over to a large wall mirror. “Is that what an idiot looks like to you, Jimin.”
For a few seconds, Jimin could only stare at his reflection silently as he looked at the now tucked and pinned tuxedo.

As the white dinner jacket was single-breasted, it skirted low at the front to reveal the front of the white waistcoat in an attractive manner, rather than simply hide it from sight. The buttons didn’t reveal the bottom of the waistcoat at all, not even when he slipped his hands inside of the trousers pockets and it should have stretched around the buttons. This pleased Hoseok immensely, for he told him that he hated it when dinner jackets revealed waistcoats like that. It was almost as bad a fashion faux pax as wearing a tuxedo without a waistcoat, which the other man made sound truly ghastly in that dramatic way of his.

Jimin had to take a moment longer just to observe the tuxedo, not because he wanted to make sure that it was right for him, but because he couldn’t take his eyes off his own reflection. Even with the pins still visible, he could get a true sense of what the tuxedo looked like on him, and he thought that he looked good.

If Yoongi had taken him shopping today instead, what would he have thought upon seeing him dressed like this? How would he have reacted to the sight of him wearing such a perfect tuxedo, after he had had to borrow him a dinner jacket for their first date?

Oh, Jimin found himself hoping that Yoongi actually invited him to some big special event even if he wouldn’t fit in there at all, just so that he would be able to wear such a thing. He would look so good on his boyfriend’s arm, would more than likely attract a great deal of attention - not all of it negative.

What about after the special event too, when they were back at some hotel, or maybe even Yoongi’s mansion?

Just thinking about how Yoongi would help him get out of the tuxedo: his fingers popping open the jacket and waistcoat buttons and slipping them down onto the bed, his thumbs snagging on the suspenders to snap them down; of how he would press kisses against his throat as he pulled down on the shirt and he sank his fingers into his waist, it was enough to make Jimin swallow hard and feel his cheeks flushing with a hint of colour.

The completed tuxedo needed to be collected in several days, so that the seamstress could cut, tuck and sew everything in place for him. The opera pumps, suspenders and bow tie were placed into boxes and bags for him to take home, Hoseok covering the costs of the order with cash. He also placed an order for Yoongi’s tuxedo, which needed to be ordered and then altered before he could pick it up from the store.
Jimin assumed that this was the final store that they were going to finish up the shopping spree in, but he rapidly discovered that he was so very wrong.

No, Hoseok still had plans to go several more stores to look at beauty, bathing and cosmetic goods, cologne, accessories and more. Jimin had no clue if he was being included in these plans, but he found himself almost anxiously hoping that he wasn’t because so much money had already been spent on his suits, tuxedo and shoes. Any more, and he was going to personally feel like he owed Hoseok an unlimited amount of favours, even if that wasn’t at all the case.

Hell, Jimin would have felt uncomfortable with even Yoongi spending this much money on him (as a shockingly high amount had been charged onto his credit card already for the suits). It just felt new in a way that was going to take him a long time to get used to, even when it was pretty nice to feel important and worth attention for once in his life.

By the time that they were finally finished shopping, Jimin had managed to amass a great deals of boutique bags - filled with goods wrapped in perfumed paper and tied closed with silk ribbons. Though there were several large Calvin Klein bags that contained his shirts, and a smaller one for his underwear, there were also a dozen more filled with so many more items: a bottle of cologne, some bathing and shaving products, sunglasses and accessories like belts and ties.

In turn, Hoseok had several bags of things for both him and Yoongi, which Wang carried on his behalf without looking to struggle in the slightest with the weight of it all.

Every single time that Hoseok had picked something up in one of the stores, Jimin had purposefully tried to find a cheaper alternative, even if it hadn’t been as attractive. Yet, the other man had realised what he had been trying to do after a while, and it had amused him to no end as they had browsed all of the goods. The trick hadn’t worked on Hoseok, but it had been worth a shot.

Wang had to carry all of the bags to Hoseok’s car to store them in the boot, so that they could enter a café for brunch. He was going to presumably wait in said car, but there was a chance that he might return and wait for them out on the curb like he had done so when they had been in the tailors. It would be rather funny dining inside whilst he was standing outside, visible through the windows as he stared off across the packed road of traffic.

Jimin hadn’t even noticed how long that they had been wandering around the neighbourhood for, and it was only upon entering the café that he realised that he was actually hungry. They must have left Namjoon’s house around 10:30am, and it was creeping close 1pm according to Hoseok’s watch. Time had simply flew past that he hadn’t even noticed, but now his rumbling stomach and dry mouth were reminding him about the fact that he had just a small and shitty breakfast this morning.
The interior the café was filled with countless people: mostly young women that looked to have also went shopping because there was a great amount of bags placed around their high-heeled feet, a random assortment of presumably rich tourists that had cameras at hand and were talking in different languages amongst each other, and the usual slew of businessmen taking a break in their hectic schedule to guzzle coffee and food.

Judging from the sight of different kinds of food on display, and the large menu that was set behind the counter, it might just specialise in French brunch dishes, of which Jimin had no clue about at all. Some of the names were impossible for him to read, whereas others were pretty obvious and thankfully in English. That meant that he didn’t have to ask the other man what any of it was, which helped alleviate some of his worries about looking foolish in front of him.

Hoseok selected one of the remaining window seats so that they got a nice view of the street outside whilst they ate. He pulled his chair out for him just like Yoongi had done so, the act making Jimin smile to himself as he let him push it in for him again.

Jemin could see that there was a small menu left on the table, and so he picked it up to eye the selections whilst Hoseok joined him at the table.

Most of the dishes seemed to revolve around bread, pastry or egg, with toppings of smoked and cured meats and vegetables, and a great variety of side dishes of delicacies like artichoke, caviar, oysters and shredded truffle. Not all of the options were so sophisticated and fancy, for there was quite a lot of range between the cheap and expensive dishes on offer.

“The coffee that they serve in this place - divine,” Hoseok said, sitting back in his chair and crossing one leg over the other. He smoothed at the pleats in his trousers, just to keep the cotton from getting creased. “I can only drink Latin American blends, the coffee is so smooth and fruity. Gigi loves his African blends, but that’s too strong for me. Personally, I think it tastes like earth or something… But what about you, Jimin? What do you usually drink?”

“Um, instant coffee,” Jimin replied in an uncertain voice, glancing up from the menu to look at the other man.

“Oh, Jimin, I’ll have to personally send you bags of real coffee,” Hoseok remarked, as he placed his sunglasses and his wallet aside on the table. “Once you’ve tasted the good stuff, you’ll wonder how you could possibly drink instant blend.”
“Well, it’s just that instant coffee is the cheapest option. Me and my partner can’t buy ground coffee, we don’t have a coffee machine, and we also can’t buy roasted beans and blend them either,” he explained, before giving a soft and embarrassed laugh.

Jimin felt so stupid admitting to Hoseok that all that he and Namjoon could afford was instant coffee. He felt cheap, poor and stupid, which was something that he knew that Yoongi would vehemently deny. His boyfriend had drank the coffee that he had made them on more than one occasion without complaints, which showed him just how much that he didn’t care about the quality of such trivial things.

But that wasn’t exactly the point. The point was that Jimin hated admitting that he was poor Bayview trash all of the goddamn time. Too poor to drink real coffee, too poor to drink fancy champagne and eat lobster on a weekly basis, or to even know what different courses in a high-class restaurant were.

“Then it’s settled - you must come out for coffee with me more often,” Hoseok declared, giving him a quick smile that made Jimin feel much more at ease. “How about for basted fitting, hmm? We can get all of that done and then come straight here; you can sample whatever coffee you like just for the hell of it?”

“That’d be wonderful, Hoseok,” Jimin said, returning the smile from over the top of the menu.

“How do you usually take your coffee?”

“With milk, usually, I prefer it a little milky, but not with sugar,” Jimin explained, more than aware of the fact that that probably wasn’t what the other man had been asking.

Hoseok had probably wanted to know some complex Italian word for a type of coffee, and not just simple instant blend instructions. Except he didn’t actually know any types of coffee by name, and so he hadn’t been able to give him one.

“Oh, I had lobster when I went out with Yoongi,” Jimin remarked to break the momentary silence, as his eyes fell upon an order that contained it.

Savoury toast with poached quail egg and chunks of tender lobster - now that sounded like a nice brunch. The plus side? It wasn’t one of the most expensive options on the menu, was actually less than quite a great deal of dishes, and so he didn’t feel that bad about wanting to order that.
“Gigi bought you lobster?” Hoseok repeated curiously. “Had you ever tried it before then?”

“Yeah, I’d tried a little lobster in Korea in a restaurant, and I really liked it,” Jimin explained with a nod, his cross earrings dancing from the movement. “But there were so many options, that he had to help me pick one - I didn’t know what one would be the tastiest.”

“I take it that you want some lobster?” Hoseok asked with a laugh, as he lifted his hand to gesture at a passing waitress.

Jimin made an enthusiastic noise in agreement at this, placing the menu down onto the table again.

“Are you ready to order?” the waitress asked with a customer-friendly smile, as she came to a stop right beside their table.

“Can we have a caffê latte with the lobster, poached egg and savoury french toast, and a short macchiato with the smoked salmon and salad baguette?” Hoseok asked, listing their order without a hint of hesitation - not even with the coffee.

“Of course; would you like anything else?” she asked, as she hastily jotted down the order in her notebook.

“No, thank you, honey.”

“Alright, I’ll bring you both your order as soon as it’s ready.”

Jimin turned his head to watch the waitress go before looking back at Hoseok. He saw the way that he also tracked the waitress across the café, noticing something in his gaze that made him think that he was checking her out just for the hell of it. He briefly wondered if he might just be bisexual; considering the fact that he was so very certain that he and Yoongi had had past intimacy with one another as teenagers.

It might just be that he wasn’t that friend, but Jimin was getting some vibes off Hoseok that told him that he wasn’t heterosexual, and they were hardly subtle vibes. Maybe, he hadn’t even been checking the waitress out and he had read the situation completely wrong, because if Hoseok was actually heterosexual, he would eat his goddamn tuxedo.
Unlike the meal at the restaurant, which had taken such a long time to prepare so that they had needed to order appetisers whilst waiting, the brunch didn’t take that long at all. It was like waiting for breakfast at Mickey’s Joint, a brief couple of minutes in which Jimin watched traffic rolling down the road outside of the window and he listened to the white noise sound of conversation coming from the interior of the café.

When the waitress returned with their order, she placed the coffee down first. Jimin’s caffè latte was in a deep and small porcelain cup, a creamy shade that had a small layer of milky foam on top. Hoseok’s short macchiato was in a glass cup; filled just over halfway and a rich and deep brown shade.

The lobster and poached egg on French toast was slightly colourful - the pink and red pieces of meat on top of the gooey quail eggs and sprinkled with spices. The toast was golden and crisp, and it smelled so very delicious to his nose that he couldn’t wait to devour it.

In complete contrast, Hoseok’s order was much more colourful. The baguette base was slathered in a layer of cream cheese, over which thin and deep pink slivers of smoked salmon had been layered, along with diced pieces of vegetables like tomato and red onion, and sprigs of herbs.

Before retrieving his cutlery and napkin, Jimin decided to sample some of the coffee, just for the sake of it. A quick inhale of the scent caught his interest, for it smelled much stronger and richer than the instant blend, even when it was a lighter shade. When he sipped at it he discovered why, for the roasted beans were clearly more powerful and aromatic.

“Oh, that’s good coffee,” Jimin said in surprise, lowering the small cup from his lips to glance at the steaming surface.

“You’re so cute, Jimin!” Hoseok declared with a theatrical flair, waving his free hand limply. “All day long, you’ve just been acting so cutely - getting fitted for your suits, sampling the cologne and makeup, and now the coffee. You’re like a little boy in toy shop.”

“I feel like a little boy in a toy shop right now,” Jimin agreed with a nod, placing the cup aside so that he could grab his cutlery. “You should have seen me in the restaurant that night with Yoongi - it was so embarrassing.”

“So, tell me, what was it like, hmm? The date?” Hoseok suggested, nursing his own coffee and making no move to start eating.
“The date in the restaurant?” he asked, glancing up at him just as the knife glided through the soft egg to slice it cleanly in half. “Oh, um…”

Jimin dropped his gaze to the plate as he thought this over, watching the thick orange yolk oozing out onto the porcelain and all over the bread.

Although Jimin had his reservations about talking about his relationship with Yoongi too much, on account of how he might accidentally upset his boyfriend…this was a different thing entirely. There was nothing wrong with talking about a simple matter like a date, which didn’t require too many personal details, as he could just talk about the restaurant itself and other minor things.

“Well, Yoongi picked me up in the evening. He had to bring a suit jacket with him for me to wear - I didn’t have one,” he explained, as he slowly cut up the serving of food. “He took me to a restaurant over in Hayes Valley, ‘The Valley Vineyard’, and the food there’s really good. We had, um, these salmon and prawn appetisers that were amazing, and Yoongi ordered risotto and halibut, and I ordered lobster and gratin - we shared a bottle of Chardonnay.”

“Very fancy,” Hoseok remarked from over the rim of his coffee cup. “You’ve got expensive tastes, Jimin.”

“Also, there was chocolate and salted caramel fondant for dessert, and honestly, Hoseok, it was such a great dinner,” Jimin added. “After leaving the restaurant, we went to Fair Oaks Hotel for the night, and in the morning, we went for breakfast at a diner over in Lower Pacific Heights - Mickey’s Joint. It was such a wonderful night, one of the best that I’ve ever had, to tell you the truth.”

“It sounds fun.”

“Actually, um-“ Jimin reached up so that he could rub at the back of his neck. “It, um, it was my first real date, Hoseok.”

“Your first date?” Hoseok repeated, raising his eyebrows as he slowly lowered his cup from his lips. “You’ve never been on a date before meeting Gigi? Seriously?”

Jimin nodded at this as he lifted a chunk of toast, egg and lobster to his lips to take his first bite of brunch. He found that it tasted as good as it smelled: the perfect balance of rich cream and herbs blending with the tender lobster and egg.
“Let me guess, you used to skip the formalities and just headed right into a toilet stall, right?”

Jimin paused in the act of chewing at this, finding his entire body growing stiff as he stared at the other man.

“I loathe to think about doing such a thing,” Hoseok said, giving a dramatic faux shudder as he retrieved his cup of coffee. “But, when you can’t take him home or to a hotel without risking being caught by colleagues or family and friends; what can you do? Hell, in some cities, you can’t even get a fucking hotel room with another man on your arm, so, I’m not surprised. Desperate times call for desperate measures.”

“I don’t, um, I don’t really like to talk about it,” Jimin admitted in a quiet voice, poking at a chunk of lobster with his fork as he finished chewing his mouthful of food.

“I understand, and I’m sorry for bringing the subject up, but I just couldn’t help myself,” Hoseok admitted, as he finally placed his cup of coffee down on the table and he moved to retrieve his cutlery. “I just don’t have a great deal of queens to talk to these days - I’m surrounded by old white businessmen on the hunt for more pussy than a crazy cat lady.”

Jimin couldn’t help but snort laughter at this joke, even after Hoseok had put him on edge with his close-cutting remark about having sex with strangers in toilet stalls.

“Gigi won’t talk to me about it, not seriously, but that’s nothing new. He closed up tight on the whole gay thing years ago and he’s still refusing to share. I mean, I know that I’m a goddamn gossip but even I know when to be discreet and sensitive about these things,” Hoseok continued, letting out a heavy sigh as he did so. “You’re the only queen that I’ve got at hand, Minnie.”

“Well, I used to be casual, but I’m not doing that anymore,” Jimin quickly explained, just to get it out in the open. “I’m being serious and committed now, for the first time in my life, and it feels good. It feels so much better than what it used to, because it used to feel so empty, Hoseok - the sex, it was empty and cold. All I really wanted back then was to find someone to love me, but it’s hard.”

Hoseok made a noise at this, a rather sympathetic noise that might just have been in agreement. Maybe, he was also struggling to find someone to love him, be they man or woman?

“But now that I’ve met Yoongi? Wow…”
“‘Wow’?” Hoseok repeated, lifting his eyebrows at him.

“Wow, I think that I’ve really found something good, Hoseok,” Jimin continued, trying his very hardest to not gush. “Yoongi makes me feel so good inside, and I’ve never met a guy like him before. He’s my first boyfriend, my first real lover.”

“This is so sweet and all, but you’re leaving out all of the good stuff,” Hoseok suddenly said, as he dabbed at his mouth with the napkin. “The sex, Jimin, the sex. If he makes you feel so good and it’s like something out of a fairy tale, then I know that the sex must be fantastic too.”

“We’re not really doing that right now, Hoseok,” he said around another bite of food, hoping that that would be enough to get him to not pursue the topic any further. “Not properly, at least.”

“Listen, I’ve had the condom discussion with him about a thousand times already, but he’s too stubborn to listen,” Hoseok said, rolling his eyes hard. “Yoongi’s so terrified of AIDS that he won’t even have protective penetrative sex, but these days, I don’t think it’s just because of the stupid disease. I think it’s something deeper than that.”

“Yeah, that’s what I think too,” Jimin agreed with a soft nod, going to reach up to wipe at his lips with his thumb before stopping to grab the napkin instead.

“But now that he’s smitten with you, maybe, he’ll finally start using them again?” Hoseok suggested with a shrug. “Yoongi works so hard, he deserves a deep, hard fuck from a babe like you, Jimin.”

“Hoseok,” Jimin exclaimed, giggling into the napkin in a bid to mute the volume.

Hoseok just smiled at this as he cut into his own serving of brunch, not a hint of embarrassment present on his features.

Over the duration of their brunch, Jimin found himself asking questions about Yoongi’s childhood, just as a way to fill up the silence between them both. Hoseok was more than willing to share, for it seemed that his joke about being a gossip was entirely correct.

According to Hoseok, they had known each other from when they had been mere babies through
their parents. Though Yoongi had been the older of the two, he claimed that he had had a bit of a babyish side when he had been around his mother; that he had been a little bit spoilt by her as a result of his own parents not really caring for him that much at all. Around his own parents, Yoongi had been quiet and miserable, but whenever he had come to stay with the Jung clan, he had been like a completely different child.

Jimin found it fascinating learning about all of this, just the little things about his boyfriend that he had never thought to ask about before. He knew about how he had collected books because he hadn’t been allowed out of the family mansion that much at all as a child, and that he had had a habit of sucking his thumb that stemmed from some kind of deep-rooted anxiety problem. But now he also knew about the fact that he had been an affectionate and rather immature child too.

Talking about childhoods often left Jimin feeling cold because of his own hellish upbringing, but he wanted to learn more about Yoongi no matter what, and Hoseok was the best source of knowledge.

After finishing their brunch, Hoseok paid with cash rather than his card, and then they left the café to presumably return back to his car. Like he had imagined, Wang was indeed on the curb outside, and the man followed them back across the neighbourhood before taking the wheel once more to drive them across the city.

Rather than bring him back to Haight-Ashbury, Wang guided the car into Pacific Heights until he was pulling up in the drive of a rather large mansion that no doubt belonged to Hoseok. In the current sunlight, the cream and white exterior was almost blinding, and Jimin eyed the massive bay windows and manicured drive as he climbed out of the vehicle. The home looked to be three storeys tall and it was very wide too - which made him wonder about how large that Yoongi’s mansion might just be.

After following Hoseok up the front steps and into the mansion, he was sure to remove his loafers so that he wouldn’t track dirt inside of the home. He saw that the floor was marble, the interior walls the same bright white as the exterior and covered in framed prints and photographs. The ground-floor was open-plan, with a sweeping spiral staircase that would go up to the next two floors; a slide-glass door across the floor revealing a large garden with a patio and a swimming pool.

The furniture in the kitchen consisted of stools that stretched the length of a granite counter, and a large dining table with half a dozen chairs currently pushed in as it wasn’t in use. The furniture in the massive sitting-area was quite numerous - plush armchairs, long settees, and even a chaise longue placed here and there in a way that seemed to hint that Hoseok entertained a lot of guests.

Jimin was in the act of trying to figure out where to sit when he felt a shadow falling upon him, and he turned his head just in time to catch sight of Wang carrying all of the store bags into the mansion. The man moved to place them down on the floor close to the centre of the room, before turning on
his heel again.

“Thank you, Wang!” Hoseok called from the kitchen, in the act of retrieving something from the huge refrigerator.

“You’re welcome, Master Jung,” Wang said, revealing his voice for this first time all day - which Jimin found was very deep, but not gravelly or hoarse.

Just like that, the man left the home again so that he could presumably resume working in some way.

Jimin tracked him through the window to watch him going along the sidewalk until he was out of sight, and then he turned to look over at Hoseok. He saw that he had retrieved a large glass bottle of orange juice, which he was pouring into a cocktail shaker - likely over ice and a splash of something strong.

All of the hustle and bustle attracted the attention of Hoseok’s pet cat, the one that Yoongi had told him about. She made a grand entrance in the form of trotting down the spiral staircase in a flash of silken black fur, catching his eye so that Jimin twisted to follow her descent with a surprised sound.

“Oh!” he cried out upon finally seeing her, unable to control himself. “Oh my god!”

Yoongi had told him that Hoseok’s cat was beautiful, had joked about her being a supermodel of a cat, and he could totally see it. She was a sleek and thin cat with a luxuriously thick black pelt; her ears high and pointed on her long triangle-shaped head, and her eyes a golden yellow shade. Her tail was so long and thick that he couldn’t help but want to touch it, just to see if it felt as soft as it looked as it swished around with a lazily comma-like curl at the very tip.

The cat trotted right over to the expansive assortment of store bags so that she could sniff at the contents with great feline curiosity.

Jimin dropped down to his hands and knees so that he could crawl closer to her, wanting to stay close to her eye-level as to not scare her away. But he had very little need to worry about that, for the cat just stared at him openly before giving his outstretched hand a quick sniff with her wet nose.

“What’s her name?” Jimin asked, as he cupped the cat’s furry chin in his fingers and he gave her a ticklish and teasing stroke.
“Cleopatra,” Hoseok replied, the sound of him mixing up a cocktail coming from across the floor.

“She’s so beautiful, Hoseok,” he said, placing his other hand down on her head so that he could give her a smooth stroke right down her spine to her tail. It twitched from the stroke, her fur ruffling from the movement. “I think that she’s the most beautiful cat that I’ve ever seen.”

“I should hope so,” the other man retorted jokingly. “I only settle for beautiful things, Jimin.”

Jimin stroked and tickled at Cleopatra’s ears and chin in turn, hearing Hoseok moving around to retrieve glasses as he did so. He couldn’t stop touching her because she was just so soft and warm, and he actually moved so that he could pick her up and carry her over to one of the settees. The cat was so light that he barely even felt a thing as he placed her down onto his lap. Luckily for him, Cleopatra was clearly a lap cat, for she proceeded to sit down on his thighs, her claws hooking in the material of his jeans as she looked right up at him with a rumbling purr.

Though Jimin had loved playing with Tigger and taking her on that walk across the city with Jungkook, the puppy just didn’t have a fluffy coat of fur to sink his fingers into like Cleopatra did, nor did she have a massive plume of a tail that would wiggle around to tickle at his lower face. It was probably one of the main reasons why he loved cats more than dogs, just simply because of their plush pelts.

“Yoongi actually told me about your cat,” Jimin explained, as he sat back against the burgundy cushions and he continued stroking the cat. “We were talking about dogs, and I mentioned that I much preferred cats, so, he told me that his friend had the most beautiful cat in the world. Turns out, he was right.”

“Hmm, Gigi can’t take his eyes off my black queen either. Some days, I’m convinced that he’s going to smuggle her out of the house by hiding her inside those big loose tee-shirts of his,” Hoseok remarked, which made Jimin laugh heartily at the thought. “I’ve told him that he should buy a cat, that they work wonders for stress. But he keeps telling me that if he buys a cat then she won’t be as perfect as Cleopatra.”

“I totally understand why he thinks that already, and I’ve only just met her,” Jimin joked with a grin.

Hoseok moved so that he could leave the kitchen, two glass flutes in his hands and his bare feet softly padding on the marble flooring. He stopped just in front of the settee, holding one of the flutes out to him in offering.
Jimin accepted the flute from him with thanks, lifting it to his nose to take a sniff to find that the orange juice inside had been mixed with something that smelled alcoholic. He didn’t think that it was vodka, for it smelled more like it might just be wine of some kind - more than likely champagne. A quick glance over at the kitchen counter showed him that there was indeed a bottle of champagne sitting on the granite: beads of condensation rolling down the green glass.

Hoseok had also retrieved a bottle of something from the kitchen - the brown plastic instantly recognisable to Jimin’s eyes, because it looked exactly like a prescription bottle. As he discreetly watched the other man unscrewing the cap and tipping a pill or two onto his palm, he found himself wondering if the prescription label might just be blank of information and signatures.

Jimin watched Hoseok tossing the pills into his mouth, chasing them with a sip of his drink to wash them down rather than dry swallow them. Then he looked down at Cleopatra, seeing that she had closed her eyes because she was clearly enjoying her pampering session.

“Hmm, time to relax,” Hoseok almost purred, as he proceeded to settle back against the armrest of the chaise longue and he brought his long legs up onto the cushion. “Jimin, you travel around a lot with your muling. Tell me some stories, hmm?”

“What kinda stories?” Jimin asked, after swallowing a sip of bubbly cocktail.

“Anything, just talk for a little while,” Hoseok suggested with a wave of his wrist. “It’s nice listening to you talk, rather than the toxic silence that’s always in this fucking mansion.”

Hoseok reached up to place a hand against his brow, giving it a kneading rub as he let out a soft groan. His expression shifted at the corners as he did so, his lips turning down severely with a detectable wince at the corners of his eyes.

“Not even parties can get rid of the silence. I just- I fucking hate it,” Hoseok finished, as he dropped his hand onto his stomach.

“OK, um, well…” Jimin paused for a moment as he thought it all over, trying to find something interesting enough for Hoseok. Unlike Yoongi, who he knew would find pretty much anything that he told him interesting enough to listen to, he didn’t think that Hoseok would be so easily entertained. “Have you heard about Kowloon Walled City? Me and my partner over in Seoul, we’ve actually been there a few times and…”
Jimin really wasn’t sure just how long that he told Hoseok stories for, because he had no watch to check for reference, nor did the sitting-area have a clock hanging on any of the walls. The other man seemed to be listening to him, for he made noises every now and again to let him know that he was following his words, and he laughed at the little jokes and funny things that he said too. Yet, Hoseok kept his eyes closed for most of the time, which was a sign that he was very much drifting in and out of reality - thanks to his pills of choice and his champagne cocktail.

It was just as Jimin was in the middle of telling Hoseok about the evening dinner in which he had first met Yoongi, that something unexpected happened.

From somewhere outside the mansion, there came the sudden sound of a muted thump, which made Jimin look up sharply from his champagne flute because it had sounded just like a car door being slammed shut right outside on the front drive. He was unable to fully twist to look out of the window behind him, and so he could only spare a quick glance and then turn to look over at a Hoseok.

Before Jimin could open his mouth to say something, there was a soft creaking sound followed by what seemed to be footsteps - signalling that someone had just entered the mansion. He wondered if it might just be Wang, but it might be someone else and he didn’t know what to say or do.

“Hoseok, did someone just open the front door?” he asked in a quiet voice.

“Hmm, oh, that’ll be Gigi,” Hoseok hummed to himself, opening his eyelids just a crack so that he could stare up at the ceiling.

“Yoongi?” Jimin repeated in surprise, lowering his flute from his lips to stare over at the other man.

Out in the slight hallway, there was a series of soft thumps followed by a suppressed yawn, and a moment later, Yoongi proceeded to walk straight into the main-area of the mansion. He did so slowly, his posture slightly slouched in the shoulders and lower back in a way that showed that he was tired, and Jimin could only stare at him in surprise.

Yoongi was dressed in a similar fashion to what he had seen him wearing that day in Mickey’s Joint when he had been working - a loose white tee-shirt tucked into a pair of fitted black trousers, with a belt cinched tight around his thin hips and a black baseball cap on his head. He had brushed his hair back off his brow before slipping it on, so that his rounded face was on full display below the brim. His feet, which were now bare, had likely been clad in a pair of sandals that would be sitting in front of the door, and his Rolex watch looked very large and impressive on his thin wrist.
Cleopatra let out a mighty mewl as she jumped down from Jimin’s lap, trotting right over to Yoongi so that she could demand strokes.

Yoongi glanced up as he hunkered down to get closer to the cat, looking right at him before dropping his gaze. After a second, he looked back up again sharply; his eyes growing incredibly rounded in what could only be shock.

“Hey, Jimin,” Yoongi finally said to break the momentary silence, his lips curling up at the corners in a smile as he straightened up with the cat nestled in both of his arms.

“Hey, baby boy,” he replied, returning the smile as he shifted on the settee.

Jimin placed the champagne flute down on the side table, getting to his feet to go over to his boyfriend just like how Cleopatra had done so. He lifted a hand so that he could lean close to him, aiming to cup his cheek or the back of his neck in hand so that he could give him a kiss in greeting.

Though Yoongi had given him a kiss right in front of Namjoon that night that he had returned from Hong Kong, standing in the hallway of his house, it seemed that he wasn’t entirely comfortable with the thought of kissing him in front of Hoseok right now. It might just be because it was his own friend, and it would feel strange, it might just be for another reason entirely, but Jimin sensed his apprehension right as he leaned in to give him a chaste kiss.

So Jimin shifted to press his lips against the apple of his cheek instead; his hand settling on the back of his neck affectionately, rather than grabbing hold of his face. When he pulled his face away again, he saw that his boyfriend had actually closed his eyes at the quick peck, and he slowly opened them to peer at him through his thick eyelashes with a soft and fond smile.

“I didn’t think that I’d be speaking to you until tonight, Yoongi,” Jimin said, giving his neck a firm rub and squeeze before letting go again.

“Me neither, I thought you’d be at Namjoon’s house by now,” Yoongi admitted, shifting Cleopatra in his arms so that he could start stroking at her head and under her chin. “But it’s good you ain’t, ‘cos that means that I got to see your face today.”

“Oh god, the lovebird’s here,” Hoseok called from the chaise longue, lazily rolling his head to look over at them both.
“Hey, Seokseok, d’you have fun shopping?” Yoongi asked him, turning his head to look at his friend.

“I had lots of fun shopping, Jimin’s so funny and cute. I like shopping with him so much more than with you, Gigi. Hmm, but I’m tired right now, I think I’m going to nap or something,” Hoseok muttered, as he turned onto his side and he curled his legs up in front of him.

“You can’t sleep on the sofa, Seokseok,” Yoongi pointed out, pausing in the act of stroking Cleopatra.

Jimin saw something shifting across his face at this, his light smile twitching at the corners before it dropped right off his face.

“D’you see how many that he took?” Yoongi asked in a whisper, his gaze still focused on Hoseok.

Jimin could only shake his head with a shrug, because he really hadn’t seen how many pills that Hoseok had swallowed. He had assumed one, maybe two, but it could have been as many as four or five for all that he knew. Combined with the champagne, he knew that that was a bad mix, and that might just be why his boyfriend wanted to know the exact amount.

Yoongi moved so that he could hold out Cleopatra to him, silently requesting that he take the cat out of his arms for him. So Jimin did so, supporting her stomach and ribs in one hand and then cupping her lower body in the other securely.

“Seokseok, hey?” Yoongi said in that same quiet voice, as he moved to hunker down in front of the chaise longue. “Hey, you feeling alright, mmm? D’you feel sick, huh? Dizzy, anything like that?”

“No, just tired, Gigi, I wanna nap,” Hoseok almost whined, turning to shove his face against the cushion with his lips severely pouted out.

Watching Yoongi talking to his friend, Jimin found himself focusing on the way that his hand was sitting on the crown of his head. His boyfriend wasn’t too soft with his words, because he likely knew that he needed to be firm with his friend when he was stoned out of his mind like this, but the way that he gently patted at his hair said more than words ever could.
It was that wonderful level of trust, affection and love that friendship brought - that powerful platonic love just like the one that made itself known whenever Jimin found his arm slipping around Namjoon’s neck when he was sitting in front of the sofa playing video games, just so that he could tug himself close and hold onto him for awhile; like when he woke up in bed in the middle of the night with Taehyung, and he wriggled up the mattress to press his face onto his hair before falling asleep again.

Yoongi managed to get Hoseok to give in, allowing him to gently tug him to his feet so that he could guide him across the room and to the staircase. Jimin watched them both going up the stairs, gently rocking Cleopatra in his hold as he did so. A minute or two later, Yoongi came back down the spiral staircase alone - his friend presumably now lying in bed.

“Valium?” Jimin asked him, even when the answer was so very obvious.

“Popping pills and mimosas,” Yoongi sighed, as he moved to collect the empty glass and pill bottle from the floor in front of the chaise longue. “Hoseok’s favourite afternoon pastime. Sorry that you had to see him like this, darling.”

“See him like what? Stoned?” Jimin pointed out, before shaking his head slowly. “Yoongi, I’ve spent a great deal of my teenage years surrounded by stoners and downer addicts - I don’t care, I’m not uncomfortable or frightened of it. It’s the coked-up guys that I like to avoid, they’re the rowdy and violent ones - and the drunks.”

Yoongi just made a noise at this as he fixed the cap back onto the bottle. He eyed the pills in a way that showed that he didn’t like them, that he didn’t trust them either. Then he moved to go behind the kitchen counter, placing the empty glass down on the granite top.

“Did you elevate his head?” Jimin asked, just for the sake of it; watching his boyfriend hiding the bottle away in one of the countless kitchen drawers. “Always elevate his head, and place him on his side.”

“Uhuh, I’ve been handling this for ‘bout two years now, Jimin,” Yoongi reaffirmed with a nod, shoving the drawer shut so that it made a soft thumping sound. “I always make sure he’s elevated and safe.”

“God, I remember always having to check on some guy in a communal home that I used to live in. He used to pass-out a lot during his heroin slumps. One time, I wasn’t there because I was out working, and he almost died choking on his own vomit. It’s scary, Yoongi,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, shifting Cleopatra in his hold so that he could support her body more comfortably.
“Seokseok’s got a maid, she’s here pretty much every single day - sunup ‘til sundown. I pay her extra on the side to watch over him when I ain’t ‘round,” Yoongi explained. “He ain’t ever done something like that, but I like to make sure that it ain’t gonna happen. Better safe than sorry.”

“I agree, Yoongi,” he said with a nod, before shaking his head to knock a lock of hair out of his eyes.

“You want some more champagne, huh? He ain’t gonna drink it, he’ll throw it away when he comes ‘round ‘cos it’ll be flat and warm,” Yoongi said, moving to grab the bottle so that he could hold it up and study the label.

“Um, no thanks, baby boy,” Jimin replied, as he hunkered down to place Cleopatra down on the floor at last. “I think that I should probably head on back home, actually. I left with Hoseok this morning without telling Namo. He’s probably wondering where the hell I ran off to.”

“Oh, yeah? I’ll drop you off,” Yoongi offered, placing the bottle down and wiping the condensation on his palm free onto his trousers. “Which bags are yours, mmm?”

“Wait…”

Jimin had to hunker down again, checking through all of the store bags to figure out what was what. Most of the items had been bought for him, after all, and so he ended up with a great deal of bags in front of him.

Yoongi eyed them all for a moment before snorting hard, clearly finding the sight highly amusing. He moved to grab several of them, testing the weight before shifting them to one hand so that he could grab another handful from the floor. Jimin picked up the last couple of bags, going to the front door so that he could open it for his boyfriend with a thankful smile.

Yoongi carried the bags down the front steps and onto the drive, fumbling for his keys in his front trouser pocket so that he could unlock the vehicle. Rather than stow the bags in the boot, he just placed them in the back of the car, and so Jimin copied his actions before going around the hood of the car to climb inside. As Jimin was in the act of slamming the door shut, Yoongi joined him in the car. Before he could move to fasten his seatbelt in place, his boyfriend shifted behind the wheel so that he could lean closer to him.
Yoongi moved to cup his cheek in his hand, bringing their lips together in a quick kiss.

Jimin pouted his lips out to return it, moving to give him a second deeper kiss that made him sigh against his mouth when he broke the contact.

“I, uh, I wanted to do that before, when you went to kiss me. I did, I really wanted to, but I just couldn’t, y’know?” Yoongi said in a quiet voice, as he slowly moved his thumb across his cheekbone. “What’d you think ‘bout that, Jimin?”

“I understand, baby boy, public displays of affection are hard for you,” Jimin replied, reaching up so that he could place his hand on top of his to give it a quick touch. “It’s hard for a lot of gay guys, trust me. Such displays require a great deal of confidence and zero monitoring, and right now, you’re still monitoring all of your actions in public a lot. But that’s OK, you shouldn’t worry about it so much. So long as you’re comfortable with me when we’re together, that’s all that really matters. I saw that you were uncomfortable when I tried to kiss you, so, I kissed your cheek instead. That was alright, wasn’t it? You didn’t mind me kissing your cheek in public? Or should I just not kiss you at all next time?”

“Next time? Just kiss me,” Yoongi suggested, giving his cheek another fond squeeze before letting go to turn back to the steering-wheel. He started the car with a sharp twist of the keys, pulling back on the handbrake hard. “Lemme know when it’s safe to kiss you, yeah? I-I can’t tell that good, I get so nervous in public places, ‘cos that stupid voice in the back of my mind keeps telling me that someone’s gonna see me - some important businessman that might start talking to others, someone that knows my parents well enough to tell ‘em what they saw; even when I know that the chances are one-in-a-fucking million. I, uh, I felt safe in Mickey’s Joint that morning, and when you kissed me in the restaurant, it wasn’t that bad.”

“And Namo’s house?”

“Shit, Namjoon’s house is one of the few places I feel like…like I can be myself, Jimin,” Yoongi admitted, as the car pulled away from the curb and it rolled into the lane. “It’s so hidden, it’s so secure - no one’s got a fucking clue that I’m there ‘cept me, you, and Namjoon. I ain’t gotta worry ‘bout anything the second that I step through the door. It’s like I can take my skin off for the first time in days and just…stop thinking for a lil while; y’know?”

“Oh, baby boy,” Jimin sighed, moving to place his hand down on his knee to hold onto him. “I’ll do it, OK? I’ll find the best spots for us, the safest spots for us. I’ll make sure that you feel comfortable and then I’ll just lean in close and kiss you, like this-“
Jimin quickly moved so that he could give Yoongi a peck right on the rounded end of his soft nose. It made his boyfriend blink hard rapidly, the contact catching him by complete surprise.

As Yoongi laughed at the sudden peck on the nose, Jimin finally pulled his seatbelt in place over his body; sealing him into his seat securely. He couldn’t help but laugh too, finding the way that the other man’s cheeks flushed with a hint of pink as endearing as always.

“I asked Seokseok, but he was fucking sky-high at that point and he didn’t really answer me - but how was today, huh? Was it good, darling?” Yoongi asked, as he moved one hand off the wheel so that he could place it down onto his knee instead. “It was a bit sudden, a bit of a rush, but I’d to change plans last minute and ask him if he’d take you out on my behalf.”

“Hoseok told me that you were really busy,” Jimin said with a soft nod, settling back comfortably in his seat and letting his boyfriend take firm hold of his thigh. “It was good today, really good. Hoseok picked me up in the morning, we had a couple of appointments to keep, but it didn’t feel rushed. The most important thing was getting fitted for a suit - my very first suit. Um, Hoseok went a little wild, and he ordered a lot of suits on your card, baby boy, I mean a lot of suits and-”

“Don’t worry ‘bout it,” Yoongi interjected, giving his thigh a soft squeeze. “I told him to treat you, and besides, the suits ain’t even that much a treat. You need ‘em for work.”

“After the suits, Hoseok took me to a big boutique and into a lot of stores. He bought so many things, Yoongi, I couldn’t get him to stop,” Jimin admitted, before letting out a laugh. “I tried, I promise that I tried, but he was outta control and he wouldn’t listen. He just kept saying that he wanted to buy me things, that he thought that you would really like seeing me in this and that, and I could only follow him around the place like a puppy.”

“Darling, I can’t even get him to stop when it comes to shopping,” Yoongi said with a lazy smile. “The only thing that you can do is leave him to race ‘round everywhere ‘til he gets tired and he needs to sit down and pop a Valium or three.”

“But it was fun, Yoongi, it was really fun and I’d a great time today,” he continued. “He took me out for brunch in this little café in Presidio Heights. They had amazing coffee, and I got to have lobster again!”

“Mmm, I should take you out again for lobster,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice, pulling his lip in to give it a quick nibble before letting go again; his lip bouncing back flushed and slightly slick. “That place was really nice, yeah? The restaurant?”
“Baby boy, I’d love to go back there whenever you want,” Jimin agreed with an eager smile. “The trouble is, I really liked the lobster, but I want to try the different options too!”

Yoongi laughed heartily at this, patting and squeezing at his knee as he did so. His eyes never once left the front window, his left hand guiding the car around corners with ease.

In the brief ride from Pacific Heights to Haight-Ashbury, Jimin told Yoongi more little details about what had happened during his impromptu shopping trip. He told him about sampling all of the different kinds of cologne, and how he had kept a little piece of sample paper close to him with his Chanel *Antaeus* cologne on it, so that he had been able to smell it - which made Yoongi’s smile widen enough to crinkle the corners of his eyes deeply and reveal his gums. He explained about how he hadn’t had a clue about coffee and that Hoseok had told him that the kind that he liked tasted like soil, and Yoongi just shook his head and told him that Hoseok was the one without taste.

There was no discussion about the fact that Hoseok had downed a great deal of Valium and that he was more than likely unconscious to the world right now, but Jimin got a sense from Yoongi that that was a subject that he didn’t really want to discuss. It was something he was pretty sure that his boyfriend worried enough about, and in time, he might just talk to him about it as a way to seek comfort and advice.

Jimin might not have experience with Valium addicts, but he had spent a great deal of time around users before he had met Namjoon and he had gotten away from that scene. He had seen heroin up close and personal, along with a random assortment of party style drugs, and so he felt like he could at least talk to him about things and offer him some comfort as he tried to figure out what to do with his best friend.

It might just have been the first time that Jimin had met Hoseok today, but there was something about him that even he could detect was…off, wrong in a way. The other man was friendly and upbeat, a little too much so, and behind his wide smiles and oftentimes campy declarations, Hoseok was hiding something. Something dark, something painful, something that he was clearly using the pills to try and cure to no avail.

If Hoseok was just like every other rich kid out to have fun and party, he would be snorting lines of coke or poppers and knocking back handfuls of uppers to get that raw rush of power. But he wasn’t, he was slipping prescription-strong sedatives into his system with a kick of alcohol to strengthen the effect, and he was seeking sweet oblivion and a total numbness to everything around him.

What had Hoseok been through that could make him want to feel like that? What could he possibly have seen or felt that could hurt him that much?
Jimin wasn’t really all that certain that he wanted to know.

Upon pulling the car right up to the curb outside of Namjoon’s home, Yoongi proceeded to kill the engine and remove his seatbelt.

Jimin copied his actions, exiting the car so that he could quickly go up the front steps to knock on the front door. Whilst he waited for Namjoon to answer the door, he ran back down the steps to help his boyfriend with all of the bags. He was in the act of going back up them, Yoongi slamming the back door shut with his hip, when the front door swung inwards.

Namjoon was standing in the open doorway, fully dressed and looking like he had only just finished getting showered for the afternoon. There was a ruddy hint of colour under his cheeks and exposed lower arms and legs, as he was dressed in his loose red and black striped tee-shirt and denim shorts.

“Hey, Daddy-o!” Jimin called with a quick laugh, almost skipping up the steps. “Did you enjoy sleeping all day long, huh?”

“What the fu-” Namjoon stopped himself from cursing at the very last moment, just like he always did so when Yoongi was around. It was those fake manners of his, or it might just be because he thought that it was actually incredibly disrespectful to curse around Prince Min himself. “Jimmy, what is all of that? Did you go shopping while I was in bed? What?”

“I went shopping with a new friend - new as in I only just met him this morning,” Jimin explained with a grin, keeping the front door open for his boyfriend with body.

“You just keep meeting all of the rich guys, huh?’” Namjoon remarked, watching Yoongi carrying the dozens of store bags into the home. “Good afternoon, Yoongi. I hope that business is going good for you.”

“Thanks, and you too, Namjoon,” Yoongi replied, sparing a quick glance back over his shoulder at him before going through the open doorway.

“Can I smell something cooking, Namo?” Jimin remarked, as he moved to go down the hallway. “Are you making dinner?”
“Yeah, it’s kimchi spaghetti night, Jimmy,” his friend replied, to which he made excited sounds under his breath.

Jimin followed Yoongi inside of the living-room, carefully placing the bags down onto the floor close to the usual tower of books. He was in the act of straightening up and he was about to go into the kitchen when he noticed that his boyfriend was nowhere in sight. So he stepped out into the hallway just in time to catch sight of him.

“Where are you going, baby boy?” Jimin asked, turning to look at Yoongi just as he stepped back out onto the front steps. “Are you leaving already?”

“Huh?” Yoongi hummed, his eyes growing rounded as he stared back at him. Then he reached up to rub at the nape of his neck in a fidgeting manner. “I, uh, I was gonna go, I thought you and Namjoon were busy, and I don’t wanna intrude.”

“You’re not intruding at all,” Jimin pointed out, as he quickly crossed the hallway to get closer to him. “We were just gonna make some dinner, and you’re always welcome to stay for dinner, Yoongi.”

“Are you sure? Namjoon don’t mind at all?”

“Come on, Namo’s making his kimchi spaghetti tonight, baby boy - you’ve gotta try it!” Jimin almost demanded, tugging at his wrist in a bid to get him to just step through the doorway and join him inside of the house. “Kimchi spaghetti and Coors beer, remember?”

“I ‘member,” Yoongi agreed with a quick smile, letting him tug him that little bit closer before he dragged his weight back against him to stop him. “Kimchi spaghetti, I gotta say, it could be nice…”

“Are you teasing me right now, Yoongi?” Jimin asked, digging his heels down against the flooring as he cocked his head to look at him. “Are you playing a game just to see how much that I want you to stay, hmm?”

“Maybe,” Yoongi replied after a moment of thought, his smile taking on a rather mischievous note.

“OK,” Jimin said with his own mischievous smile. “Well, this is how much that I want you to come stay for dinner, baby boy.”
When he let go of his wrist, he saw Yoongi’s smile shifting at the corners in uncertainty; as he no doubt tried to figure out what he was going to do. Jimin hunkered down slightly to slip his arms right around Yoongi’s hips, lifting him up with ease so that his boyfriend let out a startled sound. The angle meant that Yoongi had to look down at him, his hands instinctively settling on his shoulders so that his fingers seized tight handfuls of his silken shirt.

“Oh, my shoes!” Yoongi cried out, the sound of one of his sandals dropping to hit the floor with a soft thump, quickly followed by the second one.

“It looks like your shoes want you to stay too,” he suggested, the pair of them laughing at the joke.

Jimin carried Yoongi down the hallway and into the living-room, hearing the front door creaking as it slowly swung inwards again. It didn’t shut with a click, but the front door was hardly important right now, when he was carrying his boyfriend over to gently lower him down onto the sofa.

When Yoongi settled back against the sofa cushions, he planted his heels into them and he spread his thighs wide in something that might just have been instinct, but to Jimin felt more like an invitation. He slotted right between his spread thighs to also get onto the sofa, his weight on his knees so that he was slightly elevated above him and able to press their bodies close.

Yoongi reached up to take hold of the front of his silken shirt first, slowly running his fingers up to his throat so that he could lace them together on the nape of his neck and hold onto him.

“You really wanted to stay, didn’t you?” Jimin asked, letting Yoongi gently pull him closer so that their brows were touching. “You were just playing a little game with me, you flirt.”

“I like it when you ask me to stay,” Yoongi almost whispered against his lips, his eyes growing half-lidded. “I like being told that you want me to be here, it makes me feel welcome, darling.”

“Hmm, that’s so adorable,” Jimin hummed, pouting his lips out to give him a quick peck. “But you know that you don’t have to get permission, baby boy.”

“I know,” Yoongi sighed out, closing his eyes as he did so.
“Next time, don’t walk out of the door,” Jimin suggested, pressing more tender pecks along his nose and cheek, up to his brow so that his nose ruffled at the mess of hair hanging over his forehead. “Next time, just ask me if it’s fine and I’ll tell you how much that I want you to stay, OK?”

Yoongi made a noise at this as he moved his head to bring their lips together in a proper kiss.

Jimin opened his eyes during the kiss, looking at Yoongi to see that he had his eyes closed gently rather than squeezed shut like he had used to do so when he had first started kissing him. It showed him just how at ease that he was, how much that he had started getting comfortable around him instead of anxious.

Yoongi was holding him in place, tugging him close so that he could stop any hint of space from happening between their bodies. The position that he was in meant that Jimin was in the perfect position to grind down against him, feeling his boyfriend’s thighs trembling as he no doubt curled his bare toes up to clench his muscles tight.

Yoongi let out a soft moan against his mouth, turning his head into another kiss as one of his hands roamed down his back to sink his fingers into the silk of his shirt.

Jimin watched him from under his half-lidded eyelids, seeing the way that his brow twitched from every soft rotation. When he pulled his face away for a quick gasp for breath, his tongue stayed out between his lips just so that he could lick out at his mouth and keep encouraging him to give him more kisses.

“I take it that Yoongi’s staying for dinner?” Namjoon suddenly called from the doorway, a kitchen knife in hand that was currently covered in hints of vegetables and beaded liquid.

Jimin pulled his face away at this with a quick grin, seeing the way that Yoongi’s tongue slipped out between his parted lips to seek his own mouth, before he opened his eyes a slit. His boyfriend wet at his lips, slowly pulling his tongue back in in a way that just demanded another kiss or three.

“Hmm, staying the night, if you ask me,” Jimin joked, pulling in his lower lip to sink his teeth into his skin as he rubbed his hand over the swelling bump in the crotch and thigh of his trousers.

Yoongi made a flustered sound at this that quickly turned into a laugh, dropping his head with a hint of shyness. He made no move to push his hand away, however, which meant that Jimin kept it place to give him another discreet rub with his palm.
“Well, Jimmy, I’m gonna need your assistance,” Namjoon said, completely oblivious as to what he was doing. “I’m trying out some garlic bread as a side dish, so, I’m gonna need you to pan fry the bacon and mince for me whilst I check on it, and-”

“Garlic bread?!” Jimin exclaimed, stopping in the act of roaming his hand all over Yoongi’s crotch. “Oh, baby boy, I told you it was a good idea to stay for dinner!”

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5th October, 1984, 8:02am: Pacific Heights, San Francisco, United States of America

This morning, the weather was cooler than it had been all week.

Yoongi was thankful that he had slipped into a long-sleeved shirt instead of a tee-shirt, even if he rolled the cuffs up his forearms, because at least the breeze wasn’t as cool on his skin. It played with the open collar, ruffling it just like it made the material around his ribs and waist pull back against his skin before falling loose again.

In several weeks time, Yoongi might just find himself slipping a jacket on just for the added layer of warmth, and he would have to exchange his sandals for a pair of Oxfords too. Seokjin might just exchange his light summer mac for a wool one, or at least one with some lining, and Hoseok would no doubt slip into something designer so that he could complain about how much he hated the cold (even when it mostly was mildly cool and dry). But until that time came, he was going to enjoy the last of the double digit temperature and bright sunshine.

When he turned the corner at the end of the street, he wasn’t at all surprised by the sight of a certain someone sitting outside of the diner. As he reached up to rub at his eyes roughly, Yoongi found his lips curling up at the corners in a soft smile because just like yesterday, Jimin was sitting on the slight jut of concrete on the front of the diner windows.

Jimin had his gaze focused off across the wide and sloping street currently, and so he had yet to notice the fact that he was heading straight in his direction. His eyes were following a trundling tram that was slowly turning a corner at the very bottom of the road that was no doubt packed with travelling workers at this early hour; droves of pedestrians making their way across the traffic-filled
street like busy ants all around it. He was slowly following all of the commotion from behind the lenses of his sunglasses.

But after a moment, Jimin turned to look at the opposite sidewalk before turning his head to the side to catch sight of him. The movement made his tousled hair shift, his dangling cross earrings catching the light before a lock of hair fell forward to hide them from view again.

Even from their distance, Yoongi could see the way that his full lips parted in a wide smile. It was impossible to miss it, from his dazzling teeth to the way that his entire posture shifted upon seeing him - his shoulders lifting high and his back straightening. It was funny how just seeing him was enough to make a little spark of something ignite inside of Jimin’s chest: excitement and happiness, maybe? Most certainly love, that much was certain to him.

Yoongi quickly walked along the sidewalk before cutting across an empty narrow side street to get onto the curb, finding that there was a skip in his step that hadn’t been present a mere moment ago. If just seeing him sparked a ripple of excitement in his boyfriend’s chest, then Yoongi was certain that Jimin made his entire body flood with vitality - which would explain the sudden upbeat skip in his step and the smile on his face.

“Good morning, baby boy!” Jimin called, as he shifted to get to his feet. He reached behind himself to brush any dust free from the full seat of his jeans, before holding a hand out to him.

“Morning, Jimin,” Yoongi replied with a smile, as he came to a stop right in front of him and he took hold of his offered hand. He let Jimin lace their fingers together tight, giving his hand a soft squeeze as he did so. “You been waiting here since sunrise, mmm?”

This joke made his boyfriend giggle, throwing his head back to knock a lock of hair back off his brow. It didn’t stay in place, however, for it slipped free again just a mere moment later.

Yoongi reached up to brush it back for him, feeling the silken strands against his fingertips as he tucked it in place. There, he looked so much better now; the shell of his ear on display and his silver earring glinting in the morning sunlight.

“I should bring a sleeping bag with me,” Jimin joked in reply, eyeing him from the tops of his sunglasses with a cheeky grin.

Yoongi pushed the door open for them both, tugging Jimin inside behind him so that he could escort
him over to his usual window seat. He grabbed a newspaper from a table that they passed just like always, not even glancing at the front of it to check the headlines.

For the last couple of days now, Jimin had been coming to visit him for breakfast at Mickey’s Joint, on the occasion that he hadn’t happened to have spent the night at Namjoon’s house with him, that was. If that had been the case, then he had made breakfast with him in the kitchen instead of going to the diner - Jimin slouched against his back holding onto him, his head on his shoulder as he had ebbed in and out of sleep with husky mumbles.

Yoongi could only imagine how tired that his boyfriend was hitting the streets at this early hour every single morning. But seeing as he hadn’t been muling since early September, he had long since managed to adjust back to his usual time-zone, so that wasn’t awake all night long and sleeping away the entire day.

Jimin should easily be sleeping and waking at normal hours. After spending a couple of nights in his company with good food, evening drives and rigorous workout sessions in the form of dancing and singing along to Music Television whilst high on life -or the occasional shared joint -in the living-room, to prostate massages and thigh fucking in bed and the shower; Yoongi thought that he might just have been able to tire Jimin out at last. But his boyfriend seemed to have so much energy stored inside of him that he doubted that he would ever tire him out for too long.

Jimin was there right on time each morning, always waiting around on the curb for a minute or two before he showed up; always dressed in a pair of skintight blue jeans and a blindingly white tee-shirt and sneakers, with pair of designer sunglasses on the end of his delicate nose that Hoseok had no doubt bought him. Judging from Hoseok’s previous mention of being obsessed with the idea of owning some Gianfranco Ferré sunglasses, Yoongi had assumed them to be from that designer - thin golden wire frames and oversized dusky coloured lenses.

Jimin moved to sit down at the diner table first, letting go of his hand as he did so. He removed his sunglasses, placing them down onto the table rather than on the crown of his head like Hoseok usually did so. The surface of the table was clean, not a single speck of sugar or salt on it to show that it had been previously used.

Yoongi dropped the newspaper onto the surface before sitting on the opposite side of the table to him. He settled down on the leather seat with a soft sigh, hearing it creaking under his weight as he folded one leg over the other comfortably.

As Yoongi opened the newspaper, he noticed that Annika was emerging from the backroom to get behind the counter. The bell over the door had no doubt attracted her attention, and so she gave them both a warm smile.
“The usual, darling?” Annika called, an almost empty coffee pot in her hand.

“Mmm, but waffles as a side dish,” Yoongi said with a quick nod, as opposed to the usual order of fruit salad.

“And you, honey? Anything extra today?”

“Uhuh, the same, no extra sides,” Jimin replied, turning away from the window to return her smile.

“Then I’ll be right back with your coffee,” Annika called, as she moved to go right into the kitchen.

Yoongi watched her go before glancing back down at his newspaper again, eyeing the front to see that the usual shit was all over the page - politics, international conflicts, and more healthcare cuts and scares to frighten the general public. He quickly moved to open it close to the back, to the sports section so that he could scan the races first.

“You bet on the races, baby boy?” Jimin asked curiously, as he played with a napkin and he looked at the page in front of him.

“Nah, I just like to guess the winners,” Yoongi replied, as he scanned the usual column of names, colours and odds. “I don’t gamble with my cash, darling, no more than usual for business. Unlike most men, I know how important cash is. Not only is it important to make it and keep it, but tossing cash ‘round makes it easier to track. I don’t need the fucking IRS on my ass, I’m already dodging ‘em every single day.”

Jimin made a noise at this, shifting in his seat as he looked out of the window again. He was no doubt looking out at the bay down below at the very bottom of the hill; the great expanse of perfect blue water that ran right out across the horizon.

Yoongi flipped the newspaper over again so that he could start reading it from the front, even when he doubted that there was going to be anything worth reading inside of it. Either way, it was better to check, just in case there was something important nestled away inside of all of all of the nonsense and chaos.
Annika brought their coffee over to their table after a minute, placing it down with a promise that their food would be right with them.

Jimin mixed up the coffee, adding just a hint of milk to both of the mugs and no sugar as he gave it a quick stir with a disposable wooden spoon.

Yoongi had glanced through just several pages and perused an article about real estate as he sipped at his scorching hot coffee when his boyfriend shifted in his seat again.

“Are you gonna read that whole paper and ignore me all morning?” Jimin asked with a teasing pout, cocking his head to the side so that a thick lock of hair dangled free from in front of his ear.

Yoongi glanced up at him from under the brim of his cap for a few seconds, before turning the next page painfully slow. The paper rustled loudly underneath the sound of the grill frying in the kitchen. He didn’t even want to read the rest of it, he was just playing a little game with his boyfriend, just to see how he would react.

“Seriously, baby boy?” he whined, wriggling on the padded bench and knocking his feet against his in a way that made Yoongi stick his tongue out to wet at his lips. “What’s in that paper that’s more important than me, huh?”

Jimin suddenly moved to lie right on the newspaper, so that he could block it from his view. He folded one arm across the double page, plopping his head right down in the centre to take up as much room as possible. He made sure to press his face against it for effect, letting out a mischievous noise as he did so in true immature Jimin fashion.

Yoongi could only chuckle at his antics, lifting a hand to place it down on his head and give his hair a soft stroke. He put his coffee mug down on the table, freeing up both hands so that he could ruffle at his hair and get him to lift his head up.

“Fine, I’m done,” Yoongi promised, tickling at the nape of his neck so that Jimin squirmed on the seat. “No more reading.”

“Promise?” Jimin asked in a muffled voice, turning his face to the side so that he could roll his eyes up to look at him.
“Mmm, it was all shit anyway,” Yoongi agreed, dropping his head to give him a quick peck on the top of his head; feeling his warm hair against his lips and breathing in the scent of his shampoo with a sigh.

Jimin shifted to sit up at this with a pleased hum. It was obvious that it was just a little game, that he actually didn’t want the attention, but it was fun to play around with him. There was an added bonus in the fact that he actually got attention from him too, and so it made total sense that he had wanted to mess around like that.

“Oh!” Jimin exclaimed in surprise, glancing at his forearm to see that there was a smear of newspaper ink all over his skin.

Yoongi could see a matching smear on his chin and nose too, from where he had plopped it right down onto the newspaper, and he found himself struggling to control the urge to burst out laughing at the sight of it. He ran his tongue around his mouth to try and control himself, only to find that he couldn’t help but let out a laugh.

There was a napkin holder on the table along with the condiments and small jug of milk, and so he moved to retrieve one. Yoongi had to wet the napkin with a hint of saliva, dabbing it against his tongue before moving to wipe it against his skin. With a rough rub, he managed to clean the ink free from his face for him, and so he took hold of his wrist so that he could wipe at his inner forearm too.

Yoongi had just scrunched the napkin up to drop it onto the tabletop when Annika emerged from the backroom. She pushed the door open with her hip, a tray balanced on her arm that was covered in plates and glasses, and then she moved to get to their table so that she could set it for them.

“I told him that he needs to order some meat, but here he is - buying waffles like a little kid,” Annika remarked with a head shake, a joking expression on her face as she placed down Yoongi’s breakfast of mushroom and pepper-filled omelette and fried tomatoes on French toast.

Yoongi laughed at this, letting her set the rolled-up napkin of cutlery down on the surface along with a glass of milk and a plate on which whipped cream-covered waffles and strawberry chunks had been layered.

“I’ll order double bacon next time,” Jimin suggested with a grin, as she added his plates to the table: the main serving of cheese grilled toast, egg, bacon and fries, with side dishes of maple-drizzled pancakes and sweet waffles. “I’ll be sure to feed him some.”
“Hmm, oh, I’m sure that he’ll eat it if you feed him it, honey,” she replied, giving Jimin a knowing smile as she straightened up and she proceeded to cross the floor to go back into the kitchen.

“I think that she’s onto us,” Jimin said, that very same grin still on his face as he moved to fold his elbow on the table and he cupped his cheek in his hand. “Wow, we’re too obvious, baby boy.”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment as he cut up his breakfast into edible chunks, the knife sliding through the soft and firm omelette and golden bread. As soon as he had done so, he placed the cutlery down on the side of the plate.

“How’d you sleep, huh?” Yoongi asked, as he closed and folded the newspaper up, before placing it aside on the table away from their plates of food. “D’you have any good dreams?”

As he sat back in his seat, Yoongi placed his hand on the table so that it was right beside his mug of coffee. After a few seconds, he slowly turned it to the side to offer his palm out to him, silently requesting that Jimin take hold of his hand, and so his boyfriend moved to do so without a single word.

Yoongi liked it when Jimin held his hand like this, his hand on top of his so that his fingers were folded across the back of his knuckles and hand and his thumb was clasped securely inside of his curled fingers. It allowed him to gently rub his thumb over the side of his hand, from the bump of his thumb joint to the webbing between it and his forefinger almost all of the way up to his wrist. He liked not having to quietly ask him if he could hold his hand, for just knowing that Jimin was in tune enough to read his silent signals meant that it helped cut down on the final hints of nervousness that public physical contact still brought him.

Even though Seokjin came to meet him at this diner, Yoongi felt like he was starting to get much more comfortable with Jimin inside of it. Ever since that first time that they had shared breakfast together in the diner, he had found that it was a safe place of sorts for him. Not as safe as Namjoon’s house, of course, but still safe enough to relax and be himself inside of. He could hold Jimin’s hand, maybe give him a quick kiss on the head, cheek or lips, and it was perfectly fine.

None of his men ever came to such a place, some fry-up diner on the edge of Lower Pacific Heights that had no business being a part of his daily schedule. His father’s men and his serious real estate and legal business associates weren’t going to see him in Mickey’s Joint, and so there was nothing to worry about.

Elsewhere in the city, Yoongi knew that he wasn’t safe, and so he had to find the places that he was and fully enjoy himself in them.
“Um, I can’t really remember a lot of my dream last night,” Jimin replied, taking hold of his fork so that he could use the side to start cutting into his own breakfast - unable to use his knife as he was holding onto his hand. “I’ve got a feeling that Jungkook was in it though, that’s all that I can remember.”

“Oh, yeah? I’ve had a couple of dreams with him and Tigger in ‘em,” Yoongi replied, lifting his mug of coffee up from his table so that he could hold it in front of his face; breathing in the scent. “Usually, it’s when we’re in a park in the morning, he’s teaching her tricks.”

“Hmm, I think that we were on a plane and I was taking him to Seoul or something,” Jimin explained, his brow severely furrowed as he tried to recall what he had been dreaming about. “Probably to see his friend, I can’t remember.”

“You ain’t dream ‘bout me?” Yoongi asked after a quick sip of coffee, to which Jimin snorted laughter.

“You think that you’d be on my mind, right? I was thinking about before I fell asleep, if you know I mean,” Jimin said with a rather naughty-looking grin, which made him swallow his next sip of coffee in a hard gulp. “Those Polaroids, ah, they’re great.”

Yoongi placed his mug down on the table so that he could grab his fork and start eating. It gave him something to do for a moment, rather than mumble out a flustered response to what his boyfriend had just said about masturbating to his Polaroid photographs of him.

“But speaking of the kid, how’s the school application going?” Jimin suddenly asked, spearing a chunk of food onto his fork. “Have you been able to apply for him? Can he really study in that language school?”

“I got one of my best on it, Dohee - Hoseok’s mother. She’s offered to sort out the application for me for the kid, so, he should be set to start studying by November, I think?” Yoongi replied around his own mouthful of food. “He can study, there ain’t no problem with his age. There was just some legal shit that needed to be forged first, but that’s going smoothly.”

“Good, that’s really good, baby boy,” Jimin said around a massive bite of sticky pancakes and bacon. “He’s gonna get so good at English that he won’t need to talk to us in Korean anymore.”
The thought made Yoongi start laughing, finding the idea hilarious after he had heard several of Jungkook’s amateur mistakes when trying to talk to others in English. It would be fantastic for a kid to speak better, but he had a feeling that it might be tricky for him to learn at first.

After a moment, Jimin let go of his hand so that he could retrieve his knife and start eating his breakfast properly. Yoongi didn’t mind at all, as he got just as much enjoyment from watching his boyfriend eating than he did holding his hand, and so he watched him eagerly devouring his large serving with a soft smile playing at the corners of his lips.

As they ate breakfast, Yoongi found out through Jimin that he was going out with Hoseok again today in regards to something to do with a suit order. They would be going for brunch and coffee again, and so that meant that he had no need to worry about what his best friend would be doing for the day. Jimin would keep Hoseok entertained for a couple of hours whilst he was working, would keep him out of trouble. In turn, he had some minor business plans that he needed to address today, and so they were both going to be busy.

By the time that Yoongi had finished eating his breakfast, sweet waffles and all, he saw that it was edging close to 9am on his watch. He had told Seokjin to meet him around 9am instead of 8:30am so that he and Jimin could share breakfast over the last few days, and that meant that his boyfriend was going to have to leave soon to avoid meeting him.

“My man’s gonna be here soon, Jimin, you should go,” Yoongi suggested, wiping his mouth clean with his napkin and then dropping it onto the empty plate.

“I know, I know,” Jimin said with a soft smile, as he glanced down into the remains of his no doubt lukewarm coffee. “I’ll go, just gimme another minute.”

Yoongi glanced out of the window to see that the road was empty, and when he turned back to Jimin, he saw that he had finished drinking his coffee. His boyfriend copied his actions with his napkin, wiping at his mouth even though there was a chance that he would accidentally leave a smear in the corner of his lips, just like always, and then he scrunched it up into a tight ball and he dumped it onto the plate.

“Can I get a goodbye kiss, baby boy?” Jimin asked with a hopeful smile, shifting to lean closer to him.

Yoongi dragged his gaze away from the window, leaning over the table so that he could give him a quick kiss - a chaste peck. He went to pull his head away from him, only to find himself bringing their lips together again in a deeper kiss. Just a quick one, nothing more than a few seconds in length,
but just because the first one hadn’t felt satisfactory enough for him. At least the second kiss felt perfect, when Jimin’s lips parted to let him gently prod his tongue out to meet his own between their pouted mouths.

Jimin’s lips curled up lazily as he finally pulled his face away, his eyes half-lidded and sparkling in the early morning sunlight. His skin looked so golden, especially when it clashed against his white tee-shirt.

“OK, that was a goodbye kiss,” Jimin said, finally moving to get to his feet so that he could get off the bench. “Talk to you tonight, baby boy? You’ll call, right?”

“I’ll call, as soon as I’m free,” Yoongi promised, reaching up to take hold of his hand and giving it a quick squeeze. “Have a good day today, darling.”

As Jimin exited the diner and hit the street, Yoongi turned his head to watch him go. He blew him a kiss just because he knew how much that his boyfriend loved the act, tinkling his fingers at him with a lazy smile as the younger man passed his window. He heard the faint noise of him giggling through the glass, the sound making him laugh to himself too.

A mere minute later, Yoongi caught sight of Seokjin’s Ferrari at the bottom slope of the hill, and so he moved to slip his wallet free from his trouser pocket to pay for the food. After giving Annika her usual tip, he got up to leave the diner and he waited on the street for his partner to pull up to the curb.

“Good morning, Yoongi,” Seokjin greeted, as he moved to climb into the passenger-seat beside him. “You look well today.”

“Oh, yeah?” Yoongi remarked, glancing over at him to see his usual get-up of a pristine white shirt with a bolo tie tucked into cream trousers; his mac delicately folded on the backseat. “What’d you mean?”

“You look like you’ve been getting more rest and food,” his supplier explained, as he pulled the vehicle away from the curb. “That kind of well, a healthy kind of well. It’s good.”

Yoongi made a soft noise at this, settling back in his seat as he fixed the seatbelt in place across his body.
A quick look up at his reflection in the rear-view mirror showed him that his eye sockets were certainly ringed with less discolouration than usual; his eyes glinting and his skin much more glowing. He did look like he was sleeping better, and though he had yet to put any noticeable weight on, he was probably going to put on a couple of pounds over the next few weeks if he carried on eating more than one meal a day.

“Actually, there’s something that I wanted to discuss with you,” Seokjin said, slowing the car down to stop at a set of traffic lights. “I’ve heard that there’s been some changes being made to our supply system. You’re changing one of our mules into a runner? May I ask who exactly you’re promoting into the position of supplying our affluent buyers?”

“Jimin Park,” Yoongi replied, looking out the window at the busy lane of traffic beside them. “He’s deserving of the promotion.”

“You’re grooming Park to be a runner to our wealthiest clients?” Seokjin asked him with a couple of quick sidelong glances, his tone indicating that he was uncertain about this fact. “Do you think that that’s a good idea?”

“Yeah, I think it’s a fucking great idea. Why don’t you think it’s a good idea?”

“Well, he’s hardly the best choice is he, Yoongi?”

“What’d you mean? Why ain’t he a good choice?” Yoongi asked in confusion, turning his head to look back at him. “He’s reliable, he ain’t using blow, he’s shown himself to be consistent and constantly making us a profit - why ain’t Park a good choice over the rest?”

“Park doesn’t look the part. He looks like he’s more apt to trick up on Polk Street,” Seokjin remarked without a hint of hesitation, his cool and clipped words cutting him right down to the bone.

Yoongi felt his breath leaving his lips in a soft wheeze at this, his entire middle almost folding in half as he stared at his supplier.

Seokjin had just told him that his boyfriend looked and acted like a fucking rent-boy, and Yoongi couldn’t say a single thing against this in his defence. Not only because he was so shocked by his bold words, but because he didn’t want the other man to find out about the fact that they were in a relationship with one another.
If Yoongi got angry and offended, it would be a highly strange reaction from him, considering the fact that they were only acquainted through business and nothing more than that. If he denied it too much, it might also seem unusual.

But Yoongi couldn’t look Seokjin in the eyes and say a single word in agreement with this remark, even when it was probably the only way to react that wouldn’t raise suspicions.

Not when he knew about Jimin’s past; not when he knew about the things that he had been through as a young gay boy growing up surrounded by older men with cash and fatherly affections that had wilfully abused him for their own pleasure.

If Yoongi agreed with this statement even if only to hide their relationship, he would feel like he had just slapped his boyfriend right across the face. He couldn’t do it, he just simply couldn’t do it, because it was disgusting to even lie about such a thing at Jimin’s expense.

“I, uh, at that dinner with Park and Kim, I actually saw something in him,” Yoongi managed to mutter after a moment of thought. “He’s fucking ruthless ‘bout business, Seokjin, just like the rest of us. He’s a great mule, yeah, I ain’t gonna deny that, but he ain’t scared to haggle and he’s feisty. Some of those rich bitches, they’re taking us for a ride and I think they need to be knocked down a peg or two. What better way to get ‘em to start paying up than to let the kid of some immigrant family talk down to ‘em?”

“That is true,” Seokjin remarked, making a soft noise under his breath as he rolled the car through the traffic lights. “There have been issues in the past with loose change floating around. I think that our soon to be replaced runner is far too familiar with our clients, familiar enough to let some things slide for personal favours. I suppose that anyone can look the part with time and effort. So long as Park can talk business, that’s really all that matters.”

“Exactly,” he agreed with a nod. “Business talks - fuck everything else.”

When the interior of the vehicle fell silent, Yoongi sank back down in his seat, turning his head to look out of the window again. His heart had started racing in his chest, so much so that he found himself struggling to get it under control. He hoped that Seokjin wasn’t aware of how nervous that he was right now, that he couldn’t hear his pounding heartbeat and uneven gasps for breath.

Yoongi felt like he had just dodged a bullet, that he had narrowly avoided being clipped right in the side and wounded grievously.
Hopefully, Seokjin was just sharp with things and no one else would remark on how unusual it was for him to be promoting Jimin, seeing as no one else had to monitor his business dealings as thoroughly as his supplier had to do so. Therefore, he probably didn’t have to worry about the fact that he was promoting Jimin to such a good position on the runner ladder, so long as no one else started talking about the slight switch-up.

Seokjin rolled the car across the neighbourhood so that he could escort them both to Haight-Ashbury. It was where Sooyoung had been set-up as his snake; the young dealer that had been caught dealing speedball by Namjoon that had had connections through Chinese dealers that they wanted to keep track on. It was just a brief ride, fifteen minutes in total before he was pulling up in a lot just across the block to discreetly park there instead of outside of the block that he was living in.

“Better hope your car’s still here when we get back,” Yoongi remarked, as he slammed the door shut and he proceeded to rapidly cut across the open lot. “She’s just asking to be stolen in this lot, Seokjin.”

“I’ll try to not think about that,” Seokjin called, following along behind him so that they could hit the street and cross the wide road.

Unlike the terrible housing block that Sooyoung had been living in in The Bayview, the one that Yoongi had had him moved into was in much better condition. It was strange thinking that there was a drastic difference between them, as the block in Haight-Ashbury was in bad condition too. But the fact that the wallpaper wasn’t peeling away from years of thick mould, that there was no ruined carpet on display out in the corridors and on the staircase, meant that it looked luxurious in contrast.

Yoongi went up the stairs at a quick pace, hearing Seokjin right on his heel as he got to the right floor and he proceeded to go along the hallway to get to the door. He hammered on the door with the side of his fist, glancing down the empty hallway whilst they waited for it to swing open. The sound of televisions and soft voices echoed from the other rooms, including through the thin door that they were waiting in front of.

After a moment of waiting, the door swung inwards, and Yoongi saw that Sooyoung was visible in the space in the door frame. Today, he wasn’t sporting any pink handprints across his face or bleeding gashes on his shaven scalp, for there wasn’t a single blemish present on his face.

“Prince Min, Kim,” he said, much more meek and respectable than he had been during their last meeting.

Sooyoung moved out of the way to let them enter, and Yoongi found that his room was in far better
condition than it had been. It wasn’t filled with bust-up furniture and filthy stacks of dishes and food containers, but was actually in a clean state. He ran his gaze across the bare amount of furniture in the main room, seeing a couple of small tables, a single sofa and a beanbag close to the small television unit.

There was a stack of cash currently sitting on one of the tables with a mound of envelopes - all signs of his ongoing dealing on their behalf. There was no obvious drug memorabilia on display, but that was likely hidden away in the tiny bedroom, or even the bathroom.

After closing the door, Sooyoung quickly crossed the room so that he could go into the bedroom. He returned a moment later with a box in hand, a small box that Yoongi knew the contents of at a single glance.

Sooyoung had been wearing a wire during all of his interactions with his suppliers and all contact with whoever he was meeting for all transactions relating to the speedball that he had been selling over on Clay Street. One of Yoongi’s enforcers had fitted him with the equipment and had replaced the tapes when needed, so that they had an ample source of conversations recorded and waiting to be translated by one of his men.

It might just be that Sooyoung had picked up nothing worth recording at all, but it was still worth a shot. Even if he just happened to pick up a couple of words that led them to another street or another man, then it would be worth it. If not, Sooyoung would prove his worth in time through making connections and learning on their behalf.

“Here, Prince Min,” Sooyoung said, dropping his head low to hold the box out to him.

“Business, it’s the same as always, yeah? No changes, nothing new?” Yoongi asked, as he accepted the box from him and he popped it open to eye the tapes. “You ain’t got anything to report right now?”

“No, Prince Min, it’s the exact same as before,” Sooyoung replied, awkwardly lingering in place as he still seemed to be highly nervous around the two of them after their first meeting. “Clay Street, I meet the two suppliers there and I return my earnings through them. A day later, I go to Chinatown to get my cut, but sometimes, I see different guys in the building and not only my suppliers.”

“What kinda building?” Yoongi asked, lifting a tape up to eye it with a great amount of interest before placing it back inside of the box.
“A tea shop.”

“A tea shop in Chinatown,” Yoongi repeated, glancing over his shoulder at Seokjin to hold his gaze. “You get a good look at these guys, huh?”

“Some of them look like enforcers to me, you know, goons and stuff? But some of them look like they got cash, they look kinda rich,” the other man explained, reaching up to give his nose a quick rub with the back of his hand as he sniffed hard. “They take the cash, and they move it around - that’s what I think. I don’t see them that much, but they seem important.”

Yoongi thought this over as he fiddled with the box, thinking that there was a good chance that Sooyoung was actually right. He might have witnessed a couple of exchanges between his suppliers and their superiors, which meant that he might just have overheard something important. But he knew to not hope for too much, that they more than likely weren’t going to find out anything interesting from this endeavour.

After all, this was nothing more than a small blimp on Yoongi’s district radar. If 14K were taking their merchandise and mixing it to sell on the streets as cheap speedball, they were still making a profit. The problem was that they could be poaching their addicts from using cocaine or heroin in favour of their cocktail drug, and that was going to affect their profits in the future. That was why he had to find a way to either stop them from selling the knock-off drug, or to stop supplying them directly and find a new and better paying source for their cocaine to cut them off.

Right now, however, Sacramento Snow was much more important, because it was using up their stock and the money was bleeding its way through the gang so that they couldn’t track who was making a profit at their expense. It was their cocaine and heroin being stolen and mixed, it was their men secretly dealing it and making money that they had no right to pocket - and that was why he needed to stop it as soon as possible.

But if Yoongi could clean up both matters at the same time, his jurisdiction would be so much cleaner for it.

“The pills are good, yeah?” Yoongi asked to break the momentary silence. “They’re strong, ain’t they?”

“The pills are really good, Prince Min, thank you,” Sooyoung said, before letting out a rather flustered noise as he reached up to rub at his stubbly head. “The pain isn’t that bad now, it hurts a lot less.”
“Good,” Yoongi said, moving to cradle the tape box against his side in the crook of his elbow. “You deserve ‘em, Sooyoung. I’ve forgiven you for your mistakes, you’re working hard for us, like you always should have. Keep working with my man to record your transactions with your suppliers, keep bringing us these tapes, and you’ll keep on getting those pills. I like to reward those who help me, mmm?”

“I will, Prince Min.”

Upon leaving Sooyoung’s room, Yoongi went down the stairs and he exited the block again, holding the door for Seokjin.

“Get this to Noh, he’ll translate everything,” he said, holding the tape box out to him. “I doubt we’re gonna hit gold at this point, but it’s better than nothing.”

“How are the investigations into Lee’s sudden death leading us?” Seokjin asked, accepting the box from him as they waited on the curb so that they could cross the road. “We seem to be running into walls in regards to all ongoing matters; wouldn’t you agree?”

“Yeah, info’s coming in, but it’s slow, Seokjin,” he replied, scanning both sides of the road. “Hopefully, the Lee case’ll be dead and buried soon, just like him.”

“Your father’s not listening to reason?”

“Pft, my father still thinks that I got him murdered, he ain’t listening to reason or the evidence that proves that I didn’t do it,” Yoongi retorted, quickly cutting across the road to get to the opposite sidewalk. “I was working to negotiate with him and Kwon through Uncle Jung in regards to Sacramento Snow - why’d I suddenly murder a man I was tryna extract info from? Sure, I’d have put a bullet in him the very second he gave us what we needed, but he hadn’t done that yet, and-”

Yoongi stopped talking as they entered the parking lot, finding his ears picking up a rather unmistakable and unexpected sound.

Seokjin’s phone was ringing away inside of the car, had been for an unknown amount of time.
As they both cut across the lot to enter the car, Yoongi left Seokjin to answer the call. It was likely business related in regards to muling deals, and so there was little point in him answering it on his behalf. So he just settled back in his seat and he watched the other man retrieving the receiver, shoving it into the crook between his neck and shoulder as he pulled the plastic body up onto his lap.

“Hello?” Seokjin said, shifting to get hold of the receiver with his hand more securely. “You have? I’m terribly sorry, I was just seeing to business, Father Min. Yes, Yoongi is with me currently.”

Yoongi dragged his gaze away from the front window at this, just as he had finished snapping his seatbelt in place.

His father was on the phone right now, talking to Seokjin?

Why was he phoning them in the middle of the morning like this? Was it because of something important, or was he just trying to contact him to request that he talk to him over simple matters relating to business, seeing as he wasn’t replying to any faxes that he might have sent earlier in the morning?

Seokjin shifted to hold the phone out to him without a single word, signalling that his father wanted to speak to him. That meant that it was probably related to business, and so he moved to take hold of it and he brought the receiver up to his ear.

“Yeah?” Yoongi almost barked down the line, caring not for fake manners right now.

“You’re proving as troublesome as always to track down, son,” his father remarked in a dry tone. “I thought that I would be able to reach you via your phone, but you weren’t answering it, nor was Hoseok - I tried him after realising that you weren’t at home.”

“Kim just told you, we’re out seeing to business in my jurisdiction,” Yoongi replied honestly. “We’re working, father, y’know that I ain’t one to slack-off when it comes to my business.”

“Indeed, you’re so busy working that you never seem to stop,” he said in that same dry tone, the sound of him moving in his seat travelling down the line in the form of a dry rustle. “I want to see you today, as soon as possible. We have matters to discuss that I feel are better discussed face-to-face rather than on the phone like such.”
Yoongi shifted in his own seat, aware of the fact that Seokjin had made no move to start the car and exit the lot yet as he was waiting for him to finish his call. It was probably because he was being respectful and not wanting to make noise as the car engine could generate a lot of static on the line, or it might be because he was waiting for him to tell him where he needed to drive the car.

“I’ll head over now,” he said, before holding the receiver out to Seokjin so that he could end the all on his behalf.

Seokjin dropped the receiver into the cradle, and then he moved to shove the box underneath his seat once more.

“Seokjin, drop me off over in Presidio Heights. Wherever, I don’t give a shit, I’ll walk there, I think I need some air to clear my fucking head,” Yoongi groaned, sinking back into the seat whilst the other man started the car.

“Of course, Yoongi.”

Over the duration of the near twenty minute ride across several neighbourhoods, Yoongi found himself wondering why his father wanted to see him right now.

The obvious answer seemed to be that his father was finally going to put the issue with Dukwon Lee’s murder to rest. It had been long enough now, and he must have realised by now that he hadn’t killed the other man, nor had he had him executed by his enforcers. Evidence that pointed him in the direction of someone else should have been uncovered by the police by now at least, just to finally get him to stop accusing him of the murderous act.

The problem was that no one was telling his father where he had been over the duration of the day and night in which Lee had been murdered, because no one but Hoseok knew where he had been visiting Jimin. That was probably why his father was still refusing to accept his innocence right now, as he had no solid alibi at hand that could simply eradicate all chances of him being involved.

There was a chance that Yoongi was assuming wrongly and that his father might just want to see him about the Sacramento Snow trouble. Maybe, he had finally realised just how much of an issue that it was now that one of his men that had had connections to the branded drug had been suddenly murdered? Maybe, he was finally going to admit that should have listened to him all along, when he had told him that the drug was bad and that they should have tried to control it months ago when it had first started appearing out on the streets?
His father, actually admitting that he was wrong about something? Like that would ever happen…

Upon entering Presidio Heights, Seokjin slowly rolled the car around the neighbourhood as he tried to find the best spot to drop him off. He had to get through the densely populated commercial areas first, just so that Yoongi wouldn’t have to mingle with crowds of people out on the packed streets and wait at dozens of sets of busy traffic lights. By the time that he had found an optimum location, they were in a stretch of residential land that was very close to his family home.

Yoongi shifted so that he could remove his seatbelt, which was a sign that he wanted to get out of the car. His supplier slowly pulled up to the curb to stall the engine, allowing him to climb out and go around the front to get onto the sidewalk. Rather than walk away, he hunkered down by his open window so that he could look in at Seokjin.

“Keep up business like usual, if you’ve got anything to report, call me - I’ll head on home after seeing my father to monitor everything,” Yoongi explained through the window. “Don’t forget, get the tapes to Noh.”

“I’ll deliver the tapes to him when I’m passing through his neighbourhood,” Seokjin said with a nod. “I hope that whatever your father wants to see you for, you can resolve the issue swiftly and cleanly, Yoongi.”

“Yeah, me too,” Yoongi said with a nod, straightening up again to walk along the street.

It took Yoongi several minutes of constant walking to reach his family home, passing tall detached mansions with front lawns and back gardens in a variety of styles and colours, alongside semi-attached mansions that shared land. The opulence varied, much like the cars in the drives, and he found himself nervously nibbling at his nails as he strolled along the spotless sidewalks until he finally reached the most affluent homes with their own private land.

Much like the Jung clan family home, the Min clan mansion was a towering castle of a home set upon an acre that had a sprawling front lawn for playing polo, perfectly manicured side gardens filled with rose bushes and other fanciful flora, and a back garden that had both a conservatory for dinner parties, and a small patch of green for practising golf. The white and cream mansion had ten bedrooms over four storeys, a massive garage filled with his father’s vintage British cars that he liked to collect like toys, and a swimming pool right across the greens. There was a paved path set behind towering wrought iron gates on which security cameras were attached, and guards were often left to watch the street for added security.

Just looking at the massive building was enough to make Yoongi feel his saliva drying up in his
mouth, struggling to swallow as he was granted entry through the front gates. He walked up the front path, his sandals lightly slapping as the soles connected with the paving flags.

There were gardeners present all over the lawn, pruning hedges and bushes and trimming grass to keep perfectly manicured, so that the air was filled with noise. The pond was also being drained and cleaned this morning, the imported and large koi darting around a paddling pool in the shade of one of the tall hedges.

Yoongi had used to like watching the fish as a child, had liked sticking his fingers in the water so that they had nibbled at them with their gaping mouths before darting away a second later. He had once thought of them as his friends, and he still found the sight of them pleasing.

The koi were probably the only thing in the goddamn home that he actually liked seeing.

When he reached the front door, Yoongi ran the doorbell and he waited on the slight step. After a minute of waiting, he saw movement on the other side through the frosted glass window, and then the heavy oaken door swung inwards. There was a manservant on the door, a now ageing and grey-haired man that Yoongi had known his whole life - Mr. Sang.

“Good morning, Master Yoongi,” he greeted, his voice as dry and creaky as it had always been. “It is good to see you are in good health.”

Yoongi stepped inside of the family home, running his eyes across the grand foyer to see that it was still the exact same as it had always been.

The flooring was dark wood that was polished to a high sheen, reflecting the glow from the dangling chandeliers right back at his eyes, and the walls were papered in authentic William Morris - the luxury paper covered in floral print. There were many family portraits hanging on the walls, both in the form of artist paintings and massive printed photographs of his ancestors, along with attractive art prints that his mother had adorning the entire house. The display tables were covered in vases filled with fresh bouquets, and fine Korean poetry was placed here and there that had cost a damn fortune to import into the country.

The staircase that lead up onto the first and second-floors was a grand double staircase with sweeping gilded banisters and thin carpet runners placed in the middle of the steps to expose the marble on both sides. The third-floor was accessible by way of a flight of stairs along one of the large hallways, but Yoongi had no need to go up to that floor today. It was where the guest rooms were, and he only had a need to go up onto the first-floor, should his father want to see him in his private study and not his public greeting study just across the foyer.
“How’re my parents, Mr. Sang?” Yoongi asked, as he exchanged his sandals in the waiting-area and he hunkered down to find his house slippers.

They were carefully stored away in a discreet storage unit set beneath a large display table. He exchanged his shoes for the slippers and then he straightened up again. As he stepped into them, he removed his cap and he placed it down onto the table, just to be respectful.

“Your parents are well, Master Yoongi,” the old man replied, as he moved to follow him into the foyer. “Your mother has just finished curating a new art exhibition that is set to open over the weekend, and your father is as busy working as usual. I believe that he is awaiting your arrival in his private study.”

“Thanks, Mr. Sang, I’ll be sure to go and see him,” he said with a nod, reaching up to run his fingers through his rather messy hair.

Yoongi moved to cross the massive foyer to get to one half of the double staircase. He went up the steps slowly, running his hand up the banister as he did so. He was in the act of walking along the landing when he saw that his mother was in the act of descending the opposite flight of stairs; having just exited his father’s study herself.

“Good morning, Yoongi,” his mother called from the top of the staircase.

To Yoongi’s trained ears, this sounded like a perfunctory greeting rather than a genuine one. It was all in her tone, from the somewhat weary sigh at the end and the complete lack of enthusiasm.

Yoongi turned his head to look at her, seeing that she was dressed in a fitted green dress with a scooped neckline and three-quarter sleeves. The emerald shade matched her dark hair well, which was currently hanging free well down past her shoulders, and it also complimented her lightly tanned skin tone - which he knew was the result of constant lightening and bleaching products, rather than natural like his own. As a result of her current house slippers, she would be considerably shorter than him, but she would be taller if she was wearing her usual towering and thin heels of choice.

“Good morning, mother,” Yoongi greeted in reply, finding that he had nothing to possibly say to her right now.

The last time that he had seen his mother she had refused to let him kiss her goodbye in case he gave
her AIDS. The ensuing argument that had unfolded had resulted in him smashing one of her prized and imported vases across the foyer and then storming out of the house, only to have had an emotional breakdown in the car: his knuckles bruised and bleeding from punching the steering-wheel, and his eyes swollen from his tears.

Understandably so, this incident had rather soured the air between them both ever since. There had been no apologies from his mother for what she had said to him, and in turn, Yoongi had refused to apologise to her for breaking her vase; though he had often pondered on doing so because it left a bad taste in his mouth whenever he thought about his childish act of destruction.

“Father summoned me,” he finally decided to say, just because the air had fallen deathly quiet between them both and he just had to break it. “I should go and see him.”

His mother just made a noise at this rather than speak, remaining on the staircase as she looked over at him. It appeared that she wasn’t going to continue descending the steps until he had left, and this fact made him stick his tongue out to wet at his dry lips.

“I, uh, I’m sorry for what I did that night,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice. “It was wrong of me to do that, but it was also wrong of you to say those things to me, mother. You hurt me, you hurt me in a way that you’d never done so before, and I didn’t know what to do. So, I lashed out and I broke your vase. I regret doing so, but I still dunno if you regret saying those things to me.”

“I regret saying that you’ve got that disease, Yoongi, because you clearly don’t have it…yet,” his mother said, lifting her head to knock a thick sheath of hair back and sniffing in what seemed to be disdain. “If you would have had it, you would be dead by now. It kills very fast, from what I’ve been told. The fact that you aren’t dead means that you don’t have that homosexual cancer, but I still worry that you are going to catch it every single day.”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment as he studied his mother, once more finding the stark contrast between her and Dohee unbelievable.

Upon seeing Hoseok’s mother again after some time, she had remarked upon his health as she had embraced him, before asking him many questions about how he was doing, if he was taking care of himself, had he met someone special. She had smiled at him and had shown him so much maternal love and affection that Yoongi sometimes thought that he didn’t deserve; on account of him being such a terrible son.

His own mother, when faced with the event of seeing him again after several months, was refusing to come anywhere near him and talking about how he was so lucky to still be alive and not dead from
AIDS. She was cold as ice, just like always, and she had refused to show him any form of affection since he had been a mere child as she had simply despised motherhood.

“Yeah, I’m still fucking kicking - sorry to ruin your day, mother,” Yoongi spat, as he turned on his heel to cross the landing and get away from her.

His mother didn’t call out to him at this to get him to stop, to try and explain herself or even demand that he come back and talk, rather she let him stomp his way along the landing to get to his father’s study on the adjacent stretch of the first-floor. As soon as he was a considerable distance away, she resumed her descent down to the ground-floor, just like that, not another word on the matter.

The last time that Yoongi had seen his father it had been on Presidio Golf Course whilst they had discussed the untimely demise of Seunghyun Choi and Sacramento Snow, only for the man to have refused to have let him investigate the drug outside of his jurisdiction. He had since seen him in a dream - the one in which he had attacked him with a golfing iron and had reduced him to hysterical tears, which he supposed was actually closer to a nightmare in nature.

Yoongi really wasn’t looking forward to seeing his father again, especially not in the family home. After his icy encounter with his mother, he wasn’t feeling the familial love in the air today at all.

Rather than knock on the door, Yoongi decided to just enter the study right away because he knew that his father was expecting him.

Like he had assumed, Yoongi saw that his father was seated behind his desk; in the act of smoking one of his pungent-smelling cigars and going through a large amount of paperwork that would all be legal business and not gang-related.

His father never touched anything gang-related whilst he was in the family home, he had other men to do it for him to keep his hands and the land completely clean of criminal activity.

Just like always, his father was wearing a pressed three-piece black suit with chalk stripe, the suit jacket open as he was sitting down so that his waistcoat was on display. His cigar was perched between his lips, the smoke curling up from the end thick enough so that he had to squint through it as he read the paperwork on the desk in front of him.

“Father,” Yoongi said, moving to draw close to his desk, but making no move to take a seat in front of him in the opposite armchair.
His father didn’t look up right away for he was in the act of signing a sheet of paper several times, and so he left him waiting for a minute as he did so. After finishing signing the sheet, he moved it onto a pile and he reached up to pull his cigar free; dabbing ash into an ornate ashtray set across the wide oaken surface.

“What am I here for today, father?” Yoongi asked, shifting from foot to foot impatiently because he just wanted to hurry up and leave the mansion as soon as possible.

“I’ve summoned you here this morning, son, to discuss the matter of Lee’s murder,” his father replied, finally looking up at him.

“We’ve been over this issue a thousand fucking times - I didn’t kill Dukwon Lee,” Yoongi spat, as he reached up to rub at his nose roughly - struggling to not sneeze from the pungent scent of the cigar smoke. “I ain’t gonna lie, if I’d had him killed, I’d have told you to your face like I did with Choi. I don’t stab men in the back, I stab ‘em right in the front so that they can see me do it. Lee was murdered through some petty deal gone wrong, by some money-hungry bastard that wanted a bigger cut or whatever. Instead of investing all of your focus on him, how ‘bout you focus on Sacramento Snow, huh? The real root of the fucking problem.”

At this, his father’s study fell silent, and Yoongi dropped his gaze to stare down at his house slippers as he waited for him to say something. His words hung heavy in the air, in a way that he hadn’t intended for them to do so, and he felt like he might just have made a mistake by angrily blurting it all out like that.

“I was going to tell you that the reason why I summoned you today was to inform you that I’m aware of reason for Lee’s death,” his father said after a moment. “However, like always, you decided to throw a tantrum just like a child, and you stopped me from doing so.”

Yoongi ran his tongue around his mouth at this, forcing himself to not speak and make himself sound even more childish in front of the man after his irritated rant.

“There are reports from an insider source within the police that Lee’s home was heavily burgled during the homicide. It appears that whoever murdered him ransacked the place afterwards to steal a great deal of goods. Judging from some forensic samples taken from the scene - drugs were the main bust. There were large amounts of cocaine powder retrieved from the samples, and yes, I’m more than well aware of the fact that Lee owned heroin dens.”
Yoongi lifted his gaze up from his slippers at this, his teeth biting down on his lower lip as he listened to his father intently.

“The police are looking for a vehicle spotted in the area during the crime, but I doubt that they will find it,” his father added, taking another drag on his cigar and blowing a thick lungful of smoke out of his mouth. “It appears that Lee was meddling in the wrong affairs after all.”

“That’s what I’ve been saying all along, father,” Yoongi pointed out. “That morning on the greens, when I asked for your permission in tracking down the new drug, I told you that we had info on men - Lee was one of those men. I was tryna negotiate with him for more info before he was murdered, but if you’d have given me permission sooner, I might’ve been able to use him to track it down.”

“Are you blaming me for not extending your jurisdiction, son?” his father asked, his eye-contact strong and unwavering.

“Yeah, I’m blaming you. I’m blaming you for not even granting me permission to just handle the issue, it ain’t ‘bout granting me extended jurisdiction,” Yoongi argued. “Fuck extended jurisdiction, it ain’t worth it right now. If you’d have just lemme confront either of ‘em with my men and resources within your territory, we might’ve sorted this shit out by now, father.”

“Mmm, you place far too much emphasis on trust and haste,” his father remarked. “Rushing won’t find the issue if you aren’t even aware of what the issue is, Yoongi.”

“I ain’t rushing, I know what it is - would you like me to remind you?” Yoongi smartly retorted. “Sacramento Snow is a speedball mix I originally tracked through Seunghyun Choi and his heroin dens, along with my stolen key of blow. After murdering him, I discovered that the drug’s coming from multiple sources and that he was just a supplier. Dukwon Lee in Bernal Heights and Seungho Kwon in Mission are two further suppliers. Uncle Jung was tryna use his influence and resources to broker a deal with one of ‘em to get us in on the drug and its source at a cut price incentive, and then I was gonna absorb the brand whole and eradicate everyone involved when the time was right.”

“Do you believe that this plan will effectively eradicate the drug?”

“What else’d you suggest, father?”

“Truthfully, I was going to leave the drug issue alone and let it come to an end through lack of demand, but since Lee’s death, I’ve been…embroiled in the matter,” his father said, moving to sit
back in his armchair as he did so. “It’s very fortunate for you that Lee was murdered, whether or not if it was your design; wouldn’t you say so, son?”

“No, I think his murder’s just made everything more complicated,” Yoongi admitted, feeling no need to lie to him or bite the bait that had just been thrown his way. “We only have one current known supplier of the drug now, and that’s a risk. I killed Choi, someone else killed Lee, I think that Kwon ain’t gonna be left breathing for much longer - his odds ain’t looking too great right now. Either Lee’s murder was a genuine coincidence, or someone had him put in the ground before we could get to him for info.”

“That would suggest that someone is aware of your actions and is trying to stop you, Yoongi,” his father pointed out, which made him shift from foot to foot and swallow hard.

“Yeah, it’d suggest something going on inside of the gang, a snake within my own men,” he agreed, hating the fact that he had to admit such a thing to his father. “It might just be a coincidence, but I don’t like taking chances. Father, I need you or Uncle Jung to sort this matter out for me. I can’t do it, it ain’t in my jurisdiction and I’m wasting my time tryna chase after info in the hopes it might leak onto my streets where I can do something ‘bout it.”

“Whenever I had to request assistance from my father, do you know what he made me do, Yoongi?” his father said, moving to stub the pitiful remains of his cigar out into the tray.

Yoongi did know, as he had once witnessed such an act when he had been just a mere child.

Back then, Yoongi had been with his grandfather when the event had happened. He had been sitting on his grandfather’s knee in the sitting-room of the family mansion, a boy of just four years old with his short legs dangling high above the marble flooring and a book in hand filled with Korean fairy tales that he had been reading from to impress the man. His father had entered the room in a flustered state, a younger and thinner man that had been handsome, but not extraordinarily so. Both adult men had fallen into discussion, but Yoongi was now unable to recall what they had been talking about.

All that he could remember was the vivid image of his father getting down onto his hands and knees to kneel at his grandfather’s feet; and the look of displeasure on his face as he had done so.

Yoongi moved to stand to the side of his father’s desk so that he was visible to the other man. He shifted so that he could lower himself down onto his knees first, before leaning forward and pressing his palms into the thick carpet pile. As he lowered his head down onto the backs of his hands, he sat back on his heels - kneeling fully in front of his father.
“Father, please follow through with my plans with your great power and influence. Please find Seungho Kwon and destroy the branded drug for me, as I’m unable to do so,” Yoongi said through his clenched jaw, his fingers seizing tight handfuls of the carpet pile as he did so. “If you don’t do it, I fear that the drug might spiral outta control and take over great deals of our streets. It might make the press and cause a public panic and further the war on drugs crisis, which will heighten police efforts and cause us to lose more cash through bribes and insiders. Please, I need your help, father. I’ve done all I can and it ain’t working.”

“You may stand,” his father said, lifting his hand to gesture for him to get to his feet again. “I will see to the issue with Kwon. I will have you informed of progress through Hajoon. See, son, this is why I never granted you permission in the first place. I knew that you would be unable to handle the matter. You’re twenty-three years old, you’re incapable of handling such immense conflicts at your age. Do you know how old I was when I was first able to control such an issue without your grandfather by my side? I was thirty-eight years old, and you were a mere child.”

Yoongi thought that this sounded like bullshit. This sounded like his father had been incapable of wielding influence as a young man and so his grandfather, a far superior man, had blocked him from a great deal of power until he had matured and learnt to control things; and as a result, he was punishing him for his own past inadequacies.

Yoongi thought that he was more than capable of controlling the matter, but because of his father constantly refusing to give him permission, he had forced him to his knees just so that he would fail.

A bitter taste flooded his mouth, and Yoongi found that he was unable to keep the corners of his lips in a neutral position.

“I don’t give a shit, so long as you get rid of Sacramento Snow, that’s all that matters,” Yoongi said, his closing words on the issue.

“Mmm, so, now you’re free to run off and do whatever you wish,” his father said, lifting his hand to give it a limp wave as if brushing him away. “These days, I have no such clue what that might just be, you seem to want to be very secretive about your private affairs.”

Yoongi heard movement behind him, and when he turned around, he saw that his mother was lingering in the study doorway. This wasn’t at all a surprise, for she often lingered around whenever he was visiting - even if the matters of his visit didn’t in any way involve her. If his father were to dismiss her, she would leave, but oftentimes, his father refused to dismiss her so that her added presence just made him feel even more uncomfortable.
“That’s why they’re called private affairs, father,” Yoongi replied, turning back to look at the other
man. “You often want to keep ‘em private, like your private affairs at the greens with your
wandering hands and a pretty waitress’ ass.”

Yoongi heard his mother making a sound from behind him, a disgusted noise at the back of her
throat. It was hard telling if she was directing it towards him for saying such a crude thing, or if it
was in fact aimed at the both of them - at him for talking about the matter in such a way, and at his
father because she already knew and she was voicing her displeasure at the fact that he was also well
aware of it.

“What are you hiding from me, Yoongi?” his father asked in a quiet voice, as he shifted to sit back in
his armchair with his elbows on the padded rests so that he could tent his fingers underneath his chin.

“I ain’t got a clue what you’re talking ‘bout, father,” Yoongi retorted brusquely, folding his arms
over his chest so that he could attempt to look carefree and unfazed by this question.

In reality, his heart had just started beating a hell of a lot faster in his chest.

“I keep getting told by Hajoon that you’re innocent of Lee’s murder, and I’m more than inclined to
agree with him at this point,” his father explained slowly. “However, Hajoon has yet to see fit that I
know how he knows that you’re innocent. I know that Hoseok was singing your praises in the early
morning hours of the 24th, because I spoke to him personally in the Jung household, and that means
that Hajoon found out through him. What did Hoseok tell him, Yoongi?”

“I dunno; have you tried asking Uncle Jung?” he retorted acerbically.

If there was one thing that Yoongi could trust Hoseok for, it was his loyalty, and he knew for a fact
that his best friend hadn’t told his father about Jimin. Hajoon knew about as much about Jimin as his
father did so, and it made a kick of childish enjoyment run through his system as he held his father’s
gaze and he tried to not smirk at this fact.

“Yoongi, don’t be so rude to your father,” his mother scolded from the doorway, as if he was thirteen
and not twenty-three.

“Are you up to no good again?”
Yoongi knew what his father meant by this, as it was his way of describing anything to do with his sexuality. It could refer to massage boys, trips to bathhouses, secret boyfriends - anything at all, it really didn’t matter. It was his more polite way of referring to his proclivities. But if he was feeling particularly irritated with him, or if he was drunk, then “are you up to no good?” would rapidly be changed to “are you playing sick games?” or even simply “you’re acting like a faggot again, aren’t you?”.

“Please, tell me that you aren’t up to no good. Your mother will be very upset if you are, Yoongi, and not to mention-”

“Are we finished, father?” Yoongi interrupted, not at all in the mood for another lecture on how his mother would have fainting spells and need to see a therapist over the thought of him sucking another man’s cock. “I’m sure that you got business to see to, we all got business to see to - it’s a fucking busy world.”

“You’re avoiding my questions, Yoongi,” his father pointed out, before letting out an exhausted sounding sigh. “If you carry on doing such disgusting things, you know you’re going to get sick and die from the queer disease like a wild animal. Your mother is sick with worry about you, and I’m sick of telling you to stop by now, Yoongi. You never listen because you don’t care and you’re still hungry for attention, like always.”

“I ain’t got AIDS and I ain’t gotta worry ‘bout contracting it either,” Yoongi retorted smartly, lifting his head high and setting his jaw in an act of defiance. “Unlike you, I actually know the fucking facts, father. You ain’t gonna frighten me no more, not like you used to.”

“I do know the facts, and the facts are that queers are dirty. That’s why they’re all dying from this disease, Yoongi,” his father stated in a matter of fact voice. “If you don’t stop acting like that, you’re going to die too.”

Even though Yoongi was trying his very hardest to emulate Jimin’s bravado and his powerful words, he could feel himself starting to flag underneath his father’s cold and unyielding presence. The other man didn’t even have to get loud and aggressive to put pressure on him, for just his heavy gaze and down-turned lips could shake him down to his very core. The fact that his mother was also breathing down his neck just added to the pressure that they were both exerting on him.

“I ain’t queer and I ain’t dirty - stop calling me that,” Yoongi muttered, as he reached up to massage at his brow. “Stop telling me that I’m disgusting and dirty. You-you think I dunno this already, huh? You think I need to be reminded every-single-fucking-time that I walk through the door, huh?”
“If you know that you’re dirty, Yoongi, then why don’t you just stop?” his mother suggested, her words making him scoff loudly. “You can stop doing those dirty things with other men, if you know that it’s dirty and wrong.”

“You think I ain’t tried?!” Yoongi argued, twisting on his heel to look at her. “You think that I ain’t spent years tryna fuh-force it away, mother?! I can’t, alright, I’ve tried!”

“We know all about the fact that you were ordering rent-boys, son,” his father said in a blunt tone, which made him drop his hand from his brow to stare at him dumbly. “It doesn’t sound like you’ve been trying hard at all. Men are talking about you, Yoongi. You might think that it’s all one big secret, but they know that you’re a goddamn faggot! My associates share drinks with me in meetings, and they all know that you’re rutting around with rent-boys like an animal!”

This made his mother gasp theatrically, and though Yoongi wasn’t looking at her, he assumed that she had just clutched at one of her designer necklace chains. His own fingers were clutching at the front of his shirt, twisting at the material as he looked between them both; his breath almost wheezing in and out through his slack lips.

“Fine, I’ll stop ordering ‘em - can we just stop talking ‘bout this, please?” Yoongi almost pleaded, struggling to blink back the stinging tears that were gathering at the corners of his eyes. “Can I go now? Ain’t you both humiliated me enough for the day?”

“I haven’t humiliated you half as much as you’ve humiliated me, son, and that’s the truth,” his father said with a severe downward twist at the corner of his lips. “Do you know how hard it is working with investors from outside of this city with a faggot for a son? They laugh at us! A family-run corporation that will need to be sold off in the future because of you and your perversions!”

“Just get married, Yoongi,” his mother stressed. “Just have a son. It doesn’t matter if you don’t love your wife or any of your children, just do it before you get homosexual cancer and you die. If you don’t, you’re going to ruin this family, and…”

Yoongi could hear his parents talking, but he suddenly found that he was unable to really hear what they were saying. Their words were just echoing through the room, fading out to the point in which they sounded like they were echoing down a massive tunnel to reach him.

Yoongi was vaguely aware of the fact that he had stopped breathing, that his chest had done that hideous thing so that it felt like there was a crushing weight on it and every attempt at an inhale made
it hurt. The pain was so strong that he didn’t want to breathe, but he had to; he had to breathe before he ended up collapsing. Even if his chest was so tight that it felt like he was having a heart attack and he could feel cold pulses travelling through his body.

When Yoongi gasped for breath, he found his eyes squeezing shut tightly because of the pain. Oh, he wanted to cry out from it, but he couldn’t - there was no air in his lungs to possibly expel in a cry of pain.

Yoongi was going to die, he was convinced that he was going to drop dead on the floor of his father’s office and-

“Deep breaths, baby boy, you got this.”

The sound of Jimin’s voice suddenly cut through the panic inside of his mind, so soft and so close that it was almost like a whisper down his ear.

Yoongi felt his body reacting, his shoulders shooting up and his hands seizing hold of his shirt as he took another sharp gasp of air. It hurt so much, but he needed it, he needed to breathe just like Jimin has told him to. Just like that morning in the diner when he had had an episode, he was having one right now, and he needed to get his panic attack under control.

“In and out, just close your eyes and breathe, I’m right here. It’s OK,” Jimin sighed, his voice filled with so much tenderness and love that Yoongi could feel himself taking another gasp for breath, and another, and another - slowly but more frequently than before.

“Are you even listening to me right now, Yoongi?!” his father suddenly yelled, but his voice was so terribly muffled underneath his pounding pulse and wheezing gasps for breath that it was little more than a whisper to him.

“When that weight hits you, when it hurts to breathe and the world feels too big, just hold your breath and close your eyes, and suddenly, the world’s so small, baby boy. It’s so small, and it’s just inside of your head where no one else can get you or hurt you. Inside your head, you can find peace, you can float like… like you’re floating in the bay,” Jimin whispered, every single word soothing him. “Every breath is a wave, so, you’ve gotta go nice and slow. Deep breaths. Calm those waters down, baby boy.”

Yoongi found himself imagining the bay again, the black waters that he and Jimin had watched
together that night; his boyfriend’s head on his shoulder and their hands tightly entwined under the blanket. Those gorgeous lapping waves had been as black as ink, yet they had reflected the hundreds of lights from the Golden Gate Bridge right back at their eyes, like the night sky itself; and they had been as cold as ice on their naked skin.

Oh, how gentle they had moved as they had licked against the sand. How soft they had been when they had crashed down onto one another, the roar of the sea trickling down into splashes as curds of foam had splashed up high into the air, and the scent…that beautiful scent of damp sand mixing with the tang of the ocean blowing in on the wind.

Yoongi was so distracted imagining the waves that he didn’t even realise that the weight on his chest was starting to lessen. He was able to take deeper breaths now, filling his lungs with air so that his pounding heartbeat started slowing down. His skin was still coated in a clammy layer of sweat, but he no longer felt that familiar tingling dizziness running through his body so that he felt like he was going to faint.

When Yoongi opened his eyes again, he saw that his father was standing just a few feet away from him, still very much in the midst of shouting at him about he was a disgusting pervert, and that his grandfather would beat him if he told him about the fact that he was ‘a queer’ and a ‘pansy’; that he wasn’t a real man at all. He rolled his eyes to look at his mother, seeing that she was still standing there in the doorway, fanning at herself in her usual dramatic fashion just to show him that she felt a fainting spell coming over her.

“‘I’ve got a lover!’” Yoongi finally snapped, the words just tearing free from somewhere deep inside of him in a way that he was unable to possibly suppress. “‘I’ve got a fucking boyfriend, father, that’s my big secret! Are you happy, huh?! Is that what you wanted to hear?!’

Yoongi saw his father actually taking a step backwards from him, taken by surprise by his sudden shout as they had been standing so very close. His eyes widened ever so slightly, but he could see that it was just complete surprise and not because of what he had said to him. It was going to take a moment for his bold declaration to fully sink in, after all.

“Oh!” his mother exclaimed, before the softest sound of her slumping against the wall came from a few feet away.

Yoongi stormed across across the study so that he could leave the room, stepping over his mother without a single care for her fainting spell. He knew that it was all just pretend anyway. His father didn’t yell at him to come back, didn’t demand that he explain himself, as he seemed far too shocked to possibly speak right now.
Yoongi went along the landing to get to the staircase, almost running down the steps in his haste to get out of the house and away from his parents. His heart was still uneven in his chest, skipping every couple of beats so that he struggled to breathe evenly.

“Mr. Sang, I require assistance!” his father finally called out. “The lady has had an accident, she’s collapsed again!”

“Yes, Mr. Min!” Mr. Sang replied, hastily moving away from the front door so that he could make him way up the staircase and get to the study.

Yoongi passed him without a single word, his gaze completely focused on the front door. Upon reaching it, he wrenched it open to leave the mansion and he cut across the paved path, seeing one of the guards opening the gate for him at the very end. He went through them, turning to go straight out onto the street and letting his pent-up breath out in a hard groan.

It was only when Yoongi was several streets down from the mansion did he realise that he was still wearing his house slippers; that he had left his sandals and baseball cap back in the foyer. It was enough to make him slow down to a stop, dropping his gaze down to look at his slippered feet.

Yoongi moved to step out of the house slippers, snatching them up to throw them into the empty road with an irritated grunt. There, let some goddamn car run them right over, let them be destroyed - like he gave a damn. Whilst he was at it, he might as well throw himself out in front of a car too.

“Fuck!” Yoongi shouted, his voice cracking hoarsely as he bent forward and he almost doubled over from the force of his yell.

After a moment of frustrated pacing and gasping for breath, Yoongi finally managed to get himself under control. He needed to go back home and he needed to spend some time reflecting on things, because standing out on the street wasn’t helping him in the slightest. When he was back home, in his little sanctuary - his safe place away from his family and the outside world, then he would finally be able to calm down and think about everything with a more level-head.

Yoongi wasn’t looking forward to walking home barefoot, as it was going to take him half an hour or so of constant walking on the gritty and hot paving flags. By the time that he got back home, his feet were probably going to be cut and bleeding in parts, which seemed fitting. As if he hadn’t suffered enough already because of his parents, now he was going to feel a lingering and stinging pain for so much longer. Every single step that he took for the next few days would remind him of his behaviour and his stupid actions.
As he started walking along the street again, Yoongi found himself wondering if he had made a big mistake by blurting out that he had a boyfriend to his parents. His initial fear was to assume that he had done so, that he had exposed a weakness to his father that he should have kept well hidden. He was frightened that exposing Jimin’s existence to him might somehow put him in danger, but he knew that that was just paranoia and nothing more than that.

But his father had just told him that his sexuality wasn’t as well hidden from the world as he had assumed it to have been. Therefore, did it really matter if his parents knew about Jimin? If they already knew about his past habit of using Hoseok’s darling massage boys for sex, was this really anything different? They would probably refuse to accept that he could even have a real lover because he was homosexual, and so it wouldn’t mean a thing at all.

His parents were going to hate him and refuse to understand and love him no matter what - there was no point in worrying about such things anymore. Yoongi should just try to spend his time worrying about his business and the people that he actually loved and cared about instead.

As he glanced at his watch to check the time, Yoongi found himself wondering what Jimin would be doing right now. He might just have left with Hoseok for a day to go our for suit fittings and brunch, or he might still be at home waiting to leave.

Whatever the case, Yoongi hoped that he was having a good day because one of them deserved to feel good. He hoped that Jimin had enough fun for the two of them, so that he could tell him all about it on the phone tonight and finally bring a smile to his face.

5th October, 1984, 9:37pm: Pacific Heights, San Francisco, United States of America

It was the sound of something whirring away loudly from somewhere in the house that made Yoongi come back around to reality. He shifted with a soft grunt, hearing the bathwater sloshing against the sides of the tub and feeling it lapping around the very tops of his knees, which were sticking out of the hot water. He also felt it against his lips, for he appeared to have sunk down into the tub deeply enough to almost submerge himself.
After a moment of listening to the whirring sound, he figured out what was making such a noise. It was his fax machine in the sitting-area, printing out something business related that he really didn’t care to think about right now. It could wait until the morning now, as he was far too relaxed to possibly delve back into business again for the evening.

Yoongi shifted to sit up against the porcelain lip of the bathtub, his skin settling on the cool surface and his head rolling back to look up at the ceiling through his eyelashes. He could hardly keep his eyes open because his eyelids felt so heavy, his body so tangled up in the pleasurable heat of the water. The tousled ends of his hair were damp with water, so that little droplets of it ran down his neck to roll back out into the bathwater, and he could feel beads of it clinging to his chest and gathering on his jawline to drip down too.

The bathroom was currently illuminated by only candles rather than the ceiling light, meaning that there was just a soft and orange-tinged glow reflecting off the tiled walls. It made the surface of the water glint back at his eyes, soft foam clinging to his thighs and arms so that every movement made it pop with soft crackles. The view outside of the window was a dark blue sky that was rapidly going to turn black over the next hour or so, signalling that night was starting to draw close.

Yoongi had no clue what time it was right now, but he was certain that he had climbed into the tub around 8:30pm, or maybe a little bit later than that. The water was still hot, but it wasn’t the scorching temperature that it had been earlier, and the foam was starting to dissipate in parts so that it left little more than a milky layer on the surface of the bathwater. At least the beautiful fragrance of jasmine was still hanging in the air, which he breathed in and held in his lungs for a moment.

Yoongi supposed that he really should get out of the bath now, before he accidentally fell asleep. He had drifted off momentarily just then, but he really might just end up falling asleep if he stayed in the hot water for much longer. It was just hard moving to do so, on account of the fact that his body felt so heavy and warm right now.

After another minute of staring up at the ceiling and lazily moving his legs through the hot water, Yoongi finally sat up so that he could drain the tub. He climbed out slowly, wrapping himself up in his bathrobe as he stepped down on the thick cotton mat. He lowered himself down to sit on the rim of the tub for a moment, running his fingers through his damp hair and squeezing out tiny hints of moisture as he loudly yawned.

The soles of his feet had since stopped stinging, but he could feel the scratches and tender skin against the mat. The hot and fragranced bathwater had irritated them at first, but now the cuts were no longer hurting. By tomorrow, they might just start closing up, which would be a blessing. He would be sure to massage ointment into them before retiring to bed.

One by one, Yoongi carefully extinguished all of the candles around the bathroom; thick white wisps
of fragrant smoke taking to the air from the burnt wicks that he breathed in and exhaled with a soft sigh. The scent of extinguished candles was highly pleasing to his nose, for it always made him feel relaxed and ready for sleep after taking a hot bath. As soon as they were all out, he left the bathroom so that he could go into his bedroom and then out onto the landing to go down the staircase.

Before going back into his study, Yoongi went down to the ground-floor so that he could enter the kitchen. Like he did almost every single night, he boiled water on the stove in his kettle and he packed loose chamomile tea leaves into the metal strainer, so that he could prepare a mug of tea for himself.

“Mmm, shit,” Yoongi groaned out, as he reached up to massage at the back of his neck whilst he waited for the liquid to brew. He rolled it back as he did so, his fingertips searching for that one tight knot so that he could try and knead at it and loosen it.

If Jimin was here, Yoongi was certain that he would find the right spot for him. His boyfriend had never given him a massage, but he had a feeling that he would be good at it. He had strong and warm hands, and so he could probably roughly knead away all kinds of aches and pains, before pressing little kisses against his skin with a sweet giggle.

The thought made him smile to himself as he finally located the knot, pressing his fingers down hard to rub circles against his stiff muscle as his breath escaped his slack lips in a sigh.

After brewing the tea and cleaning out the strainer, Yoongi went back up to his first-floor study again. He had been working away in it before going for a bath, and as a result, he had left all of his papers and tools across the surface of the desk. He eyed the mess slowly as he moved to sit down again, pulling his telephone closer to him so that he could lift up the receiver and shove it in the crook between his neck and shoulder. He dialled Namjoon’s landline without a hint of hesitation, his thumb hitting the buttons in a fast and smooth rhythm.

“Hey, is that you, baby boy?” Jimin asked after just several short dialling tones.

“Uuhh, it’s me, darling,” Yoongi confirmed with a nod, shifting to sit back in the armchair to get more comfortable. He turned his head to look out of the window to see the distant and dark bay waters at the edge of horizon. “It’s your baby boy.”

Jimin giggled at this in a way that showed him that he just loved hearing him say such things, and Yoongi simply loved hearing the happiness in his laughter. He knew personally that it could just chase away any bad feelings with ease.
“What’re you doing, huh? You busy right now or are you free?” Yoongi asked, reaching up with his free hand to rub at his eyes with a soft sniff.

“I’m free, I just finished cleaning up the dishes after a late dinner with Namo. He’s went off to work, so, I was just lying around in bed reading. You sound tired, baby boy. Are you sleepy, hmm?”

“I just got outta the bath, that’s why,” Yoongi explained with a soft laugh. “Baths always make me feel tired. But it’s alright, I ain’t going to sleep yet. I’m still here, Jimin.”

“That’s so cute, Yoongi,” his boyfriend remarked with his own giggly laugh. “You’re such a baby. Remember when you went all pink in the bathhouse Jacuzzi, and I just had to squeeze your face and kiss you? You’re just a big pink baby that loves hot baths, aren’t you?”

Yoongi hummed in agreement at this, running his thumb over the lip of his mug as he studied the papers in front of him. Then he lifted the cup to take a quick sip, letting the hot liquid settle on his tongue as he moved to sort the papers out across the surface.

“What type of soak did you use?”

“Huh, what type of soak?” Yoongi repeated, before quickly adding. “Jasmine.”

“Oh, jasmine? That smells really nice right?” Jimin said. “It’s really soft and delicate, and it makes you feel so good breathing it in. It suits you, Yoongi.”

“Mmm, it helps me calm down, darling,” Yoongi explained, taking another sip of tea as he looked at the sheets of his practice calligraphy and poetry that he had been working on for most of the afternoon. “Today was, uh, it got a lil bit bad for awhile, I thought that I was gonna lose control of myself, but I managed to get outta the situation.”

“What’d you mean, Yoongi? Talk to me, hmm? Tell me what happened, if you can,” Jimin suggested, a series of sounds coming from down the line that signalled that he might just have sat up in bed. “I’m here to listen now, you can get all of the negativity out, OK?”

“I’d to go see my father for business today, and whilst I was there, my, uh, my sexuality was brought
“Yoongi, it’s OK,” Jimin almost cooed, his voice a breathy whisper. “It’s OK, just take deep breaths and calm down. Listen to me. You’re still fighting to accept yourself, and it’s OK to say things like that when you’re upset and scared, it’s not a bad thing. There’s still such a long way to go to reach full acceptance, for the both of us. I know that if I met my dad again, I’d probably burst into tears at the mere sight of him. If he hit me, I wouldn’t be able to fight back even when I’m not a kid anymore, because I’m just so scared of him, Yoongi. I’m scared of his fists and his yelling, just like you’re scared of your parents’ hatred and their lies. When you come up against something that truly scares you, it’s OK to run away and hide instead of trying to fight back.”

“You think so?”

“Yeah, I think that we spend our whole lives scared of running away because we’re told that it’s cowardly, that it’s weak. But is it really that weak to get away from something that you can’t fight back against?” Jimin asked theoretically. “Is it pathetic to think about saving ourselves from more pain and fear rather than getting into pointless fights? I think that it takes a great deal of strength and courage to run away from a fight that you can’t win, Yoongi. Most people would rather stay and lose a fight just to not appear cowardly to others, and they get badly hurt in the process. That’s real weakness; letting yourself get hurt for no reason at all.”

“I-I think that I did the right thing by running away,” Yoongi admitted, reaching up to take hold of the receiver in both hands. “I was only gonna get more upset by what they were saying to me. My parents ain’t ever gonna listen to me. They never even listened to me when I was a kid, Jimin, so, they ain’t gonna start now, not when they know that I’m gay.”

“But the most important thing is, Yoongi, you don’t feel disgusting right now, hmm? It was just something that you said to your parents because you were upset, right?” Jimin asked him in a soft voice, a hint of something that might just have been anxiety in his voice.

“I don’t feel disgusting when I’m with you,” Yoongi whispered, squeezing hold of the receiver tightly. “I feel good when I’m with you, Jimin, I feel alive like I ain’t ever felt before. Sometimes, I-I feel disgusting, but it ain’t ‘cos of you. It’s ‘cos of everything - all of those bad repressed years, y’know? It’s so hard letting go of all of that pain and anger, but I’m doing so slowly - I’m really trying to accept myself. When we’re apart, I ain’t getting so anxious ‘bout my feelings for you up,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice, as he placed his mug of tea down on the table. “It’s been a long time since I saw my parents together like that, so, there was a lot of pent-up anger and unspoken words hanging in the air between us. They got mad at me again, and they said a lot of things, Jimin, a lot of things that used to hurt me so bad; a lot of things that I used to agree with and think ‘bout myself ‘til recently. I tried to defend myself, I really tried to fight back, but I think I slipped a lil - I-I dunno, I dunno, I think I called myself disgusting. I panicked, Jimin. I was just so anxious and they were talking ‘bout AIDS again, like the kinda things I told you ‘bout. I just had to run away, I’d to run outta the house and-”
anymore, I feel good when I think ‘bout us. I ain’t thinking bad thoughts as much too. I feel like I’m getting better, it feels like forever since my last bad day.”

“That’s OK, baby, you just take your time,” his boyfriend suggested, letting out a sigh of relief down the line. “You can’t feel good all of the time, that’s normal. I don’t feel good all the time either. Some days, I think about all of the bad memories too, and I just start crying and I can’t seem to stop. But I know that the bad days will pass and I’ll feel good again, I just need to be strong and fight through it. You’re strong, Yoongi. You’re so much stronger than me, trust me. You’ve been through so much hate and pain and you’re still standing tall. You can get through this bad day too and carry on fighting, I know that you can.”

“It’s hard being strong, Jimin,” Yoongi said with a nod, finally letting go of the receiver with one hand. “My back feels like it’s gonna break some days, from all of the weight.”

“That’s what friends and boyfriends are there for, baby boy. They can help you shoulder the weight so that you don’t break under pressure, and they can share that burden as a team, hmm?”

“I know, you really can handle it all, my…my baggage, just like you promised. Are you having a good day today, Jimin? Y’know that you can tell me if it’s a bad day, right? We’re a-a team, yeah?”

“I know, we’re the best team there is, baby boy. I’m having a good day today. You don’t need to worry, I’ll tell you when I feel bad. I mean, you’ll probably be able to tell just looking at me anyway, but I’ll be honest with you, like you’re honest with me. So, what’re you doing right now, hmm? Business? Are you reading faxes in bed?”

“I, uh, I’m actually working on something right now - a project,” Yoongi said, shifting in his seat and pulling a vial of black ink that little bit closer for convenience. “I’m tryna perfect my calligraphy, so that I can write something for you, darling.”

“Write something? What, like a love letter?” Jimin asked, the unmistakable sound of a smile audible in his voice, along with something light that seemed to hint that he was joking around and not being serious.

“Yeah, a love letter,” he confirmed, before quickly adding. “Well, actually, it’s more of a poem. The letter’s in English, and it’s actually more difficult getting that perfect instead of the poem. I keep making fucking mistakes and having to trash the whole page - it’s ridiculous.”
“There’s nothing wrong with mistakes, baby boy,” his boyfriend pointed out in a quiet voice. “It’s a letter, you’re bound to make one or two. I don’t mind at all if you do, I think that the mistakes are an important part of a letter - they make it feel real and authentic.”

“I know, but I’m a goddamn perfectionist, darling,” he replied with a smile. “If I see a mistake, I’m scared that it looks sloppy, that I didn’t put any effort into creating it for you. That’s why I really want it to be perfect, ‘cos then I know that I really worked hard.”

“Are you seriously writing me a love letter, Yoongi?” Jimin asked, his tone indicating that he trying to figure out if this was true or if he was just playing another little game with him.

“Uh, that’s what I’m calling it,” Yoongi replied, slowly dragging a thin paintbrush across the page and then giving it a quick flick. “It probably ain’t even sweet or romantic, y’know that I ain’t good with that kinda shit, and-”

“Nope, I know that you’re really sweet and romantic, baby boy,” Jimin spoke over him, and so he held his tongue as he eyed the drying streak of black ink. “I know you as the guy that talks to his answering machine and sends coffee mugs in the mail as an apology for breaking one by accident. I know that you’ve got a Polaroid of us kissing in your wallet, just like I do, and I also know that you constantly step on my toes whenever we’re close dancing to really bad ballad songs on the TV…”

Yoongi made a soft sound at this, closing his eyes for a few seconds as he thought his words over.

“Therefore, I’m willing to bet that your love letter is gonna be so sweet that my cheeks will hurt from smiling whilst reading it,” Jimin finished with a little laugh. “Then I’ll start swearing when I realise that I’ve gotta write you one back…”

“Mmm, ‘member what I told you - I collect the letters that my grandmother sends me. I like letters, I dunno why exactly. They’re sentimental, I guess? Before answering machines, they were the best way to keep hold of conversations, and I like holding onto those moments, ’cos conversations are important to me. I talk a lot of business, but I ain’t get to talk to the people that I love that much at all. So, I like to keep hold of as many words as I can, and letters used to be the best way to do so.”

“Why not have both letters and answering machine messages?” the younger man suggested. “I mean, I’m no good at writing letters, but if you like them that much, baby boy, I can learn and get better. I’ll be sure to keep all of your letters too - I’ll buy something special to keep them in, like a memory box. We don’t even need to send them in the mail, right? We can give them to each other when we’re together, little secret love notes that only we know about.”
That’s a beautiful idea,” Yoongi agreed with a nod, even when his boyfriend wasn’t able to see the movement. “But enough ‘bout me, mmm, what ‘bout you? I recall you mentioning another fitting and something ‘bout brunch with Hoseok?”

“Today was the first of a couple more fitting sessions. I think that they’re called ‘basted fittings’?” Jimin explained in an uncertain tone, to which he made a noise in agreement to let him know that he was correct. “Mr. Black, the tailor, he had all of my lounge suits in this kinda…skeleton condition? Like, the suit was all there, but the cuts were all held together with this white thread? So, I had to wear the suits with one of my tailored shirts, to see what they looked like and to get some final adjustments made. It was so weird, because I kinda got to see the completed suits, even when they weren’t finished yet.”

“Did Seokseok suddenly change everything?” Yoongi asked with a smile, dabbing the brush into a glass of water and gently swirling it around so that he could clean it of ink. “The last time I went to a basted fitting with him, he decided that he hated the entire suit, and I’d to stand there like a goddamn idiot whilst the poor tailor cut the stitching to adjust every-fucking-thing. I ain’t ever went suit shopping with him since.”

This made Jimin burst out laughing, his infectious giggles sounding down the line and making Yoongi’s lips curl up at the corners into a smile.

Goddamn, why did Jimin have such a beautiful laugh? He was beautiful all over, sure, but when something really tickled him and he started giggling and he threw his head back hard, it was really something. Even just listening to him laughing, Yoongi knew that he had just thrown himself back against the mattress from the force of his giggling.

“But the most important thing is - d’you like the suits, mmm?” Yoongi asked him, as soon as his giggling had subsided. “D’you like ’em? D’you feel comfortable in ’em? That’s all that matters in the end, darling.”

“I love the suits, Yoongi! All of the lounge suits are really comfortable and kinda simple, but they look really good so far. The evening suits are still being assembled, so I need to wait for the basted fittings for them, but the lounge suits are all ready to be completed for my final fitting - which is the day before my birthday.”

“Oh yeah?” Yoongi asked, pausing in the act of hovering the brush over the page. “When, uh, when’s that?”
“October 13th,” Jimin replied, before making a funny little noise down the line. “I’ll be twenty years old soon, still not old enough to legally drink yet, but still sneaking into bars and getting served like I have been since I was fifteen. God bless lazy bartenders, that stupid National Minimum Drinking Age Act really fucked up my plans this year - I actually got caught in a few bars for the first time in a couple of years. I got away with it in that restaurant though, hmm, and with most of a bottle of Chardonnay.”

This time it was Yoongi’s turn to laugh, even though it was a little bit hollow, because he was thinking over what Jimin had just told him.

October 13th was Jimin’s birthday, and he had had no clue because his boyfriend hadn’t told him the date that night in the Twin Peaks bar. No, they had both listed their birth years, but they hadn’t said the dates, and it had just escaped Yoongi’s mind to ask him about it during their telephone conversations and face-to-face meetings and dates.

In just eight days, Jimin would be celebrating his twentieth birthday, and Yoongi didn’t know what to get him as a gift at all.

“You got any birthday wishes, huh?” Yoongi asked, shifting to drop the paintbrush in the glass so that he could lounge back in his seat and turn his head to look out of the bay window at the dark road down below. “Maybe, something you really want, mmm?”

“My birthday wish? Hmm, that’s easy,” Jimin replied in a sunny tone, the noise of him shifting to stretch out on the bed sounding down the line. “Guess, baby boy?”

“A blowjob?” Yoongi asked jokingly, his tongue shifting to lick at his inner cheek almost instinctively and distending the skin as it did so.

“How did you know?!?” his boyfriend exclaimed with a theatrical gasp, the pair of them laughing at his playful antics.

“I, uh, not yet…” Yoongi said in a soft voice, his grip tightening around the receiver as he lifted his free hand to his lips to stroke at them. “I mean, I wanna do it, I-I’ve thought ‘bout it a couple of times. But I don’t think I’m ready yet.”

“I know, baby boy, you don’t have to explain,” Jimin replied without a hint of hesitation. “When you’re ready, you’re ready - you’ll know. Until then, it doesn’t matter, OK?”
Yoongi hummed at this to let him know that he understood, his thumb instinctively slipping between his lips so that he could nibble at it.

“One guess down, two more to go,” Jimin said, and he just knew that he was grinning from ear to ear.

“Another dinner?” Yoongi asked around his thumb, going for a more serious option this time around.

“Just the two of us - lobster and Chardonnay?”

“Oh, I didn’t wish for that, but that’s a good wish!” Jimin declared, his enthusiasm making him snort laughter. “One more wish, baby boy. What’s it gonna be, huh?”

“Oh, I dunno, an expensive gift?” he guessed, because he really didn’t know what his wish might just be.

“I wished that we’d get to spend the day together, even if just for a little while,” Jimin admitted in a quiet voice. “I didn’t wish anything specific, like a date or a location, just that we’d be together. Do you think that we can? I mean, if you’re not busy with business and.”

“Jimin, darling, I’ll be there all day long - fuck business,” Yoongi interjected, pulling his thumb free from his lips so that he could collect his mug of tea.

“You promise?”

When Yoongi made a noise in agreement, his boyfriend cried out in excitement down the line - letting out a series of cheers that rapidly turned into giggles. He was pretty certain that he heard him stomping his feet on the bed too, as he was no doubt writhing with excitement.

“I can’t wait to show you all of the lounge suits, baby boy! I should wear one for my birthday, right? The best one of the set, just to show you what they look like.”

“Nah, don’t wear a suit,” Yoongi suggested with a head shake. “Not if you don’t wanna, I mean. That’s business, Jimin, and I like you looking like…you - in those tee-shirts and blue jeans of yours, yeah?”
“OK,” Jimin agreed in a chipper tone. “I can always give you a private fashion show in the bedroom, hmm? I can show you all of the suits, and the new underwear that Hoseok bought me…”

“New underwear?” Yoongi repeated, lowering his mug from his lips as he swallowed a deep sip of tea.

“Yes, Hoseok bought me some Calvin Kleins, he said that you’d like them - more specifically, that you’d like to see me in them,” Jimin continued, his tone taking on a rather husky note that was completely meant to arouse his attention.

“What, uh, what kinda underwear?” Yoongi asked, his tongue slipping free to wet at his lips as he placed his mug down on the table.

“Come and visit and I’ll show you,” Jimin teased, a rustling sounding down the line. “They’re briefs, baby boy, but they’re so tiny and tight. You can see everything. I really like how they fit at the back, they really make my ass look great.”

“Fuck, Jimin, I ain’t gonna be able to sleep tonight; I’m gonna be thinking ‘bout you in those briefs,” Yoongi joked, sinking back in his seat and dropping his free hand onto his stomach. “I’m gonna need to get more Polaroids of you wearing ‘em, ain’t I?”

“Uhuh,” Jimin hummed mischievously. “You should buy yourself a camera, baby boy. You’re gonna need a whole roll of film…”

“But, uh, ‘bout your birthday,” Yoongi asked, shifting in his armchair as he found the belt of his bathrobe to give it a teasing stroke and tug. “D’you have anything in mind? Anything special you’d like me to buy just for you?”

“Yoongi, birthday gifts are supposed to be a surprise!” his boyfriend exclaimed. “I can’t tell you, I’m not even supposed to ask for a present from you, right?”

“Yeah, but I wanted to make sure that I got you something that you really wanted, darling,” he explained with a smile, dropping his head to look down at the sheet of poetry again. “But if you want me to surprise you, I can do that.”
“Good, I’ll wait for the surprise, and I’ll spend the whole week bugging you for hints until I drive you crazy,” Jimin joked with a giggle. “Is there gonna be cake? Are you making all kinds of plans?”

“Mmm, I’m planning it out right now,” Yoongi confirmed with a nod. “I’m gonna make a list of reservations, I got people to contact and book appointments with, I got-”

“Are you being serious, baby boy!?”

“Ha, I ain’t doing it right now, but I’m gonna do it, yeah,” he said with a grin. “You said that you love surprises, right?”

“Hmm, yeah, but not as much as I love you, Yoongi...”
Chapter 14

13th October, 1984, 7:35am: Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco, United States of America

Though Jimin often dreamt whenever he fell asleep for both short and long periods of time, he found himself coming around from the blackness of his slumber without any strong recollections of having had a proper dream. There was a feeling at the back of his mind that he might just have had something like a dream, but the remnants were too vague for him to fully remember.

Wispy images of streets rolling past outside of a car window, of lilac and pink-tinged skies and lightly tanned skin covered in beads of water and gritty grains of sand were all that he could seem to recall right now.

But was that a part of his dream, or was it just vivid memories of the night that he and Yoongi had went cruising across the city in the evening and had gotten high on the beach? He might just have been reliving that special moment during his slumber, playing over all of his wonderful memories and fantasising about the night stretching on for so much longer.

Jimin slowly opened his eyes to see of a hint of sunlight, and so he closed them again with a soft whine. He was so heavy with sleep that he really didn’t know if he was even awake or not. In a few seconds, he would likely fall back asleep again. Maybe then, he would have a nice, deep dream.

“Wake up, darling.”

Jimin shifted on the bed with a series of soft grunts. As he stretched his legs out across the mattress, the light covers messily strewn over his body, he turned his face away from the window so that he could press it against his pillow. He wanted to block out the sunlight currently streaming into the bedroom as much as he could, just because it was disturbing him and he wouldn’t be able to fall asleep again unless it was dark.

When Jimin felt something touching the back of his head, he realised that the voice that he had just heard hadn’t been his sleepy imagination. It had been reality. That was unusual, as it had most certainly not been Namjoon’s voice that he had heard just a moment ago. No, it had actually sounded
an awful lot like Yoongi’s voice, and that was enough to make him lift his head up off the pillow.

For a few seconds, Jimin struggled to keep his eyes open because his eyelids were so heavy. It took a moment for his blurry vision to focus, and when it did so, he saw that Yoongi was indeed sitting on the very edge of the mattress right beside him.

“Yoongi…huh?” Jimin mumbled in confusion, his voice husky from sleep. “What’re you doing here?”

“Good morning, Jimin.”

There was a soft smile on Yoongi’s face as he said this greeting, that showed Jimin that he was already in a great mood today. It was a wonderful sight to see first thing in the morning, for his boyfriend’s smile could be as dazzling as any beam of sunlight.

“Are you gonna get outta bed, mmm?”

Jimin had to roll onto his side so that he could bring his fists to his eyes and rub at them roughly. When he pulled them away again, he saw that Yoongi was still there - very much real, and not some phantom remnant of his dream.

Yoongi was dressed casually today: in a pair of tightly fitted, blue jeans and a loose, black tee-shirt rather than a shirt or blouse, which was tucked into the waistband. There was no baseball cap present on his head, so that his black hair was on full display. It was a mess of tangles that looked to be the result of a breeze coming in through an open car window.

But Yoongi looked good. He looked relaxed and comfortable in a way that made Jimin’s lips curl up at the corners in a lazy smile. He moved to stretch an arm out to place his hand down on his thigh.

“What’re you doing here, baby boy?” Jimin repeated just for the sake of it, still trying to free himself from the fogginess of his slumber. “Did you seriously come to see me this early in the morning, hmm?”

When Jimin shifted to sit up, he turned his head to look at the clock on the side table beside the blue lava lamp. He didn’t have a clue what time it was right now, but it seemed to be the morning - judging from the still lilac-tinged sky visible outside of the window.
The digits on the clock told him that it was 7:39am.

All that Jimin could do was stare at the white squares for a moment, on which the black numbers were painted, until two of them shifted with a dry click to reveal that it was now 7:40am. No wonder he felt so tired right now, with it being so early in the morning.

7:40am…

“Yeah, uh, you don’t mind, right?” Yoongi asked with a dry chuckle, as he reached up to rub at the back of his neck. “You don’t think it’s weird me being here right now? I mean, you said you wanted to spend the day together, and I-”

Before Yoongi could mumble out even more reasons why he was here, on account of the fact that he was a little nervous, Jimin moved to get onto his knees. The bed covers shifted as he did so with a loud rustle, his wrinkled, borrowed tee-shirt falling down in place around his hips as he slipped his arms around Yoongi’s neck to give him a kiss.

Jmin pressed a chaste peck on his lips first before giving him a quick, deep kiss. The contact was what made Yoongi stop talking, his words trailing off into a soft mumble.

“Sorry, morning breath,” Jimin joked, moving his face away and lifting a hand to his lips so that he could cover his mischievous smile.

Yoongi just pressed a kiss against the backs of his fingers instead, his own smile wide enough to crinkle the corners of his eyelids.

The act was so innocent and cute that Jimin simply adored it, just like he loved the way that Yoongi often kissed his knuckles when they held hands, or how he would press little pecks into his hair when they were lying side by side in bed. It was just something that seemed so unlike Yoongi, and yet, also encapsulated him perfectly - simple and silent acts of affection.

Jmin knew that he would always find these little acts of affection, that he would find his touch alone, to be incredibly comforting. He knew just how much that Yoongi needed his touch and his voice sometimes, to help him calm down after a moment of upset or anxiety. But he didn’t know if Yoongi knew just how much that he craved his touch too.
Sometimes, Jimin didn’t even understand why he needed it so badly. It was like he was starved for it, and he guessed that he was just desperate for actual care and affection that he had never really felt from another man before - especially not from his dad.

“I made plans, Jimin,” Yoongi finally finished, his hands settling in place on his waist oh so perfectly. “That’s why I’m here early.”

“Plans? Oh, you mean the super secret plans that you won’t tell me about?” Jimin teased, bumping their noses together in a way that he knew always made Yoongi’s shoulders tense up. He felt his grin widening when his boyfriend’s shoulders lifted up right on cue; a soft sound escaping him. “The super secret plans that I’ve been bugging you about all week long? Those super secret plans?”

“Mmm, those exact plans, darling,” Yoongi replied, his lips still curled up at the corners in a smile. “Today, you’re finally gonna find out the plans.”

“Ooh, I’m excited, baby boy!” he exclaimed with a giggle, as he pulled his face away to glance across the bedroom.

Jimin wondered where the hell Namjoon was, seeing as he wasn’t present in the bedroom right now. He must have let Yoongi into the house because he had no key, so there was a chance that he was in the living-room or kitchen - half-asleep or even snoring away on the sofa. His pillow still had a wrinkled indent on it to show that he had been using it recently, and so he was likely downstairs.

“Do I need to hurry up and get ready?” he asked, as he shifted to swing his legs over the side of the mattress and he got to his feet.

Sadly, Yoongi had to let go of his waist to do so. But his boyfriend reached up to give his lower back a soft stroke that made a little shiver course through him.

“Take your time, darling, you ain’t gotta rush,” Yoongi suggested, as he moved to settle back against the wall. He brought his legs up onto the bed to get comfortable, his bare feet rustling against the covers and the pillow trapped behind his back much like a cushion.

Rather than get a quick morning shower to refresh himself, Jimin just settled on getting dressed for the day. His skin was still fragrant with lotion, his hair clean and bouncy with the scent of shampoo from his shower yesterday evening. He didn’t want to keep Yoongi waiting for too long; not when
he had plans sorted, and he had a terrible habit of falling asleep in the shower in the morning.

Jimin dragged Namjoon’s borrowed tee-shirt off over his head, tossing it onto the bed without much thought at all for making mess. He dropped his briefs to his ankles and he stepped out of them, moving to get to the dresser so that he could drag one of the drawers open and start rummaging through the contents to locate something clean and wearable.

Jimin couldn’t help but notice the fact that Yoongi was staring at him from across the bedroom. He could feel the weight of his gaze on him, which really wasn’t that surprising at all.

There was little else to look at in the bedroom, after all, and his naked body was most certainly the best thing to stare at. Like stroking fingers, the funny, prickling heat of his gaze almost seemed to run down his bare spine to the dip of his lower back, and so he turned to look back over his shoulder at him.

“Enjoying the view?” Jimin joked, his fingers grabbing hold of one of his white cotton tee-shirts.

Yoongi let out a laugh at this, glancing away for a second or two before looking right back at him again. He looked a little bit flustered, but not as much as usual, for he seemed to be getting more bold with every passing day.

Jimin liked this fact, even though he did like his boyfriend’s sweet and flustered moments, as he felt like it was proof that he was growing more confident with himself.

Hanging inside of the cramped wardrobe, still very much protected in their dust covers, Jimin’s seven lounge suits were hanging. They were visible on account of the fact that the door was still broken - the black covers all neatly hanging in a row. They just about fitted inside of the wardrobe, and it was going to be a challenge getting the rest of the suits to fit. He might just need to shove them to the side even if it was cramped, or hang them on the front if he was unable to get them to fit inside.

After slipping into his jeans, tucking the ends of the tee-shirt inside and himself to the side, Jimin exited the bedroom. He called back over his shoulder that he was just using the bathroom and that he would be right back, hearing Yoongi calling back a moment later to confirm that he had heard him.

Upon entering the bathroom, Jimin relieved himself and then he went over to the sink. He vigorously brushed his teeth and cupped handfuls of cold water to splash against his face to help wake him up and bring down his sleep-swollen eyelids. He gently patted his skin dry as he studied his reflection in
Just like always, Jimin saw that he looked good, even when he had only just woken up. The thought made him smile to himself, but it was true. He never looked at his reflection and thought that he looked bad, unless he had just stepped off a plane after a twelve hour long flight - and even then, that was only because he was exhausted and stressed out. If not for the hollow eyes and black bags underneath them, he wouldn’t look that bad.

Jimin didn’t apply any makeup save for a smear of lip balm, shoving the tin down into one of his jeans pockets. Then he opened the bathroom cabinet so that he could grab his deodorant and cologne. After spritzing them on, he left the bathroom to go back into the bedroom - Yoongi still very much lounged on the bed waiting for him.

Just like Yoongi had requested that night on the phone, Jimin was wearing his casual outfit of choice, the one that he seemed to love seeing him in - his white tee-shirt and blue jeans combination. The last thing that he needed to do was slip into his sneakers and add some jewellery, and then he was all ready to go.

Jimin rummaged through the bowl on the dresser to collect several items, exchanging his hoop earrings for the dangling crosses, and slipping on some of his silver bands. He grabbed his sneakers and he sat down on the end of the mattress to slip them on, knotting up the laces tight. Then he got upright, holding his hand out to pull Yoongi to his feet so that they could both leave the bedroom and go down the stairs.

“Yes, you want some coffee before we go?” Jimin offered, as they reached the bottom of the staircase. He cocked his head in the direction of the kitchen, hearing no sounds coming from the house to signal that Namjoon was currently present. “Some black coffee in your special mug?”

“We can get some coffee,” Yoongi replied, stepping into his sandals and opening the front door.

Jimin thought this over for a moment, glancing inside of the living-room to see that Namjoon wasn’t inside of the home. That was a little strange, but clearly his friend was busy doing something right now. So he followed his boyfriend out through the front door and down the steps to get onto the sidewalk.

Yoongi’s BMW was parked on the curb just outside of the house, the gleaming, red paint job reflecting the early morning sunlight back at their eyes. It was eye-catching at all times, but it was even more so on a street like this one; which was filled with old vehicles that were burnt-out or just about able to start, or cheap and basic models.
Jimin was in the act of passing the vehicle to climb into the passenger-seat when he caught sight of someone sitting in the backseat.

“Huh? Wait…Daddy-o?” Jimin asked in complete shock, staring at the sight of Namjoon sitting in the backseat of Yoongi’s car through the rolled-down window. “What’re you doing?! Why’re you in the car?!”

“What do you think?” Namjoon retorted with a grin, as he twisted to look at him and he folded one arm on the window rest. “It’s your birthday, Jimmy. We’re gonna go celebrate.”

Jimin thought this over for a moment before he shifted to climb inside of the vehicle. He pulled the door shut behind him, fastening his seatbelt in place whilst Yoongi got behind the steering-wheel. He twisted to look back at his best friend again, seeing that he was also wearing his seatbelt because he was such a square.

Namjoon was wearing his usual casual clothing of choice rather than anything fancy: his red and black striped tee-shirt, his long denim shorts with the frayed ends, and a pair of battered, white Keds. His sunglasses were currently shoved on the top of his head, the massive, round ones with the black lenses and white frames.

On the seat beside him, there was a khaki backpack and several wrapped items that looked to be gifts.

Namjoon wasn’t exactly the best at wrapping things. He had a tendency to accidentally wrinkle and tear a lot of the paper whilst trying to fold and tuck it, and so the gifts often ended up looking rather beat-up as a result. There was a strange sweetness in his amateur attempts at wrapping that Jimin didn’t quite understand.

The gifts on the seat looked better than usual, the paper nowhere near as wrinkled and torn. The white paper was covered in colourful balloon print, a little bit immature, but likely one of the few options available at their local store. One of the gifts looked much larger than the others, one was a thin but sizeable square, and the final box was a small rectangle.

There was something so very surreal about the morning, on account of the fact that Namjoon was sitting right there in the backseat of Yoongi’s car. It was the first time that Jimin had been in the car with someone else present, and with it being Namjoon, it just felt that much more strange. Just lifting his gaze up to look at the rear-view mirror and seeing him sitting there in the backseat was something
that he was struggling to process.

“Is this a dream?” Jimin suddenly asked, breaking the temporary silence inside of the vehicle just as they came to a stop at a set of traffic lights.

For a few seconds, neither Yoongi or Namjoon replied to his question. But then they both started laughing, which caught him by complete surprise. It had been an honest question, and not a joke.

“What? I was being serious!” Jimin argued, shifting in the seat so that he could fold his legs to the side and slip his arm around the headrest to look at the both of them. The seatbelt was taut around his ribs for a few seconds, before it loosened up a hint. “I didn’t think that this was gonna happen today - Yoongi waking me up, Namo coming with us in the car. It feels like I’m dreaming right now.”

“You want me to pinch you?”

“Actually, yeah, Namo. Pinch me.”

At his request, Namjoon moved to sit forward, and then he reached over to grab a hold of his cheek. He gave him a firm and joking pinch, squeezing his cheek and wiggling it before letting go again. That was proof that he was indeed awake, and so Jimin gave his cheek a quick rub before focusing on his boyfriend.

“Where are we going, Yoongi? Can I get a hint, just a little hint? It’s my birthday today, so, you’ve gotta be nice to me,” Jimin asked, going as far as to bat his eyes at him sweetly in the hopes that he would give in to this rather reasonable demand.

“We’re going for some breakfast,” Yoongi replied, watching the lights as he waited for them to change to amber. When they did so, he got ready; rolling the car forward just as the circle turned bright green. “I ain’t telling you where, but it’s somewhere special. I know that you’ll like it, Jimin.”

At this, Yoongi moved so that he could place his hand down on his thigh.

The contact made Jimin settle down in the passenger-seat, placing his own hand on top of his to keep it there. He wondered if Namjoon was able to see this little act, but when he glanced up at the rear-view mirror, he saw that his best friend was looking out of the window instead. He had forgotten to slip his sunglasses down his nose to block the slight glare, so that he was squinting ever so slightly
from the brightness.

“I think that Namo should be able to give me a hint too,” Jimin suggested with a cheeky grin, eyeing him in the rear-view mirror.

“Pft, nice one, Jimmy. Except, I don’t know where we’re going right now,” Namjoon retorted, turning away from the window to look at him.

“But you just said that we were gonna go celebrate! You must know something about the plans!” he argued.

“I know *some* things, I don’t know where we’re going right now though. So, there,” Namjoon said, as he fixed his sunglasses back down on his nose. “That’s your hint - there’s more things.”

Jimin thought this over for a moment before realising that that was actually a good hint. Yoongi had told him that he had been arranging all kinds of plans, and Namjoon’s hint meant that he knew about something other than what was happening right now.

Was that because Yoongi had needed his assistance arranging that particular part of the plan, or was it something else instead?

Yoongi wasn’t driving for long at all, for it was just several minutes before he ended up stopping the car. They happened to be in Western Addition, which caught Jimin by surprise because he had no idea what was in the neighbourhood. He knew that there were an assortment of restaurants and stores, bars and jazz music joints around the district, but they had never visited Western Addition together before.

On the street that Yoongi had stopped the car, Jimin could see just a single building that looked to be open at this early morning hour. The other building doors and windows were hidden behind thick, metal shutters. He moved to get a look out of the window at the building front, catching sight of a black and red sign.

“’Taste of Pusan’, ” Jimin read aloud, as he eyed the wall sign; seeing that the restaurant name was in both English and Korean.

A sign in the restaurant window said that the building was closed, and yet, it seemed that Yoongi
was taking them inside for some reason. Maybe, he had hired the place out for the morning, so that they could have a private breakfast together. It seemed like the kind of thing that he would do; the thought bringing a soft smile to his face as he looked over at his boyfriend.

“You brought us to a Korean place,” Jimin with a smile. “Seriously, where did you find this place, baby boy? I thought that you were gonna bring us to Mickey’s Joint or something.”

“You said that you love eating Korean food, but you never get ‘round to making it,” Yoongi explained, killing the engine and slipping the keys out of the ignition. “I figured that this was the right place to take you and Namjoon.”

Jimin popped the passenger-seat door open to climb out onto the curb, hearing the echo of the two other doors opening on the still air. Yoongi went around the front of his car to get onto the sidewalk, whilst Namjoon got out of the backseat - the wrapped gifts nestled in his arms so that he could carry them inside of the restaurant.

Yoongi slipped his arm around his waist without much thought at all, as he guided him along the sidewalk to the door. The weight and warmth of his palm settled in place on his waist, his grip wrinkling his cotton tee-shirt.

It was funny thinking about the fact that not too long ago, Yoongi hadn’t been comfortable at all holding onto him like this in public. Outside of the restaurant in Hayes Valley on their first date, he hadn’t allowed him to take hold of his arm, and he had held hands with him only whilst they had been alone and waiting on the valet boy to bring him back his vehicle.

Today, on his birthday of all days, Yoongi had his arm around his waist out on the streets of the city, and he didn’t even seem to care. It might just be because there was no one around to witness this act, save for Namjoon, but Jimin thought that it was just because his boyfriend was starting to get more confident out in public.

After all, Yoongi had no reason to worry about being seen by associates or his father’s men out on the streets of Western Addition at 8am in the morning.

Upon stepping inside of the restaurant, Jimin heard a bell ringing softly on the air. He glanced up to see one hanging over the door, and then he dropped his gaze to look over the interior of the building.

It was rather dim inside the joint, but he could see that the walls painted were deep red, and the
flooring and low tables were made from a dark wood that reminded him of the restaurant that he and Taehyung liked to frequent together in Seoul. The floor cushions matched the walls, and they looked very plush to his eyes.

Jimin was in the act of studying the light fixtures on the walls and ceiling when a curtain behind the counter shifted to allow someone to enter the storefront.

“Good morning, Prince Min,” the woman behind the counter greeted in Korean, a smile on her face that showed that she clearly knew Yoongi well.

Jimin saw that she was a young-looking woman that might just have been in her thirties, her black hair pulled up into a tight bun to fully reveal her face. She had mousey features: large eyes, a soft nose and small lips. She was wearing a cream blouse with a modest neckline and short sleeves, with what looked to be a high-waisted skirt. There was something familiar about her, but he couldn’t quite put his finger on it right now.

“Morning, Mijoo,” Yoongi replied, returning the smile as he escorted him and Namjoon over to a table.

It wasn’t hard choosing one, for the entire restaurant was empty, just like Jimin had expected. Yes, it seemed that Yoongi might just have bought the place out for breakfast, or he had paid the owner to open early in the morning instead of the evening, just for the special occasion.

“Which one of your friends is the one celebrating his birthday today, Prince Min?” Mijoo asked, as she shifted to duck under the counter so that she could move over to their table. “Who is Jimin?”

“Me, it’s my birthday,” Jimin replied in Korean, lifting his hand up and giving her a quick smile. “How’d you know that it was my birthday?”

“Prince Min has requested that I prepare a birthday feast just for you, Jimin,” she quickly explained. “I’m just waiting on my son to bring the last of the ingredients, so I can resume the preparation.”

“Oh, your son? Are you…are you Jungkook’s mum?” Jimin asked, glancing up at the young-looking woman to find that he could now see some similarities between their faces. “Jeon Jungkook? I’ve all heard about you, Jungkook’s mentioned you before.”
“He has?” Mijoo asked in genuine surprise, her eyes growing huge in a way that showed that she was most certainly Jungkook’s mum.

“Yeah, we’ve met before,” Jimin explained, finding himself smiling at the fact that he had managed to figure out why he recognised Mijoo so quickly. “We actually met out on the streets when he was taking his puppy for a walk one morning. We got talking, and I discovered that I knew an old friend of his - from before the clan move from Korea to America.”

“You know one of Jungkook’s old school friends? Who?”

Jimin realised that he really shouldn’t be talking to Jungkook’s mum about his gang connections right now. He didn’t think that the woman wanted to know that her young son had been spending time in the company of a drug mule and his drug dealing partner, as that was apt to make her explode. He knew just how protective that she could be, thanks to Jungkook.

There was also the issue with a certain somebody with a fake identity that had a habit of forgetting to use it correctly. Jungkook might just know Taehyung by his real name, just like he did, because he clearly knew all about his gang affiliations, but Mijoo might have met Taehyung under his alias instead - Jang Jeongmin.

“Oh, um, Kim Taehyung?” Jimin said after a moment of thought, trying to not wriggle too much on the floor cushion as he did so. “He was a student, you mightn’t have actually met him.”

“I don’t know his name personally, but Jungkook did have a lot of friends. He was very popular in school,” she replied, which made Jimin let his breath out in a sigh of relief. “But, if you know him, then that means that you must travel to Korea. Have you been there recently? What is it like there right now?”

Jimin heard something in Mijoo’s tone, something that was caught between hope and fear as she placed her hand on her stomach and she fiddled with one of her blouse buttons. There was a chance that she might not have had many updates on the country currently, and she was anxious for any information that she could find.

“I last went to Korea shortly after the flooding hit the capital,” Jimin explained slowly, glancing over at Yoongi and Namjoon before looking back up at her. “The damage was pretty extensive, I mean, some districts were really badly hit. But the city seemed to be recovering at a slow and steady pace, thanks to everyone working together, and all of the international aid. I’ve only ever been to Seoul, I’ve not seen the rest of the country, but…there’s still a lot of troubles with the government and protesters.”
“I see,” Mijoo said in a soft voice, dropping her gaze to look down to her shoes. After a few seconds, she looked up again and she let out a soft sound. “Oh, but I’m disturbing you all. I should go back into the kitchen.”

“No, you’re not disturbing us at all,” Jimin said with a head shake, and Namjoon made a noise in agreement from across the table.

“I’ll go and check on the cooking. Hopefully, Jungkook will bring the final ingredients soon, so that I can finish the feast. I’ll bring you all something to drink in the meantime. Tea? Egg coffee?”

“Egg coffee would be great. Thanks, Mijoo,” Yoongi said, turning his head to watch the woman go back behind the counter.

It was obvious that Yoongi knew Jungkook’s mum, and that he was friendly enough with her (and perhaps his dad) to talk to them about such things like business and daily life. He must come here often; maybe, to meet Jungkook to take him out for rides around the city or to bring him to a local park with Tigger. But there was one thing that caught Jimin’s attention, and that was the fact that Mijoo called him by his respectful title - Prince Min - instead of by his given name.

Jimin doubted that Yoongi had personally requested that she call him by his title. He knew that he didn’t really like being called it by those that he considered acquaintances.

Maybe, Mijoo just preferred doing so because she wanted to show respect for his position within the gang, and so he allowed her to do so?

“What’d you think of this place, huh?” Yoongi asked in English, smoothly transitioning from one tongue to the other with ease - just like he could do so with Taehyung. He shifted on the floor cushion to look at him, the usual expression on his face that showed Jimin that he was both hopeful and anxious. “It’s nice, right?”

It made sense that Yoongi was a little nervous about everything today. Jimin knew that he had put a ridiculous amount of time and effort (and money too, no doubt) into planning things for his birthday for him. It was unbelievable that Yoongi had went to such lengths just for him, but Jimin was starting to understand that his boyfriend wasn’t one to do things without care or effort. It was one of his best features - his dedication to ensuring that he put effort into every single thing that he did, even if his perfectionism could get a little too much sometimes.
“I think that this restaurant looks nice. It’s so warm and homely. It makes me feel like I’m in Seoul right now, seriously. It’s a slice of Seoul right in the middle of San Francisco. Oh, and a birthday feast? That sounds fantastic, Yoongi,” Jimin remarked, giving him a warm smile as he moved to place a hand on his knee. “Here I was thinking that we were gonna be having a nice, big breakfast in Mickey’s Joint, and you actually planned a whole birthday feast for us!”

This made Yoongi laugh softly, reaching up to hide his pleased smile behind his fingers for a moment as he rubbed at his nose. It was a good attempt at hiding it from Namjoon, but Jimin was pretty certain that his friend had caught sight of his happy smile regardless.

Mijoo exited the kitchen again after several minutes, carrying a tray in hand that had several small and deep cups on the surface. She ducked under the counter with ease, the tray not even wobbling in her hold as she straightened up again to move over to their table and place the cups down on the surface.

“How about some egg coffee?” Jimin asked for the sake of it, unable to help himself. He watched Mijoo going back into the kitchen, before turning his head to look at his boyfriend. “Is it good?”

“My grandfather loves this shit,” Yoongi explained, holding his cup under his nose so that he could inhale the scent. “He can’t get through a morning without it, he says that it’s great for energy. I used to sneak sips of it when I was a kid, but then I found I liked black coffee more.”

Jimin found himself smiling at this little anecdote. He liked listening to Yoongi talking about his grandparents like this, as opposed to his parents. From his grandmother’s love of Elvis and The Beatles, to his grandfather letting him sip at his morning coffee when he had been a child, there was just something so nice in his recollections. Jimin didn’t even know his grandparents, as both pairs were living somewhere in Korea - should they even still be alive.

As Yoongi took his first sip of egg coffee, Jimin lifted his own cup to his face so that he could breathe in the scent.

It smelled just like regular coffee, closer to instant blend that he and Namjoon bought than the freshly brewed roast that Hoseok liked to buy for him at cafés during their shared brunches. But there was another scent coming from it too, something creamy and slightly nutty.

From across the table, Namjoon sampled his first sip of the coffee without a hint of hesitation.
“It tastes…” Namjoon moved his tongue around his mouth, and then he let out a pleased hum. “It’s rich and smooth, but without a strong aftertaste. I like it.”

Jimin decided to try it too, taking a cautious and small sip of the hot coffee to find that Namjoon was right about the flavour. He was surprised to find that he liked it so much, because he had found the idea of raw egg whipped into coffee incredibly weird and he had assumed that it would taste unpleasant. But it just tasted creamy and smooth, rather than unusual, and he knew that he would be able to drink this with ease.

“Oh, this is really good!” Jimin exclaimed, hearing Yoongi laughing at his enthusiasm and his surprised expression. “I’ve never had egg coffee in Seoul before, but I’ve had the best egg waffles ever in Kowloon.”

“Egg waffles, huh?” Yoongi asked, nursing his coffee in his hands. “Looks like I’m gonna need to learn how to make egg waffles.”

“Yours would be even better, Yoongi,” Jimin said, as he moved to lean against his side affectionately and he placed his cheek against his shoulder. “Your pancakes were so nice, I’d eat them for breakfast every single morning.”

Namjoon shot Jimin a look at this, a joking look that was supposed to be a grimace at how sickly sweet and romantic that he was acting in front of him. Though he knew that he was just messing around, Jimin didn’t know if Yoongi would get that from his friend’s expression, and he was a little worried that he might read it all wrong and think that the public display of affection might be too much.

But Yoongi was far too busy studying his coffee to even glance up at Namjoon, his cheeks starting to turn a soft shade of pink from embarrassment. He didn’t shrug him off, but he did give off a sense that he was getting a little bit uncomfortable, and so Jimin moved away after a few seconds.

When the door swung inwards several minutes later, Jungkook stepped inside of the restaurant at last. He had several red and white plastic bags in hand, along with a large, cardboard box that he was carrying in his arms, hugged against his chest. To Jimin, it looked like a lot of weight to handle, but Jungkook seemed to carry it with ease.

Jungkook was clad in a pair of deep blue denim shorts, along with a red and white striped tee-shirt. On his feet, he was wearing his no-brand white sneakers with a pair of knee-high socks, and his
Polaroid camera was currently hanging around his neck. There was something rather funny attached to one of the belt loops on the front of his shorts.

The long and red length of Tigger’s leash had been clipped onto the loop, so that he didn’t have to hold it. The other end was attached to the puppy’s collar, and Jimin watched her trotting her way inside of the restaurant whilst the boy kept the door open with his body. He was so distracted carrying everything that he didn’t even look in their direction once; completely oblivious to their presence.

The ringing overhead bell must have attracted Mijoo’s attention, for she pushed the curtain aside to glance into the storefront again. Her expression shifted into that of a relieved smile at the sight of her son.

“Good, you’re finally here, Jungkookie,” she said, as she moved to get behind the counter. “I really needed these ingredients.”

“Oh, mama, it was so hard finding the right tteok! I really had to search to find it all over Chinatown!” Jungkook exclaimed, as he crossed the restaurant to place the box down onto the counter. “A couple of the stores had some, but not the right variety. When I found the right store, I don’t think that the owners liked me that much. They were giving me funny looks and they didn’t help me find it.”

“That might be because you brought Tigger with you, Jungkookie,” Mijoo pointed out, her expression and tone rather knowing.

Jimin didn’t mean to eavesdrop on their conversation, but he was unable to help himself. The restaurant interior was so quiet that it was impossible to not hear what they were saying, even if just in passing. He glanced between them and his cup of coffee slowly in turn, seeing that Namjoon and Yoongi were also curiously listening and watching everything.

Yoongi would be translating everything that they said in his mind with ease, his Korean absolutely perfect. But Namjoon was likely struggling here and there with their distinct dialect and the fast speed at which they were conversing.

“No, I left Tigger outside. I tied her leash to a lamppost, mama. You can’t bring dogs inside of lots of places here.”
Jimin had to fight the urge to laugh at this reply. Jungkook was telling his mum all about how he had made sure to leave Tigger out on the street whilst he had been inside of all of the different Chinese supermarkets, and yet, he had needed to be taught such a thing through him.

Jungkook had needed to be told about the fact that he hadn’t been allowed to take Tigger inside of Mickey’s Joint that morning when they had first met each other. It seemed like Jimin’s quick lesson had come in handy, and that the boy was actually following his advice.

“Anyway, how’s the cooking going, mama? Is the meat and broth finished? You had only started it when I left, and I know just how long it takes.”

“The meat is tender and the broth is prepared. I’ll be ready to resume cooking, now that you’ve gotten everything for me, Jungkookie,” she replied, as she moved to wrap her arms around the box to lift it up off the counter. “Leave everything here. I’ll put it in the kitchen. You should greet Prince Min and his friends whilst I finish cooking; yes?”

Jungkook placed the store bags down on the counter, twisting to run his eyes across the restaurant. It took him a moment to locate their table, and even from their distance, Jimin saw his eyes growing round and huge in surprise. Tigger was still trapped on the end of her leash, racing around his legs excitedly because she had caught sight and scent of them all and she wanted plenty of strokes and attention.

“What are you doing here?” Jungkook asked in surprise, as he came to a stop in front of their table.

Tigger barked and proceeded to climb all over Jimin’s lap in search of affection. He allowed her to do so, taking hold of her head so that he could stroke and scratch at her ears and press a quick kiss against her wet nose. The puppy reacted to this by letting out an excited bark, panting heavily as she clawed at his jeans.

“Oh, such a good girl!” Jimin cooed in English, as he rubbed at her ears and neck playfully. He saw her lips almost parting in a grin to show her lolling pink tongue and teeth.

“I hired the restaurant out today, kid,” Yoongi explained, moving to give Tigger a stroke on the top of her head. “For a special event, that’s why your mother needed you to get some extra ingredients. She’s preparing a birthday feast.”

Jimin gave the back of Yoongi’s hand a cheeky kiss as he stroked Tigger’s head, seeing his fingers
Yoongi didn’t pull his hand away, and he actually moved to give the back of his head a joking stroke that made Jimin laugh. His fingers tangled in his hair, gently caressing locks of it before he pulled his hand away again.

“But it isn’t your birthday, big brother. Wait, is it your birthday today, Jimin?” Jungkook asked, his eyes growing incredibly rounded as he looked down at them. “So…mama’s preparing your birthday feast…”

“Ohuh,” Jimin hummed with a nod, slipping his hands down Tigger’s body to massage at her ribs and sides. “Are you gonna join us for the meal, Jungkook? You’re more than welcome, and Tigger too.”

“Wait! I’ve gotta go get something! I be back!” Jungkook exclaimed, his English far from perfect but getting the point across perfectly. He dropped his hand to unclip Tigger’s leash from his belt loop, hunkering down to dump it onto the table.

“Huh? Where are you going, cutie!!” Jimin called in surprise.

But it was already far too late, for Jungkook had raced across the restaurant and had shoved his way right through the front door to get out onto the street. All that Jimin could do was look between the two other men, completely taken aback by his actions.

“Where’s he going?”

Yoongi shook his head with a shrug at this, as he seemed to be as clueless as he was on the matter.

Jimin could see Jungkook speeding off across the sidewalk outside, and then he shot across the road to get onto the opposite side of the street. He clearly had a destination in mind, but there was no possible way of them knowing where he was going. As he watched him running, Jimin could almost hear his sneaker soles pounding on the pavement in a quick rhythm; his dark hair bouncing around in the soft breeze.

“Whoa, that kid sure can run,” Namjoon remarked, turning his head to track Jungkook’s movements as he raced along the street outside. “He’s gonna take-off if he doesn’t slow down.”
“Yeah, but take-off where exactly?” Jimin asked, before letting out a confused laugh.

“I think he’s going to get something, like, a present or something,” his best friend suggested. “I mean, when you told him that it was your birthday, he ran off. Did you tell him that it was Jimmy’s birthday today, Yoongi?”

“No, I ain’t tell him,” Yoongi replied with a head shake, shifting on the floor cushion to try and turn around and look out of the window. “Jungkook didn’t know that it was his birthday today. I think he only just found out.”

“Huh, well then,” Namjoon said with a soft shrug. “I guess that we’ll find out when he comes back…”

Jungkook was gone from the restaurant for perhaps fifteen minutes. None of them had a clue where he had even ran off to, only that the boy had raced off across Western Addition in search of something only he knew about.

Whilst they waited for him to return, Jimin removed Tigger’s leash from her collar so that she could move around freely, the length no longer dragging around the floor and threatening to trip her up. She went between the three of them in turn, seeking nose kisses, ear scratches, and tummy rubs. But she decided to settle down on Yoongi’s lap whilst her owner was absent, her head on her front paws and her body curled up tight so that her small tail was almost touching her nose.

During Jungkook’s absence, a variety of noises came from behind the counter as Mijoo resumed cooking the birthday feast. Jimin could hear the sound of hissing pans, cooking utensils connecting against the sides of pots as she stirred at broths or soups, and loud chopping as she sliced at other ingredients. There was an enticing aroma hanging in the air that smelled like meat, creamy broth, mild spices and herbs.

Whatever it was that she was cooking, Jimin didn’t know, but it smelled good. It smelled really good, and he couldn’t wait to sample it all.

When Jungkook finally returned, Jimin saw him stopping on the curb through the restaurant window. He lifted up a store bag so that he could pull something free, and so he instinctively looked away just in case he wasn’t supposed to see what it was - lest he ruin some kind of surprise.
There was a chance that Jungkook might not have brought him a gift, on account of the fact that they barely even knew each other. But both Namjoon and Yoongi seemed to think that he had ran off to get him a gift of some kind, and Jimin couldn’t think of any other reason why the boy had raced out of the restaurant like that either.

“Oh, I think he just went and bought you a present, Jimin,” Yoongi said, letting out a sudden, soft laugh.

“What? Seriously?” Jimin asked, also struggling to not laugh at the thought. “Are you just saying that, Yoongi?”

“I think he seriously did,” Namjoon added, sitting in a much better seat so that he had a clear view of Jungkook through the window. “Talk about a birthday surprise.”

Jungkook moved to enter the restaurant, pushing the door open with one hand held behind his back. It was to stop Jimin from seeing what he was carrying, to keep it a surprise.

“Close your eyes,” Jungkook almost instructed, still very much holding the item behind his back as he stopped beside their table. “Presents are supposed to be surprises.”

Jimin couldn’t help but laugh at this entire situation, as he found the absurdity of it all highly amusing. As well as closing his eyes, he lifted his hands up to cover them just to appease the boy. He heard the soft rustling sound of Jungkook’s clothing as he moved to stop hiding the item behind his back.

“OK, you can look now.”

Jimin lowered his hands as he opened his eyes, placing them down in his lap. The first thing that he focused on was Jungkook’s face, as he had been looking up at him, and so he dropped his gaze to see what he had in his hands.

Jungkook was holding a large photo album out to him in offering.

Jimin could only let out a soft noise at the sight of the book, both surprised and amazed by the object.
The cover was a beautiful, rich gold that was covered in colourful butterfly print. There was a typical hallmark slogan on the front, which declared “life is beautiful”. But it was the butterflies that had caught his eye, for they reminded him about the conversation about butterflies that he had had with Yoongi - the one in which his boyfriend had told him all about a beautiful variety called the Adonis Blue.

Well, Jimin could see dozens of blue butterflies all over the photo album, just like the ones on his silken shirt. He found his lips curling up into a happy smile as he lifted his gaze up to look at the boy.

Which was exactly when Jungkook decided to burst out into song.

“Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to…dear Jimin!” Jungkook recovered, having almost gotten the lyrics wrong so that they all let out a laugh at his cute antics. “Happy birthday to you!”

“Thank you!” Jimin said with a grin, his cheeks almost hurting because of how widely that he was smiling. “Oh, thank you so much, cutie!”

“I heard that on TV,” Jungkook explained, his own lips curled up in a massive grin. “They sing it in films and shows when they all eat cake. Do you like it?”

“Seriously, Jungkook, I was thinking about how much that I needed a photo album. I keep all of my photographs in a drawer because I haven’t got an album, but now I can finally keep them safe. Thank you so much, it’s a wonderful present,” Jimin said, as he moved to take hold of the photo album.

“I can read the front,” Jungkook bragged, as he accepted the present from him. “It says “life is beautiful”, which means that life is beautiful.”

“I can agree with that statement,” Namjoon remarked from his window seat, which earned him a quick grin from Jungkook; his nose scrunching up to reveal his slight buck teeth. “Life’s feeling pretty beautiful today right, brother?”

“So beautiful,” Jimin agreed, instinctively moving to hug the photo album against his chest. “Ah, it’s feeling so good that I think I must be dreaming or something.”
“Sit down, kid,” Yoongi suggested, as he gestured at the free floor cushion beside Namjoon. “You heard Jimin, you’re more than welcome to join us.”

Jungkook moved so that he could sit down at the table with them, crossing his legs in front of himself to get comfortable.

Though Jimin had assumed that Tigger would have went straight over to Jungkook to curl up on his lap, she did no such thing. Yoongi’s lap was clearly comfortable enough to keep her content, and Jimin found himself rather jealous of this fact, as he wanted to place his head down in his lap and enjoy some of that comfort for himself.

“I’ll have to get a camera, so that I can start filling this baby up,” Jimin remarked, as he placed the photo album down on the table and he stroked the smooth surface. “I’ve already got some Polaroids at home that I can slip inside, thanks to Taehyung.”

“I can help! I can help fill it up, starting with today! I’ll get lots of great photographs, just for you, Jimin!” Jungkook offered, gesturing at his dangling camera. “It’s filled with film right now too. So, I can get plenty of good shots for you.”

“Oh, that’s a good idea! I’ll have yours and Taehyung’s photographs in the photo album, side by side,” Jimin pointed out with a smile, finding this fact rather sweet. “That’s kinda crazy, right?”

After all, if Jimin filled the album up using the Polaroids that he currently possessed, with the exception of the snapshot of Yoongi and Tigger, they were all photographs taken by Taehyung. That one had been taken by Jungkook, of course, and it was currently stored inside of his wallet with his other ‘special’ photographs of Yoongi that they had taken together.

Therefore, if Jungkook were to take a bunch of photographs today and give them to him as a gift, Jimin would then have an assortment of Polaroids from the two of them. Two friends, half a world apart, and yet still connected together through him.

Life could be pretty crazy sometimes.

“I’m much better with a camera than Taehyungie,” Jungkook said, not even a hint of modesty present in his voice or on his face. “I taught him the best ways to adjust the lighting and focus.”
“You’re much better than I am, cutie. I’m good, but not great.”

“I think that you take good photos, Jimin,” Yoongi suddenly said in English, nursing the remains of his egg coffee in one hand. His other hand was placed on top of Tigger so that he could give her side the occasional soft stroke.

“Oh, really?” Jimin asked, shooting his boyfriend a mischievous smile. “I think that your photos are way better, baby boy. Those kiss shots? They’re perfect.”

Jimin noticed that Jungkook was staring at them both intently, no doubt as he tried to understand what they had just said to each other. He had probably caught one in every couple of words, just enough to get an idea, but not enough to fully understand them. Maybe, he was able to discern from Yoongi’s soft smile that he had said something nice to him?

“I guess it’s time you opened my presents, huh?” Namjoon also said in English, dropping his gaze to look down at the rather eye-catching pile of presents that were sitting to the side of the table. He moved to pick them up, holding the bundle out to him with a smile that caused dimples to appear on his cheeks. “Here you go, Jimmy. Happy birthday, brother. It’s been a hell of a year so far, right?”

“It’s been the craziest year of my life, Daddy-o,” Jimin agreed, accepting the bundle of presents from him. “But also the best year ever, and it’s only set to get better. Thanks to my loved ones, of course.”

“Wow, that was lame,” Namjoon said with a head shake, trying his very hardest to look stern even when he was obviously trying to smile.

“Shut up, Namo, you love it really.”

After placing the bundle of presents down onto the table in front of him, Jimin had to select which one to open first.

There were three presents in total, and he didn’t have a clue which one to open first. Jimin had felt the large parcel when he had accepted it from Namjoon just a moment ago, and it felt soft and presumably material in nature - like it might just be an item of clothing. The other two parcels looked to be boxes, and he was pretty certain that the large, square one was a vinyl record of some kind. He couldn’t imagine anything else that would be shaped like that.
After a moment of contemplation, Jimin selected the small box first so that he could unwrap it. He only had to tear a flap free to see that it was a joke gift - a box of small condoms. That wasn’t at all a surprise, for Namjoon had given him them before as a joke gift, much like how he had bought his best friend bags of cheese puffs and other junk food that he liked to snack on when he was stoned.

“Ha, joke’s on you, Namo! These might just come in handy!” Jimin declared, as he placed the box aside on the table.

“It’s good to know that you might just need the small condoms, Jimmy.”

“Ah! Not like that! I didn’t mean it like that,” he argued, finding himself stammering in his efforts to distract away from this. “I meant it like - whatever!”

Jimin could see that Namjoon had a smug grin on his face, and he had every right to look so smug. That had been the perfect rebuttal, and nothing that he could say would possibly top it. He had been hoping that his joke about actually using the condoms would have made them all ignore the small size on the box, but his friend had just had to use it against him.

There really was a low chance that Jimin might just actually get to use the condoms in the future. Him or Yoongi, should the time come when his boyfriend finally felt like he was ready for that next big step in acceptance and intimacy with him. He hadn’t been joking, but rather pointing out the fact that Namjoon had actually provided him with protection so that he would be able to practise safe sex.

Jungkook was openly staring at the box of condoms on the table, his head cocked on an angle as he tried to read what it said on the front. He looked rather clueless as to what they even were, and it made Jimin think about what Taehyung had told him about condoms over in Korea. There was a high chance that Jungkook really wouldn’t know what they were, as he doubted that the boy had been on the lookout for them like Taehyung had.

Judging from the fact that Jungkook didn’t look to be embarrassed or amused by the sight of the condoms, Jimin could only assume that he was clueless. That was a rather worrying sign, but he guessed that they would all just have to teach the boy about such things in time.

Namjoon was going to have a blast with Jungkook. He would be able to whip out his fliers from health clinics and educate the boy all about condoms and sexually transmitted diseases, just like he had done so with him.
“OK, so, that was the joke gift,” Jimin said, still talking in English for the sake of ease with Namjoon. “Which one should I open next, hmm? Does it matter?”

“Uh, open that one last,” Namjoon suggested, as he gestured at the large, square parcel. “I think that you’ll like that one the most.”

Jimin selected the large parcel to open next instead, placing it down on his lap. It was soft and light, very much seemingly an item of clothing from what he could discern. He ripped at the wrapping paper to reveal a shocking flash of colourful leather.

As he dragged the paper away, Jimin saw that the item in choice was a leather bomber jacket, the main colour of the body deep blue and covered in yellow stars and swirls, green leaves and red zig-zag print. The look was very abstract, but that was what made the bomber jacket look so good. When he lifted it up to look at it, he caught a quick hint of the inner lining to see glossy, black cotton and a label tag. Michael Hoban for North Beach, a large, square tag on the inner lining declared.

“Oh my god,” Jimin said, as he turned the jacket this way and that to look at it properly. “I love it, Namo. I seriously love it. It just screams “look at me”!”

“Well, with the winter coming up, I thought that you really needed a new jacket,” Namjoon explained over the rim of his cup. “I know that it doesn’t get too cold here, but your leather jacket is so thin that it can’t keep you warm at all. You gotta wrap up more, brother.”

Jimin laughed at this, moving so that he could slip his arm into the sleeve and slip the bomber jacket on. The item of clothing fitted him perfectly, even though it was clearly a woman’s jacket - snug in all of the right places and not baggy or tight on his frame.

“What’d you think, huh?” Jimin asked, reaching up to hold onto the black knit collar and turning to look at Yoongi. “Does it suit me? Do I look good?”

Yoongi studied the bomber jacket with a great level of interest, taking in the colourful abstract print and the wide sleeves.

“You look lovely, Jimin, but you always do,” Yoongi replied, to which Namjoon voiced an agreement. “I can imagine you wearing that exact outfit during dinner at a high-class restaurant.”
“I’ve got some suits now, at least. But that’s a great idea, baby boy. The other diners would go crazy seeing me wearing this, right?” Jimin said, him and Yoongi laughing at the little joke.

“Wow, so cool,” Jungkook said in English, lifting his hand to give him a thumbs-up and show him that he liked the bomber jacket.

Jimin slipped the bomber jacket off again, folding it to the side of the table with the condoms. He couldn’t wait to start wearing it, but it wasn’t practical to do so during breakfast. He didn’t want to risk getting food on the brand new and fragrant leather.

There was just the single present left to unwrap now, and so Jimin picked it up and he started tearing the wrapping paper free. Just like he had assumed, it was a vinyl record.

As the front cover was revealed, Jimin found a shiver running down his spine at the sight of a highly familiar cover. By the time that he had tossed the wrapping paper aside, the shiver had turned into a funny tremble that made his fingers shake.

“Howa, Daddy-o! This is- it’s perfect!” Jimin exclaimed, as he held up the vinyl record to get a better look at it. “It’s literally perfect, there isn’t even a hint of damage on it!”

Somehow, Namjoon had managed to find the most pristine copy of a ‘Love Will Tear Us Apart’ vinyl that Jimin had ever laid his eyes on.

The vinyl had been in circulation now for the best part of four years, and so finding copies in pristine condition really was a rarity. There was always some damage to parts of the copy: be it creasing on the outer casing, bent corners, or even something wrong with the disk itself, like a scratch that would make it skip on the deck.

But the vinyl that Jimin was holding in his hands was in even better condition than his old copy that he had left behind in his family home. Even that record had had some minor superficial damage to the edges of the cardboard case from general use, but it had been as close to perfect as he had ever seen.

Until now, that was.

Goddamn, it didn’t even look like this copy had been played once - it was that free from flaws.
“Yeah, and now you gotta keep it that way - don’t use it like a goddamn Frisbee, Jimmy.”

“No way! I’m not even opening this, Namo. I’m keeping this sealed airtight! It’s a first-press too!”

“You should frame it,” Yoongi suggested. “It ain’t ever gonna get damaged then.”

“Ah, that’s a great idea, Yoongi!”

Just to ensure that the vinyl case was kept away from any potential damage, Jimin wrapped it back up in the wrapping paper and then he slipped it underneath his bomber jacket to keep it away from the bright sunlight coming in through the window. There, that made him feel so much better.

“Big brother, what did you buy Jimin?” Jungkook suddenly asked in Korean, no doubt noticing the fact that Yoongi had yet to give him something. “You must have bought him something special, right? He’s your boyfriend, that means special gifts.”

Jimin looked up from Namjoon’s presents at this, turning his head to look at Yoongi as a series of thoughts raced through his mind.

On account of the fact that Yoongi had planned the entire day out as a surprise for him, it had completely escaped his mind that he might just have gotten him a present. If Yoongi hadn’t gotten him one, Jimin wouldn’t even care because the day alone was such a wonderful treat that it was a gift within itself.

Rather than say anything in reply, Yoongi just shifted on the floor cushion so that he could reach into his jeans front pocket and collect something; jostling Tigger on his lap. The movement alone was enough to catch all of their attention, for Jimin saw that both Namjoon and Jungkook were watching his boyfriend intently.

The item in Yoongi’s hand was small: a small, wine red box with golden details around the sides that looked to be a ring box. He couldn’t imagine what else might just be inside of it, save for something like a key, or some other type of jewellery.

“Jimin, I…uh,” Yoongi paused to wet his lips with his tongue, giving himself a moment to think of
the right words to say. His eyes shifted from the ring box to his face in turn, his restless gaze a sign that he was incredibly nervous. “Shit, I can’t get it out right, Jimin. It’s all there in my head, but I can’t get it out right.”

“It’s OK, baby boy. Just take your time,” Jimin suggested in a soft voice, as he reached over to squeeze hold of his knee. “You’ve got this, we both know that you do.”

“I… I spent a lot of time thinking ’bout this gift. I know that y’know what that means. It means a lot of worrying and panicking and all of that shit,” Yoongi said after a moment of thought, which made Jimin smile at him softly. “But I finally managed to convince myself that it ain’t a mistake, that it’s actually a good thing. It’s serious, I ain’t gonna lie. It’s a serious gift, and I hope that you can understand the depth of my… my feelings.”

“Are we getting a marriage proposal right now?” Namjoon joked, his expression both joking and also surprised. It seemed like he might just be thinking that his joke could be reality, even when that was impossible. “Is that an engagement ring in that box, Yoongi?”

Yoongi let out a flustered sound at Namjoon’s joke, his cheeks flushing with colour as he dropped his head. He stared at the ring box in his hand, which Jimin noted wasn’t at all steady. No, his fingers were almost trembling as he stared at it, and he could see that the rest of his body looked to be shaking too - albeit only slightly.

“Is that a ring? Did you get Jimin a ring, big brother?” Jungkook asked, clueless as to what was going on because they weren’t talking in Korean to one another. “Whoa! If you got him a ring that really is a special gift! Rings are so expensive!”

Jimin could see that all of the joking and questions were starting to make Yoongi uncomfortable, that he was starting to get a little anxious in a way that meant that he was might start panicking. It might just be because of all of the attention from Jungkook and Namjoon was making him get nervous, or it might just be that he was upset that his gift had caused such a high level of amusement when it was clearly heartfelt and important to him - but whatever the case, it had to stop now.

“OK, OK, you’re embarrassing him, you guys,” Jimin said in Korean, so that Jungkook could understand him too. He lifted his hand up from his knee to place it down on Yoongi’s neck. He felt the heat that was radiating from his skin, just like it was coming from his red face in hot waves. “You’ve embarrassed him so much, quit it.”

This was enough to make the both of them stop asking questions and joking around, even when the damage had been done. Their intentions hadn’t been malicious at all, but sadly, Jimin knew just how
sensitive that his boyfriend could be when it came to his sexuality and their relationship - even in the company of friends. It was obvious that Yoongi was uncomfortable right now, but hopefully, it would subside after a few minutes and he would be able to collect himself.

Jimin leaned closer to him so that he could say something to him privately, breathing in the scent of Yoongi’s masculine cologne as he did so.

“I’ll open it later, baby. OK? When it’s just me and you, hmm?” he whispered against his ear, before pulling his face away to look at him.

Yoongi let his breath out in a sigh of relief at this, his entire body relaxing. He moved to slip the ring box back into his jeans pocket again, hiding it from view. Now that the gift was hidden, it might just be enough to make him forget about his discomfort.

After several more minutes of waiting over light conversation, Mijoo exited the kitchen so that she could collect their coffee cups and clear the table in preparation for breakfast.

There was a pleased smile on her face as she told them all that she was very proud of the feast, which piqued Jimin’s interest. She requested that Jungkook help her in setting the table, and so the boy got to his feet to do so - Tigger finally waking up from her nap to toddle across the restaurant after her owner.

When Mijoo had said that she had been asked to prepare a birthday feast for him, Jimin had just assumed that she had meant that she would make a large breakfast for them to all share. But the fact that she had requested Jungkook’s assistance in setting the table made him rapidly realise that the word ‘feast’ had not been used so lightly.

No, the sight of the two massive serving trays that they both brought over to the table was enough to leave him in total awe, because that meant that there really was a lot of food.

“I wasn’t sure what to make for you at all, Jimin,” Mijoo explained, as she lowered herself down onto her knees and she started placing dishes down onto the table. “I had to ask Prince Min for some assistance in selecting some of the dishes. I hope that you all enjoy the meal.”

“I’m sure that we will, Mijoo,” Yoongi said with a smile, before quickly adding. “Mijoo is a fantastic cook, quite possibly the finest I’ve had the pleasure to meet.”
There were two varieties of soup alone which would serve as appetisers: creamy tteokguk that was filled with soft chunks of chewy tteok, and tangy miyeokguk that was packed with seaweed, beef and mussels. Jimin had never tried either of these soups before, but they both smelled delicious and so he was more than eager to taste them.

The main meal seemed to consist of a mixture of dishes: jangjorim with hard-boiled chicken eggs (which Jimin had sampled many times whilst in Seoul, as it seemed to be a very popular dish), fluffy steamed rice, and an assortment of namul and kimchi that were displayed artfully in stoneware bowls for each of them. The dishes rapidly took up space on the tabletop, along with small bowls of dipping sauces.

Lastly, there was even some abalone for them to share, which made Jimin smile to himself as he looked at the platter and he thought about the last time that he had eaten that particular delicacy.

Back then, Yoongi had been sitting on the opposite side of the table from him - a complete stranger that had been unable to take his eyes off him for a great duration of their meal. Now, he was sitting right beside him to share this meal - his hand on his knee so that he could squeeze hold of it firmly.

It was just as Jungkook and Mijoo were finishing up setting the table with a large pot of tea, teacups and rolled-up napkins filled with cutlery, that the restaurant door swung inwards and a man stepped inside.

Jimin glanced up at the man to see that he was of average height; dressed in casual clothing that consisted of a shirt and slacks. Nothing about the man caught his attention, and so he dropped his gaze back down to the interesting and fragrant spread of food instead.

“Daddy, are you here for birthday feast?” Jungkook suddenly asked, as he picked up the teapot to start filling up their cups. “It's my friend’s birthday today.”

Just like that, Jimin looked up sharply from the table to stare at Jungkook. He felt a twinge in the back of his neck from the speed of the movement. Yet, the pain barely even registered with him as he shifted his gaze over to look at the man.

This was Jungkook’s dad?

Jimin found his body reacting on complete instinct to this sudden and new found knowledge, even when there was no need for such a reaction. The man didn’t even look like his dad, but there was just
something about seeing Jungkook’s parents standing so close together that triggered a sudden rush of cold fear to flood through his body.

Sitting at the restaurant table, Jimin didn’t feel like he was a twenty-year old man anymore. He felt like he had just reverted right back to being a six-year old boy, and it was enough to make him fold his arms over his chest and drop his gaze down to look at the table.

Why was it suddenly so hard to breathe right now? It felt like his lungs had shrunken on him and that he could only take small intakes of air; shallow, little gulps that weren’t enough to fill his lungs.

A quick glance at his boyfriend showed him that Yoongi looked completely unaffected by the man’s presence. He didn’t look to be frightened of him, for he looked to dealing just fine.

Yoongi had daddy issues too, just like him. But there was one major difference between the two of them, and the difference was that Yoongi’s dad hadn’t beaten him. The man hadn’t lifted a hand against him according to his boyfriend, and so their complications were entirely rooted in emotional trauma. It was trauma in the form of severe homophobia and mental manipulation, along with the constant verbal attacks and insults that were meant to whittle away at Yoongi’s confidence and self-esteem.

Yoongi hadn’t been through what he had been through. His boyfriend hadn’t been chased from room to room inside of a tiny and squalid apartment, screaming and crying because he had known that if his dad had caught him then he would have spanked the backs of his thighs hard enough to make the skin turn a shocking shade of raw red.

Yoongi hadn’t been pinned down against a sofa and pummelled to the point of almost passing-out, whilst his mum had screeched and wailed about how she was going to run away or just jump off the apartment block with him in her arms so that they could both get away from the violent man.

Yoongi had never had his dad stop slamming him against a wall when he had been eight-years old, only because he had realised that they hadn’t been able to afford to take him to the hospital if he had snapped his arm or wrist.

But Jimin had. He had been beaten, scared, and humiliated for most of his childhood for no real reason at all that he could understand, and it wasn’t so easy letting go of those bad memories and deeply ingrained responses.
Seeing Jungkook’s dad made his body react in a very contradictory manner that was highly confusing for him.

Jimin’s initial response was to just run - to dive to his feet and get away from what was happening right now. That might just mean moving across the restaurant to create some distance between him and the man, or it might just mean going out onto the street because it was safer out there than it was inside of the building. It was this response that made his heartbeat jack up in his chest so that he found himself breathing quick and shallow, and it also caused his fingers to start twitching and trembling; that rush of sheer adrenaline.

Yet, the second response that Jimin felt flooding his body was a defensive one - a powerful urge to curl his body up tight to protect his head and delicate organs from hard blows. It was what had made him fold his arms over his chest in the first place, and he was struggling to fight the urge to try and drop low enough to the floor to possibly crawl under the table right now.

Jimin knew that this was stupid, but he was unable to control himself. It was hard trying to convince himself that everything was fine, that he was safe here and that this man wasn’t going to hurt him when his body was alternating between powerful fear responses that made him want to start crying.

It was the way that the man was standing, maybe, or possibly even his clothing - Jimin was certain that that was what made him uncomfortable. It was just enough to remind him of his dad in the slightest way possible, and all that he could do was stare down at the table and hope that he might just go away soon. If he didn’t, he might just faint or something.

“No, I can’t stay Jungkook. I just need to speak with mother for a moment,” his dad explained in Korean, before switching to rather good English to address their table. “It is nice to see you again, Prince Min. I hope you all enjoy this meal.”

Jimin was so very thankful that Jungkook’s dad had to leave, even when he knew that it was silly. He couldn’t help but watch him and Mijoo crossing the restaurant to enter the kitchen, and it was only when the man was out of sight that he realised that he had been holding his breath. He dropped his arms from his chest, quickly reaching up to touch his brow to find that he felt rather clammy against his fingertips.

“Yes, I’m fine, Yoongi,” Jimin replied in a whisper, giving him a quick and rather forced smile as he placed his hand on top of his. He squeezed hold of it to reassure him that he was.
perfectly fine, even when he knew that his boyfriend could see right through his façade.

“Wow, this is…this really is a feast,” Namjoon remarked, breaking out his Korean at long last. “I don’t even recognise most of these dishes, but goddamn, they look and smell great. What’re these soups, huh? Are they appetisers?”

“That’s tteokguk, and that’s miyeokguk,” Jungkook explained, gesturing between the two different kinds of soup. He shifted to sit down on his floor cushion again, Tigger sitting to the side eagerly eyeing the meat on the table. “Didn’t your parents cook this for you when you were growing up?”

“My parents didn’t cook food like this for me when I was a kid,” Jimin explained with a head shake; Namjoon making a noise in agreement. “I mean, we were too poor to be eating food like this. I’ve had a lot of different dishes in Seoul when I was with Taehyung, but not those two.”

“You’ve got to eat miyeokguk and tteokguk on your birthday, Jimin,” Jungkook said in a very serious tone. “Americans celebrate births on the day and not New Years, so, you can’t get older unless you have tteokguk today.”

“Why not, cutie?” Jimin asked in surprise, glancing over the vast array of dishes that had been spread across the table as he retrieved his napkin bundle of cutlery.

“It’s tradition that you can only grow a year older after eating tteokguk,” Yoongi explained on Jungkook’s behalf. “So, eat up, darling.”

“Oh, trust me, I will,” Jimin replied with a smile, unwrapping the bundle so that he could tuck his napkin down the front of his tee-shirt. “Like Namo said, everything looks and smells fantastic.”

“I’ve never had any tteokguk before on my birthdays either. Does that mean I don’t even exist?” Namjoon asked, which made Jimin snort laughter under his breath and roll his eyes.

“That means that I’m older than all of you!” Jungkook exclaimed with a massive grin. “Ah, I should be in charge for the day. You should all have to serve my drinks and clean the dishes!”

Jimin burst out laughing at this, throwing his head back from the force of his laughter.
Jungkook’s cheekiness was unbelievable, considering the fact that Yoongi - Prince Min himself - was sitting at the table with them. But it was evident from the smile on Yoongi’s face that he found Jungkook’s antics amusing and endearing, rather than disrespectful and offensive.

“Wait, I gotta get a shot of this!” Jungkook suddenly cried out, waving his arm to stop any of them from dipping their spoons into the soup and rice bowls or grabbing chunks of meat with their chopsticks. “It looks good right now, don’t touch anything!”

“Kid, we know that it looks good, that’s why we wanna start eating it,” Yoongi remarked, as he dropped his folded-up napkin back down on the table.

This caused a ripple of laughter to fall across the table, as Jungkook shifted to get up onto his knees to get a better angle. He moved this way and that with his camera held up in front of his face, before finally finding an angle that satisfied him. He hit the button to snap the photograph, which shot out of the front slot a second later with a whirring sound.

“There,” Jungkook said, as he pulled the Polaroid free and he started shaking it. “Now Jimin will always remember this meal whenever he looks at this shot.”

Over the duration of the birthday breakfast, Jungkook took just another photograph so that they could all eat in peace without him shoving the camera into their faces. The boy suggested that he should get a photograph of him and Yoongi eating food together, because it would look ‘nice’, and so they had to pose for one such photograph.

Jimin struggled to not laugh as he held a bowl of jangjorim under his chin, Yoongi doing the exact same right beside him so that they could pose and smile for Jungkook. He had a chunk of beef caught between his chopsticks, his mouth open in both a smile and in imitation of eating the bite, whereas Yoongi had a mouthful of egg that had made his cheek distend as he smiled at the camera.

Namjoon found the sight hilarious, for he almost choked on a mouthful of rice as he started laughing at them; his eyes closed tight and his shoulders lifting and falling.

But Jungkook managed to get a snapshot of them both, and when the piece of film developed and Jimin saw it, he found that it was a lovely photograph. It seemed that Jungkook really did have a good eye with the device, for he had taken two fantastic shots already, and he had plans to catch a great many more over the duration of the day.
Just like Jimin had expected, the birthday feast was delicious. There wasn’t a single dish that Mijoo had prepared that he didn’t enjoy, from the soups and main meal to the side dishes. The jangjorim was tender and succulent, the meat almost melting on his tongue so that he moaned around the first bite. The soups contrasted wonderfully, from the creamy tteokguk with the soft chunks of tteok floating in the thick broth, to the tangy miyeokguk with shredded seaweed, beef and sweet mussels that he had never tasted before. He even devoured the kimchi and namul, just because it felt like forever since he had had such side dishes. He savoured the sticky peanuts, steamed eggplants and broccoli, seasoned bean sprouts, stir-fried cucumber and mushrooms, and braised potatoes.

Jimin could see that he wasn’t the only one that was enjoying the meal, for everyone else looked to be so doing so too.

Yoongi ate at his usual slow pace, savouring every single bite in silence, whilst Jungkook eagerly ate his serving at a much quicker speed. Namjoon might not have tasted most of the dishes, but he obviously enjoyed them, for Jimin could see him sampling a little bit of everything so that he wouldn’t get full and miss out on the different flavours.

Even Tigger was enjoying a bite of jangjorim that Jungkook had given her, the puppy wrestling with a chunk of meaty bone. It was highly amusing to watch her trying to gnaw on it, for she didn’t seem to be big enough to master the bone just yet. But she was giving it her best shot.

Upon finishing the meal, Jimin could only lean back on his wrists so that he could curve his back comfortably. His stomach was completely full to the point of feeling swollen against the waistband of his jeans, the sensation incredibly satisfying.

“Oh, I’m so full that I’m gonna explode!” Jimin declared, which made Jungkook laugh as he spooned at the final abalone shell. “That really was a feast. I don’t think that I could eat another bite!”

“I wish that we could make breakfast like that, Jimmy,” Namjoon remarked, as he wiped at his face with his napkin. “Instead of eating Pop Tarts every single day…”

“Hey, don’t make fun of my Pop Tarts,” Jimin argued, seeing Mijoo exiting the kitchen out of the corner of his eye so that she could come over to their table. “I make a mean Pop Tart, Namo.”

“What was daddy talking about, mama?” Jungkook asked his mum around a mouthful of abalone. He gathered his dishes together in a stack to place them onto the tray for her, and so they all copied his actions.
Beside him, Tigger was still wrestling with a gristly beef bone so that she could gnaw at the stringy meat and try and get some of the juicy marrow from it.

“Well, if you must know, Jungkookie. We got a letter today, a very important letter,” Mijoo explained, as she added the teapot onto the tray along with the teacups. “Thanks to Prince Min, you’ve been accepted to go to a special school in the city. They teach you English and all kinds of subjects.”

“Ah! But I just finished school!” Jungkook almost whined, twisting to look at Yoongi with a disgruntled expression. “Big brother, seriously?!?”

“Seriously,” Yoongi confirmed with a slow nod. “You’re gonna learn English, and you’re gonna work hard and graduate that school. Then, when your green card’s sorted, you can get a proper job. It’s important, it’s real important, kid.”

Jimin could see that Jungkook was thinking this over intently, likely because Yoongi had mentioned getting a job and he had caught his interest. It likely hadn’t crossed the boy’s mind that he wouldn’t be able to get a legitimate and good job without decent English skills, just the usual manual and underpaid labour that all immigrants - both legal and illegal - could expect to find within the country.

Yoongi might just have increased Jungkook’s chances of living a normal life in the future, once his family were given green cards by Moon Tiger Mob. He could leave it all behind - helping his parents run an illegal card club in the basement of a restaurant, in favour of a new start. That was something that Jungkook should be thankful for, even if it meant that he had to go back to school again.

“OK, I’ll go to school, big brother,” Jungkook finally said, his shoulders held low in a way that showed that he was still annoyed about it all.

In time, Jungkook would come to understand just how good that this opportunity was, Jimin knew that he would.

“The breakfast was amazing, Mijoo,” Jimin said, just to distract away from the subject of school and green cards. “Thank you so much for preparing it for us. I haven’t eaten so well on my birthday before, especially not Korean cuisine. Thanks for letting me taste those dishes and experience a part of my family’s culture that I’ve never been able to do so before.”
“You’re more than welcome, Jimin. There’s just a final serving of food for you all,” Mijoo said, as she straightened up with the serving tray in hand. “I’ll bring it right away.”

“A final serving?” Jimin remarked, as he watched her go and then he turned his head to look at his friends. “What does she mean by that, Jungkook?”

Jungkook just shrugged at this, as he tugged at the chunk of bone to play with Tigger. Clearly, he didn’t have a clue what surprise his mum had prepared to finish breakfast, and Jimin was pretty certain that Yoongi didn’t know either; that he was as clueless as he and Namjoon were.

When Mijoo exited the kitchen again a moment later, there was a metal dish cover over said serving of food so that none of them could see what was on the tray. After placing it down on the table, she lifted the cover up to reveal that there was a secret cake - a birthday cake.

The sight of the cake was enough to make them all let out surprised sounds, before laughing at their shocked reactions. Jimin couldn’t believe that he hadn’t even thought about the chances of Mijoo preparing a cake of some kind for his birthday, as it had completely escaped his mind.

“Prince Min told us that Americans like to eat cake on their birthdays,” Mijoo said in a very solemn tone. “Cake is very important.”

For some reason, Namjoon found this very amusing, and Jimin saw him struggling to keep his expression neutral.

It was probably because of the fact that Mijoo thought that cake was a very important and almost sacred part of birthday celebrations, when it really wasn’t that special.

Sure, it was a bit of a tradition to do such a thing, and pretty much most people would give cake to their loved ones. But Jimin had never really had enjoyable birthdays from the age of four or five, and so he really hadn’t gotten that much into celebrating the event. He and Namjoon had spent their birthdays together getting high and eating junk food, giving each other presents that consisted of several stupid joke gifts - like condoms and Playboy magazines, and one serious gift - like items of clothing, books, vinyl records, and video games.

Therefore, he didn’t really get the whole birthday cake deal. But he did like the look of the cake that Mijoo had just placed down on the table, and he was pretty certain that he could handle a few more bites of food without exploding.
Unlike the usual birthday cakes that Jimin was used to seeing in store windows and on television, Mijoo hadn’t prepared a sponge cake covered with rolled icing, which would likely have a thick jam and cream centre. Instead, she had prepared a very soft cake of several sponge layers, between each there was a spread of whipped cream. Rather than cover the top in candles and piped icing letters, she had added even more whipped cream in small dollops, along with pieces of cut strawberry artfully placed across the cream.

Jimin was handed the cake knife so that he could slice into the cake, and so he carefully cut the cake into six pieces so that they could all enjoy a slice - Mijoo and Jungkook’s dad included.

Whilst Jimin cut the cake, Jungkook was sure to snap a photograph of him to add onto the growing pile of birthday Polaroids.

It turned out that Mijoo was as good at baking cakes as she was at cooking everything else. The sponge was soft and light, matching well with the whipped cream so that it wasn’t heavy or too thick and rich. The little pieces of strawberry were an added hint of sweetness that made Jimin’s lips curl up at the corners in a smile.

Mijoo carried the remaining slices of cake back into the kitchen, presumably so she could store them for later and keep them fresh. She might just enjoy a slice with her husband, or just give them to Jungkook as a treat later in the day.

As Jimin shovelled a large bite of cake into his mouth, quite a lot of cream got caught in the corner of his lips. He stuck his tongue out to try and catch it, but he was unable to lick it all free.

Yoongi moved to wipe the blob free for him with his thumb, gently cleaning it away and then letting him lick the cream free from the pad of his thumb. His boyfriend smiled at him as he did so, their little act of affection completely missed by Namjoon and Jungkook.

“Are you two gonna kiss?” Jungkook suddenly asked, as he moved to cock his elbows on the table and he balanced his chin in his hands. He looked between them both, a rather mischievous-looking grin on his face that Jimin was starting to think was a very common expression of his.

“What, you waiting for us to kiss or something?” Yoongi asked in reply, cutting into his slice of cake with his fork.
“No, I just thought that you two would kiss,” Jungkook said, quickly adding. “You keep looking at each other like you really want to kiss…”

This made Jimin lower his own fork, turning his head to look at Yoongi as he did so. He returned the look, holding his gaze with an expression that he found he could read with ease. It was enough to make him smile around the bite of cake, waiting to see if his boyfriend would be the one to brave the kiss, or if he should take a risk and try and kiss him.

Yoongi hesitated for a moment, torn between eating his bite of cake and placing the fork down on the plate. He settled on placing the fork down so that he could turn to face him, lifting a hand to cup his chin and bring their lips together in a soft and chaste kiss.

Jungkook burst out laughing at the sight of their kiss, a rather giddy series of giggles escaping him. But Jimin could tell that Jungkook wasn’t laughing at them, as in he found their kiss funny because it was between two men. It was more like he had been unable to control the giggle from escaping him in a moment of what might just have been happiness.

“Ah! I should’ve had my camera ready!” the boy cried out, realising that he had missed the perfect photograph opportunity. “I need to get a shot of you kissing at some point to go into the photo album - a special shot for you, Jimin.”

As soon as they were all finished eating, it was time to leave. Jimin didn’t have a clue what was even going on, where they were going, and who was tagging along for the day. But he knew that no matter what - it was going to be a great day. It might just end up being a perfect day, which seemed highly likely considering how the day was going so far.

Before leaving the restaurant, Yoongi followed Jungkook into the kitchen, presumably so that he could personally thank Mijoo for the breakfast.

“You coming, kid?” Yoongi called, as he lingered in the kitchen doorway. “Like Jimin said before, you’re more than welcome to join us for the day. I’m sure that he’d love spending time with you.”

“I would, I’d love it a lot!” Jimin called from the table, seeing Yoongi’s expression shifting into a quick smile.
Whatever Jungkook said in reply was lost from their distance, for all that he could hear was a muffled hint of words and nothing more than that.

“I ain’t telling,” Yoongi replied. “You gotta wait and see.”

Jungkook must have decided to join them for the day, for he exited the kitchen just seconds after Yoongi did so. He made sure to clip the leash onto Tigger’s collar because he had to take her with him and not leave her behind in the restaurant, which meant that the puppy was coming along too.

The more the merrier, Jimin thought to himself with a smile.

Upon exiting the restaurant, Yoongi made sure to store his presents in the boot of the car to keep them safe and secure. Jimin didn’t want his vinyl record getting damaged in any way possible, now that Namjoon had finally managed to locate such a perfect copy for him. He didn’t even want it being out in the sunlight for too long, lest the sun fade the cover.

Jimin climbed into the passenger-seat beside his boyfriend, seeing Jungkook, Tigger, and Namjoon all comfortably sharing the backseat. Whilst he fixed his seatbelt in place, Yoongi started the car to pull away from the curb and roll into the road.

The interior of the car was quiet, almost too quiet for Jimin. He was tempted to switch on the radio, just for the sake of it - hoping to lessen the somewhat heavy sensation in the air. He knew that Yoongi didn’t often drive with the radio playing unless it was just the two of them, cruising of an evening together. But a song might come on that they knew that they could sing along to (though he doubted that Yoongi would want to embarrass himself in front of Namjoon and Jungkook in such a way).

“I know you said you were fine back in the restaurant,” Yoongi finally said in English, breaking the silence within the vehicle. “But I know that you were just saying that, Jimin.”

Jimin turned away from the window so that he could look at Yoongi. His boyfriend hadn’t taken his eyes off the road, one hand firmly holding onto the steering-wheel and his other arm folded on the window rest. Even when he wasn’t looking directly at him, he knew that he was studying him out of the corner of his eye.

“D’you wanna talk ‘bout it, huh?” Yoongi offered, as he spared a quick look over at him. “If not, just say so. I understand if you don’t wanna talk to me with the kid here, even if he can’t really
understand us.”

“Hmm? Oh, he knows about my…bad upbringing,” Jimin explained, glancing at Jungkook’s reflection in the rear-view mirror. “Still, it’s probably best to not talk about this in a way that he can understand.”

“I knew that you were freaking out back there,” Namjoon remarked from the backseat, his gaze still focused on the window to watch the streets go blurring past. “It was because of his dad, right? That’s what freaked you out, Jimmy.”

“Yeah, I didn’t expect that to happen, I wasn’t prepared for it,” he agreed with a slow nod. “When he said that he was his dad, when I looked up at him and I saw how close that he was to me, it just…it really set me off. You know? Man, it was crazy.”

“His father made you feel uncomfortable?” Yoongi asked, glancing between the road and him in turn. “Did he remind you of your own father?”

“Jimmy doesn’t deal too good around men that remind him of his dad,” Namjoon explained on his behalf. “One time, my parents came to visit without telling us in advance. When Jimmy walked into the living-room and he saw them both, he just lost it. He got really upset and he hid upstairs, just so that he could get away from my parents. It was the only way that he could calm down, because just being in the same room as them scared him.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah, Yoongi. But he’s get better at handling all of that. You’re really getting better with it all, Jimmy, trust me.”

“I don’t feel like I’m getting better,” Jimin replied in a quiet voice. “When I saw his dad, I felt so bad, Namo. I literally felt like I was gonna puke or start crying, even when I knew that there was no reason at all to feel that way. It’s like…my brain shut down the part of me that knew that I was safe, that I’d nothing to be scared of. It shut that down so that all I could think about was my dad and everything that he did to me and my mum, and I just…it was bad. I’m sorry for lying to you about feeling fine, Yoongi.”

“You ain’t gotta say sorry, Jimin,” Yoongi replied with a soft head shake. “I just want you to know that if you ain’t feeling alright, if there’s anything I can do to help - just ask me, just tell me what you
need. You told me to close my eyes and think ‘bout waves when I start feeling that panic washing over me, the one that makes it hard to breathe sometimes. If you need me to help you focus on something to fight that feeling, or to just hold your hand - I’ll be there, darling.”

“Thanks, baby boy,” Jimin said, as he placed his hand down to hold onto his knee. “It’s so good knowing that you’re there for me, no matter what.”

As Yoongi guided the car down the city streets, Jimin couldn’t help but stare out of the front and side window at the passing sights.

They travelled west through Western Addition to go through the neighbourhood of Nopa, then entering Richmond District through Inner Richmond. There was something incredibly familiar about this route, for Jimin felt like he had travelled this route with Yoongi before - just not on these exact roads.

When they rolled along Fulton Street, Jimin was able to look at Golden Gate Park through Yoongi’s window; seeing the massive stretch of park filled with towering trees that was likely packed with locals and tourists. That would be a great place to take Tigger one day, should he and Jungkook go out together again. Yoongi took a right on 25th Avenue to head north through Richmond District, which meant that he was heading straight towards Sea Cliff. That was when it hit him where they were going, and the realisation was enough to make Jimin gasp.

Yoongi was driving them to Baker Beach.

“We’re going to the beach? Seriously?! We’re going to Baker Beach?!” Jimin exclaimed, twisting away from the window to look at Yoongi. “I didn’t bring anything for the beach though, not even my trunks!”

“That’s exactly why I packed your trunks for you, Jimmy,” Namjoon said, reaching over to pat at the backpack affectionately. “I brought everything that we need in this baby - your trunks, beach towels, beer. I’m the best friend there is.”

“You the man, Daddy-o!” Jimin agreed, twisting in his seat to hold his fist out to him for a solid.

“What’s going on?” Jungkook asked in Korean, as he had finally grown tired of trying to guess what they were all talking about. “I can’t understand you guys!”
“We’re going to the beach, cutie,” Jimin explained in Korean. He made a note to carry on talking in Korean from this point onward, just to not exclude the boy. “We’re going to Baker Beach, it’s my favourite beach in the whole city.”

“Bay…kur Bee…chu,” Jungkook sounded out slowly, before trying again. “Baker Beach. I’ve never been to the beach before, not here in America. Is it big?”

“It’s really big,” he agreed with a grin.

“Everything’s so much bigger in America. The cars, the houses, the dogs, and now the beaches too,” Jungkook muttered to himself, the sound of awe audible in his tone. “Why is everything so big?”

Unlike last time that they had visited Baker Beach, Yoongi was unable to park the car in the large and central lot, as it was already filled with vehicles. That meant that he had to slowly turn the car around and drive back up the sloping hill to get to another parking lot. This one had available spots for him to park in, and so he maneuvered the vehicle into the best parking space and then he killed the engine.

Jimin dived out of the vehicle first with much enthusiasm, dropping so that he could start unknotting his sneaker laces and slip out of them. He wanted to walk on the hot sand right away, to feel the sand against the soles of his feet because he loved and craved the sensation.

Jungkook climbed out next, and he could hear Tigger barking excitedly because she could no doubt scent the fragrant, briny water and damp sand. It was hanging heavy in the air, coming on the soft breeze, and so Jimin breathed it in deeply until he could almost taste the salt on his tongue.

Namjoon climbed out with his backpack in tow, and Yoongi went around the back of the car to pop the boot open. Jimin saw him retrieving a sizeable case that looked to be made from leather, one that had a durable strap of some kind.

“What’s in the bag, baby boy?” Jimin asked, saying his nickname in English because it sounded so much better to him.

“I thought ‘bout what you said, ‘bout buying a camera,” Yoongi explained, as he shrugged the bag up onto his shoulder and he reached up to slam the boot shut. “I decided to go one step further.”
“Oh, yeah? What’d you mean?”

“I bought a camcorder - the, uh, the JVC GR-C1.”

“Wait, you’ve got a JVC?!” Namjoon asked, his expression that of dumb shock as he stared at Yoongi. “You’ve got one of those babies?! Oh man, I gotta get a look at that thing in action.”

“You good with technology?” Yoongi asked, as he came to a stop beside Jimin. “I might need assistance getting the thing to work. I ain’t touched it, save for charging the battery overnight. I ain’t gotta clue how to work it, so, you might just be my right hand man, Namjoon.”

“Awesome! I’ll be sure to be extra careful with it. I won’t break it, I won’t drop it either - I promise.”

Jimin took hold of Yoongi’s hand so that he could guide him across the parking lot and in the direction of the beach; his sneakers dangling from their laces in his other hand. Yoongi enveloped his hand within his own, entwining their fingers and holding onto it tightly in a way that made him feel so good inside.

Loosely clasped fingers over breakfast at Mickey’s Joint were nice and all, but there was something so comforting about letting Yoongi take tight hold of his hand. It might just be because Yoongi’s hands were soft and cool, that they were slightly wider than his and longer in the fingers, so that he could cradle his hand within his own - much like how he could wrap his arms around him in bed and hold him against his chest.

After exiting the parking lot, Jimin guided Yoongi towards a long slope that would take them down to the beach.

It was the sand ladder, the rather famous beach attraction that tourists were always snapping photographs of. It was a long stretch of sandy hill which had wooden steps built into it, allowing safe access to the beach. But it was incredibly steep and it really would take a lot of effort to descend the ladder. Their calves would likely be aching by the time that they reached the bottom.

When they had visited Baker Beach in the evening, they had gotten to avoid the sand ladder because they had parked at the central lot at the bottom of the hill. But Jimin really wanted to go down it just once, just so he could give it a try.
“Wow, the beach isn’t packed at all!” Namjoon remarked, as they started the slow descent down the sand ladder.

“It’s the middle of October, Namo!” Jimin called back over his shoulder. “People aren’t exactly in the mood for sunbathing this time of year!”

“Are you kidding me, Jimmy?! It’s the best time of the year! The weather’s always the best around the autumn, it’s hotter than it was in spring!”

Namjoon did have a good point, as the weather during the autumnal period didn’t cool off greatly from the summer, and it sometimes peaked even higher. Winter and spring tended to be noticeably cooler, and spring was most certainly cooler than autumn every single year. It seemed like tourists weren’t aware of this fact, for they travelled for the good weather in the spring and summer, and they often missed the heat of the autumn period.

Just like he had expected, Jimin found that the sand ladder really was a workout. It was tough on his calves and his upper thighs, not only because it was so steep, but because the wooden steps almost seemed to shift in the sand; connected together by pieces of rope.

Yoongi ended up having to remove his sandals after one too many stumbles in the sand, just to save himself from falling right onto his ass. Jimin was barefoot and so he had much better footing and grip on the steps, and his boyfriend also ended up gaining a better footing after removing his sandals.

Namjoon, however, did end up landing on his ass in his attempt to get down the sand ladder. Jungkook didn’t stumble, but he did have the challenge of trying to settle Tigger down and stop her from dragging on her leash in her excitement to get down onto the beach.

When they reached the bottom of the sand ladder, Jimin could only cry out in relief for his aching legs. He could see that Yoongi was grimacing too, his legs likely sore from the intense workout.

Jimin could see exactly where he and Yoongi had settled down that night when they had first visited the beach, for it was right along the shoreline and very close to the central parking lot. It was a perfect stretch of sand that was close to the middle of the beach, and so it had attracted a great deal of the visitors today.

But the section of beach in front of them was also very nice. It was a wide chunk of white sand, with a slight curve to the left that stretched out in front of some beach house properties. Hardly anyone
was present on this side of the beach, save for some fitness guys that were doing laps in the water and up and down the sand ladder, and some locals that were out exercising their dogs.

“If I was rich, I would buy one of those houses!” Jungkook declared, as he lifted his hand to gesture at the distance blocks of Sea Cliff mansions that were all over the horizon. “That way, I’d be right by the beach - all year round!”

“That’d be nice,” Jimin agreed, eyeing the massive mansions. “It’d be so perfect living this close to the sea. Right, Yoongi?”

Yoongi hummed in agreement at this, running his eyes across the beach to likely locate somewhere that they could all settle down.

“Maybe, one day, we should buy a house up on that cliff,” Jimin said, cocking his head to study him. He was half-joking and half-testing the waters with his boyfriend to see how he would react to such an idea. “That’d be amazing, don’t you think so?”

“Yeah, darling,” Yoongi agreed, giving him a fond smile as he turned his head to look at him. “That’d be the greatest thing in the world. That kinda view first thing in the morning? It’d make waking up totally worth it.”

“Hmm, just like waking up next to you,” Jimin remarked sweetly, as he moved to give his boyfriend a quick kiss in the corner of his lips.

Yoongi let out a flustered sound at this, his shoulders lifting to almost brush against his ears in that usual shy and potentially ticklish way of his. The little act always made Jimin want to do it again and again, but he knew that he should save such playful antics for when they were alone together - just to save him from getting anxious.

Jungkook was too slow with his camera again, for he was unable to catch their near kiss. He had been too distracted looking off across the beach at the sight of the city skyline; one hand held up to serve as a visor to block the powerful sunlight. Maybe later, he might just get a great photograph opportunity, but not yet.

A few feet away from them, Namjoon was rummaging through his backpack. He had hunkered down onto one knee to do so, dragging a rather large and thin beach towel out of the main compartment so that he could toss it over his shoulder.
Yoongi took this as a sign to find a spot for them to settle down, and so he escorted Jimin along the stretch of sand until he found an ideal spot.

It was still close enough to the sand ladder for ease of leaving the beach later, but a good distance away to avoid other beach goers coming and going. The sand around them was pristine - not a sight of rubbish, condoms or used needles in sight, for it seemed like the beach was really well kept.

“This is a great spot,” Namjoon said, as he dropped the backpack down onto the sand; the contents clunking in a way that hinted that he had brought cans of beer. “Goddamn, look at that view.”

Whilst Jimin got changed out of his tight blue jeans, Namjoon held the beach towel up around him to protect his modesty. Baker Beach might just have a stretch reserved for nudists, but they were far from it, and he didn’t really feel like flashing a bunch of random strangers.

Jimin dropped his jeans and he fumbled to slip into the pair of black swimming trunks that his friend had brought with him. It had been quite some time since he had changed into them, but they still fit him well.

“Did you bring any trunks, Namo?” Jimin asked, quickly tucking himself into the trunks and fixing the waistband in place.

“Nah, I didn’t bring any,” Namjoon replied, before gesturing at his denim shorts. “These are fine, I’m not planning on going deep enough into the ocean to get them wet.”

As soon as Jimin was ready, Namjoon spread the beach towel out on the sand so that they could all sit down on it. Jungkook and Yoongi did so first, neither of them making a move to start getting changed into swimming trunks of any kind.

“Am I the only guy here in trunks?!” Jimin asked, placing his hands on his hips as he looked down at them all. “I look stupid! You’re all dressed and I’m practically naked!”

“Look, you look good enough in those trunks for the rest of us,” Namjoon argued, which made Yoongi and Jungkook start laughing. “Besides, don’t act like the idea of being naked is weird to you, Jimmy. You don’t wear any goddamn clothes in the house! I see your ass on an almost daily basis!”
Jimin let out a series of grumbles at this, still feeling very self-conscious. It wasn’t that he was uncomfortable with this level of skin on display in public, but rather just the fact that none of his friends were showing off any - not even a slight hint save for bare lower legs.

“Fine, I’ll take this off,” Namjoon offered, reaching up to snag hold of the back of his tee-shirt so that he could drag it off.

“Me too,” Jungkook added, slipping his camera free from around his neck so that he could also remove his striped tee-shirt.

Jimin couldn’t help but let a pleased smile appear on his face, so very thankful that the two of them had been willing to do such a thing just for him.

On account of the fact that they had been living together for several years now, Jimin knew Namjoon’s body almost as well as his own. He could recall every little freckle on his shoulders and the back of his neck, and the lean hint of muscle in his arms and legs.

But Jimin had never seen Jungkook without a tee-shirt on before, and so he was surprised to see that the boy actually had some definition to his body. It wasn’t sharply defined, but it was obvious that Jungkook was an athletic boy that clearly enjoyed sports and exercise.

“Whoa,” Jungkook breathed out, as he moved to examine Namjoon’s now exposed upper arm tattoo. “That tattoo’s so cool! It reminds me of my friend’s tattoo, but it’s much more…”

“Badass?” Yoongi suggested in English, which made Jimin and Namjoon laugh heartily.

“Yeah, that,” Jungkook agreed, rather than attempt to pronounce the new word. “You look like a real gangster with that tattoo, Namjoon…”

Yoongi had made no move to remove his tee-shirt, for he was far too busy unzipping his camcorder bag to remove the device. It might just be that he wouldn’t take his tee-shirt off just like in his dream, as he might be a little shy, or wanting to hide his unmissable and striking back tattoo from any wandering eyes.

Jimin was shocked to see just how large that the camcorder actually was. He had expected a small device because of the way that Yoongi and Namjoon had been discussing it - a small, portable
camcorder that would top the bulky ones with countless wires and tape decks that he had seen in the past. But the camcorder was actually significantly larger than he had been expecting.

The JVC GR-C1 was a long red rectangle of plastic, on the front of which there was a black box that the recording lens came out of. Above the long lens, there was something that looked to be a small microphone, along with an angled viewfinder to the left that meant that the device was optimal for right handed users. The length of the entire device looked to be three of Yoongi’s hand-spans, and that made Jimin think that it would weigh a considerable amount.

One side of the camcorder was covered in buttons that were labelled for ease of use. There looked to be an empty compartment beside these buttons that would hold a tape of some kind, but Jimin had never seen tape that small before. There was also a black strap to slip the hand through and hold onto the camcorder properly, and so Yoongi slipped it over the back of his hand to get a secure hold on the device.

Whilst Yoongi turned the camcorder over in his hands, Jungkook unclipped Tigger from her leash so that she could explore the beach. He was sure to follow along after her, just to keep her from racing too far away, or getting too deep in the waves. A little puppy like herself might just be washed away by a strong wave.

Jimin watched him for a moment before turning back to his boyfriend, highly intrigued by the camcorder. He hunkered down so that he could get a better look at the device, folding his arms on his knees.

“OK, let’s try and work this baby out,” Namjoon declared, shifting to get closer to Yoongi on the beach towel. He had reverted back to speaking in English once more, now that Jungkook was out of earshot. “First thing’s first, what does it record on, Yoongi?”

“You, uh, you gotta load these special tapes into it,” Yoongi explained, as he unzipped another bag compartment and he proceeded to pull out a much smaller than usual VHS tape. It was easily half the size, if not smaller, and Jimin found himself staring at it in wonder. “It records right onto the tape, yeah, like the old ones used to, but without all the separate decks and wires.”

“How much recording time can you fit on a single tape?” Namjoon asked curiously, watching the other man peeling away the plastic covering from the tape.

“Uh, thirty minutes,” Yoongi replied, dumping the plastic wrapper into the camcorder bag.
“Thirty minutes?! Whoa, all on that little tape?!” Namjoon shook his head at this with a laugh, clearly struggling to accept that such a compact tape could hold so much recording. “That’s crazy, Yoongi!”

“Technology’s fucking crazy,” Yoongi agreed with a quick grin, his eyes crinkling at the corners as he moved to pop the tape inside of the device.

“What about the battery?”

“Uh, I ain’t sure yet - it said in the manual that it’s low power or something, for longer battery life. We ain’t probably gonna get a lot of time, but even an hour or two’s great; right? Hang on, hold onto this for me; would you?”

“Yeah, that’s a couple of those tapes right there,” Namjoon pointed out with a nod, as he accepted the camcorder from Yoongi and he lifted it up to squint down the viewfinder. “OK: battery charged, tape in - what next?”

Yoongi paused in the act of retrieving another tape so that he could peel the plastic free in advance. He moved so that he could lean closer to Namjoon, to help him work out the device because they both seemed a little clueless.

Jimin heard a clicking sound as Namjoon hit one of the buttons on the side, and that was when an orange light appeared on the front right next to the massive lens. His best friend turned the device towards Yoongi, so that the lens was pointing right at him.

“I think you gotta- oh!”

Yoongi pulled away from the camcorder before letting out a sudden laugh, realising that he had been caught right on camera. He covered his grin with his fingers to try and hide it, his eyelids crinkled deeply at the corners to show just how much that he was smiling. He let out a series of dopey guffaws, his shoulders lifting and falling as he did so, and Jimin could see that Namjoon was also grinning from ear to ear as he held the somewhat bulky camcorder in hand.

“Talk about a close-up,” Namjoon joked, holding the camcorder in place whilst he cocked his head to examine the buttons. There were several, right there above his fingers so that he could press them with ease. “Say ‘hey’, Yoongi.”
“Ah, no,” Yoongi disagreed, dropping his head to cover his face that little bit more with his fingers. “Don’t record me, I ain’t good with cameras.”

“No one’s gonna see this recording but us, baby boy,” Jimin pointed out, as he moved to lean closer to Namjoon to eye the device. “There’s nothing to be nervous or shy about, hmm?”

Yoongi thought this over for a few seconds, still very much hiding behind his hand because he seemed to be camera shy.

Jimin recalled him saying that he was a little shy around them when they had been taking Polaroids of each other. But a camera and a camcorder were two completely different things. It was no wonder that he might just be more shy around this new device.

Jimin had never even held a camcorder before; had only ever seen them in store windows, on television adverts and magazine advertisements, and in the hands of wealthy tourists and locals during his muling trips.

“…Hey.”

Yoongi finally pulled his hand away from his face, giving the camcorder a tinkling wave with his fingers. There was an uncertain smile on his face that made his lips twitch at the corners, and his cheeks were slightly flushed with a hint of colour.

“Do I look stupid?” Yoongi suddenly asked, looking between the lens and Namjoon in turn. “Do I look ugly or something-”

“No, you look fine, Yoongi, you look handsome,” Namjoon interrupted, before Jimin could do so much as open his mouth. “Look way more handsome than me any day.”

Yoongi laughed softly at this, giving the camcorder another quick look before dropping his gaze down to their legs.

Namjoon seemed to take this as a sign to stop recording him for a moment, turning around to focus on Jimin instead. He still had it held up to his face to squint down the viewfinder at him, the bulky camcorder naturally settling in place on his shoulder so that he could rest the tape deck there and lessen the weight on his wrist.
The lens was pointed right at him, yet Jimin felt no stirring hint of discomfort or fear at all. There was nothing to be shy or worried about, for it was just another camera. It might just record him instead of taking photographs, but that didn’t mean a thing to him.

“It’s the birthday boy himself - say ‘hey’, Jimmy,” Namjoon declared, his lips splitting into a wide grin from behind the camcorder.

“Hey,” he said with a happy smile, eagerly bathing in the spotlight that the camcorder created.

Jimin found himself shifting to sit more upright, his bare shoulders lifting as he sat down on the sand. The heat of the sand warmed his skin almost instantly, the gritty particles clinging to his thighs and the slight hint of his buttocks that were free from the confines of his trunks.

“How’re you doing, huh? How’s the day been so far?” Namjoon asked, just to fill in any potentially awkward silence.

“Amazing! The day’s going amazing and I feel amazing, thanks to you guys,” he replied, sparing a quick glance between the lens and Yoongi to see that his boyfriend was smiling at him. “I seriously couldn’t have asked for a better day.”

“…I wonder if I can turn this around and get all three of us in the shot?” Namjoon mumbled to himself, moving the camcorder so that he could hold it out in front of himself. He slipped his hand free from the handy strap, slowly and carefully turning the device around in his hands until it was pointed right at him. “Wait a sec, wait a sec…I think I got it! Scoot over, I think we can all fit!”

Jimin and Yoongi shifted on the beach towel until they were sitting on either side of Namjoon. They had to place their heads close to his, their chins almost sitting on his shoulders, but it seemed like the three of them might just have managed to fit. Hopefully, that was the case, and Namjoon wasn’t just recording the tops of their heads, or their chests, and assuming that their faces were in the shot.

“Alright, looking good!” Namjoon said, as he tried to support the camcorder’s weight between both hands. “This thing’s awesome, Yoongi, you can even record like this.”

“We should record a message, right?” Yoongi suddenly suggested, glancing away from the camcorder lens to look at them both. “A birthday message for Jimin, so that he can watch this recording back in the future and hear it again.”
“Oh, that’d be so sweet,” Jimin said with a happy smile. “I really like that idea, Yoongi.”

“OK, I’ll start. I’ll give Yoongi some time to think,” Namjoon offered, pausing for a moment so that he could get his words together and start his birthday message. “Jimin, today’s your twentieth birthday. We’ve known each other for three years now, and that’s hardly that long at all. But to me, it feels like I’ve known you my whole life. It’s kinda funny how much you feel like a little brother to me, to the point in which I often think that you are.”

Jimin’s cheeks were starting to hurt from smiling so much at Namjoon’s birthday message, and yet, he couldn’t seem to stop.

“Those three years haven’t been easy,” Namjoon continued in a quiet voice. “There’s been many ups, but so many downs. I think that the downs hit us pretty bad sometimes, and we didn’t really think that we were gonna get past those hardships. But here we are, making it through another year together, and things couldn’t get any better. This year’s been so good to the both of us, and you deserve it, brother. You deserve to have a great birthday and an even greater year. I love you, Jimmy.”

“Ah, that was so sappy, man!” Jimin exclaimed with a giggle, even as he moved to slip his arm around Namjoon’s neck and give him an embrace. “I love you too, Namo.”

“Now it’s Yoongi’s turn. You got anything yet?” Namjoon asked, letting Jimin give him a quick squeeze before he ended the hug.

“Yeah, yeah, I got something.”

Rather than hold the camcorder out in front of himself, to fit all three of them within the frame, Namjoon turned it slightly to the side. This allowed him to focus more on Yoongi, just to ensure that he was completely in the shot whilst he said his message. That meant that Jimin wasn’t even in the frame right now, but he didn’t mind at all.

Yoongi looked at the camcorder for a few seconds before glancing away again, the tip of his tongue escaping to lick at his lips. It took him a few seconds to start talking, his voice soft as he settled his gaze just to the side of the camcorder lens.

“Happy birthday, Jimin. I, uh…when I was tryna think of something to say for this message, I kept
tryna think of good things, nice things that would make you laugh or smile when you watched this tape again. But I, uh, I can’t stop thinking ‘bout this one thing and I just gotta get it out, I just gotta say it. I ain’t known you for as long as Namjoon has, not even close. But I-I want to. I wanna be able to watch this video again three years from now with you and think ‘bout how fast time flies. I wanna be able to…to look back in ten years time and think “wow, that’s actually such a long time to spend with someone”; y’know?”

“Oh, baby boy…” Jimin sighed, his words barely above a whisper so that they were likely lost underneath the sound of the waves.

“It’s a lot, I know it’s a lot to say to you and that it might come across as-as fucking crazy to some. We’ve known each other for just a few months, Jimin, but those months have affected me in ways that I ain’t ever thought possible. I feel like I’m becoming a new person ‘cos of you, and I like who I’m becoming.”

Yoongi paused for a moment to take a deep breath, and it was then that Jimin realised that he had barely even stopped to breathe. The words had just ripped free from deep inside of him, all of them spilling out at once now that he was finally finding a way to say them.

“It’s ‘cos of you, Jimin, that I can tell my friends that I’m…I’m gay. It’s ‘cos of you that I ain’t fucking terrified of my feelings anymore, and that’s why I can say this to you: Jimin, happy birthday, I love you.”

When Yoongi glanced away from the lens to look over at him, Jimin felt the most sudden urge coursing through his body that he was unable to resist. He moved so that he could give Yoongi a kiss, having to lean across Namjoon to do so. He was still holding the camcorder up to record his boyfriend, and so the sudden act caught him by total surprise.

“Argh!” Namjoon cried out dramatically, throwing his head back and lowering the camcorder so that he could get out of the way of the kiss.

Jimin was able to cup Yoongi’s cheek in one hand and bring their lips together, giving him a kiss that was deeper and longer than the one that they had shared back in the restaurant. He felt his boyfriend’s lips pouting out to meet his own, soft and so ready to part with a slip of the tongue.

Yoongi wasn’t that uncomfortable being kissed around Namjoon because the other man had caught enough of their secret kisses in the kitchen and on the living-room sofa by now. That meant that he didn’t tense up anxiously, though he did quickly scan the beach to make sure that no one had seen them when Jimin ended the kiss.
Yoongi let his breath out in a soft laugh, leaning into his hold as he came down from his rather impromptu emotional outburst. His fingers weren’t exactly steady in his lap, but otherwise, he seemed to be fine.

“We, uh, we didn’t break the camcorder; did we?” Yoongi joked, glancing over at Namjoon - who was still awkwardly leaning back to stay out of their way.

“No, it’s fine. But I think I hit the button with my thumb by accident and it’s stopped recording,” Namjoon suddenly said, as he checked the front of the camcorder. There was no orange light present, which seemed to be a sign that the device was currently not recording. “But that’s actually a good thing, I can show you how to work this baby, Yoongi. I know a guy that owns a camcorder. It’s way older and bigger than this one, but it looks to function the same way. It’s actually less complicated without all of those goddamn wires and tape decks that the old models need.”

Jimin relinquished his hold on Yoongi, sitting back down in the sand so that Namjoon could sit upright again. There were so many things that he wanted to say to Yoongi, but he decided to hold his words and not say them just yet. He could wait until later to talk to his boyfriend about what he had just said, when they were alone together for a little while and they could speak more openly.

Namjoon shifted on the beach towel to get more comfortable, unfolding his legs and cocking them up in front of him. He got the camcorder in hand, angling it so that Yoongi would be able to examine the viewfinder and button display.

“OK, these buttons here, these are all for playback - except for record. Hit it once to start recording, hit it again to stop. Think of the other buttons like buttons on your TV remote: play, pause, stop, rewind, and fast forward. That one there? That’s eject, to take out the tape. You’ll only need that when you’re finished recording on this tape and you need to slip in a new one. Those two buttons there? Also for playback, they let you skip between multiple recordings on the same tape. Also, there’s a jack here for headphones.”

Yoongi examined the display of buttons intently, likely memorising the layout to stop himself from pressing any of them by accident. It didn’t look too complicated at all to Jimin, but with a piece of technology like that, he wouldn’t want to accidentally break it by being careless.

“So, the regular recording like what we just did - that’s a panned shot, Yoongi. Without pressing any buttons, you can record everything in front of you. It’s good for recording whilst outdoors, really gives you a great shot of the scenery. But you hit this button here, and it zooms in to let you focus on one thing - say, Jungkook over there. The button beside it, that zooms out again. You can zoom in several times, usually, but apparently recording quality drops when you zoom into things on cameras
and camcorders. I read somewhere that this baby’s got autofocus from a panned shot, but that might just be rumours.”

“So, it’s best to get close instead,” Yoongi suggested, to which Namjoon made a noise in agreement. “’K - panned shots, zoom in, zoom out. That’s all there is to it, right?”

“Pretty much,” Namjoon agreed with a nod, handing the camcorder over to him. “All you need to know is how to start and stop recording, how to zoom in and out, and how to change the tapes. The battery’s displayed in the viewfinder, so, just keep an eye on it, and turn it on and off during the day to reserve the battery for when you want to record.”

“’K, let’s give this a shot,” Yoongi mumbled to himself, holding the camcorder up to his eye. “I’ll get a panned shot of the beach, it looks great from here. I’ll try playing around with the zoom options, but I’ll likely let it stay panned to not fuck up the focus.”

“OK, whilst you two play with your new shiny toy, I’m gonna go check on Jungkook,” Jimin remarked, getting upright and knocking sand free from the backs of his thighs and buttocks. “Have fun.”

Jimin crossed the stretch of sand so that he could join Jungkook and Tigger down by the water. The boy was in the act of trying to get his puppy to chase after a piece of driftwood to play fetch with him, and she was mostly bringing the chunk back to him - though she did like to take her sweet time doing so. When he drew closer to them, he saw Tigger happily gnawing on the piece of driftwood; lying away from the waves so that she couldn’t get wet.

“Training’s going great, huh, cutie?” Jimin joked, feeling the sand starting to turn damp under the soles of his feet.

“*Fetch* is taking awhile, but she can give *paw* really good,” Jungkook replied, standing in the waters deep enough for the lapping waves to reach his knees. “Me and big brother are still working on *fetch*, but she’ll learn it eventually.”

When the first licking wave touched Jimin’s feet and lower legs, he found that it was terribly chill. Unlike the night that he and Yoongi had went for a dip, however, it wasn’t icy cold and unbearable. He was able to adjust to the drop in temperature after a moment, taking several more steps forward so that he could fully submerge his feet in the water.
Now that he was actually standing in the waves and not just sitting up on the sand, Jimin was finally able to feel all of the exquisite sensations that the beach offered. From the cold and tangy water lapping against his warm skin, to the slight breeze coming in from the ocean that swept his hair back off his face - it was enough to make him let his breath out in a soft hum of pleasure.

“I don’t think she likes the water too much,” Jungkook remarked, eyeing his puppy - who was lying quite a few feet away from them on the damp sand. “Maybe, it’s too cold? Maybe, she can’t swim? Her legs aren’t that long…”

“I just think that she doesn’t get it yet,” Jimin suggested, moving to step out of the shallow water. “You’ve gotta introduce her to the water slowly, get her used to it so that she knows what it is. Like a baby, I guess? Hang on, let me try something.”

Jimin hunkered down so that he could take hold of Tigger, lifting her up so that he could carry her. The puppy put up no resistance at all, in fact she lifted her head to eagerly bump her wet nose against his jaw and mouth. He hunkered down again as soon as he was in the shallow water, holding her by her sides so that he could keep her in place for a moment.

Even though she was stationary, Tigger started kicking her legs around like mad almost as if she was swimming through the shallow water. The determined look on her face just made it even funnier, for she looked like she was ready to head right on out to sea.

This was enough to make him and Jungkook burst out laughing, finding the puppy’s antics both adorable and hilarious. He looked up at the boy to see that he had grabbed his camera, the strap hanging around his neck so that it dangled against his bare chest. He held onto Tigger for a moment longer, just to let him snap the moment with the trusty device.

“See, she’s a natural!” Jimin declared, letting go of the puppy so that she could bound through the shallow and foamy water. “She’ll be swimming in the bathtub from now on.”

Jungkook snorted laughter at this, no doubt imagining the puppy swimming laps around the tiny tub that would be shoved inside of his family’s apartment room bathroom. He pulled the piece of film out of the slot to shake it quickly, and then he had to store it inside of his shorts pocket to keep the Polaroid safe and dry.

Through Jimin’s introduction to swimming in the water, Tigger certainly showed less fear than she had before. She still stayed clear of the deeper waters, and she only bounced around the shallows for a moment before retreating back to the damp sand. But that was better than nothing, for it showed that she was getting used to the sensation of being in the water and having her thin coat soaked
Jimin glanced back across the sand so that he could look at Namjoon and Yoongi, seeing that they were both sitting side by side and still playing around with the camcorder. It was nice seeing the both of them bonding over something like that, and it made Jimin feel so good knowing that they both got along with one another so well.

“How’s the recording going?!” Jimin called, cupping his hand around his mouth in an effort to amplify his voice. “Does everything look good?!”

“Yeah! Yoongi’s zooming in on your ass, so, we’ve got a great view from here!” Namjoon called back in English.

Jimin let out a sudden laugh at this, reaching back to clap his hands over said ass. The act made Jungkook start laughing too, even when he probably hadn’t understood most of what Namjoon had just shouted. It was likely his reaction that had made him laugh, or his squeaky surprised giggle.

“I ain’t! I ain’t, I’m tryna figure out how to work it and- fuck off, Namjoon!” Yoongi argued, moving his arm so that he could give him a hard dig in the ribs with his sharp elbow.

This made Namjoon burst out laughing, clearly pleased that his cheeky joke had earned him such a reaction.

Not too long ago, Namjoon would have been terrified at the thought of being disrespectful around the young mob heir, but he had clearly discovered that he could get away with such behaviour after spending prolonged time with him.

Jimin heard Yoongi laughing after a moment to show that he had also found Namjoon’s joke funny. That, or he might just have actually zoomed into his ass to amuse himself and Namjoon.

Whatever the case, Jimin would admit that it really was a great view to get on film. Speaking of which, he thought that he could get some great views from down in the water too, and so he decided to go back over to them to request that he be able to borrow the camcorder.

Yoongi gave him the device without a hint of hesitation, clearly trusting him to not break the expensive item. He must have recorded enough footage of the beach and possibly him and Jungkook
playing with Tigger to be satisfied - allowing him to record more interesting things with the camcorder.

Jimin gave the device a quick check to locate the record button, finding that it was a small red button placed in the button display. He carried it back over to the water, which Jungkook was currently hunkered down in so that he could stroke Tigger’s ears.

“What is that thing, Jimin?” Jungkook asked curiously, pulling back just as Tigger shook her head to knock droplets of water free from her ears. “I saw big brother and Namjoon playing around with it. Is it a camera? It’s so big.”

“This is a camcorder, cutie. It’s like a camera but it records things,” Jimin explained, hunkering down so that he could start recording Tigger’s adventures in the water.

“Like films?” Jungkook asked in awe, eyeing the camcorder with much more interest. “Whoa, so cool!”

Jimin had just gotten the perfect angle on the puppy and had hit record when she noticed what he was doing. His squatted down position meant that he was in reach for more slobbering kisses, and so she bounded through the shallow water to reach him. The first thing that her black nose did was slam right into the plastic cover around camcorder lens, which she was eager to sniff.

“Ah, no, Tigger!” Jimin exclaimed, as he pulled the camcorder away from her just in time. “No licking the lens!”

Tigger lolled her tongue out at him in what could only be described as a sheepish grin, which he caught on the camcorder.

Jimin filmed her for a few seconds as she trotted off to lay down on the damp sand, shaking herself off so that droplets of water flew every which way. Then he shifted his focus onto Jungkook. It took the boy a few seconds to realise what he was doing, as he had been distracted trying to peel an embedded shell free from the sand between their feet.

“Oh, am I on film?” Jungkook asked, his round eyes growing huge as he stared at him.

When Jimin nodded in agreement, the boy let out a series of noises that varied between gasps and
giggles. But he didn’t move to cover his face like Yoongi had, showing that he wasn’t frightened of
the device.

“Hey, Jimin,” Jungkook said in English, looking right into the lens as he did so. “Happy birthday,
have good day today, man.”

Jimin couldn’t help but laugh at this, not only because of his casual usage of the word ‘man’, but
because of the fact that he was surprised by Jungkook’s level of skill.

Going to that specialist school really was going to help him, and he might not even struggle that
much if he was already speaking in such sentences. Jimin couldn’t even recall his parents ending up
that fluent by the time that he had ran away from home, but that had been a result of both their
stubborn want to not learn, and the fact that they had been unable to afford paying for education.

Over the following minutes, Jimin recorded both himself and Jungkook playing with Tigger in the
sand, and a quick search for seashells. He panned the camcorder to get shots of the beach and all of
the other people moving around and relaxing on it, and he zoomed in on Namjoon and Yoongi -
who were both enjoying a can of beer each and seemingly in the midst of discussing something.
They were so distracted with whatever they were talking about that Yoongi took a moment to notice
him, and then he gave him a quick wave that Jimin caught on camera.

The tape might just be running low by the time Jimin wanted to finish recording. It only had thirty
minutes on it, and he felt like their combined recording so far must have almost totalled that amount.
He moved to go back over to Namjoon and Yoongi to let them check the device, still very much
recording with it.

“Say ‘hey’ again, Yoongi!” Jimin announced, darting up the sandy slope to get to them both. His wet
feet got rapidly coated in sand, the dry grains sticking to his skin in a ticklish manner and getting
trapped in the grooves in his soles.

“Hey, darling,” Yoongi said with a smile, lowering his can of beer right before taking a sip. “You
look happy right now; you feeling good, huh?”

“Baby boy, I’m having the time of my life right now,” he exclaimed, shifting to get down onto his
knees and shimmy closer to him. “Hot food, hot weather, hot boyfriend - what more could I ask
for?”
Yoongi almost choked on his sip of beer as he guffawed at this remark. He had to wipe at his mouth with the back of his hand, cleaning away a slight dribble that had ran down his chin. Rather than take another sip, he placed the can down on the beach towel. That allowed him to place both of his hands on his waist, holding onto him whilst they talked. His palms contrasted against his skin: his left palm slightly warm and his right palm cool from the can of beer.

“What about you, baby boy?” Jimin asked, settling down on Yoongi’s lap because it had looked so inviting. He felt his boyfriend shifting his hands in response to his change in position; one hand slipping around his waist and the other settling down on his thigh. “Are you feeling good? Are you having a fun time?”

“Yeah, I feel great today, Jimin,” Yoongi replied, softly nodding as he looked out across the water. “So far, the day’s went fucking fantastic. I’m a lil nervous ‘bout, uh, ‘bout how the day might end. But we’ll see, mmm?”

At this rather cryptic remark, Yoongi turned his head to look at him and he gave him a quick smile. Yet, Jimin found himself puzzled by what he had just said, so much so that he couldn’t stop himself from asking questions.

“What’d you mean by that, Yoongi?”

“Y’know, all of my plans,” Yoongi replied, pulling his lower lip in to nibble on it for a second or two before letting go again. “I’m nervous ‘bout ‘em, and your gift too. I hope that you like it, darling.”

“I’m sure that I’ll love it,” Jimin said without a hint of hesitation. He could hear footsteps pounding on the sand nearby that signalled that Jungkook might just be coming back over to join them. “Don’t be nervous about all of that, baby boy. Plans, gifts - believe me when I say that this has been my best birthday ever and that nothing could possibly ruin-”

Jimin felt something connecting with his hand, the one that was holding the camcorder. The contact was enough to make him stop talking, completely taken aback. Before he could even turn his head to look, he felt himself losing his grip on the camcorder until it was tugged right out of his hand. Jungkook had just snatched the camcorder from him.

Jimin let out a surprised gasp at this, twisting to look up at the boy. Tigger was jumping around his
legs like crazy, but Jungkook didn’t stumble over her once - more than used to her antics.

“Kiss! Kiss lips!” Jungkook called, hunkering down to get a perfect shot of the two of them. He had just brought the viewfinder up to his eye when he made a soft noise and pulled the device away again. “Oh…something just popped up on the screen.”

“Time to replace the tape,” Namjoon said, holding his hand out to the boy so that he would give him the camcorder.

Jungkook did so, but reluctantly. There was a look on his face that said that he was grumpy that his mischievous joke had backfired on him. Maybe later, he would be able to pull off a successful prank.

“What’s the beer like, Daddy-o?” Jimin asked, as he slipped an arm around Yoongi’s neck to lean into his hold. “Is it still cold?”

“Kinda cool, but not cold,” Namjoon explained, as he popped open the tape deck and he pulled the full tape free. He exchanged it for a fresh one, storing the full tape inside the main compartment of the bag, and then he shut the deck. He lifted the camcorder to glance down the viewfinder, likely checking that everything was good. “The battery’s still looking pretty good to me, almost full from what I can tell. Here.”

Namjoon passed the camcorder back to Jungkook, and then he pulled a can free from the backpack to toss it at him.

“Thanks, Namo,” Jimin said, catching the beer and pulling the tab hard, the metal giving a crisp crunch as it popped open.

A spurt of foam shot out to land on his bare thighs and the sand, but Jimin lifted the can to his mouth to quickly sip at the frothy foam that was spilling free. He couldn’t help but notice that Jungkook was looking at him as he swallowed a cool and grainy swig of beer, eyeing the beer can intently.

“Is Jungkook allowed a little beer?” Jimin asked, placing his can down beside Yoongi’s to brusquely wipe at his wet thighs.

It was rather funny that he had asked this question, considering the fact that he was now an underage drinker thanks to the National Minimum Drinking Age Act that had been passed earlier in the year.
Technically, Namjoon and Yoongi were the only ones that were legally allowed to drink now, but fuck that pointless law. Jimin had been drinking in dive bars illegally since the age of fifteen, and he wasn’t about to stop now.

“Have you ever tried beer, Jungkook?” Namjoon asked curiously. “Is it a big thing in Korea?”

“I haven’t tried it, but I’ve had soju before. I tried some with my friend, Taehyungie. He added a shot to, uh, to a Pepsi, I couldn’t really taste it because of the cola,” Jungkook replied, moving the camcorder from hand to hand. “You can get beer, a lot of people drink it, but soju’s way more popular. What’s beer taste like?”

“You can try a sip, kid. If you like it, you can share some with Namjoon, but not a whole can,” Yoongi instructed firmly. “I bring you back home later, stinking of beer, your mother’d beat my ass with her house slippers.”

Jungkook grinned at this as he accepted the can of beer from Namjoon, his nose doing that funny crinkling thing that Jimin found highly endearing. He looked at the logo on the can before lifting it to his lips to take a small sip. Judging from his expression when he swallowed it, he didn’t like the taste of beer at all. He grimaced and then handed the can back to Namjoon, clearly passing up the opportunity to share it with him.

“Jungkook can stick to mixes in the future,” Jimin suggested with a smile. “He can have mimosas, and beer and coke on special occasions, if he doesn’t like the taste too much. Honestly, cutie, I used to hate the taste of booze too, but then I got used to it.”

“It tastes so bad,” Jungkook said, moving his tongue around his mouth to try and get rid of the lingering taste. “How can you drink that stuff?”

“Sheer willpower,” Namjoon replied without missing a beat, the smart quip making them all laugh.

Luckily, Namjoon had been smart enough to pack a couple of bottles of water alongside the beer, and so the boy accepted one of the bottles to drink instead.

Jungkook drained almost half of it in a bid to rid himself of the flavour of the beer, and then he got back to his feet. He still had the camcorder in hand, and so he held it out in offering to Jimin. He accepted it from the boy, quickly turning it off to reserve the battery for a little while.
“What’s Tigger doing?” Yoongi suddenly asked, the question catching them all by surprise and making them turn their heads to locate the puppy across the beach.

Jimin saw that Tigger was close to the water again, this time more further along the shore to the left. She had her nose pressed against something in the sand, and she kept leaping back and forth every few seconds in a manner that seemed to be playful. She had clearly sniffed something out, something that had her utmost puppy attention.

Jungkook went to go check on her, just to make sure that she hadn’t found anything she might try and eat and make herself sick as a result. Hopefully, it wasn’t a used and dirty drug needle or condom.

“Ah, Tigger found a starfish!” Jungkook cried out excitedly, dropping to his knees in the sand to get a better look at the sea creature.

“Whoa, a starfish?!” Namjoon gasped in surprise, dumping his can of beer down on the sand. “For real?!”

For all of his mature wisdom and merit, Namjoon could be so easily enchanted by the simplest of things. That was why he had jumped to his feet to race over and check out the starfish, unable to resist the lure of such a childish thing.

Jimin couldn’t help but laugh as he watched him go, not even surprised in the slightest.

“Namjoonie, look at it!” Jungkook exclaimed, holding the starfish up in both hands to show it to him. “I think it’s alive, I can feel it moving its suckers! It feels funny! Can you take starfish home?”

“You can’t take live ones off the beach. But if we find a dead one, you totally can.”

Jimin watched the both of them for a moment longer, seeing the way that they were excitedly checking out the starfish. Jungkook would no doubt snap a photograph of the starfish seeing as he wasn’t allowed to take it back home with him. Then he turned his head to look down at Yoongi, giving his boyfriend a soft smile.

“Come on, let’s go down to the waves, baby boy. Just roll up your jeans, that’ll keep the ends dry,” Jimin suggested, cocking his head in the direction of their friends. “We might find a starfish too.”
“I, uh, I’m actually wearing trunks under my jeans,” Yoongi admitted in a quiet voice. “I feel a lil… stupid though, taking my clothes off. People might stare at me, ‘specially ‘cos of my tattoo. Being all exposed like that, I dunno if I’m comfortable with that, Jimin.”

“Then leave your tee-shirt on, if that makes you feel better,” Jimin suggested, stroking at the front of said black tee-shirt. “That can cover your tattoo, you won’t be too exposed, hmm?”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment, and then he silently gave him a pat on his thigh to request that he get off his lap.

Jimin did so, letting his boyfriend also get to his feet and watching him intently to see what he would do.

After a moment of hesitation, Yoongi lifted up the front of his tee-shirt so that he could start removing his belt. He unbuckled it and he slipped the length through, working the button and zipper to open up his jeans. A quick flash of black was visible through the open flap, and then he dropped his jeans down to his ankles to step out of them.

Finally getting to see Yoongi dressed in such a way on the beach, it was just like Jimin had imagined in one of his first dreams about him.

Yoongi, wearing his tee-shirt and tiny, black swimming trunks, awkwardly tugging on the ends in a bid to cover his crotch and behind from everyone else. Just the way that he folded his arms across his chest and he dug his toes into the sand flooded his body with waves of affection that made him feel warm and weak.

Jimin held a hand out in offering to him with a happy smile, which Yoongi took hold of to tightly entwine their fingers together. He quickly switched the camcorder on with his thumb, holding it up so that he could look down the viewfinder and record himself escorting Yoongi down to the water.

Though he started off walking, Jimin rapidly evolved into skipping and then running, giggling excitedly as he did so. Yoongi laughed with him, his face lighting up and his worries about being stared at slowly melting away; the ends of his tee-shirt dancing around his upper thighs.

“See?! Isn’t it so much more fun in the sea, baby boy?!” Jimin asked, feeling the first wave slamming into his calves. Every single step was met with resistance from the water, slowing him down
“Uuhuh, but colder too!” Yoongi replied, his shoulders shooting up to almost touch his ears from the sudden shock of the cold water on his skin.

Jimin kicked water at him with a mischievous giggle, seeing quite a lot of it hitting Yoongi’s thighs and the very ends of his tee-shirt. It made his boyfriend cry out in surprise, before he retaliated with his own kick. Luckily, the splash of water went nowhere near the camcorder and mostly missed him - save for some droplets hitting his stomach and arm.

“Here, take it! I’m gonna go for a dive!” Jimin said, letting go of Yoongi’s hand and holding the camcorder out to him in offering. “I haven’t dived into the sea in forever! I gotta do it!”

Yoongi accepted the camcorder from him, slipping his hand through the strap and pointing it right at him. He likely caught him on film running through the shallow wave to get to the deeper waters.

Jimin dived straight into an incoming wave, emerging himself fully in the cold water. As he hit the surface, he heard Yoongi letting out a cry that quickly turned into a laugh, but then the sound was lost underneath the roaring of the water entering his ears. He had to swim against the wave for a few seconds as it tried to push him back, fighting the resistance so that he could shoot straight up and out of the water again.

“Ah, that felt so good!” he exclaimed, his wet hair plastered to his face so that he had to blink water out of his eyes.

Jimin was submerged in the water up close to his ribs, the cool temperature seeping through his skin so that his muscles tightened in response, particularly around his thighs and crotch. He reached up to brush his soaked hair back off his face, quickly blinking rivulets of water out of his eyes. He saw that Yoongi was still very much recording him, and so he waded his way through the water to get to him.

“You look so beautiful like that, Jimin,” Yoongi said, as he moved the camcorder up and down slowly to take in his full body.

“Like what, baby boy?” Jimin asked curiously, reaching up to knock a fat droplet of water off the tip of his nose.
“All wet like that, like when you step out of the shower or the water. Your skin gets so flushed, and you brush your hair back off your face,” Yoongi explained, pulling his face away from the camcorder viewfinder ever so slightly to look at him. “I, uh, I can see the little freckles on your forehead - I dunno, I just think that you look beautiful, Jimin.”

“Hmm, not as beautiful as my baby boy though,” Jimin said with a smile, moving so that he could slip his arms around his waist to pull him close and start pressing kisses against his cheek and neck.

“Don’t,” Yoongi almost whined, bringing his shoulders up in his tight hold. “You’re cold, Jimin.”

Namjoon and Jungkook had wandered off quite the distance, leaving the both of them alone. This meant that Jimin could shower his boyfriend with as many cold kisses as he liked, taking great enjoyment from the way that Yoongi squirmed and gasped from both the ticklish and cold sensation.

Yoongi actually turned the camcorder around after a moment, holding it in both hands as he tried to angle it right to record them both.

“I love my baby boy,” Jimin declared between kisses, feeling Yoongi melting into his hold from the affection. “So warm, so soft, I just wanna cover my baby boy in kisses like-”

Jimin pulled his face away from his neck so that he could give Yoongi a kiss on the lips, feeling his boyfriend pouting his lips out to return it. It might just be the first kiss that had been caught on film, seeing as Namjoon had accidentally stopped the recording earlier.

The kiss rapidly devolved into little more than giggling and quick pecks, rather than anything deep and passionate, but seeing the smile on Yoongi’s face was more than worth it.

Over the duration of the afternoon hours, Jimin and Yoongi went between splashing around in the water to relaxing up on the beach towel to just bathe in the mild sunlight. Sometimes, Tigger joined them for a nap, either by lounging on the hot sand beside them, or lying on her back on their thighs so that she could enjoy tummy strokes. It felt so nice just lying beside Yoongi, their fingers gently entwined and their heads placed in the crooks between necks and shoulders, or balanced on each other’s chests.

Namjoon left the beach to go to a local store and buy some ice cream and sodas after awhile, just so that they cool down and refresh themselves. Jimin eagerly devoured bites of sweet strawberry cheesecake-flavoured ice cream, sharing the free little wooden spoon with Yoongi and occasionally
feeding him mouthfuls.

Tigger got her own share of food and water: dining on a big treat bone that was made from jerky and crunchy biscuit, and lapping up cold water from an empty ice cream tub.

Somehow, Namjoon and Jungkook managed to find not only a dead starfish across the shoreline in the late afternoon, but also a crab. The crab was very much alive, a tiny, black one that fit right into the palm of all of their hands with ease. This earned a photograph, of course, and some filming on the camcorder because they were all amazed by the tiny creature.

Jimin was having such a great time that he didn’t even think to check the time once. He was only aware of it passing in the way that the colour of the sky started to shift as the hours went by, changing from a late morning blue with steel grey-lined clouds, to shades of orange and pink as the sun started to lower itself closer and closer to the horizon.

The camcorder had been switched on and off sporadically throughout the day to reserve the battery, but Jimin was still surprised to find that there was a little charge still left in it by the time that he collapsed onto the dry sand with Yoongi - exhausted from hours of frolicking around on the beach.

With the battery being so low, there wasn’t really much left to record. Jimin took control of the camcorder, leaving Jungkook to snap photographs of whatever caught his eye with his own camera - like starfish and tiny crabs and the sun that was slowly starting to set across the horizon.

Namjoon and Jungkook were chilling close to the water with Tigger, leaving the two of them lounged up on the sand quite some distance away.

Jimin found himself focusing the camcorder onto their thighs, which were lazily cocked up in front of them both as they lay on the sand. The contrast between their tanned skin was noticeable through the viewfinder: light honey against rich gold, both lightly speckled with white grains of sand. Through the thin space between Yoongi’s lean thighs, Jimin could see the orange-tinged sunset and golden clouds lazily rolling across the sky, which would turn pink soon enough, before shades of deep purple, and then finally black.

Jimin slowly moved the camcorder so that he could fully take in the sight of Yoongi, shifting his weight up onto one elbow as he did so. His boyfriend was lazily lounged on the beach towel, one arm folded under his head to form a pillow and his other hand placed on his stomach. His tee-shirt was wracked up in parts to reveal the soft curve of his stomach and the waistband of his snug swimming trunks. He didn’t look to be asleep, but he was certainly drifting in that blissful state between consciousness and slumber.
After a moment of focusing on his face, Yoongi’s eyelids fluttered open. His thick eyelashes batted rapidly as he came around, his glazed eyes focusing right on the camcorder lens. Unlike before, he made no move to cover his face out of shyness, but rather just looked right at the lens.

“Did you just fall asleep, hmm? You’re such a baby,” Jimin teased, seeing Yoongi stretching out on the beach towel as a series of grunts escaped him. “God, that’s so adorable.”

“Mmm, this baby wants…some affection right now,” Yoongi croaked, as he stopped stretching and he reached up to rub at his heavy eyelids.

“Really?” he asked in return, surprised that Yoongi had openly requested affection from him in a public place like this.

Such requests were usually reserved for when they were alone together, and more often than not, they were silent cues that he had learnt to read and memorise over time. Like the way that Yoongi would shift his hand closer to his across a table or sofa cushion, until he turned his hand over to expose his palm and let him take hold of his hand; or the way that he would cock his head towards him so that Jimin would scoot close enough to let him rest his head on his shoulder.

“Really,” Yoongi reaffirmed with a sniff, before slipping his arms around his neck to pull him close.

Jimin let Yoongi take control of the moment of affection, let him hold him down against his body until he was almost lying on top of him. As his lips found his eager lips, Yoongi’s hand roamed down the expanse of his back, his fingers brushing away grains of sand and tracing the slight dimples of his spine.

Jimin loved the way that Yoongi’s tongue gently curled out to prod at the corner of his mouth, much like how his fingertips felt every soft bump and dimple on his spine. He loved the way that the other man moved beneath him whenever they kissed, his thighs parting with a tremble to invite him that little bit closer, to beg for the deepest intimacy that they had yet to share. But most of all, Jimin loved the way that Yoongi would moan softly into his mouth, always caught up in the moment so that even simple kisses brought him pleasure.

“Turn off the camcorder,” Yoongi managed to say between their fast kisses, gasping for breath only for Jimin’s lips to steal it from him.
“Don’t need to, the battery’s just died,” Jimin remarked, quickly glancing at the dead device in his hand before placing it down onto the beach towel. “Oh, well. Now, where were we?”

Yoongi let out a husky laugh at this, which Jimin cut off with another kiss. He shifted on top of him as he did so, the slight movement close to a grind as he tried to get into a more comfortable position.

Oh, his boyfriend shivered at this, his thighs clamping around his hips for a few seconds before loosening again. The little spasm let Jimin know that the grind had caused a nice burst of heat to flood down into Yoongi’s belly: the first hint of arousal.

“Namjoon and the…the kid ain’t ‘round, are they?” Yoongi asked, unable to look around them because he was trapped underneath his body and in his tight hold.

“Hmm, no, they were looking for crabs or something,” Jimin replied, not even bothering to check because he was far too focused on sucking kisses against the smooth slope of his neck to care. “They aren’t gonna see us, it’s OK.”

“Mmm, I think we should stop before this gets out of control,” Yoongi suggested, his voice uneven as he took a quick gasp for breath. His lips were flushed and slick from their kisses, as pink as his cheeks were.

“Sex on the beach sounds fun to me, baby boy,” Jimin joked, his lips trailing up to find the shell of his ear so that he could give it a teasing nibble.

“Yeah, but not with everyone else watching,” Yoongi quickly retorted, squirming underneath him in a way that told Jimin that he had most certainly enjoyed the sensation. “Let’s save this for later, mmm?”

“There’s a later?” he asked, shifting to balance his weight on one cocked elbow and lifting his head up to look down at his boyfriend. “Does Namo know that he’s gonna be sleeping on the sofa tonight?”

“Don’t worry ‘bout Namjoon,” Yoongi suggested, reaching up to brush a stray and sandy lock of hair back behind his ear for him.

Jimin thought this over for a moment, before coming to conclusion that Yoongi must have been
talking about the fact that they weren’t going back to Namjoon’s home.

Usually, it was where they ended up after dates as Namjoon worked moving drugs evenings and nights and they were free to spend time together, or because Yoongi just came to visit him at the house at all hours. If he didn’t need to worry about Namjoon, that must mean that they were going somewhere else for the night - perhaps, Fair Oaks Hotel again.

“Sure thing,” Jimin said, giving him a final quick peck on the lips to end the rather passionate moment. “Let’s wait until later. We can have plenty of fun then, if you want. Whatever you want, just tell me, baby boy. I’ll be more than happy to help. You deserve it for making this day so good.”

“I just want you to be happy, darling,” Yoongi said, his fingers stroking stray locks of still damp hair back behind his ear.

“Yoongi, can I talk to you about something? I’ve been thinking about it since earlier today, I’ve been waiting for some time alone. You’ve said a lot of…deep things today. Are you feeling good, hmm?” Jimin asked in a whisper, tenderly stroking at his cheekbone for him. “You really let out a lot of raw emotion back when you were recording that birthday message for me. I know that can be hard for you, especially when we’re not alone.”

“Yeah, darling, I feel fucking…fantastic for getting it all out,” Yoongi replied, nodding vigorously as he took another quick breath. “It’s like I said before, I ain’t that scared anymore. It ain’t easy, but it’s starting to hurt less every time that I open up and talk ‘bout these things.”

“Good, that’s good, baby boy,” he praised, giving him another quick and chaste kiss on the lips and then trailing it up his nose to his brow. “Get it all out, but remember that you don’t have to rush. Take your time, make sure you feel comfortable in front of me and others. You’ve come such a long way, and slow but steady progress is still progress.”

“Maybe, one day, it ain’t gonna hurt - not even a lil,” Yoongi said, in tone sounding incredibly hopeful to Jimin’s ears. “Maybe, it’ll be so normal for me to talk ‘bout everything that you won’t even have to ask if I’m feeling alright.”

“Hmm, but I still will,” Jimin promised, as he nuzzled against his boyfriend’s hair and he breathed in the scent of shampoo and sand. “It’s a habit now, baby boy, one that I’m never gonna be able to break.”
As the sky started to change into that of burnt orange, it was time for them to finally leave the beach for the day. They had spent a great deal of the day just relaxing and having fun on it, but Jimin could see that Jungkook was starting to get tired, for the boy couldn’t stop yawning.

They retrieved their belongings together and got dressed back into their clothing: Namjoon and Jungkook simply tugging their tee-shirts back on, Yoongi getting into his jeans, and Jimin changing out of his trunks to get fully dressed again at long last.

Yoongi was sure to check his jeans pocket to ensure that the little red box was still inside; slipping it free and opening it just a crack to eye the contents. Satisfied that the gift was safe, he slipped the box back into his pocket and he started packing the dead camcorder away. He carefully checked that the device and bag were free from sand, just to make sure that it wouldn’t damage the lens or viewfinder, and he examined each tape carefully too - checking the holes between the plastic.

Namjoon shoved all of their trash into the plastic store bag, knotting it shut to responsibly dispose of it in the beach dumpsters to keep the sand clean. After he had packed the beach towel and Jimin’s swimming trunks back inside of the backpack, and Jungkook had collected slumbering Tigger in the cradle of his arms, they were all ready to go.

Getting back up the sand ladder again was fun, especially now that they were all so tired. Jimin and Yoongi weren’t wearing their shoes, and at least Namjoon and Jungkook had been smart enough to keep them off too. That meant that none of them stumbled on the wooden steps this time, though Namjoon did stub his toe and curse for almost thirty straight seconds.

Upon reaching the top of the sand ladder, they quickly crossed the parking lot to climb into Yoongi’s car. Jimin knocked sand free from his feet and clothing first, to try and avoid getting any on the leather. But it was obvious that the car would need an intensive and professional cleaning to get rid of all of the sand that they were going to accidentally track onto the inner carpet.

The time on the dashboard clock told Jimin that it was 6:35pm. He was shocked to find that it was that time for two reasons. He hadn’t realised that they been stayed on the beach for such a long time, and he had actually thought that it was later in the evening because of the early sunset.

As Yoongi started the engine and he reversed out of the parking space, Jimin settled back in his seat with a content sigh; his hand moving to settle down on his boyfriend’s thigh, just like always. Yoongi held the steering-wheel in one hand as soon as he had guided the vehicle onto the main road, so that he could place his other hand down on top of his and keep his hand in place for the drive.

The first place that Yoongi needed to drive to was quite the distance away from Baker Beach. Rather
than bring Jungkook back to Western Addition, he had to bring him back home to The Bayview instead, where his parents would be waiting for him. It was going to take him around thirty minutes to get there, passing through multiple districts and utilising many shortcuts in a bid to get the boy back home as soon as possible.

Jimin wasn’t at all surprised to notice the fact that both Namjoon and Jungkook were napping in the backseat. They were both wearing their seatbelts, but they had slumped to the side in their slumber so that their heads were touching; Tigger happily asleep on Jungkook’s lap. It brought a smile to his face as he looked at them both in the rear-view mirror, and then he focused on the sights outside of the side window as they went past in a soft blur.

It didn’t to take that long at all by the time that Yoongi was pulling the car up on the street right outside of Jungkook’s apartment block. The jostling motion of him pulling up to the curb woke Namjoon up with a start, and he reached up to rub at his eyelids.

“Here we are, kid,” Yoongi announced, shifting in his seat to look back over his shoulder at Jungkook. “Home sweet home.”

Jungkook stirred in the backseat with a soft grunt, lifting his head up and blinking at the brightness of the ceiling light. He sniffed hard a few times as he fully woke up, Tigger barely even moving on his lap because she was so comfortable. He was about to pop the door open and climb out of the vehicle when something hit him - his seatbelt was still in place, digging into his ribs as he tried to get out.

Jimin couldn’t help but laugh to himself as he watched the boy popping the the seatbelt free. He struggled with it for a moment before it snapped back against the seat, freeing him at long last.

“Oh, Jimin, for the photo album,” Jungkook explained, as he retrieved the small bundle of Polaroids out of his denim shorts pocket and he held them out to him in offering.

“Thanks, cutie,” Jimin said, as he moved to accept them from him. “The photo album’s in the boot right now, but I’ll keep these safe inside of it. You can help me arrange them all, and maybe write some funny things on the pages?”

“Yeah, that would be cool,” he replied, the smile on his face sleepy but still able to show just how much that he liked the idea.

Jungkook climbed out of the backseat with Tigger still very much in his arms, on account of the fact
that she was so tired. The puppy wasn’t exactly the smallest or lightest, but he showed no signs of struggle as he carried her under his arm and cradled against his ribs. He was unable to slam the door shut behind himself, and so Namjoon shifted along the backseat to do so on his behalf.

“Um… bye, guys!” Jungkook called through the open window, breaking out more English slang that made Jimin smile. “Today is good, very fun!”

“It looks like Tigger had a great time,” Jimin replied in Korean, which made the boy laugh heartily as he straightened up again. “Get plenty of sleep, Jungkook. I’m so glad that you had so much fun today, it wouldn’t have been the same without you and Tigger.”

“Best day, the best day,” Jungkook said with a massive and dopey smile, and then he moved to go around the front of the car to get onto the sidewalk.

Jimin turned his head to watch the boy go, seeing him entering the apartment block so that he could finally return home. He might just go straight to bed because he was so tired after such a busy day, or he might just clean up and have dinner with his parents. He might even start working on another letter that he would send to Taehyung across the world, to tell him all about the wonders of camcorders, and how great that Baker Beach is.

Whatever the case, Jungkook had had a lot of fun today and he wasn’t the only one.

As soon as Jungkook had entered the building, Jimin dropped his head so that he could look at the Polaroids that he had just given him. There was a small pile, which he slowly looked through as Yoongi pulled the car away from the curb to roll back into the road.

Jimin flicked through them to see the kinds of things that Jungkook had snapped photographs of, seeing everything from food, starfish and crabs, to distant snapshots of him and Yoongi sitting on the sand and messing around in the water when they had been unaware of his attention.

“Seokseok wanted to see you this evening,” Yoongi suddenly said, as he turned the steering-wheel hand over hand to roll the car around the upcoming corner. “I think he wants to give you a gift.”

“Oh, I wonder what he could have even bought,” Jimin replied with a smile, looking up from the photographs to glance at his boyfriend. “Knowing him, half of the contents of Calvin Klein.”
Yoongi snorted at this joke, shifting in his seat to get more comfortable. He got the steering-wheel in one hand, reaching over to place his free hand down on his thigh instead.

Jimin was too busy looking through the Polaroids to place his hand on top of his, but he would do so as soon as he was finished. He studied the photograph of the breakfast feast, finding that the sight made his stomach rumble in appreciation, and then he moved it to the back of the pile to eye the next one.

“Oh, look at this one, Yoongi!” Jimin said, turning the Polaroid around to show him the snapshot.

It was the one of them eating jangjorim together, holding bites of beef in front of their faces as they smiled at the camera.

“Oh, that’s lovely, Jimin,” Yoongi said, glancing between the road in front of them and the Polaroid in turn. “I might’ve to steal that one for my wallet…”

“You’re more than welcome to have it, baby boy.”

The drive to get back to Pacific Heights took almost twenty-five minutes, Yoongi opting to skirt around Mission and cut up north through Hayes Valley and Western Addition to save time. It was now dark outside, to the point in which Yoongi needed to switch on the headlights to illuminate the road in front of them. The orange sky had turned deep purple instead, though it wasn’t dark enough for the stars to start breaking through the heavy clouds and light pollution.

Yoongi drove right up onto the front drive of Hoseok’s mansion, which was empty at this late evening hour, and then he killed the car. It was obvious that Hoseok was still in the mansion because Jimin could see lights on several floors on the home, from the ground-floor all of the way to up the second-floor.

“We’ll be right back, Namjoon,” Yoongi promised, as he popped the door open to climb out of the vehicle first. “We shouldn’t be too long.”

“Sure thing, take your time, Yoongi,” Namjoon replied, lifting a hand up to cover his mouth right in the middle of a yawn so that he could pretend to have good manners.

It crossed Jimin’s mind that Namjoon had never met Hoseok before, but there might just be a chance
that they could do so in the future just like how he had ended up meeting Jungkook. Tonight was not the right time for such introductions, however.

Before Jimin could pop his own door open, he saw that Yoongi was going around the front to do so on his behalf. His boyfriend opened the door for him, and so he climbed out and onto the curb with a thankful smile. He slipped his arm around his without even thinking, taking hold of his elbow just the way that he liked as his bare soles stepped down on the warm tarmac of the front drive.

Yoongi escorted Jimin him around to the back of the house, rather than up the steps to the front door, and he quickly saw why. The back door was wide open, a massive glass slide door pulled to the side to let absolutely anyone just walk right into the home. Clearly, Hoseok trusted the security of the wealthy neighbourhood enough to not lock his doors. Jimin could hardly believe the fact that people could be so blissfully reckless.

Namjoon always made sure that all of windows on the ground-floor were locked shut every single evening, just to make sure that no one would try climbing inside of the house. Sure, they lived in a much less safe neighbourhood with higher crime levels and cases of robberies and carjackings, but that wasn’t the point. It was still dangerous of Hoseok to not trust anyone to enter his home at this late hour, and so Jimin was sure to close the slide door and lock it shut behind the both of them.

“Seokseok, you upstairs?!” Yoongi called, stepping out of his sandals so that he could move over to the kitchen counter. He eyed a spread of mail and then checked an uncapped bottle of Valium, examining the pills before he located the cap and he twisted it back on again.

Yoongi’s voice attracted the attention of a certain fluffy someone, for Cleopatra came trotting down the spiral staircase at a fast speed. She headed straight for them, and so Jimin hunkered down to get on her eye-level and he scooped her up into his arms. The cat let him do so, cradled in his hold by a hand against her ribs and under her behind.

“Oh, it’s the most beautiful cat in the world!” Jimin declared with a smile, pressing a quick kiss against the flat plane of her skull between her pointed ears.

Yoongi chuckled at this, reaching over to give the cat a quick tickle under the chin that had Cleopatra purring like an engine.

“I’m getting ready, Gigi!” came Hoseok’s called reply, his voice muffled through the walls and flooring. “Come up, I’m too busy to come downstairs!”
Jimin turned his head to watch his boyfriend going up the staircase, Cleopatra still nursed in his arms - purring and swishing her tail around to slap it against his stomach and ribs. Before he could help himself, he placed the cat down on the kitchen counter so that he could follow after Yoongi and go upstairs too.

Upon crossing the ground-floor, Jimin heard a soft padding sound coming from behind him, and when he glanced back over his shoulder he saw that Cleopatra was following after him too. She let out a funny series of chirps, cosying up against his leg and then bounding up the staircase to wait for him at the very top. So he went up the steps so that he could get onto the first-floor too, noticing that Yoongi had already started going up the second flight of stairs.

The first-floor of Hoseok’s mansion looked to be an area for guests to stay in, judging from the several rooms placed across the floor.

The main section of the floor had an entertainment area with a massive television and sound system that made Jimin stop to stare at it in total wonder. He had never seen a television so big before, for it made the one that Namjoon owned look like something that a child would use. The tall speakers were no doubt incredibly powerful too; would blast Music Television in perfect clarity and at a deafeningly loud volume.

What would it be like to play Mario Bros. on that baby?

All around the mammoth-sized television set, Jimin could see that there were display units filled with VHS films, cassettes, vinyls and more that signalled that Hoseok might just be a great fan of films and music. There was a plush loveseat sofa placed to face the television, the material wine red, and there were pink, crushed velvet throw cushions on the floor in front of it.

Nice, Jimin could picture a great many pretty women and men lounging around on those things - flocked around Hoseok like flies to honey.

Rather than wait for Yoongi to come down the stairs again in a few minutes time, Jimin found himself going up the second set of stairs too.

The soft sound of music had caught his attention and had made him curious, because it was somewhat unusual. Of all of the music that he had expected that Hoseok might play in his mansion, Jimin hadn’t expected to hear what sounded like the score to an opera blaring from upstairs, and that was likely what had caught his attention.
Hoseok was getting dressed when he reached the top of the staircase, in the act of tucking his shirt inside of the trousers waistband. He had just finished buttoning up the front of his black trousers when he seemed to catch sight of his reflection in the wardrobe mirror, and it was enough to make him let out a surprised sound.

“Oh! Minnie Mouse, you frightened me!” Hoseok exclaimed, reaching up to clap a hand against his chest dramatically. “I thought that it was just Gigi coming here tonight. He didn’t mention that you would be coming too.”

“We were passing through the neighbourhood and Yoongi thought that it’d be best to come and see you as soon as possible,” he explained.

Yoongi was sitting a few feet away on Hoseok’s bed, one leg crossed over the other as he waited for his friend to finish getting dressed.

“Are you going out tonight, Hoseok?” Jimin asked, as he watched him securing the fly of his trousers. “You’re getting all dressed up like you are.”

“I’ve got some…oh, I don’t know, art show to attend tonight, with mother,” Hoseok replied, as he retrieved a suit jacket from his wardrobe and he held the hanger up to study it. “Gigi told me that I should go with her. I conceded the point, on account of the free champagne that they serve.”

“An art show? Wow, I’ve never been to an art show before,” Jimin remarked, before quickly adding. “I’ve never been to an art gallery either, actually.”

“Mother loves art shows, I prefer the theatre,” Hoseok explained, as he slipped the jacket free from the hanger; hanging it back inside of the wardrobe. “I don’t know the exact details, just that it’s some exhibition featuring pottery or something - Yoongi’s mother curated the exhibition.”

Jimin didn’t know much at all about Yoongi’s mum, save for the fact that Yoongi didn’t get along with both her and his father. Finding out through Hoseok that she had curated an art exhibition was highly interesting, as it showed that she might just be a culturally refined and intelligent woman.

What a shame that she also sounded like a stone-cold bitch.

After pulling the jacket on, Hoseok reached back to try and smooth his lapel down in place, and so
Jimin moved so that he could do it for him. He had to fix the back around his shirt collar so that he could get it in place for him, feeling smooth satin softness against his fingers.

“You look really handsome, Hoseok,” Jimin said with a smile, as he finished smoothing the lapel down for him.

“Thank you,” Hoseok said, returning the smile. “Look who’s talking.”

There was a serene expression on Hoseok’s face, but there wasn’t a hollow glassiness to his eyes that Jimin associated with one too many Valium. That was hopefully a sign that he hadn’t been popping the pills like crazy today, not when there was a chance that he might just be driving across the city soon enough.

“Wait, why are you both here again?” Hoseok suddenly asked, turning his head to look over at Yoongi with a completely clueless expression.

“You told me to come and see you today, it’s Jimin’s birthday,” Yoongi replied, talking slow and clearly for him.

“Oh, yes! Minnie’s present! How did I forget…”

Hoseok moved so that he could cross the bedroom and go over to a bedside table. He opened the single drawer so that he could root around it, straightening up as soon as he had retrieved it.

Jimin saw that there was a wine red box in Hoseok’s hand, a box that had been intricately wrapped in a red bow. The box was the exact same shade of red as the box that Yoongi had slipped out of his pocket just this morning, which was a sign that they might just have purchased the gifts together. That meant that it might just contain jewellery, but he wouldn’t know for sure until he opened it.

“Happy birthday, Jimin!” Hoseok declared, giving him that wide and dazzling smile of his. “I know that we’ve only spent a few days in each other’s company so far, but I’m looking forward to seeing you often from now on. Not just for shopping either, though that it so much fun with you than Gigi. He complains the entire time, it’s fucking unbearable.”

“Thank you, Hoseok,” Jimin said with a smile, as he accepted the box from him. “You shouldn’t have got me a gift after everything, you’re always buying me treats.”
“I know, but it’s because you’re worth it, Minnie,” Hoseok pointed out. “A pretty boy like yourself should be showered in treats.”

Jimin could only laugh at this ridiculous compliment, once more amazed by how bold and flirtatious that Hoseok could get. He never crossed the line of being crass or too much, and he always toed the line of humour whenever he complimented him just to keep it light and friendly.

The wine red box had ‘Cartier’ emblazoned on the front in golden letters, visible even under the bow. His assumption had been correct, and so Jimin pulled at the ribbon to loosen it and lift up the box lid, quickly finding out that the box was for presentation purposes and it didn’t actually contain the gift.

Inside of the presentation box there was a smaller leather box - this one the exact same as Yoongi’s box. It was wine red with decorative golden filigree patterns around the edges, along with a golden pop button to open it. Jimin had to take it out of the presentation box, Hoseok holding it for him so that he could open it.

When Jimin popped the box open, he could only stare at the contents for a moment as he was so shocked.

There were a pair of earrings inside of the box, placed in a contrasting black, velvet cushion. The earrings looked to be made from white gold: circular-shaped settings in which brilliant cut stones had been set - stones that looked like real diamonds to his eyes. They were small, rather than chunky, but the diamonds glinted so strongly within the metal that no one would be able to miss them if they were in his ears.

“Oh…oh my god, Hoseok,” Jimin breathed out, finding his words catching in his throat as he looked up at the other man. “I can’t believe…they’re so beautiful. Yoongi, look at them.”

Yoongi got up off the bed at this to move over to them both, and so Jimin turned the box to show him the earrings. His boyfriend placed a hand on top of his to gently move his wrist, making the light play off the surface of the stones and humming in obvious appreciation at their lustre and beauty.

“They’ll suit you, darling,” Yoongi said with a soft smile, as he tucked a lock of hair back behind his ear for him. “Everyone’ll turn their heads to look at you, and then they ain’t gonna be able to look away again.”
“Hmm, Minnie was made for diamonds,” Hoseok declared in that theatrical way of his, one arm folded over his chest so that he could reach up and play with his necklace chain. “Diamonds, platinum, white gold - just gorgeous.”

“They’re real diamonds, not something like cubic zirconia?” Jimin asked, and this was enough to make the other man burst out laughing. “Huh?”

“Minnie, I’d rather die than buy fake diamonds!” Hoseok exclaimed, letting out a shrill laugh as he gently shoved at his shoulder. “You kill me, you’re so cute!”

Jimin joined in with the laughter, even though his question had been completely genuine. At least he now knew that the stones were real, and that meant a hefty price tag. But he wasn’t going to think about that right now.

“Haven’t you given Minnie his gift yet?” Hoseok asked curiously, his gaze focused on his hands as he had no doubt noticed that there was no ring present. “Gigi, don’t you go getting anxious over it… again. You had better give him that gift!”

“I’m gonna give him it,” Yoongi muttered, as he stepped from foot to foot and he refused to lift his gaze up from his feet. “I was waiting for the right time, Seokseok. Don’t nag me, I’ll give him it during dinner.”

“Hmm, during a private dinner really is the best time,” Hoseok agreed with a slow nod. “Speaking of which, I shouldn’t keep you two any longer. You’ve got to get ready, so-”

Hoseok moved so that he could place his hands on Jimin’s shoulders, and then he leaned forward to press a quick kiss right against his cheek.

Jimin couldn’t help but let out a quick laugh at the sudden kiss on the cheek. Though it had caught him by surprise, it wasn’t at all an unexpected thing for Hoseok to do, and he found that he rather liked the parting kiss.

“Oh, you smell like…the sea,” Hoseok remarked, pulling away from him and looking him up and down quickly. “Did you two go skinny dipping without me?”
“Not today, but we did so that a couple of weeks ago,” Jimin replied with a grin, which made Hoseok gasp and playfully slap at his upper arm. He accepted the presentation box back from him so that he could safely store the earrings box inside, closing it shut with the lid. “You should come to the beach with us one day, Hoseok. It’d be fun.”

“I’m sure that it would. Anyway - go, go, go,” Hoseok declared, shooing at them both with his hands. “Go get ready for dinner! Minnie, dress well and bring a condom - just in case you get lucky!”

Yoongi gave Hoseok a sidelong look at this that Jimin could read with ease: one that showed that he wasn’t amused at all by the joke, that he might just be a little bit offended, in fact.

But Hoseok didn’t even see it, for he was too busy gently pushing them towards the staircase in a bid to get them to leave.

Upon exiting Hoseok’s mansion, Yoongi had to drive them to Haight-Ashbury, to drop off Namjoon at home and let him get ready for the evening dinner. They wouldn’t be allowed inside of a high-class restaurant in sand-encrusted jeans, sandals and damp tee-shirts, after all, though it would be pretty funny showing up to see the reactions of the other diners before they were abruptly removed from the establishment.

After a brief ten minute ride, Yoongi was pulling the car up on the street right outside Namjoon’s home.

The time on the dashboard clock said that it was 7:53pm, and Jimin studied it for a moment as he popped his seatbelt free and he collected Hoseok’s gift box from the dashboard. Namjoon was already climbing out of the backseat to get out onto the curb, the backpack swinging from his fist.

“Today was a good day, Yoongi, and I’m glad that I got to spend it in your company,” Namjoon said through the open window, hunkering down to respectfully look at Yoongi whilst he spoke. “I’m also glad that Jimmy got to have such a good birthday. I hope that the rest of the evening goes great for you both.”

“Thanks, Namjoon, and thanks for helping me organise the entire thing - I couldn’t have done it without you,” Yoongi replied, holding his hand out to him so that Namjoon could take hold and shake. “Keep up the good work, yeah? I wish I’d more good men like you ‘round.”
Jimin climbed out of the passenger-seat and he went around the front of the vehicle to get onto the curb. Rather than follow Namjoon across the sidewalk and up the front steps, he leaned forward to look through the open driver-seat window.

“What time’s the dinner reservation, Yoongi?”

“The reservation’s for 8:30. I’ll be back to pick you up in ‘bout…twenty minutes?” Yoongi suggested, sparing a quick glance at his watch. “That should give you plenty of time to get ready. I don’t take too long at all, I can rush if I need to.”

“Sure thing, I’ll get ready for dinner,” Jimin promised, moving to give him a quick and chaste kiss on the lips. “I’ll wear something nice, just for you. See you soon, baby boy.”

Chapter End Notes

This update was supposed to be a single chapter, but because of the sheer size of the finished chapter, I decided to split it into two halves and update over two days. Please stay tuned for part two tomorrow, and don’t forget that you can find me here for updates on more upcoming chapters, content and other fics :)

Standing on the front steps of Namjoon’s house once more, his hand hovering in front of the wood with his fingers rolled up to form a tight fist, Yoongi found himself overcome with a surge of powerful nerves.

Being nervous around Jimin was nothing new to him, as Yoongi had been learning to conquer his nerves around the younger man for the best part of almost two months now. Even though Jimin had made it obvious from just a few days of knowing him that he had had nothing to be so worried about in his company, being anxious had become a bit of a second nature to Yoongi, especially in regards to his sexuality.

It was hard not being a little bit intimidated by how open, affectionate and playful that Jimin could be, though that was starting to be a thing of the past now. Yoongi had been getting so much better at controlling his nerves during public and private situations, and he had also grown much more confident in and out of Jimin’s company overall.

But tonight felt different.

Right now, Yoongi felt exactly like he had felt when he had knocked on the front door of Namjoon’s home for their very first date. It was that funny kind of nerves, the fluttery kind that got trapped somewhere around his lower ribs so that his stomach was starting to ache, and he kept feeling like his mouth would flood with saliva. No amount of slow and deep breaths could seem to make the ache go away.

Unlike the first date, which had filled him with a combination of anxiety and fear because he had actually been going on a date with Jimin, with another man - Yoongi was nervous for a completely different reason tonight. It wasn’t only because he hoped that the evening dinner would go well.

No, Yoongi was nervous about his gift and the very serious question that he had prepared for Jimin, which he would have to think about over and over during dinner until the perfect moment to ask the question presented itself. That would probably be when he gave Jimin his gift, though he was still trying to figure it all out.
After a final deep intake of breath, Yoongi rapped his knuckles against the wood and then he folded his hands behind his back. This allowed him to hide his shaking hands from sight, just so that Jimin wouldn’t notice and ask him if he was alright.

When Jimin opened the front door a mere moment later, Yoongi could only stare at him in total wonder.

Considering the fact that when he had first taken Jimin out to dinner, he hadn’t even had a suit jacket to his name, it really was shocking seeing the way that he was dressed right now.

For their evening dinner, Jimin was wearing one of the suits that had been tailored just for him. He had selected a dinner suit with an eye-catching jacket of royal blue crushed velvet. It had black contrast silk lapels, buttons and jetted pockets. He was wearing it with a pair of black fine wool trousers, the match very complimentary. His shirt looked to be white cotton, the fabric soft and silken to the touch, and he had left the top two buttons open to reveal his golden tanned skin. His freckles and prominent clavicle caught Yoongi’s eye, before the glinting sparkle of diamond earrings attracted more attention.

Jimin was wearing the earrings that Hoseok had bought him, and they looked perfect to Yoongi. The white gold suited his skin tone, and the ice cold glint of the precious stones was visible through the wispy locks of his tousled hair. Hopefully, they would look just as good with the ring that he had bought him as they had looked together in the store; when he and Hoseok had held the boxes close together to find the perfect match. He could hardly wait to see what it would look like sitting on his hand.

After the initial wonder from the colour and material of the dinner suit had worn off, Yoongi found himself focusing on the fit. He saw that it was good, that it was *perfect*, in fact.

The trousers in particular were tailored to fit his frame, the leg lengths skirting snugly around the tops of his ankles rather than brushing against the flooring as they were too long in length. It allowed Yoongi to see that he was wearing a pair of leather loafers, not his usual pair but rather a brand-new pair that didn’t have a single scuff mark on them.

Considering Jimin’s measurements: his slight shoulders and waist but strong chest and biceps, his gently flared hips and full thighs, Yoongi had imagined that it would have been difficult getting perfectly fitted into a suit. But, goddamn, Hoseok really had picked a great tailor. If all of the suits had been fitted this good then his boyfriend was going to look like a million dollars in every single one of them.
“Yoongi? Are you OK?” Jimin asked, his voice catching him by complete surprise.

Yoongi realised that he had been staring at Jimin without even saying a word to him, not even a greeting. It was enough to make him let out a flustered laugh, reaching up to rub at the back of his neck.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m great, Jimin,” he replied, dropping his hand to hold it out to him in offering. “I was just…wow, that’s one of your new suits, huh?”

“Namo helped me pick out the suit for tonight,” Jimin explained, as he pulled the door shut behind him and then he accepted his hand. He let him escort him down the front steps and over to the car. “I’ve got all of my lounge suits ready and perfectly fitted, but this is the only dinner suit that’s ready so far. After some debating, Namo said that I should just totally go for the dinner suit and wow you with how good that I look. So, what’d you think?”

“I think…” Yoongi dragged out, as he shifted his gaze down to look at his dinner suit again, “that I can’t wait to have you on my arm, Jimin.”

Jimin made a pleased noise at this as he opened the passenger-seat door for him. His smile made his cheeks lift up, the apples rosy with a hint of colour that matched well with the glossy balm on his lips.

“You look so handsome, Yoongi,” Jimin said, reaching over to give the silken notched lapel of his suit jacket a soft stroke. The jacket was black just like his trousers, also a fine wool dinner suit of a much more simple cut. “Just like for our first dinner, in your suit and pretty blouse. You look so handsome in suits, you look just like a prince. Hmm, my prince.”

Yoongi felt his grip tightening around the car door handle at this, overcome with a flush of embarrassment and sheer happiness at the compliment. Ah, the need to smile was so great that his cheeks were starting to hurt, and he couldn’t suppress it any longer.

“D’you really think so? I-I knew that you were gonna look good, ‘cos you always look so good, and I wanted to make sure that we looked good together,” Yoongi rapidly explained, stepping from foot to foot as he did so. “This’ actually a new suit, I got it made ‘specially for tonight and.”
“Yoongi, we’re gonna be the most beautiful couple in the entire restaurant,” Jimin interjected, moving to cup his cheeks to give him a quick kiss in the corner of his mouth; the taste of his lip balm lingering behind so that when Yoongi wet his lips he tasted the sweet and honeyed rose oil on his tongue. “Stop worrying, hmm?”

Yoongi stopped blabbering for a moment so that he could drop his head and catch his breath. He hadn’t even meant to start going on and on like that, for the words had just escaped him and he had been unable to shut his mouth to get them to stop spilling out.

“I can tell that you’re nervous right now, baby boy, you’re doing that thing that you do - the constant mumbling,” Jimin continued, angling his head to get a better look at his face. “There’s nothing to be nervous about.”

Yoongi thought about the weight of the ring box currently sitting in the inner breast pocket of his dinner jacket, and the question that he had prepared for him, and he thought that Jimin was wrong. But his boyfriend didn’t know about either of these things, and so it was no wonder why he thought that everything was perfectly fine.

“OK?”

Yoongi nodded at this to let Jimin know that he was fine, that the moment had passed and that he was calm again. It would come back later to haunt him all over again, but for now, he felt like he was back in control.

Jimin moved to press another kiss against his lips, this time fully and not just in the corner. He pouted his own lips out to return the kiss, closing his eyes for just a second to fully feel the soft warmth of Jimin’s lips against his own. Then his boyfriend pulled his face to break the contact, and he ducked to climb into the car.

Yoongi shut the door for him whilst Jimin fixed his seatbelt in place, and then he went around the front of the vehicle to climb into the driver-seat.

“Did you get all of the sand out from between your ass cheeks, Yoongi?” Jimin asked jokingly, as he slammed the door shut behind him.

“Yeah, eventually,” Yoongi retorted, hearing his boyfriend giggling in response as he dragged his
own seatbelt over his ribs. “I ain’t never wearing trunks again.”

“Oh, but you looked so cute in them! You can’t say that! I’ll cry, I’ll seriously cry, Yoongi.”

“So, the trip to the beach. That was nice, huh?” Yoongi remarked, starting the car and slowly rolling it into the lane. He did so for the sake of starting a casual conversation with him, even though the drive to get to the restaurant would take only five minutes. “D’you like it?”

“Baby boy, that trip to the beach was so good,” Jimin declared with a massive smile, emphasising his words in that wonderful way of his. “I can’t believe that I got to spend the whole day with you, Namo and Jungkook - it was amazing! I’d been hoping for a good day, you know? I trusted that you’d plan something perfect because you promised that you would, and you never break your promises. But today? Wow, I couldn’t have even dreamt about something as perfect as today, so, thank you.”

“Mmm, you ain’t gotta thank me, darling,” Yoongi replied with a quick smile. “It’s your birthday, Jimin. You deserve the best. You deserve the best every single day, that’s the fucking truth.”

“Hmm,” Jimin hummed, reaching over to place his hand down on his knee, like he always did so when he was driving. “What about you, Yoongi? Did you enjoy our time at the beach? What’s the day been like for you, now that we’re finally alone and we can talk together?”

“I’m having a great day today, Jimin. It kinda scares me how used to having ‘good days’ I’m starting to get, y’know? I used to never have ‘em, not even close. The best I used to get was alright days - days when I didn’t get drunk, cry, or just feel hollow,” Yoongi explained, as he slowed the car down at an upcoming set of red lights. “I knew that it was fucked up, I knew that I was sick, but I used to think I was sick for all of the wrong reasons, ‘cos of my parents.”

“Hmm, but now you know that you’re not sick like that anymore, baby boy,” Jimin said, giving his knee a firm squeeze.

“No, I ain’t sick for being gay, Jimin. I’m… I’m different, but I ain’t sick,” Yoongi agreed in a soft voice, as he peeled a hand free from the steering-wheel. “The sickness that I got inside of me? It’s loneliness. It’s self-hate and anger and loneliness. It’s a fucking toxic mess of negativity, and it was so powerful that I thought it was gonna kuh… kill me. For a long time, I thought that it’d kill me ‘cos it used to hurt so fucking bad in my chest. But then I met you, and you’re making me get better, Jimin.”
“No, Yoongi, it’s not me. I’m not the reason why you’re starting to get better, I’m just a…a facilitator, that’s all. I’m helping you understand and accept yourself, but getting better? That’s all you, baby,” Jimin said with a warm smile. “So, be proud of yourself. Be proud of yourself, because I’m so proud of you.”

“You think so?” Yoongi asked, sparing a quick glance over at his boyfriend whilst the lights were still red.

“Yeah, I think so. I don’t want you thinking that I’m the reason why you’re getting better, because it’s all you, baby. You’re starting to love and accept yourself, you’re starting to have great days, you’re in control of your emotions. I’m helping you, I’m supporting you, but the journey to change couldn’t have happened without you taking every single step.”

As Yoongi slowly guided his vehicle through the traffic lights, he thought Jimin’s words over intently.

Just thinking about the fact that Jimin had said that he was the reason why he was feeling better, that he was in control and he was starting to love and accept himself…it was enough to leave him in total shock. Yoongi hadn’t really thought about the fact that he was actively doing these things, for he had always thought of his actions as more passive in light of Jimin’s overwhelming support and love - the main driving force for his slow journey into self-acceptance and battling years of internalised homophobia.

But now, Yoongi had had his eyes opened to the idea that his actions were actually the driving force behind his journey, and that Jimin’s support and love were actually just positive accompaniments to his change.

“That…that, uh, it makes me feel good, Jimin,” Yoongi said to break the momentary silence. “It makes me feel fucking powerful, in fact. Thinking ‘bout the fact that I’m getting better ‘cos I wanna be better - shit, that’s crazy.”

“Oh, yeah?” Jimin asked, turning his head to smile at him. “It might seem crazy, but it’s the truth. You couldn’t have gotten this far without wanting to get better, and that can be the hardest part for some men and women to accept. Sometimes, it feels easier to tell yourself that you can’t ever get better, and that way, you don’t even have to try. You don’t have to face your inner demons and past trauma, you don’t have to get hurt again.”

“I’d to get hurt, Jimin,” Yoongi agreed with a nod, tightening his hold on the steering-wheel. “I’d to face some things that scared me, and I gotta keep doing it, but I’d to get outta that place. I’d to get out
before it fucking killed me - the misery, the loneliness, the pain. Shit, Jimin, I don’t wanna go back to that place.”

“And you won’t, Yoongi,” Jimin said, as he lifted his hand up from his knee so that he could place it down on the back of his neck instead. His palm was warm and soft against his skin, settling in place in a way that made Yoongi let his breath out in a sigh of relief. “You’ve come so far, and you know that there are people that’ll love and support you for the rest of your journey. You’re not alone, hmm, because I’m right here with you.”

After several minutes of driving, the journey lengthened because of multiple irritating traffic light changes on Oak Street, Yoongi was slowly guiding the car down the sides streets of Hayes Valley. Like most evenings, the neighbourhood was packed as a result of the booming restaurant and commercial streets that attracted locals and tourists in great numbers. Regular parking spaces would be hell to find in the district, but that was one thing that he didn’t need to worry about tonight.

Rather than take Jimin to the previous restaurant that they had visited in Hayes Valley, ‘The Valley Vineyard’, Yoongi brought him to a new restaurant. It was an exclusive seafood restaurant that would suit Jimin’s palate for lobster and other delicacies and, hopefully, it would be the perfect place for his birthday dinner.

According to Hoseok, despite there being a slight difference in price between the two restaurants, the quality was so good that one would assume the meals to cost more than they did. The cost of the meal wouldn’t bother Jimin in the slightest, as he would probably prefer a less expensive meal tonight considering his initial reaction to finding out the price of a bottle of Chardonnay.

The real reason why Yoongi was taking him to another restaurant wasn’t because of the menus or the price, but was for a different reason entirely.

The Valley Vineyard didn’t have private dining-rooms for hire, rather just two forms of dining experience inside of the main restaurant floor. Those choices were the ground-floor and balcony - the balcony offering the most available privacy.

Yoongi wanted a private dining-room tonight, so that they could be alone together without having to fear that other diners would look at them if they got too close to one another. He had noticed the occasional staring that night though he had tried his hardest not to, mostly when he and Jimin had been feeding each other and giving each other fond and smouldering looks that had revealed them to be a gay couple and not just friendly young business associates.

Yoongi wanted Jimin to be dined on by their own private waiter or waitress. He wanted him to
savour every single bite of every course that they shared, every single sip of wine or champagne, and he wanted that to happen without rude and disgusted sneers being directed right at him. Jimin deserved a night of luxury without any negativity, especially after the day had went so well so far.

A private dining-room also allowed them to talk openly with one another without fear of being overheard, and it provided Yoongi with the best possible chance to present Jimin with his gift. He couldn’t possibly do it in a room filled with other diners; the mere thought enough to make him want to gag in discomfort. No, he couldn’t possibly give Jimin such an important gift in front of anyone else. He had tried to do so earlier, but his emotions had gotten the best of him and had made him feel nervous about it all. Only when they were alone together would Yoongi have the courage.

Much like The Valley Vineyard, the ‘Royal Octavia’ restaurant had an available valet service for diners. As Yoongi pulled the car up to the curb to kill the engine, he retrieved the valet key from the glove box and he proceeded to climb out of the vehicle.

Jimin was still in the act of removing his seatbelt, and so Yoongi went around the front of the vehicle to open the door for him. The act was met by a happy smile, which lit up his boyfriend’s features until he was damn near glowing as he slipped his arm around his waist.

Yoongi let him do so as they stepped onto the sidewalk, the contact no longer making him tense up like it had used to do so. He tossed the spare key at the valet boy, seeing him catching it and then crossing the sidewalk to enter the car. He pushed the door open first, holding it for Jimin in a way that he knew would make him call him ‘a gentleman’.

Upon stepping inside of the restaurant, the first thing that hit Yoongi was the noise, quickly followed by the variety of scents hanging in the air.

The interior of the restaurant wasn’t as opulent as the other restaurant had been, but Yoongi found himself liking it more. He liked the dark wooden panelling on the ceiling and floors, contrasted against the smooth cream walls. It made the place look classy, not extravagantly so but also not in a cheap fashion. The warm orange lights on the walls were just enough to illuminate the floor without flooding the diners with unneeded harsh light; so that they could dine more privately and in comfort.

From what Yoongi could see of the ground-floor dining-area, the tables were close together. They were too close together for him. He was glad that they had a private dining-room, not only to keep them away from others but to make the entire experience less noisy. Waiters and waitresses moved around the spaces between the tables, carrying serving trays covered in glasses, bottles, and plates of food.
The tables were medium wood to not clash against the dark flooring and ceiling, and the chairs matched with dark leather padding on the seat and back rests. The tables had centrepieces on them that consisted of large conch shells: exquisitely coloured and shaped, inside of which there were tapered candles. They matched the sea theme very well, considering the menu.

“Oh, Yoongi, I like this place,” Jimin remarked, cosying up against his side so that he didn’t have to raise his voice to be heard over the soft drone of conversation and classical music playing across the restaurant. “The other restaurant was so fancy that you could tell that everyone dining there wanted you to know that they were rich. But this place? It’s luxury without all of the bragging, and it makes me feel much more comfortable.”

“I think I like this place more too,” Yoongi agreed, finding his gaze focusing on several groupings of diners that happened to consist of two men and two women sharing meals.

Friends simply enjoying meals together for a special occasion, potential business associates, gay couples - there was no exact way of telling who these strangers they were. But Yoongi still found himself feeling more comfortable knowing that they weren’t the only couple present tonight that consisted of two men, unlike at their first dinner.

“I can’t wait to find out what the food tastes like,” Jimin added with a mischievous smile, as Yoongi guided him towards the reservation counter.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” the maître d’ greeted with a quick customer-friendly smile; his accent surprisingly American. He was a heavy-set white man with impeccable gelled blond hair and a well-fitted tuxedo. “Do you have a reservation?”

“Reservation for Yoongi Min, 8:30,” Yoongi replied, sparing a quick glance across the restaurant to eye the other diners again.

“Ah, the private dining experience? If you would just follow me, I shall escort you to your private room, gentlemen.”

The maître d’ moved to step out from behind the counter, collecting two menus which he carried held against his stomach. They followed him down a small set of stairs to enter the main dining-area, and then across the wide floor to another small set of stairs. After going up and onto a slight stretch of balcony that had several doors across the length, the man pushed one of the doors open, and then he gestured for them to enter first.
Just like the main dining-area of the restaurant, the private dining-room had dark wooden panels on the walls instead of any decorative wallpaper. The ceiling had floral friezes embossed on it, along with a small cut-glass chandelier hanging right over the single table, and the flooring was simple white marble threaded with shades of cream and gold. There was no wall art present, save for a single shelf that had more exquisite seashells placed beside the door, and some ornate and orange-tinged wall sconces.

The table had already been set with a white tablecloth, cutlery and empty glasses: deep glasses with flat bottoms for water, and large wine glasses for wine and champagne. Unlike the other tables, the centrepiece consisted of a fresh bouquet of pink and white roses, with several cup candles placed around the bouquet. The extra chairs had been removed so that there were just two placed at the table for them.

It wasn’t a large dining-room or table, for Yoongi had ordered a private room for a party of four. This meant that he and Jimin were within hand-holding distance during the meal.

Overall, the private dining-room was simple but pleasing - the lighting and dark wood creating a sense of calm and warmth. Yes, Yoongi was certain that he liked the Royal Octavia restaurant so much more than The Valley Vineyard already, simply because of the private dining-room. They had yet to even sample the food, but he knew that that would just help strengthen his opinion.

“Here we are, gentlemen,” the maître d’ announced, closing the door shut behind himself. “A private room for two to enjoy.”

Yoongi pulled Jimin’s chair out for him, and this time Jimin was sure to slip his blue dinner jacket down to his elbows so that he could take it off for him and place it over the back of the chair. This fully revealed his white shirt to him, and Yoongi saw the way that it snugly pulled in to fit his slim waist before the lengths were tucked into the waistband of his fitted black wool trousers.

Jimin let out a soft giggle as Yoongi pushed his chair in for him, sitting down at the table and placing his hands down in his lap. The position was so coy, charming in its own way.

Yoongi removed his own dinner jacket, the black wool contrasting against his cream Valentino blouse. He pulled his chair in to sit down, giving his boyfriend a quick smile that he returned from across the table.

“I wish you both a pleasant evening, and that you thoroughly enjoy your meal. Should there be any need for assistance, should there be any complications with your orders or dissatisfaction with the service provided, I assure you that I shall see to any and all demands,” the maître d’ explained, as he
held their menus out in offering.

“Thanks,” Yoongi said, as he accepted his own menu; Jimin doing the same from across the table. “I’m sure that we’ll have a fantastic evening.”

“I shall summon your private server right away for wine and appetisers, gentlemen.”

Just like that, the maître d’ left the private room again, leaving the two of them alone for a moment to study their menus until their private server arrived.

Yoongi looked at the closed door for a few seconds before looking down at his menu. It was stored within a burgundy leather holder, and so he opened it up to see lines of text categorised into courses. Each course was then separated into sections, such as the type of side dishes like salads and pasta, or the main fish that was in the entrée dishes.

When Yoongi glanced up to look at his boyfriend, he saw that he was also examining his menu, which was open on the table so that he could lean over it and read the choices.

Jimin had one arm folded on the table, the other cocked at the elbow to rest his chin in his palm. The position drew attention to his open shirt buttons, to the flash of his tanned and freckled chest, and that, combined with the loose lock of tousled hair that had slipped free to dangle in front of his ear, was enough to make Yoongi stare at him because he couldn’t believe just how beautiful that he looked tonight.

“Hmm, this is nice,” Jimin hummed, his lips curled up at the corners in a soft smile. “I like the privacy, I like the fact that we get to share dinner together without anyone else present. It feels more romantic, baby boy, and we can talk about whatever we want to without a single care.”

“I’m glad that you like it, darling. I thought ‘bout taking you back to The Valley Vineyard, but I wanted a private dinner too,” Yoongi explained, quickly scanning the menu to try and locate an entrée that appealed to his tastes. “Hopefully, the food here tastes as good, if not better. Speaking of food, have you found anything you like? D’you need me to explain anything?”

“There’s a couple of lobster dishes, I think that I’ve found one that I’d like to order,” Jimin suddenly remarked, his fingers gently playing with one of his new diamond earrings in that little fidgeting habit of his.
“Really? Without my assistance?” Yoongi teased with a smile, lowering his own menu to look at him.

“Uhuh,” Jimin hummed, his lips curling up into a soft smile that revealed his teeth. “I’m learning, baby boy. I’ve even found an appetiser too. Not bad for Bayview trash, huh?”

By the time that they had settled on their orders, the door opened across the dining-room so that their private server could enter.

Yoongi saw that she was a young-looking black waitress, dressed in the standard white and black uniform that seemed synonymous with serving staff. Her hair was pulled back into a small ponytail on the top of her head, to keep her thick and full Afro curls in place. She had her notebook in hand in preparation, along with a small menu in the crook of her elbow that was likely the wine menu.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” their waitress greeted, closing the door behind herself respectfully and then moving over to their table. There was a wide smile on her lips, which were covered in a deep shade of red lipstick. It seemed genuine and friendly, rather than just for the sake of service. “Are you ready to order?”

“We’re ready to order,” Yoongi confirmed, before giving Jimin a quick look to check if he wanted to order his own meal tonight.

Jimin perked up in his seat at this, lifting his menu up in front of him so that he could look every bit the cultured young man. The little act brought a fond smile to Yoongi’s face as he studied him from across the table, once more enamoured by Jimin’s beauty.

“Um, for the appetiser, can I have…the smoked fish platter, and for the entrée, the lobster tagliatelle?” he requested, glancing up from the menu to look between him and the waitress in turn.

Jimin was trying his very hardest to look suave and not at all worried that he might have ordered incorrectly. Luckily for him, he hadn’t made a single mistake, and so he had no need to worry.

“The lobster tagliatelle is a very popular dish,” the waitress said, hastily jotting down his order in her notebook. “I’m sure that you’ll find the flavour of the meal exquisite. And you, sir?”

“For the appetiser, I’ll have the yuzu scallops, and the salmon and king crab over braised potatoes for
the entrée,” Yoongi replied.

“Fantastic choices. Would you like any side dishes? A favourite accompaniment for many dishes on
the menu is the grilled aubergine salad.”

“Then we’ll have the grilled aubergine salad, one each, with sun-dried tomato bread to share.”

“Finally, drinks? Would you like to see the wine menu?”

“A bottle of your best vintage Chardonnay, and water, thanks,” Yoongi finished, closing the menu
shut and holding it out to the waitress.

“Certainly. I’ll bring you your appetisers as soon as they’re prepared. Until then, drinks. I’ll be back
momentarily, gentlemen.”

After collecting their menus from them with a warm smile, the waitress turned on the low heel of her
pumps to exit the dining-room and leave them alone once more.

Yoongi watched her go and then he turned his head to look at his boyfriend.

Jimin was fiddling with his cutlery, which was wrapped in a napkin, examining all of the different
kind of spoons with a great deal of interest.

“Can I have the smoked fish platter’?” he repeated, unable to keep a grin from appearing on his
face. “Jimin, darling, you don’t gotta ask for the food like that in a restaurant.”

“I know, I know, but it sounds rude saying ‘I’ll have’, Yoongi,” Jimin replied with his own grin. “I
think it sounds more polite to request the food, not order it.”

In the time that it took for the appetisers to be prepared, the waitress brought them their drink order.
After checking that they were both satisfied with the selection, she poured out the Chardonnay for
them, splashing a generous tipple in both glasses, and then she filled up their other glasses with
chilled water. The bottle of Chardonnay was left on their table, to the side of the bouquet centrepiece,
so that they could top up their glasses between waiting for their courses.
Yoongi knew to not drink more than a single glass of wine, for he was limiting himself to just two small splashes in the deep glass and nothing more. It wasn’t only because he was driving, but because he knew that drinking too much alcohol when he was nervous could often result in unwanted emotional breakdowns. That was the last thing that he needed right now, and so a small amount of wine was all that he was treating himself to tonight.

“Am I supposed to drink most of the bottle again, baby boy?” Jimin asked, as he gave the Chardonnay a quick sniff and then sipped at it. He hummed in appreciation of the flavour, before lowering the glass to casually hold it under his chin.

“Only if you enjoy it,” Yoongi suggested, leaving his serving of Chardonnay aside for when the appetisers were served so that he could appreciate the flavours more. “If you don’t want to, don’t drink it all. I don’t mind, but I can only have a lil ‘cos I’m driving.”

“I’m sure that I can manage most of it,” Jimin retorted with a cheeky smile. “I hope that this bottle isn’t as expensive as the other one though…”

Yoongi eyed the bottle curiously, reading the white label attached to the green glass to see that it boldly declared: Montrachet 1981, ‘Domaine de la Romanée-Conti’ which was clearly in regards to region that the grapes had been cultivated from. Judging from the fact that it was Montrachet, vintage Chardonnay, and the region, he knew that it wasn’t cheap, but he thought that this particular year might be less expensive than the other.

Well, Yoongi would find out when he was handed the bill after dinner.

Several minutes later, the waitress brought them their appetisers. When she entered the dining-room, Jimin perked up in his seat again in a way that showed that he had been anticipating the food, just like Yoongi had.

“Here you are,” the waitress said, as she carefully moved their dishes from her serving tray. “The smoked fish platter.”

“Thank you,” Jimin said with a warm smile.

Jimin’s order of the smoked and cured fish platter consisted of a variety of cuts of fish served on a long rectangular plate. Yoongi could see what looked to be smoked eel, haddock, salmon and cured...
“And the yuzu scallops,” she added, as she retrieved the second dish.

Yoongi’s order of yuzu scallops was very eye-catching. The scallops were displayed artfully in a small wooden block rather than a plate, the marinated meat sitting on a bed of wakame seaweed and still cradled within the shell. They looked and smelled delicious to him, and he couldn’t wait to try the appetiser.

“Your entrée will be with you shortly, gentlemen. Please, enjoy your appetisers,” the waitress said, moving to exit the dining-room once more.

Yoongi thought that this would be the best time to present Jimin with his gift during dinner. Not right away, but probably when they were nearly finished eating the appetisers and there would be a slight lull between courses. He watched his boyfriend unwrapping his cutlery so that he could start eating, carefully tucking the wrinkled napkin down the front of his shirt to ensure that he didn’t get any food on it. It took him a moment to copy his actions, feeling his fingers trembling ever so slightly as he fixed the napkin in place.

Jimin retrieved his fork so that he could start eating right away, spearing a chunk of smoked salmon on the tines that he popped straight into his mouth. Judging from the noise that he made and the way that he closed his eyes to savour the morsel, it had simply melted on his tongue from the tenderness of the meat.

Yoongi sampled his own appetiser, finding that the scallops were plump and tender; the tangy yuzu and pepper paste containing a powerful punch that flooded his mouth with sharp heat. He had to take a slight sip of wine to combat the heat until his tongue got used to the sensation.

The Chardonnay had a wonderful taste of peaches that stayed on the tongue, mixing and lingering with subtle hints of oak as he rolled the sip around his mouth and then swallowed.

“Yoongi, what’s yuzu?” Jimin asked after swallowing the mouthful of tender and smoked salmon, his gaze rapidly moving from between his face and the serving of scallops.

“Yuzu? It’s Japanese, darling,” Yoongi explained, after swallowing another small sip of wine. “It’s a
citrus fruit. It can be mixed with pepper and chilli to marinate all kinda meat, like with this dish. It can get pretty spicy, hot spicy.”

“I love spicy food,” Jimin declared, which was an obvious hint that he very much wanted to try one of the scallops - he just wasn’t going to ask to seem respectful.

When Yoongi moved to hold one of them out to him in offering, Jimin leaned across the table to accept it from him with his mouth rather than take it from his hand. There was no need to worry about anyone staring at them, after all, and this fact brought a smile to Yoongi’s face as he felt his boyfriend’s fingers gently wrapping around his wrist.

Jimin opened his mouth wide, angling his wrist so that he could roll his tongue out and gently pull the tender scallop free from the shell with his upper teeth. He caught it on his tongue, the seaweed stuck to the little chunk of meat. His initial reaction was to open his eyes wide from the sudden heat, which made Yoongi start laughing.

“Oh, that’s nice,” Jimin declared, slowly chewing the bite of meat as he savoured the different notes of heat. “Do you like it, baby boy?”

Yoongi nodded in agreement as he moved to wipe at his lips for him, just to stop a slight dribble of juice from the scallop running down his chin. His thumb bumped against his lower lip, which made it bounce from the slight contact until Jimin pulled it in to softly bite at it.

Something passed through the air between the two of them, something that told Yoongi to just lean over to give Jimin a kiss. Before he could help himself, he moved to do so. The bottom of his chair scraped against the marble flooring as he got out of his seat, the sound shockingly loud in the silence of the dining-room.

Jimin must have felt the exact same ripple as him, for he moved his face just as he went to kiss him; his lips parted in preparation of his own. His tongue gently licked against his lower lip, the tip of it teasing him until Yoongi parted his own lips to deepen the kiss.

One kiss turned into two, into three - Yoongi unable to break contact for longer than a second before Jimin brought their lips together again. They were quick kisses, passionate in that way that secretive ones often were, almost as if they didn’t want to get caught should the waitress enter the private room again.
Jimin finally stopped kissing him with a soft sound, pressing their brows together with his eyes closed tight.

Yoongi saw the way that he wet his lips with his tongue, taking a deep breath as he opened his eyes again to hold his gaze. His lash line was slightly smokey from eyeliner, so that his thick eyelashes looked even more defined and his eyes more rounded. He held his gaze for a moment before letting out a breathless laugh, dropping his head to look down at his lap.

“Hmm, the scallops are nice, but that was nicer,” Jimin remarked with a giggle, reaching up to brush a lock of hair back behind his ear. “What was that for, hmm?”

“I just wanted to do it,” Yoongi replied, as he sat back down in his seat and he fixed his napkin back in place over his shirt.

This reply seemed to pleased Jimin very much as he collected his fork from his plate, his face lighting up that little bit more.

“What’s this, Yoongi?” Jimin asked, as he delicately prodded the tines of the fork against a sliver of silver and gelatinous-looking eel. “I’ve never had anything that looks like that before… Is it squid? Octopus?”

“It’s eel, Jimin,” Yoongi replied, which made the younger man pull a rather disgusted expression. “Don’t you like eel?”

“I’ve never tried it before, but just thinking about eating it makes me just go eww,” Jimin explained, giving a dramatic shudder that instantly reminded him of Hoseok and his hatred of octopus. “Why would anyone eat eel? Who looked at an eel and thought that it’d taste good, huh?”

On account of the fact that Jimin didn’t like eel, he ended up feeding the little smoked bites of fish to him off the ends of his fork instead, along with a piece of raw and tender tuna. In return, Yoongi fed him several of the scallops, which Jimin clearly enjoyed much more over his first glass of Chardonnay.

Jimin even liked touching the shells, for he collected one from the wooden block so that he could turn it over in his fingers and touch the bumps and whorls. The shell was shaped just like a fan, that elegant and treasured shape that people seemed to adore; the colouration bone white and covered in little veins of brown.
Yoongi could recall the way that Jimin had touched and stroked the abalone shells during their first meal; how he had examined them intently throughout the meal, though it seemed like he had done so back then to avoid having to look at and talk to him during their shared dinner.

It was watching Jimin examining the scallop shell that finally made Yoongi reach inside of his suit jacket pocket to retrieve the ring box. His boyfriend didn’t even notice him doing so, and so he was able to shift forward in his seat to place his elbows down on the table and study the box in his fingers.

“I, uh, I know how much that you love rings,” Yoongi said, as he moved the box into his palm. It was so small and yet it seemed to have a great weight to it. “When I bought this gift, I’ll admit, I thought ‘bout the whole engagement ring thing like Namjoon. It, uh, it made me almost not buy it, ’cos it seemed wrong - not wrong like bad, y’know, like-”

“Take your time, baby boy, you got this,” Jimin interjected in a soft voice, running his thumb over the empty scallop shell. “Just take a moment, get your words right. We’ve got all night, hmm? There’s no need to rush.”

Yoongi took a moment just like he had told him to, staring down at the wine red box in his hand. He could feel his heartbeat pounding in his chest, not even at a fast speed but rather hard and slow so that every single thump felt like it might just be his last; so that the vibration echoed through his bones. His mouth felt so dry even when his skin was starting to feel clammy, the contrast unpleasant.

Yoongi didn’t think that he could do this. He was scared, he was far too scared and he couldn’t seem to push away the fear and think.

Yet, Jimin was just looking at him with that usual level of affection, trust and understanding, his expression saying more than words ever could. He was silently encouraging him on, whispering “you can do it, baby boy” right down his ear.

“I…I thought that it’d be wrong to give you something like that when I can’t give you the real thing in the future,” Yoongi said slowly, sticking his dry tongue out to wet his equally dry lips. “It felt like an empty promise or something, I was scared that I might upset you ‘cos the symbolism’s so strong - me buying you a ring like this. I told Seokseok ‘bout my reservations and he told me that I worry too much ‘bout everything, and-”

Jimin let out a soft laugh in agreement at this, which made Yoongi’s lips curl up into a quick smile.
“and that if I wanted to give you a ring in the first place, I’d a good reason to,” he continued. “I-I think that the ring just symbolises my promise to love you, y’know, and if you wear it then that means that you love me too, Jimin. That’s what it means. It ain’t no engagement ring or nothing like that, but…”

“But that doesn’t matter,” Jimin replied, picking up the thread of his words with ease. “It doesn’t matter, because it can’t be that. But that doesn’t mean that you should hold your gift up to that ridiculous standard, baby. If your gift is what you say it is, a promise to love one another, then that’s what it is.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, Yoongi. Is this why you’ve been so nervous all night long? Because you’re worried that I’ll be upset over the symbolism?” Jimin asked, cocking his head so that stray locks of hair fell free to dangle over his brow. His new earrings glinted at him through the thick, black silken strands. “Baby, there’s nothing to be scared about, OK? It’s a ring, it’s a ring with a beautiful sentiment attached to it - that’s all.”

Yoongi shook his head slowly at this, letting Jimin know that that wasn’t the exact reason why he was so nervous right now. He couldn’t exactly seem to get the words out, swallowing a massive lump that had worked its way up into his throat.

“Then what’s the matter, baby boy? Come on, you know that you can tell me,” he said in a soothing voice, as he placed the scallop shell aside on his empty plate.

Jimin shifted to lean forward in his seat and he placed his hand down on the table, his palm up in silent offering for him to take hold. So Yoongi did so, drawing a burst of bravado from the contact.

“I…I wanted to give you a ring ‘cos I thought’d be the best way to ask you this,” Yoongi finally managed to say, squeezing hold of his hand tightly. “Jimin, d’you wanna come live with me?”

For a moment, the dining-room fell completely silent. Yoongi’s heart was still pounding so hard in his chest that he was convinced that Jimin might just be able to hear it from across the table, as he stared at him with a completely blank look of shock.

“I’ve thought ‘bout it a lot and I think that it might be a lil too fast, y’know?” Yoongi said, just so he
could break the heavy silence. “I dunno what the right time to ask someone something like that is, I-I just ‘bout managed to ask you out on a date, Jimin. But if I keep thinking ‘bout it then it must be for a reason, and I-”

“Youngi, stop. Stop, it’s OK. You don’t need to explain all of that.”

Jimin let go of his hand so that he could push his chair out, and then he got to his feet to move over to him. He gently lowered himself onto his lap, his warm weight highly comforting to Yoongi so that he instinctively wrapped his arms around his waist.

“Youngi, baby, do you want me to live with you?” Jimin asked in a soft whisper, moving to straddle his lap so that he could slip his arms around his neck and lean close to him. “Is that what you want? Is that what you really want?”

“Jimin, I really want you to live with me,” he confirmed with a slow nod. “I want you to move into my home. I don’t wanna have to travel to see you, even if you ain’t that far away. I wanna be able to come home to you, y’know?”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah, I want that so much right now. I-I love talking to you on the phone all of the time, but all of those conversations that we share could be shared in a home too - that’s what I think. I love coming to visit you at Namjoon’s home, it’s become a kinda second home for me, ‘cos I feel so safe there. But I can’t help but want something more, something for us. It’d be nice, right? It’d feel good, living with me?”

“What, you want us to have our own little suburban bliss?” Jimin asked with a smile, slipping one arm free so that he could stroke the backs of his fingers against his cheek. “You come home after working all day long and I’m in the kitchen making us dinner?”

“Mmm, and when I’m sick and tired of business, I can run a bath and we can just soak in it together,” Yoongi added with his own smile.

This little fantasy made the two of them laugh, Jimin throwing his head back with that sweet and melodious laugh of his that never failed to make Yoongi’s stomach turn all loose under his ribs.
“Oh, baby boy, that sounds too good to be true,” Jimin whispered, a thick lock of hair dangling over his brow. “I know that it’s my birthday and everything, but it’s just too good. Am I actually dreaming right now? Am I asleep and dreaming all of this?”

“No, you’re awake, darling,” Yoongi confirmed, as he fixed the lock of hair back behind his ear for him. “What’d you say, huh? D’you wanna come live with me?”

Yoongi saw the way that Jimin’s face was shifting, for it was impossible to miss the way that he had pulled his full lips in and he kept blinking as his brow gave a series of twitches. It looked like he was struggling to control himself, like he was going to…cry.

“Jimin?” Yoongi said in a whisper-soft voice. “Jimin, hey, what’s wrong?”

“It’s just- I love you so much, Yoongi, and I know that I say it all the time, but I dunno if you ever realise just how much that I do,” Jimin said in an uneven voice, tears now freely streaming down his cheeks. “I was just thinking about it and I-I just started crying, oh!”

Yoongi could only watch in complete surprise as Jimin threw one of his hands up to try and cover his face; to try and hide himself from him as the first hard sobs escaped from his pulled-back lips. His hand was shaking, his entire body trembling on his lap from the force of his crying. He had even brought his shoulders up to hunch forward slightly, the position both defensive and making him seem so much smaller.

“I’m suh-sorry, I’ve had too much to drink, baby boy, I’m so-so sorry,” Jimin sobbed through his fingers, even when he had had just a single glass of Chardonnay and he was nowhere near drunk.

“No, get it all out, darling, get it all out now,” Yoongi suggested, as he gave his free hand a gentle squeeze and he ran his thumb over the backs of his knuckles. “You ain’t drunk, mmm, you’re having an emotional moment, but that’s alright; yeah? There ain’t nothing wrong with that. Jimin, you tell me that all of the time. Just let it all out, I’m here, I ain’t gonna let go of your hand.”

“I’m so stupid,” Jimin moaned, twisting to turn away from him. “I’m suh-so stupid, oh, I’ve ruined the night. I’m suh-sorry.”

“C’mon, get up. Lemme hold you, mmm, lemme just hold you in my arms,” Yoongi suggested, as he placed the ring box down on the table.
At his suggestion, Jimin moved to get off his lap so that they could both get to their feet. He was still crying, still trying to hide himself away from him and seem as small as possible because he was so emotionally raw right now.

Yoongi didn’t even hesitate, wrapping his arms around his waist and ribs so that he could pull Jimin into an embrace. His boyfriend slipped his arms around his neck to bridge the slightest distant and bring their bodies that little bit closer. His fingers snagged hold of his hair, tangling deep and tight enough to drag at the roots almost painfully.

Jimin pressed his face against his neck with another series of loud hiccuping sobs, his skin hot and wet from his tears. He trembled in Yoongi’s hold, but at least he was able to stand without assistance.

“Shush, it’s alright,” Yoongi breathed out, as he rubbed soft circles against the space between Jimin’s shoulder blades. All things considered, he was surprised to find himself so calm and in control when Jimin was having such an emotional moment. “It’s alright, I’m here, Jimin. I got you, yeah, I got you and I ain’t gonna let go.”

“I know, buh-baby, I know you wuh-wuh-won’t,” Jimin gasped against his throat, letting out a series of noises as he tried to catch his breath and also speak at the same time. “Just hold me, puh-please.”

“Shit, darling, you’re gonna make me cry too,” Yoongi joked, as he turned his face into their embrace so that he could press soft kisses against Jimin’s hair and ear.

“Nuh-no, don’t cry,” Jimin replied, his voice heavily muffled from their position. “Please don’t cry, baby boy, or I wuh-won’t be able to stop.”

It took some time, but Jimin finally started to calm down thanks to his soothing words, kisses and touch. His rather hysterical bout of tears eventually trickled down to little more than hiccups, his trembling body falling limp in his arms as his breathing finally regulated to a much more relaxed rhythm; his breath warm against his neck.

As soon as he had gotten himself under full control, Jimin moved to sit back down in his chair, and so Yoongi hunkered down in front of him. He could see that he had finally stopped crying, though a couple more tears were no doubt going to carry on rolling down his cheeks for a minute or two longer. His nose and cheeks were flushed from crying, his eyelids starting to look a little swollen too.

“Shit, I’m crying on my birthday,” Jimin said with a laugh, as he reached up to wipe at his eyes with
his fingertips. He smudged quite the amount of his eyeliner doing so, leaving a smear of black underneath his lash line. He rolled his eyes up again as he tried to blink back some final tears, sniffing hard as he did so. “I’m such a drama queen, Yoongi.”

“I dunno ‘bout drama queen, but you’re the most beautiful queen I’ve ever seen,” Yoongi said, as he lifted his hand up to his lips to give him a soft kiss on his knuckles.

“Oh, you’re such a poet, baby boy,” Jimin giggled, retrieving a spare napkin so that he could dab at his eyes and nose. “I…I love you so much, Yoongi. I just had to let you know, I didn’t mean to get so emotional, but…but I must’ve needed to get that out. It’s been inside of me this whole time, I think, and I’ve known that it was there, but I just never had the bravery to say it. But today, with everything that’s huh-happened and you asking me to come and live with you…I just had to let it out.”

Yoongi hummed softly at this to let him know that he was listening, that he understood what he was saying.

“I’m sorry, Yoongi. I hope that I didn’t freak you out by getting so emotional, I-”

“Don’t say sorry, stop doing that, Jimin,” Yoongi spoke over him, softly shaking his head. “You didn’t freak me out, and you don’t need to apologise for what just happened. You’ve always told me that I shouldn’t apologise when everything hits me hard. I’ve had moments like that too, when I just couldn’t stop the tears and the…the bad thoughts. You ain’t gotta say sorry to me; ‘k?”

“OK,” Jimin said in a soft voice, as he finished dabbing at his lower eyelids. “I love you, Yoongi, and I’d love to move in with you. That’s what I was trying to say before I started crying.”

When Yoongi retrieved the ring box and he finally opened it for him, he realised that he was down on one knee in front of Jimin. It might just have been fate, or some strange coincidence - he really didn’t know. But he did know that the way that Jimin looked down at him so fondly would be forever burnt into his memory.

Inside of the ring box, there were actually two rings, not just one. Yoongi had fretted over this aspect of the gift for quite some time, as he hadn’t at all been certain of the right way to present Jimin with the idea of them sharing rings. But he now felt like Jimin would understand, just like how he had understood his worries about broken promises and engagement rings.
“Oh my god, did you…one for me, one for you?” Jimin asked, looking up from the box to hold his gaze. “Yoongi, that’s so beautiful. Would you…would you put my one on for me? I think that it’d be really nice if you put the ring on for me.”

“Should I say something?” Yoongi asked, as he eyed the two rings in the box. They were glinting in the light from the candles, demanding to be stared at. “Y’know, like, a promise - just for you?”

“If you wanna say something, sure, baby boy,” Jimin agreed with a nod, a lock of hair falling forward over his brow that he quickly brushed back in place.

“Jimin, I…I promise that I’ll love you, that I’ll take care of you, for as long as you’ll lemme do so,” Yoongi said, as he retrieved Jimin’s ring from the box. He got it between his fingers and thumb so that he could hold it up for a moment and look at it. “I promise that I’ll share everything that I got with you: my home, my thoughts, my love. I ain’t even need anything in return from you, I just need…you.”

Jimin allowed him to take hold of his wrist, the smile at the corners of his lips twitching ever so slightly, and so Yoongi slipped the ring right onto the ring finger of his left hand.

Thanks to Namjoon’s assistance, Yoongi found that the ring fitted perfectly - not too tight and not too loose. It slipped right past his first two knuckles to sit snugly in place. It belonged on his ring finger, and as he got it in place and he looked up, he saw the look of pure happiness on Jimin’s face.

Jimin studied the ring for a moment, turning his hand this way and that as he did so.

Both of the rings were made from platinum, two pieces carefully melded together so that each ring had two separate bands. Jimin’s bands were both covered in diamonds, which caught the light from the candles so that they glinted back at their eyes.

Yoongi’s ring, however, only had a single upper band with diamonds in it. The lower band was plain platinum with a deep line engraved into it like most signature Cartier rings. He had wanted Jimin’s ring to be much more extravagant than his, and he thought that the ring was perfect for him now that he had finally gotten to see him wearing it.

“It’s so beautiful,” Jimin sighed, as he held his hand up in front of his face to look at it. “I’m never gonna take this ring off, just to make sure that I don’t lose it. I’ll only ever take it off to clean it, I’m serious.”
Yoongi laughed at this remark, finally feeling his fears and worries from the entire night melting away because Jimin had said yes.

Jimin wanted to come and live with him. Jimin loved his gift, he loved the fact that they were sharing rings with private promises of commitment and he loved him. It was enough to make him want to cry too, but he managed to quell the urge for now.

“OK, baby boy, now it’s your turn,” Jimin said, as he held his hand out for the ring box. “Let me do it, I wanna do it.”

When Yoongi gave the ring box to him, Jimin placed it down on the table and he slipped the ring free from the black velvet cushion. He took hold of his wrist so that he could hold his hand steady, having to do so because Yoongi’s hand had started trembling a little.

“Yoongi, I promise to accept you, and everything that you’ve promised me. In return, I promise to carry on loving and caring for you the same way that I have since first knowing you,” Jimin promised, as he moved his hand forward to slip the ring on his finger. “Maybe, one day in the distant future, we’ll be able to say true vows to one another, hmm?”

Yoongi felt the cold press of the platinum slipping up his ring finger, brushing against his knuckles until it was in place. The sight of it sitting there, on his finger, just like the other ring was on Jimin’s finger, was enough to make him let out a soft sigh. Then he moved to cup the back of Jimin’s neck so that he could give him a soft kiss; almost as if to seal the deal.

When their waitress entered the private dining-room again to bring them their entrée, Yoongi could hardly believe that such a short amount of time had passed. Everything had happened so quickly that he had been gotten tangled up in the moment and it had felt like it had lasted so much longer. He was shocked to find that he had not only managed to give Jimin his gift and ask him the big question that had been playing on his mind all day long, but that Jimin had readily accepted the gift and had agreed to move in with him.

Just thinking about this was enough to make Yoongi smile to himself, holding his glass of water in front of his lips to try and hide it from view.

“How are you enjoying the meal so far, gentlemen?” their waitress asked with a smile, as she moved to place their dishes down in front of them. “Has everything been satisfactory?”
“Everything has been perfect, thanks,” Yoongi replied, glancing down at his plate before looking up at Jimin again.

Perhaps noticing Jimin’s slightly flushed cheeks and puffy eyelids, their waitress couldn’t help but study his face as she placed his serving of food down on the table.

“Are you alright, dear? I don’t mean to pry, but if there’s anything wrong with the service provided, I’m here to help. You’ve got a little something on your cheek, right here.”

“Oh,” Jimin exclaimed, grabbing the soiled napkin so that he could try and wipe away the slight smudge of eyeliner that the waitress had pointed out. “I’m fine, there’s no problem at all. Today’s my birthday, I’ve been a little emotional, but for good reasons. I’ve been crying tears of joy. I didn’t even think that you could really do that, until today.”

“Then I hope that this birthday treat goes well for you,” the waitress said with a smile, as she collected their empty appetiser plates and placed them down onto the tray. “Hopefully, it won’t make you cry again.”

“Thank you, the dinner has been absolutely wonderful so far. The wine and appetisers were delicious, my compliments to the chef,” Jimin said with a soft laugh, as he finally cleaned away the smudge of makeup and he dropped the napkin onto the table.

Yoongi had to suppress the urge to laugh at Jimin’s compliment, recalling the way that he had copied his words during their first evening dinner together. He really was learning, and at fast pace too.

After filling up their glasses with more Chardonnay, the waitress left the dining room with a promise to return in half an hour - should they want dessert before collecting the bill. The table was now set with their entrée and side dishes, a colourful and fragrant assortment of dishes that they were going to share.

Unlike the previous dinner, their entrée dishes were actually both colourful and fascinating, though Jimin’s order was much more colourful. It was highly fitting that it would be, after all, for his dish managed to embody his oftentimes bright and colourful personality and aura.

Yoongi’s meal consisted of a large fillet of lightly braised salmon, over which chunks of succulent king crab had been placed. Underneath the delicacy, there was a bed of baby potatoes, lettuce,
samphire and creamy stock. Fragrant steam wafted from the surface, which he breathed in with a hum of satisfaction as he collected his cutlery together. It was a bright and delicious looking dish, which Yoongi knew would be rich with flavour but light rather than cloying and heavy.

On one side of Jimin’s dinner plate, there was a neatly folded mound of tagliatelle, the pasta coated in a fragrant tomato and garlic sauce. On the other half, there was the serving of lobster. The lobster had been cut in half during the cooking process: the claws, antennae and tail removed so that just the body remained. The two halves were displayed artfully, the tender and sweet meat covered in sprinkles of garnish and chopped halves of cherry tomatoes. All around the food, dribbles of stock and little cherry tomatoes that had been sliced to resemble flowers had been placed to complete the display.

It was a fantastic display, but one that Yoongi knew Jimin would obliterate within mere seconds - the thought making him laugh softly to himself.

The grilled aubergine salad was very bright too: vibrant shades of purple, green and red popping out from the grilled aubergine, tomato and mozzarella. Lastly, the sun-dried tomato bread looked soft and moist - perfect for mopping up any leftover stock and juices.

“Wow, there’s so much food!” Jimin declared, as he fixed his napkin back in place to ensure that his shirt was fully covered. “I can’t wait to eat it all!”

Just like Yoongi had known, Jimin eagerly dived onto his meal: scooping chunks of lobster meat free from the shell and twirling the thin pasta around the tines of his fork to combine the different flavours. He went between the entrée and side dishes, chasing the food with generous sips of Chardonnay. He didn’t rush the meal but rather took his time, savouring the taste and texture of every single bite.

Yoongi was satisfied to know that Jimin was enjoying the meal so much. He had made a great decision selecting this restaurant this evening, as it had made the night go so perfectly so far. It was even better knowing that his own dinner was cooked to perfection too, the fish tender and moist rather than dry, the stock that it was soaked in buttery with a bite of salt from the samphire. He let Jimin sample his dish, just like always; his boyfriend leaning across the table to accept the offer.

“Baby boy, if we ever make a restaurant ‘our restaurant’, please, let it be this one,” Jimin almost pleaded around the bite of food, which made Yoongi laugh softly. He gathered more lobster and pasta onto his fork for him, to let him sample some. “It’s so good, I love everything about this place - the food, the interior design, the atmosphere. Don’t you love it too?”
“We’ll make it ‘ours’ then, darling,” Yoongi promised, accepting the generous bite from his fork and cheeking it to let the flavour settle on his tongue. “Mmm, you’ve got good tastes. That’s delicious, Jimin.”

“I know, right?!” Jimin exclaimed with a happy smile. “I’ve eaten so much good food today, I really am gonna explode at some point. But it’s totally worth it.”

Yoongi moved so that he could top up Jimin’s serving of wine for him, his own glass still containing a splash. After pouring more Chardonnay our for him, he sat back in his chair and he retrieved his own glass to nurse it for a moment.

“Hmm, what’d you think about Jungkook?” Jimin asked for the sake of conversation, as he quickly wiped a dribble of tomato sauce from his lips with his thumb. He sucked it free rather than wipe it onto his napkin, clearly enjoying the taste that much. “I forgot to ask you earlier, about the whole English school thing. He seemed to not like the idea.”

“The kid’ll go to school,” Yoongi said, swirling the contents of his wine glass around slowly. “His parents’ll make him go. They understand a good opportunity when they see it, just like they saw one when they got ‘emselves smuggled over here.”

“I thought that he’d like the idea,” Jimin said, tearing up a chunk of tomato bread so that he could fill the middle with salad and then fold it over. “I was shocked when he reacted so negatively to it.”

“Well, it’s school,” Yoongi remarked with a casual shrug, watching his boyfriend taking a huge bite of the bread. “It ain’t no surprise to me that he’d wanna get away from that. Everyone hates school, right?”

“I used to give popular boys blowjobs in the toilets so they wouldn’t bully me back in high school,” Jimin recalled, his expression surprisingly free from emotion as he slowly chewed his mouthful of food. “It worked, most of the time. What about you, how much did you hate school, baby boy?”

“I fucking despised school. I was constantly bullied. There were a lot of white faces there, Jimin, not a lot of variety. I sought refuge back then in books, in reading and learning just ‘cos I’d nothing else. I didn’t have friends, I didn’t know how to make ‘em.”

Yoongi paused for a moment to take a sip of water, seeing that Jimin was listening to him intently. He was so absorbed in what he was saying that he hadn’t even moved to resume eating.
“My father, he…equipped me with the kinda things needed for a fucking great start in life: money, good education, fantastic healthcare and all of that shit. But then, he…he robbed me of some of the most essential things needed to-to grow up: parental love and support, freedom to play with other kids and learn independence. That, combined with the fact that I started coming into my…my sexuality at such a young age, it was hell. I can understand why the kid hates the idea of going back to school, but he needs to learn English.”

“I’m sure that it won’t be like school, it’ll be different,” Jimin suggested, as he moved to retrieve his fork and continue eating. “He’s eighteen now, so, he’ll probably be learning English with a bunch of young people and adults, right?”

Yoongi hummed in agreement at this, swallowing a small sip of wine and then placing the glass back down on the table.

“It was nice that we got to spend time with him today, and with Namo too,” Jimin continued, slowly twirling pasta around his fork. “The kid got some fantastic photos, I can’t wait to show you them later. They’ll look so good in the photo album, which I’m looking forward to filling up with so many snapshots of us.”

“Mmm, we’ll have to charge the camcorder at some point too, so we can check out the recordings,” Yoongi suggested, cutting into his own serving of food to spear another chunk of salmon and king crab with his fork. “It’ll be nice watching ‘em together.”

By the time that Yoongi was finished eating his dinner, shared side dishes and all, he felt incredibly full. But it was a pleasing fullness rather than an uncomfortable one, as he sat back in his seat and he gave his stomach a soft stroke.

Across the table, Jimin was also savouring the last of the tomato bread, mopping up the remains of the tagliatelle sauce with the soft bread.

“Baby boy, I know that I said it last time, and I know that I’ll just keep saying it, but that was the greatest dinner that I’ve ever had,” Jimin declared, holding up his glass whilst Yoongi topped it up with the remains of the Chardonnay for him.

The bottle was empty now, his boyfriend having drank three full and deep splashes from the large glass to his single small glass. That meant that Jimin’s cheeks were starting to look a little bit flushed from the wine, but his hand was steady and his words were far from slurred to show that he wasn’t
“You ain’t even had dessert yet, darling,” Yoongi pointed out, placing the bottle aside on the table.

“Dessert? I’ve already had birthday cake today, but, you know what? Fuck it, let’s share dessert!” Jimin exclaimed, making the two of them laugh heartily.

Just like the first dinner, Yoongi let Jimin choose whatever dessert that he wished to end their meal on a sweet note. His boyfriend selected tiramisu, which was served to them in a large glass bowl that showed off the layers of liqueur-soaked sponge and espresso-infused thick cream.

They didn’t so much as share the dessert as feed each other massive spoonfuls, enjoying the fact that they were alone and able to do so without any worries of being stared at. The cake was ridiculously moreish even when it was so rich, from the powerful taste of coffee and cocoa to the soft sponge. The scattering of cocoa powder on the top of the cream was just the right hint of sweet that mixed perfectly with the smooth bitterness of the coffee.

Unsurprisingly, blobs of the thick cream ended up on the ends of their noses, or caught in the corners of their lips, which they wiped free with their fingers to jokingly dab on each other’s cheeks. Jimin finally settled on kissing the little blobs free from his skin, as he whispered about how much sweeter that it tasted on his tongue coming from his lips and not the spoon.

It seemed that Jimin was a bit of a poet too, one that always knew the most sweetest things to say to him that made Yoongi’s heart soar until he felt a little breathless.

Whilst Jimin excused himself to go to the bathroom, Yoongi collected their belongings together and he left a more than generous tip for the waitress. Then he went to the front of the restaurant to pay with his card, waiting for the slightly lengthy transaction to process and then signing the receipt that the maître d’ presented him.

“I trust that you two gentlemen have had a pleasant evening?” he asked for the sake of conversation.

“Everything was perfect. The private room, the food and wine - my compliments to both you and the chef for your selections. Our server was helpful and her suggestions for side dishes enriched the meal. I’ll be sure to return again in the future, and to recommend your establishment to my acquaintances and associates,” Yoongi replied, slipping the pen back into the holder on the table and then accepting his card back. “Thanks for such an enjoyable evening.”
“And thank you for choosing Royal Octavia for all of your dining needs,” the maître d’ replied, giving him a wide smile as he handed him his copy of the receipt.

Yoongi accepted it, slipping it inside of his wallet along with his card. He was in the act of placing it inside of his inner jacket pocket when he caught sight of Jimin exiting the restaurant restrooms, and so he lifted his hand to wave at him.

Jumin paused in the act of crossing the flooring, his eyes widening in surprise before he gave him a quick smile. He changed his route to reach him, carefully weaving around the serving staff until he was beside the reservation desk.

“Here, darling,” Yoongi said, holding his dinner jacket out for him so that he could help him slip it back on.

“Thank you, baby boy,” Jimin almost purred, slipping his arm through one sleeve and fixing it up onto his shoulder before he slipped his arm through the second sleeve. He got the jacket on fully, turning around so that Yoongi could fix the lapels and his open shirt collar for him. “Oh, there’s a little bit of cream right there-”

Jumin moved to give him a quick kiss in the corner of his mouth, to apparently catch a little smear of cream that he had somehow missed with his napkin a moment ago.

Yoongi doubted that there was anything there at all, which was why he turned his face right before Jimin’s lips touched his to give him a proper kiss. It was enough to make his boyfriend let out a noise of surprise, but there was a smile on his face when he pulled away again that showed that he had enjoyed the kiss.

“You ready to go, Yoongi?” Jimin asked, slipping his arm through his to cosy up to his side.

Yoongi escorted Jimin out of the restaurant and out onto the curb, holding the door for him once more. The valet boy was waiting under a slight awning, and at the sight of them both, he reached inside of his vest to retrieve the right key.

“The cherry red BMW M1? I’ll bring it right to you, sir,” the valet boy said, moving off the step to cross the sidewalk.
In the time that it took for him to bring the car to them, Yoongi and Jimin just waited under the awning - to the side of the door as to stay out of the way. The warmth coming from Jimin’s body was highly pleasing, powerful woody notes of his Jules cologne coming from his neck so that Yoongi could hold his scent in his lungs with every single inhale. He could almost taste the lingering spicy notes on his tongue, though he was used to tasting the cologne mingling with beads of his lover’s sweat.

After a couple of minutes, the BMW M1 pulled up against the curb and the valet boy climbed out again. Yoongi accepted the key from him and he tipped him for his assistance, the young man thanking him in a surprised voice because of the considerable tip. He popped the passenger-seat door open for Jimin, slamming it shut behind him before climbing in behind the wheel.

It was only after slipping the keys into the ignition and taking hold of the steering-wheel with his left hand that Yoongi realised something - something highly amusing.

“Wait, I…I was ‘bout to start driving us back to The Haight,” he said with a soft chuckle, pausing in the act of twisting the key in the ignition. “But, then I realised that I…I’m bringing you back home with me instead.”

“Oh, you should take me there first,” Jimin suggested, shifting in his seat to look at him. “I can collect some of my things from Namo’s house and bring them with me, baby boy.”

Yoongi made a noise at this as he started the engine, disengaging the handbrake and slowly pulling the car away from the curb. His boyfriend had a good point, he did need to collect some of his belongings before moving in with him, and tonight was probably the best time for him to collect the essentials. All of the small things, they could be moved over the next few days until all of his possessions were safely stored in the home.

Their home, Yoongi thought in wonder.

Five minutes and several red lights later, Yoongi stalled on the curb outside of Namjoon’s house so that his boyfriend could jump out of the passenger-seat and race up the front steps.

Rather than let himself in using a key, Jimin knocked on the door because he clearly knew that Namjoon was home. He might just be asleep, but he would no doubt wake up after such a hard hammering on the wood.
The door swung inwards after a moment of waiting and Jimin entered the house, seemingly in the act of explaining everything to Namjoon judging from his rapid hand gestures. The two of them disappeared inside, the front door closing shut so that Yoongi could only look at the dimly lit windows whilst he waited. He saw shadows moving around the first-floor window, the one that he knew was the bedroom window as he had spent quite some time inside of it.

When Jimin exited the house again several minutes later, he had a canvas holdall bag shrugged up onto his shoulder, several plastic store bags in hand, and he was carrying his suits over his shoulder in their protective covers. He darted around to the back of the vehicle to pop the boot open, storing everything inside and then slamming it shut. Then he climbed back into the passenger-seat and he dragged his seatbelt in place across his ribs.

“OK, baby boy, I’m good to go,” Jimin said excitedly, reaching over to place his hand on his thigh and giving it a hard squeeze. “I can’t believe that this is actually happening.”

“Me neither,” Yoongi admitted, as he rolled the car back into the lane. “I, uh, I thought that I was gonna end up not asking you tonight, ‘cos I was so scared earlier. I was terrified again, Jimin, just like I used to get when we first met. But, I realised that I was terrified ‘cos I wanted this. I wanted you to come and live with me, and I was terrified that you’d say no to me, I think. I mean, I know a part of me was terrified ‘cos of the…the bad thoughts and feelings, but I was mostly scared of making a mistake and asking you too fast.”

“Yoongi, baby, this isn’t too fast,” Jimin promised, shaking his head softly so that his tousled hair bounced around his face. “I think that this is the perfect time for me to come and live with you. You’re getting so much better in loving and accepting yourself, but the next step in that process is learning to share even more intimacy. Sharing a home, spending more and more time together, that should really help you progress that little bit more towards full self-love and acceptance.”

“I-I don’t like living alone,” Yoongi stammered, quickly glancing between the road and his boyfriend in turn. “I hate going back to an empty home, Jimin, it…it feels so fucking cold and lonely. It’s why I like spending time with both you and Namjoon, sometimes, just so I ain’t gotta be alone.”

“You won’t be lonely anymore, baby boy,” Jimin promised with a smile. “Your big home will finally feel a lot more cosy, and warm too.”

“Jimin, ‘member that night, when we were on the phone together and I told you ‘bout how I’d to go and see my father? I, uh, I said something to him that day, something that I didn’t tell you ‘bout,” Yoongi said in a quiet voice, as he studied the road through the front window. “I told him that I’d a lover. I looked him right in the eyes and I told him that I’d a boyfriend.”
“What’d he say, Yoongi? What’d he do, hmm?” he asked, tightening his hold on his knee.

“…Nothing, absolutely nothing.”

Yoongi shifted his gaze from the road to see that Jimin was staring at him from the passenger-seat. His boyfriend’s face was hard to read, but he looked to be surprised by what he had just said. It was as if he had been expecting something worse, something much more worse than that.

“My whole life, I’ve been terrified of this idea that my father would go fucking insane if he found out that I’d a lover. I used to-to have nightmares ‘bout it happening - I still do, actually. I used to be terrified of the idea that he’d do something, that he’d fucking kuh-kill me.”

Yoongi paused for a moment to take a quick intake of breath, finding that his fingers weren’t exactly steady around the steering-wheel.

“It’s kinda crazy, I know it sounds fucking crazy to think that my father’d do such a thing, but-”

“But I used to think that my dad would kill me too, Yoongi,” Jimin interjected, his voice a quiet whisper. It sounded so much louder in the car, the silence only punctuated by the rumbling of the engine and the white noise from the streets coming in through the open windows. “I don’t think that it’s crazy at all that you’d think such a thing. He had a lot of power, a lot of hold over you. It’s no wonder that you thought those kinda things growing up.”

“Exactly, my father had that much power over me when I was a kid, I thought that he’d do it. But you’re moving in with me, Jimin. I bought that house to get away from ‘em both, and it’s finally hit me that I ain’t gotta worry ‘bout my parents anymore,” Yoongi explained, as he slowly turned around a corner at the end of the street. “I got power now too. I ain’t gotta see my father unless it’s for business, and these days, I don’t think he’s gonna wanna see me again for a long time. So, it don’t matter what he thinks anymore. I… I think, in time, I might be able to finally let go of the toxic voice at the back of mind that sounds like him. Y’know?”

“Oh, that’d be wonderful, baby boy. I really hope that you can start living without that. But, what about business? What if your father sabotages you as some kinda punishment, to try and upset you?”

“Shit, Jimin, I don’t even care ‘bout that anymore,” Yoongi replied with a firm head shake. “I never used to have much else but business, it’s why I was so fucking obsessed with it. If my father wants to
punish me by taking away more of my jurisdiction, I ain’t gonna give a shit. I’ll just keep working my streets and doing my job. Maybe, I need to step away from it a lil while, the constant working? Maybe, I should focus on the more important things in my life? Like my happiness, my health, like… you.”

“You’ve got so many men, Yoongi. I’m sure that they can handle most of your daily affairs, with you overseeing them to ensure that they stay in line,” Jimin suggested, before giving him a soft smile. “You deserve to be happy. Work shouldn’t come at the cost of your happiness, you should be able to find the perfect balance.”

Upon reaching his mansion, Yoongi slowly rolled his car onto the main drive so that he could kill the engine. He slipped the keys out of the ignition, popping his seatbelt free and climbing out of the driver-seat.

Jimin had also climbed out the vehicle, and he moved to go over to the boot so that he could open it up and start retrieving his belongings. His gaze wasn’t on the contents of the boot at all, but rather he shifted it all over the front of his mansion as he took in the sight of the exterior.

From the immaculate green hedges that fringed the property, to the cream and white walls of the building, Jimin took in every single inch with a great level of fascination. The massive bay window of his first-floor study caught his interest, along with the other large windows on the front of the house. He might just be trying to ascertain how many rooms were inside of the home, using the windows as an estimate.

It took Yoongi a second to realise that Jimin was actually looking at the mansion with such a high-level of interest because it was his home now too. They might just be sharing it, but this was where he was going to be living from now on. It was no wonder that he was staring at it with such a look of wonder.

Yoongi helped his boyfriend unload the boot, from the bags of clothing and personal effects, to the covered suits and birthday gifts that were all placed inside. He juggled the bags around so that he could collect his house key from his inner suit jacket pocket, slipping it into the lock and twisting hard. The door unlocked with a click, which was loud on the still air of the neighbourhood.

Unlike The Haight, where the sound of blaring car alarms and shouting voices out on the streets could be heard randomly during the night, Jimin was going to be shocked to find how quiet that Pacific Heights was. There were exceptions to the rule, of course, much like how Hoseok’s mansion was often filled with loud people and pounding music at all hours, but that was a rarity. For some reason, rich people seemed to greatly enjoy total silence.
The first thing that Yoongi did when he stepped inside was drop to remove his shoes; hearing Jimin entering the home behind him. He didn’t want to track any dirt across the flooring, especially not when the maid service had cleaned the house from top to bottom just today; leaving behind a clean and fresh scent in the air that was woody in nature. He left the assortment of bags beside the door with their shoes for now, as Jimin could sort them out soon enough.

“You want anything to drink, huh?” Yoongi asked, as he moved to enter the kitchen-area; his bare soles padding on the marble.

“Do you have any coffee? I think I need a little to sober me up from all of that wine, baby boy,” Jimin joked, stepping out of his loafers and gently lounging on the leather settee across the ground-floor.

“Yeah, I’ll make us some.”

Whilst he boiled water in the kettle on the stove and he filled the cafetière up with freshly ground coffee beans, Yoongi couldn’t help but watch his boyfriend out of the corner of his eye.

Jimin was unable to keep his gaze focused on one thing for longer than a couple of seconds, before glancing away at something else. As he did so, he stroked at the low leather settee that he was sitting on without rest - perhaps liking the smoothness of the real leather against his palm.

The ground-floor was rather bare of decoration, but there was enough points of interest present to catch his eye. Jimin studied the sitting-area, with its single settee, coffee table and stack of faxes, planners and notebooks that he liked to keep track of finance and business matters in. He gazed upon the distant fax machine in the corner, placed beside his typewriter, which was about all that Yoongi needed in terms of an office. He focused on the house plants sitting on the windowsill and in the corners of the room that had ample amounts of sunlight; probably trying to figure out if the lush and towering plants were real or fake.

Jimin even craned his head back to look at the ceiling lights, which were minimal to avoid glare in the sitting-area, but in greater amount to fully illuminate the kitchen-area during the evening hours. He took in the sight of the botticino honed marble flooring, the white walls that were plain of decoration, and then he finally turned his focus onto the kitchen. From the L-shaped dark wood worktop and sink, to the small counter at which Yoongi sometimes sat to eat late-evening dinners, Jimin studied it all.

As soon as the water had reached optimum temperature, hot but not fully boiling, Yoongi turned off the stove and he wrapped a dish towel around the kettle handle so that he could lift it up. He slowly
moved to go over to the cafetière, which was placed on the counter behind him.

Jimin had his arms folded on the back of the settee so that he could balance his chin comfortably on them. He was watching him making coffee with a great level of interest. The position was childish and cute, and Yoongi smiled at the sight as he poured the hot water into the glass bowl of the cafetière; the grinds instantly diffusing rich coffee that turned the water a light brown shade.

“So, what’d you think, mmm?” Yoongi asked, placing the mostly empty kettle back down onto the stove and then folding his arms on the counter. He cocked his head to look at the younger man whilst the coffee brewed, almost imitating his posture from across the room. “D’you, uh, d’you like it?”

“Baby boy, this house is beautiful,” Jimin declared, the enthusiasm in his voice making Yoongi laugh softly under his breath. “Don’t laugh! I’m being serious! I mean, I’m really moving in with you? Into this house, this mansion? I can’t believe it, I’m just so happy.”

“I’ll tell you what I told you before, darling - this ain’t a dream, you’re awake,” Yoongi replied with a soft nod, which made his boyfriend almost squeal in delight.

“Pinch me, baby! I think you’ve gotta pinch me, just so I know!” Jimin said, as he shifted to get up off the settee and he almost skipped over to the kitchen.

When Jimin leaned over the counter to bring their faces incredibly close, Yoongi lifted his hand to take hold of his left cheek. He gave it a firm and teasing tug, feeling his soft and smooth skin between his fingertips. It bounced back from his tug, supple and elastic, before the other man gave him a grin.

“Hmm, you should’ve went for the other cheeks,” Jimin joked, turning his face to offer his pinched cheek for a quick kiss.

Yoongi pressed his lips against the rounded and dusky pink apple of his cheek in a kiss, which had lifted right up to narrow his eyes into slits from the wideness of his grin.

“Yoongi, I just want you to know that if any of this gets too difficult for you, please don’t hesitate to tell me,” Jimin said in a soft voice, slowly bringing his ecstatic elation down to a more normal level. “I can move back in with Namo for a little while, if you need space and room to breathe. Don’t feel pressured into letting me stay here if it scares you, OK?”
“No, it’ll be fine, Jimin,” Yoongi said with a head shake, as he reached across the counter to place his hand down on top of his. “We’ll take our time, we’ll do this right. We’ll be together in the mornings and the evenings between work, it’ll be the exact same as always ‘cept you’re here - in my house, in the city always. I ain’t gonna be scared of that, there’s nothing to be scared of.”

“We can do it, right?” Jimin reiterated, turning his hand over so that he could squeeze hold of his hand tightly within the both of his. “We can have a nice, normal relationship, and we’ll be happy-”

“So happy,” Yoongi agreed with a nod, bringing their enjoined hands together to plant a kiss on the backs of Jimin’s knuckles.

“And healthy together. Wow, don’t cry again, Jimin,” Jimin half-joked, half-ordered, as he blinked rapidly and he turned his face away from him. He let out a quick laugh, the sound caught between amusement and a little close to a gasp for breath. “No more tears of joy!”

The strong aroma of coffee coming from the cafetière signalled that the coffee was finally brewed, and so Yoongi gave him another quick kiss on his knuckles before letting go of his hand. He retrieved two small cups from a hook over the sink, placing them down on the counter. He pressed down on the pump on the top of the cafetière to trap the grinds at the bottom, ensuring that no irritating blobs would float around their cups and get onto their tongues - bitter and disgusting.

As Yoongi poured out the two cups of coffee, Jimin perused the refrigerator and cupboard shelves with that wonderfully eager curiosity of his. He must have located something that he liked, for he saw him reaching inside to grab something.

When Jimin closed the refrigerator door, there was a plump and succulent strawberry sitting right between his full lips. It was fresh from just this morning’s grocery delivery, just like the rest of the goods in the kitchen. He peeled the spider-leg-like leaves free from the berry so that he could suck it into his mouth, moving to sidle up behind him and slip his arms around his waist.

“I like this counter,” Jimin almost purred down his ear, his nose and lips bumping against his ear and neck. “I’d love making you breakfast in this kitchen. You could sit on that stool right there and watch, or make the coffee for us - you’re good at making coffee.”

“It’s hardly difficult, darling,” Yoongi replied with a laugh, fighting the urge to lift up his shoulders from the ticklish contact.
“Hmm, I’d love sucking you off against this counter,” Jimin continued, his words making a sudden heat plummet down into Yoongi’s stomach, so that he had to bite down on his lip to suppress a soft moan. “Wouldn’t that feel so good? The cold wood against your bare ass, my hot mouth just—”

Jimin’s tongue rolled out to lick a hot and wet stripe right up the side of his neck from the edge of his blouse collar to his ear. The broad of his tongue was so hot against his skin that it almost burnt, but not as much as the delicious throb of excitement in the pit of Yoongi’s stomach.

When Yoongi shuddered with a little gasp, it was enough to make Jimin start drunkenly giggling, pressing a quick kiss against his throat.

“Oh, baby boy, I love it when you do that,” the younger man remarked, tightening his hold around his waist in a quick back hug before releasing him from his arms. “It’s so cute, you do it in bed all of the time. It really turns me on.”

After adding a splash of milk to the two cups, Yoongi carried them over to the settee so that they could sit down for a moment and talk. Even if just for a couple of minutes over the hot drinks rather than go upstairs, just to help make Jimin feel more settled and comfortable in his home.

There was something hanging in the air between the two of them, the first blossoming buds of sexual tension that would start blooming over the night as a result of certain looks, touches and words. By the end of the evening, Yoongi knew that something would happen between them: be it simple touching and anal stimulation, or be it passionate kisses and soft humping under the covers until the heat from their gyrating bodies was enough to leave them both coated in sweat and gasping for breath against each other’s mouths.

Yoongi could sense it, just as much as he could sense his own growing want for it. It made him nibble on his lower lip as he nursed his cup of coffee in front of his mouth, watching Jimin folding his legs up to the side on the cushion comfortably so that he could face him. Yes, he wanted tonight to end in sexual satisfaction for the both of them, and he was trying to find a way to let Jimin know that he did.

As he inhaled the roasted scent of the fresh coffee, Yoongi shifted his gaze to look over at the bags right in front of the door. They were in a messy pile where they had left them, one of the bags having opened up so that a single white sneaker was lying on the marble.

“What’d you bring with you, Jimin?” he asked, just for the sake of starting conversation.
“I packed some clothes, shoes, the suits - I need those for tomorrow, right? That’s when I start working my new job?”

Yoongi hummed at this to let him know that he was correct, and so Jimin carried on talking.

“Um, I brought all of my toiletries and makeup, my jewellery. I don’t actually own that much, Yoongi. I’m pretty minimalist when it comes to possessions that aren’t essential. I think that the last couple of items I brought with me are my vinyls and my birthday gifts - that’s it.”

“Well, there’s plenty of room,” Yoongi remarked, swallowing a quick sip of coffee. “All of your things’ll fit just fine, darling.”

Jimin suddenly placed his cup of coffee down on the table so that he could get to his feet and move over to the door. He collected his shoes from one of the plastic bags, placing his white sneakers, two sets of leather loafers, and a pair of red and white Keds down onto the metal shoe rack. That was all that he seemed to own, and the contrast between his casual shoes and Yoongi’s dozen pairs of dress shoes, was enough to make them both start laughing.

“I’m starting off small,” Jimin suggested, twisting to look back over his shoulder at him with a grin.

“With Seokseok’s assistance, you’ll fill that rack up in no time,” Yoongi added, which made the pair of them burst out laughing again. “Shit, we’ll have to buy a new shoe rack!”

Yoongi noticed the way that the term ‘we’ slipped out so casually, just like it had done so earlier. It was enough to make his laughter trail off for a few seconds as he processed this fact, finding himself smiling at how right it felt saying such a thing.

“Oh, baby boy, you’re gonna need a new dresser just for the underwear that he bought me,” Jimin said, as he moved to join him on the settee again and he grabbed his still hot cup of coffee. “Speaking of underwear, I’m wearing those Calvin Klein briefs, the special ones that I told you about…”

“Oh, yeah?” Yoongi asked in a teasing manner, seeing the way that Jimin gave him a mischievous look from behind the rim of his cup. “You mean the tiny ones, the ones that make your ass look great?”
“Those exact ones,” he agreed, nodding so that a thick lock of hair fell forward across his brow. “Do you wanna see them, baby boy?”

“I, uh, I think I wanna see what’s inside of ‘em more,” he retorted whip-crack quick, his joke catching the other man by surprise.

Jimin almost choked on his swallow of coffee, lowering the cup and covering his lips to make sure that he didn’t dribble any down onto his new white shirt. He reached over to give him a hard shove to the shoulder, and Yoongi luckily didn’t slosh any of his coffee onto his shirt either.

“Then what’re we waiting for, baby boy?” Jimin asked, taking another deep swig of his coffee before placing the cup down on the table. “It’s getting pretty late, I think that we should go upstairs, hmm?”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment, a sip of coffee still lingering on his tongue. He knew that Jimin was not so discreetly hinting about the fact that they should go upstairs and into his bedroom for sexual intimacy, and though he very much wanted to do so, he found himself struggling to speak.

Go upstairs into his bedroom, with Jimin, for the very first time? The thought was enough to fill him with a sudden wash of nerves, nerves that he hadn’t felt upon letting Jimin enter his home. His home was his shelter, his sanctuary, and his bedroom was his most treasured safe place…and now Jimin was finally going to enter that space.

“Do you want to, baby boy?” Jimin suddenly asked before he could reply, placing his hand down on his knee. His palm was warm from the heat of the coffee cup through his suit trousers, his touch seeping through his skin and down into his very bones. “If you’re tired, if you’re not feeling it, we can just spend the night together another way; hmm? We can look at the Polaroids and maybe watch the camcorder tapes in bed, if you want to?”

“Yeah, it’s just…my bedroom, my…my bed,” Yoongi said in a soft voice, as he placed his own cup down on the table. “Shit, that hit me a lil hard, Jimin. I-I knew that it’d happen, I thought ‘bout it a lot but now it’s actually happening and I just…”

“It’s OK, just take a moment, baby,” Jimin suggested, shifting his hand up to his back so that he could rub at it gently. “This is a big step for you, it’s OK to be a little anxious.”

Yoongi lowered his head to take slow and deep inhales of breath, closing his eyes as he did so. His
heart was beating a little out of rhythm in his chest, and not only from his nerves.

“Jimin, I wanna go upstairs,” Yoongi said in a whisper-soft voice, lifting his head up to hold his gaze. “I wanna do something with you, I wanna pleasure you. Just…just lemme go slow, ‘k? Lemme feel you, lemme take control. Help me feel safe, yeah? I’ve never…y’know, I’ve never done anything like this…not in my bedroom.”

“Of course, baby boy,” Jimin replied, his voice as soft as his palms as he cupped his face in his hands. “Show me around the place, hmm? Let’s put all of my shit away and just talk and relax. There’s no rush. It’s all in your hands, you can start and stop whenever you like. Just talk to me, communicate with me so that we understand each other.”

“I want tonight to be special,” Yoongi whispered, as he slowly got to his feet. “Today went so perfect for you, and I’ve felt so good all day long. I just…now, I wanna make love with you, Jimin, the best way that I can, and then I wanna fall asleep with you in my bed. That’s what I want, it’s all that I want. I-I’ve been dreaming and thinking ‘bout it all week long.”

“Good, because I’ve been dreaming about you all week long too,” Jimin said, giving him a soft kiss on the lips that made Yoongi’s fingers tremble at his sides.

Jimin collected his belongings together whilst Yoongi locked the front door securely, and then he crossed the ground-floor to go up to the first-floor study, guest bedrooms and bathroom. His boyfriend stopped on this floor so that he could check it out, and so Yoongi shifted to sit down at his study table beside the bay window; giving him time to learn the layout of all of the different rooms whilst he collected himself.

Yoongi had left his letter box on the table, the one that contained all of his grandmother’s letters. He had stored Jimin’s poem inside of the box too, but it wasn’t finished just yet. He still had a little more work to do on it, both on the lines and perfecting his calligraphy skills. When it was ready, he could present it to Jimin with pride, and hopefully he would love it as much as he had enjoyed him reading poetry to him on the telephone that night.

“These are for guests, right, baby boy?” Jimin asked, popping his head into the guest room to the left of the floor. “Whoa, they’re so big! I think these rooms are bigger than the apartment that I grew up in!”

The guest rooms were rather sizeable, containing a Queen Sized bed, wardrobe, desk and small table for guests to use for various purposes. When his grandparents had came to visit him shortly after he had moved in, they had all shared breakfast around one of the tables - the sight from the massive
window the exact same view of the distant bay so that the guest rooms were flooded with natural sunlight during the day. Yoongi had never had enough guests present to require both rooms be used at once.

“They’re beautiful,” Jimin said, exiting the guest room and carefully stepping over the telephone wire that was stretched around the floor. “Imagine how wonderful it’d be to throw a celebration in the house, like, for a birthday or special event?”

Yoongi made a soft noise at this, tracking the younger man across the study as he went into the other two rooms to check them out. The guest bathroom made him let out a surprised cry, Yoongi snorting laughter under his breath as the sound echoed off the tiled walls.

“OK, so, this is your private little reading spot,” Jimin remarked with a smile, as he emerged from the bathroom and he moved to join him at the table. He turned his head to look out of the window, eyeing the view that was stretched out in front of the two of them.

Though it was nighttime, the view from the study bay window was still magnificent to observe. The long rolling hill of Pacific Heights running down into the rest of the city was the main focus.

At this late evening hour, cars were lazily drifting up and down the wide stretch of road with their head and tail lights on like neon blue-tinged white, yellow and red stars. The streetlights and distant building lights also twinkled back at their eyes. Way down at the bottom of this slope, stretching out across the horizon until they could see no more, was the pitch-black waves of the San Francisco Bay. The window was open just a crack, so that fresh air was bleeding into the study to gently caress their faces.

“Wow, baby boy, look at that,” Jimin whispered, as he cupped his chin in his palm and he sighed softly. “That view, just for the both of us.”

“You should see it in the morning, darling,” Yoongi remarked, looking between the window and his lover in turn. “5am: the sunrise from this window’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen - not including you.”

“Yoongi!” Jimin gushed, covering his mouth just as he let out a sweet laugh.

“I drink coffee sitting right here some mornings, I just like to watch the city wake up and come to life,” Yoongi continued, smugly smiling because he had made Jimin giggle so much with his
hyperbolic compliment. “Maybe, we can both watch it together tomorrow, Jimin?”

“I’d love to watch the sunrise with you, baby boy. Just wake me up in time, drag my ass downstairs if you need to,” he said, looking away from the window to run his gaze across the rest of the study. “Do you have any poetry books on those shelves, hmm?”

“No, not yet. I should get some, right?”

“Uhuh, buy the best poetry books there is,” Jimin agreed, as he got out of his seat and he moved to get a better look at the bookshelves. “We can sit here and take turns reading them to each other, morning or evening. I’ll read all of the simple ones, you can read the ones with the big words.”

“That’d be lovely, darling. You should store your vinyls on the bookshelf,” Yoongi suggested, watching Jimin examining all of the different book spines with a great level of interest. “It’s the best place for ‘em in the house: my books, your vinyls, our shared interests sharing space together.”

One by one, Jimin retrieved his vinyl records from one of the bags and he placed the them onto the middle bookshelf, carefully stacking them in place to the side of the books that Yoongi had yet to finish reading. He couldn’t arrange them like books, on account of their thin and plain spines, but he clearly had his own storage system in mind that he was utilising to keep them organised.

It crossed Yoongi’s mind as he watched him doing so that Jimin was going to need his very own vinyl player, so that he could listen to his records. He found himself thinking about what it would be like if Jimin was to finish working before him: the sound of his music echoing throughout the house and signalling that he was already home and waiting for him; maybe in the act of preparing dinner for them both or just simply dancing around the house in his own little world.

Unsurprisingly, Yoongi found his heart doing that wonderful thing again - the soaring sensation that felt like his heart was slowly expanding in his chest.

“Where am I going to hang this baby?” Jimin asked, as he held up the pristine vinyl record that Namjoon had bought him as a gift. “I was planning on hanging it in Namo’s house somewhere, but now that I’m living with you…ah, I dunno where it should go!”

“I think it should hang here,” Yoongi said, shifting in his seat to look around the study. “These walls are plain, we should decorate ‘em; right?”
“There, that’s exactly where it can hang!” Jimin declared, as he gestured at a free space right above a small display table that had an imported Korean vase on it. “It’ll look so good here, right?!"

“I’ll order a frame tomorrow, just for you, darling,” he remarked, seeing Jimin’s face lighting up in glee as he carefully slipped the special vinyl case onto the shelf for safekeeping.

Yoongi placed his coffee mug down on the table, freeing up his hands so that he could grab Jimin’s remaining belongings. He collected the canvas bag filled with clothing and toiletries, whilst Jimin hefted the heavy collection of suits folded over his arm. Then he escorted his boyfriend up the second flight of stairs to enter his bedroom.

The first thing that Yoongi did was drop the holdall so that he could take the suits from Jimin. He had to hang them on the front of the wardrobe first, so that he could neatly organise the contents and create space for the other man’s clothing. It wouldn’t be too hard fitting Jimin’s clothing inside of the wardrobe, for it was mostly his suits, shirts and trousers that would need hanging to keep them free from creases. His tee-shirts and jeans could be folded in a dresser, like they usually were back in Namjoon’s home.

“Oh my god, is that real?” Jimin suddenly asked, as he stared down at the tiger skin rug that was spread across the flooring close to his bed.

It was the first thing that had caught Jimin’s eyes upon entering the bedroom, the unmissable massive pelt rug that took up quite a lot of light wooden floor space. It was a rich copper that was threaded with hints of fiery red and earthen brown, and black stripes of varying lengths and widths rippled across the length of pelt. The edges of the rug were snow white, which contrasted against the other shades beautifully. Thankfully, the head, legs and tail had been removed so that it didn’t look so ghastly.

“Yeah, it was a gift from my grandfather,” Yoongi explained, watching his boyfriend hunkering down to touch the rug just so he could feel the soft pelt. “It’s imported from Korea from a long-standing business partner- a Siberian tiger hunted on the military border, apparently. He has one in his private study, my father has several all around the family home - with the goddamn stuffed heads still attached.”

“I always thought that tiger fur would feel rough,” Jimin remarked, as his fingers threaded through the thick pelt and caused it to ripple and gleam in the ceiling lights. “But it’s soft, it’s so soft, like stroking a pet cat.”

Jimin shifted so that he could stretch out on the rug, lying down on it to fully feel the fur against his
body: from his face to his very toes. He closed his eyes as he did so, sighing as he pressed his cheek against the exquisitely soft pelt - which Yoongi knew from experience felt like silk against the skin.

Yoongi moved to join him, gently lowering himself down in the space between Jimin’s slightly pulled-up thighs and stomach. He slotted in place perfectly, folding his legs up in front of him to hug them against his chest.

“My grandfather said that all Min clan men should own one, it’s a symbol of our heritage now,” Yoongi explained slowly, his toes curling up to sink into the luxuriously soft pelt. “I can’t get rid of it, even though I dislike it, I know that it means a lot to him. I dunno, I think he’s still holding out hope that I’ll have a son or something…”

“It’s beautiful, beautiful but cruel. I guess it’s fitting that such a thing should be a symbol for your clan, Yoongi,” Jimin remarked in a soft voice, as he stroked at the pelt once more. “Why don’t you like it? Do you think it’s cruel too, or is it something else?”

“Pft, my father think that it’s a symbol of prowess - the mighty hunter that’s brave and deadly. He has these things hanging on walls like paintings so that every single man that enters any one of his offices stares at ‘em and thinks that he’s powerful. All I see’s a piece of skin: stolen, useless now that it’s separate from the beast,” Yoongi explained, as he placed his hand down on top of Jimin’s to stroke his thumb along his skin. “When my father used to summon me to talk business, back before I left that house for good, he’d always do so in a room with one of those pelts inside. I’d listen to him calling me a monster, an animal, and I’d just look at the stuffed head, caught in a snarling growl of agony, and I’d think ‘bout how it felt like he was skinning me alive too.”

“Come here,” Jimin said, lifting his arm up invitingly and gesturing at him to join him on the floor. “Come on, come here, baby boy.”

Yoongi shifted to lie down on the rug too, lying on his side as close to Jimin as he could. He even slotted his legs between his so that they could get that little bit closer. His boyfriend slipped his arm over his side to get him into an embrace, his palm settling in the curved dip of his lower back.

“What’s the matter, hmm? Talk to me, tell me what’s going on in that gorgeous little head of yours, Yoongi.”

“I don’t belong, Jimin,” Yoongi whispered, pressing his brow against his as he let him hold him close. “My whole life, I’ve been tryna be something I ain’t. I’ve been tryna prove to my father and his father that I’m this…this big, strong man that can carry the clan into the future, but I can’t. I ain’t big, I ain’t strong, I’m a ho-hom- I’m gay, and it’s all just fucking fake. I hate it, I hate looking at this
stupid rug and I hate seeing my tattoo reflected back at me, they just remind me of how weak I really am.”

“Yoongi, remember what we’ve talked about, hmm? Being gay doesn’t mean that you’re weak, that you’re any less a man than any hetero guy is,” Jimin said in a soft voice, as he rubbed soft circles against the smooth cotton of his suit jacket.

“I know, I know that, Jimin, but they don’t,” he hastily replied, shifting on the rug so that his cheek brushed against the soft fur. “I know that my father looks at me and he sees this…this half-man, this thing that he doesn’t wanna call his son. That’s why I hate this fucking rug so much, ’cos it reminds me of my failures.”

“Do you wanna know something, Yoongi? When I see tigers, I don’t think about how they’re brave and deadly or anything like that. When I see tigers, I think that they’re beautiful. I think that they’re free, the way that they can roam around the jungle without fear. I don’t see beasts, or deadly killers, I see them for exactly what they are. Just like the way that I see you.”

Jimin paused for a moment to think his words over, before continuing.

“Maybe, you don’t feel like you fit in the clan because you don’t pride yourself on those things like your father and your grandfather do. But maybe that’s because the clan means different things for you?”

Yoongi furrowed his brow lightly at this, holding his gaze as he thought his words over intently.

“You can’t choose family, baby boy. In my case, my elders and ancestors don’t mean a thing to me because I never knew them, I was never raised to put emphasis on caring about them. Your heritage means a lot to you, and I respect the fact that you care so much about these things. But you need to stop seeing yourself through the eyes of your parents, OK? You need to start thinking about what aspects of your life are important in relation to that. You’re carrying on your grandfather’s legacy, that’s important, that’s honourable.”

“I know, but I can’t pass the legacy on,” Yoongi whispered, tightening his hold on the fur rug to snag it between his fingers.

“Then that part doesn’t matter, Yoongi,” Jimin suggested, as he fixed a lock of hair back behind his ear for him. “If you only focus on the things that you can’t do, then you’ll never realise the things
that you can. What you can do is always more important than what you can’t, because that’s what changes things. So, please, try and think about those things instead, hmm?”

Yoongi shifted to prop his weight up on one elbow, leaning over to press a kiss against Jimin’s hair rather than say anything to him. He didn’t really know what to say in reply to his lover’s moment of wisdom, but he would be sure to reflect on it and share his thoughts on the matter. He slowly got to his feet again so that he could go back over to the wardrobe.

Whilst Yoongi carefully stored Jimin’s clothing inside of the wardrobe and dresser drawers for him, Jimin ended up wandering around the bedroom to examine everything. The tiger skin rug had arrested his attention for quite some time, but there were more things to study: like the California King Size bed, the art prints on the wall and the large en-suite bathroom.

“Wow, Yoongi, you really dig erotic art, huh?” Jimin asked, stopping in front of a particular imported shunga piece so that he could stare up at it with wide eyes.

The piece in question happened to be a print of a Kitagawa Utamaro woodblock painting - that of a young male prostitute being lubricated in preparation for sex. It was one of the more tame pieces that Yoongi possessed, one that wasn’t intensely explicit, but just enough so to be titillating.

From the sight of the boy’s exposed buttocks and testicles, which were high up and revealed to the viewer, to the client amply coating his fingers in saliva - it was erotic but without a shocking amount of nudity. Most of the shunga prints didn’t even contain nudity, rather just exposed buttocks and grotesquely oversized penises that were presumably symbolic.

Yoongi didn’t care for the oftentimes cartoonish genitalia and leering older men’s faces, but he greatly enjoyed the sight of the boy’s supple limbs and soft, rounded buttocks. He had used to find himself torn between two different feelings whenever he had looked upon the erotica.

Sometimes, Yoongi had wanted to feel another man’s supple limbs in his hands, had wanted to bury himself deep within that powerful heat inside of him and just rock against those soft buttocks.

Other times, Yoongi had felt a little like the boy, laid out bare and ready for penetration - desperate for it, like on the nights that he had caved and had ordered massage boys to scratch that itch for him.

“It’s funny, I wouldn’t have thought that you’d have owned all of this erotica back when you were still really repressed around me,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, as he folded his arms over his chest and
he shifted his gaze from frame to frame. “But now, now that you’ve started opening up more and
you don’t hide yourself away from me, I can easily understand it. You needed something, right?
Something to hold onto, something to get pleasure from?”

Yoongi hummed in agreement at this, closing the wardrobe at last and slowly moving to join him in
front of the large print.

“This bedroom is your safe place, it’s a sanctuary for you to be yourself and take off your skin,”
Jimin continued, gesturing up at the print. “I’ll bet that those massage boys that you used to order,
you didn’t bring them into your bedroom. This room’s too special for them to have seen it, right?”

“Yeah, ‘cept for Seokseok and the maids, you’re the only person to actually step inside of my
bedroom, Jimin,” Yoongi confirmed, slipping his arm around the other man’s waist. “It’s ‘cos I trust
you that much to…to accept me, to understand me and love me. I feel comfortable with you being in
my bedroom, with you seeing me at my most vulnerable.”

Jimin moved his head to focus on the adjacent wall, eyeing a set of black and white photographs that
were all hanging together in a grouping.

Yoongi didn’t even recall the photographer’s name, just some local gay college kid that had had a
great camera and an even greater eye for borderline pornography that had been displayed at an art
gallery. He had purchased quite a lot of the kid’s prints upon viewing them, and those that weren’t
currently displayed on the wall were stored away in a leather portfolio with the rest of his art prints.

“There’s a lot of…cock worship going on,” Jimin remarked, as he dragged his eyes away from one
of the photographs to look at him.

The photograph in question that had caught his eye the most was a large black and white print of an
errection through a pair of tight briefs. The cotton was moulded to it, stretched around the man’s cock
until the girth was straining against the material; the ridge of his cock head obvious enough to see. It
was a personal favourite of Yoongi’s from the collection, a powerfully erotic image that often made
him feel pangs of arousal in the pit of his stomach whenever his gaze focused on it for a few seconds.

It was placed in a grouping with a random assortment of nude males that the photographer had
snapped photographs of: thin and pretty-faced young white men casually lounged in bed and chairs,
their thighs spread wide open to show the thick and sparse thatchs of their pubic hair and flaccid
penises. Some had facial hair and tattoos, some had little scattering of freckles and birthmarks on
their naked limbs. They might have been friends, acquaintances, boyfriends or one-night stands -
whoever they were to the photographer didn’t really matter to Yoongi. He just appreciated their
beauty on the surface-level.

“I can’t help but notice it, it’s like the main focus of most of these pieces - it’s all about the cock, nothing else. Even the paintings have got huge cocks in them, baby boy, it’s ridiculous,” Jimin finished, turning to look at him. “Why?”

“I, uh, I like cocks,” Yoongi admitted, before letting out a quick laugh.

Jimin burst out laughing at his reply, reaching up to cover his mouth with his fingers; his eyes crinkling deeply at the corners from his grin. He had really tickled him with his words, even though it hadn’t exactly been a joke.

“Yeah, you really like cocks, baby boy,” Jimin agreed with a vigorous nod. “You like my cock the most though, right?”

Yoongi could only guffaw at this cheeky question, reaching up to rub at the back of his neck.

“You must, you’ve got a Polaroid of it,” Jimin continued, his grin growing even wider so that he could see almost every single one of his teeth. “A lot of guys, they really dig cock worship, but they really only dig it when it’s about themselves. They like guys kneeling in front of them and touching them, telling them how big they are and how bad they want their cock. But they don’t really seem to appreciate cocks any other way - it’s sad.”

“Are you into it? Into…cock worship?”

“Oh, I love cocks in all ways, baby boy. I mean, it’s so fun kneeling in front of a guy and just taking a moment to appreciate him, you know? Just give it a nice stroke and kiss, just look at it and tell him about how big or thick is it - whatever, I might lie at that point. I’ve done it in the past, right before blowjobs. Sometimes, I find it kinda exciting, it feels pretty dirty,” Jimin explained. “But it’s not just about the sex for me, I just like cocks. Like you, I just like looking at them, sometimes.”

“D’you, uh, d’you like blowjobs?” Yoongi asked in a quiet voice, as he glanced between the photograph and his face in turn. “You’ve offered to…to blow me a couple of times before. Is it ‘cos you like it?”

“I’ve got a talent for it,” Jimin admitted, sticking his tongue out to run it along the inside of his cheek
and distend it cheekily. “I’ve got plenty of experience, so, I feel like I’m good at it. I used to get praised a lot more sucking dick than taking it, and you know just how much I like being called a good boy, Yoongi. At least I got to cum most of the time, even if it was just from touching myself. What about you, do you like the idea?”

“I, uh, I ain’t really done it properly,” Yoongi said in that same quiet voice. “I-I really wanna do it. I think ‘bout it a lot, Jimin.”

“You just really want a cock in your mouth, don’t you, baby boy?” Jimin remarked, cocking his head in the direction of the erotica on his walls. “You want a guy to play with your hair and tell you that you’re so good at it, that you’re so hot when you suck on him, don’t you?”

Yoongi could only nod at this, struggling to reply because his throat suddenly felt far too tight. It was as if Jimin had peeked right into his mind, into his darkest little fantasies that he had never told him about before. He had told him about the sexual positions that he craved to experience with him: of having sex in the bathtub and riding him in bed. But he had never told him about the little daydreams in which he had wriggled under the covers to take Jimin’s still stiffening morning erection into his mouth; about the softly whispered words of praise and weight of his palm on the back of his neck.

“Oh, that’s so fucking cute. I want you to suck me off one time, baby boy,” Jimin whispered against his neck, his breath hot on his skin. “I can teach you how to do it right, I can guide you. I might pull on your hair though, I can get a little rough when I’m needy.”

“Shit, Jimin,” Yoongi almost wheezed, unconsciously leaning into his side and feeling his boyfriend slipping his arms around his waist. He found his words spilling free in such a mess that he couldn’t quite seem to say them right. “My bed, please, just - shit.”

As their lips met in a kiss, Yoongi was guided across the bedroom through Jimin’s touch alone - their bare feet gliding across the smooth wood and their toes bumping together with every bumbling step. He felt the edge of bed against the backs of his thighs, almost stumbling to hit the mattress until he recovered.

“I think what you were trying to say,” Jimin said between hard and fast kisses, his hands roaming up and down his sides to try and get him out of his suit jacket, “is ‘darling, I’ve been waiting forever to…to fuck in this bed’. Is that right?”

Yoongi dropped his dinner jacket down onto the bed without much thought at all for the material getting creased. As he heard it rustling, he reached up to grab hold of Jimin’s jacket too. His fingers sank into the blue velvet, his blunt nails scratching at it until he managed to find the lapels and grip
onto them. With a hard tug, he was dragging his jacket off too and letting it drop to the floor.

Jimin’s throat was exposed to him once more, the top buttons of his shirt undone to reveal it and the plane of his smooth chest. Yoongi sucked open-mouthed kisses into the curve of his neck as he undone the rest of the buttons, his fingers tugging at them in his bid to get them to open.

“Huh, that feels so good,” Jimin sighed, rolling his head back to reveal even more of his throat to him, to encourage him to suck little kisses against his Adam’s Apple. “I love it when you kiss my neck like that, baby boy.”

Yoongi helped him out of his shirt after a momentary struggle, his hands feeling the bumps of his shoulder blades until his fingertips were brushing against the waistband of his trousers. One of his hands roamed up to his hair, to sink into it and snag a tight hold of his tousled locks. He felt Jimin’s hands moving from his waist to start tugging at the pearlescent buttons of his blouse, and that was when the first moan escaped his slack lips. It quivered as it did so, catching in his throat.

“It’s OK, baby boy, you don’t need to get nervous,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, as he slowly unbuttoned his blouse for him and he slipped it down to his elbows.

But it felt different than before, in a way that Yoongi really couldn’t seem to explain to him right now.

Jimin was actually going to worship him, to worship his cock so that he was looking right at it, touching him and praising him intimately. It wasn’t like anything that they had done together before, and there was indeed a sense of it being dirty even when he wanted to try it with him. Between that and the fact that it was happening in his bedroom, it was enough to make him feel slightly nervous.

Yoongi let his blouse hit the floor, the soft material slipping free from his arms to land with a rustling sound. Jimin’s hands found his bare waist to hold onto him, and so he instinctively slipped his arms around his neck to hold onto him. The position encouraged Jimin to press kisses all over him: from his cheek to his jawline, all over his neck and the jut of his collarbone until he was sucking soft kisses into the rounded ball of his shoulder.

“Fuck, Jimin,” Yoongi gasped, curving his back with another moan as his nails sank into his skin of his back. A tremble ran through his body at Jimin’s touch, at the way that his fingers trailed down the soft curve of his stomach to the front of his trousers. “I’m sorry, I don’t mean to be nervous, I…”
“Do you wanna do this, Yoongi?” Jimin suddenly asked, pausing in the act of undoing his belt for him so that he could glance up at him. He could no doubt sense the overwhelming nerves that were coming from his body, the slight shaking in his fingers as he held onto him. “It’s OK if you don’t, but remember - you need to tell me.”

“It’s ‘k, I-I wanna do it,” Yoongi confirmed with a soft nod. “I’m just nervous, Jimin. Just…just be patient with me, please.”

“Sure thing, baby boy,” he said in a soothing voice. “Sit down, right here on the bed, just for me.”

Yoongi lowered himself down onto the mattress just like he had requested, Jimin getting down onto his knees in front of him. His hair was hanging forward over his eyes, and so he reached up to brush it back with his leg hand; the diamonds in his new ring glinting in the light to catch Yoongi’s eye.

“Let’s go nice and slow, OK?” Jimin suggested in a soft voice, reaching over to take hold of his belt again so that he could slowly pull the lengths through the buckle and open it. He popped open the top button of his trousers and he grabbed hold of the zipper to run it down. “Are you wearing underwear, hmm?”

“Nuh-no,” Yoongi stuttered, his fingers sinking into the covers to hold onto them tightly. “I ain’t wearing underwear, Jimin.”

Jimin pulled the flaps of black material aside to fully open up his trousers, which made his erection stir and shift inside of the loose fabric in a bid to get free. He had to reach inside to help it do so, gently slipping his stiff cock free from his trousers and then letting go again.

For a few seconds, Jimin just stared at his erection, his hands placed on his thighs so that he could feel the heat of his palms through the thin wool. He shifted his gaze across his cock, taking in the full sight of it rising from the light thatch of his dark pubic hair, and then he lifted his gaze up to look at him.

“Yoongi, baby, I can’t believe that it took me this long to do this to you,” Jimin said, as he moved to take him in hand again. “I can’t believe that I’ve had a cock this perfect in my very hands and I haven’t praised you like you deserve.”

Yoongi sucked his lower lip to nibble at it, feeling Jimin’s thumb rubbing soft whorls against the underside of his head. The contact was highly pleasing, caused little tingles of pleasure to start
shooting up into his belly.

Jimin was talking in such a soft and sweet tone, his touch light and not at all rough or rushed. Between his tender touch to his soothing words, he could feel his nerves starting to melt away. If it wasn’t for the fact that Jimin was looking between his cock and his face slowly in turn, Yoongi would have closed his eyes to maximise the calming effect that he was having on him.

“I love your cock, Yoongi,” Jimin praised, his voice a soft and husky purr as he started rubbing both of his hands over his cock to touch it, to massage at it. “I love how it feels in my hand, when I wrap my fingers around your thickness. I love the heat and weight of it. Oh, but I love the way that you ooze precum all over your head and it gets so wet and flushed - I just wanna suck it free when it twitches like that, baby boy.”

Yoongi swallowed hard at this, his grip on the covers so tight that he could feel his tendons cabling to ripple the surface of his skin. His boyfriend just seemed to know what to say to him, and exactly how to touch him to make throbs of pleasure start shooting up into his belly and a wonderful heat start spreading through his body.

Jimin moved so that he could bring his face close, so that he could start nuzzling against his thighs to edge closer and closer to his crotch whilst he resumed massaging his cock between his two hands. His touch was still gentle, but there was a firmness to the way that he would knead around his base and head every few seconds; just to make the massage more intense and stimulating.

Yoongi could only watch as Jimin rubbed his cheek against his shaft, his eyes half-lidded and his lips slack and quivering as he let out a soft moan. The sound made a shiver run down his spine, more prickling heat pooling in his loins in response.

Jimin rubbed his face all over his cock, letting out moans of pleasure as he did so. He breathed his hot breath out against him, he mouthed along his length but he didn’t properly kiss or dart his tongue out to lick at his cock because he knew that such things could make him uncomfortable.

Yoongi moved his hand to instinctively place it on the top of his head, tangling his fingers in his messy hair as Jimin lightly caressed his cock head across the softness of his cheek.

“Fuck, can I kiss it? No sucking, OK? Nothing like that, just a couple of kisses?” Jimin asked in that soothing voice of his, as he wrapped his fingers around the base of his cock to hold it steady. “Just a couple, you deserve a couple of kisses, baby boy. A cock as perfect as yours deserves so much love.”
Yoongi made a noise at the back of his throat to let Jimin know that he could kiss his cock. Jimin had done so once or twice before, quick kisses before he had knocked his head free in fear of him attempting to give him a blowjob. It had felt good when he did so, and he wanted to feel the sensation again.

Jimin pouted his full lips out so that he could press them against the head of his cock, giving him a long and drawn-out kiss before he broke contact. His lips made a soft sound, a wet pucker that made Yoongi stick his tongue out to wet his own lips.

Jimin closed his eyes with another husky moan, pressing his lips down against his head to give him even more kisses. The softest vibrations travelled through his lips and down the length of Yoongi’s cock, which felt highly pleasing. Between his fast kisses, he also darted his tongue out to teasingly lick at his head.

“Would you suh…suck on me, just a lil?” Yoongi whispered, tightening his hold in his hair. “Just once - not a blowjob, just…just lemme know what it feels like, Jimin.”

“You want me to suck on your cock? You want me to suck on my baby boy’s perfect cock?” Jimin asked, very much into his worshipping role for he seemed to be getting great enjoyment out of his role. “Mmm, I’m gonna enjoy this so much.”

When Jimin opened his lips and he went down on him, Yoongi hadn’t been prepared at all for the sensation. No amount of fantasising could have possibly prepared him for such a feeling, such an intense level of heat and wetness. Not even the sensation that he had felt upon slipping his fingers inside of Jimin could compare to this level of heat enveloping his cock.

For the first time in his life, Yoongi had finally felt another man’s mouth around his cock. It was enough to make his thighs start trembling, to make him open them wider and almost invite Jimin to take as much of his length inside of him as possible.

“Oh, fuck,” Yoongi breathed out, his breath catching in his throat as he stared down at him. “Juh-Jimin, mmm.”

Jimin slowly took his cock into his mouth as far as he could, breathing slowly through his nose as he did so. He rolled his eyes up to look at him as he swallowed his length, peering through his thick eyelashes at him. The sensation of his tongue rubbing along the length of his cock, wet and hot, had him almost pulling on his tousled hair.
Jimin pulled his head back painfully slow, purposefully dragging his tongue along his underside before tightening his lips around his head. With a final teasing suck, he pulled off so that his slick lips made a wet popping sound, and then he lifted his cock up to resume pressing kisses up along his shaft to his base.

“Did you like that, baby boy?” Jimin asked breathlessly, his nose and lips bumping against his cock as he planted messy kisses against his head, his shaft, even his testicles; which he had cradled in the palm of his free hand to gently fondle them. “I loved it, I can’t wait to suck on your cock all night long, hmm, it’s one of my favourite fantasies when I can’t sleep at night.”

The way that Jimin’s tongue curled out to lick teasingly right at a sensitive spot of skin around his base had Yoongi accidentally clamping his thighs around his shoulders.

“Shit, Jimin, you’re such a good boy,” Yoongi groaned, rolling his head back to stare up at the sunroof through his half-lidded eyes.

“I am?” Jimin asked, pausing in the act of lavishing his cock with kisses so that he could look up at him.

“The way that you make me fuh-feel, the way that you take care of me,” he replied, his voice uneven as he tried to catch his breath. “I love you so much, muh-my good boy.”

Jimin lifted his head at this, his breath escaping him in a choked moan. There was a dribble of saliva on his chin, and so Yoongi lifted his hand to wipe it free from him, seeing him leaning into his touch. He could see just how much that his boyfriend’s cheeks were flushed with heat and colour, which was a sign of just how much that he had been excited to bring him pleasure.

When Jimin went to lower his head again, to resume kissing and fondling him, Yoongi cupped his chin and he moved his face away. He angled his head back so that he could hold his eyes, seeing a look of surprise on Jimin’s face.

“I wanna do it,” Yoongi said, sticking his tongue out to wet his lips. “Lemme do it too, darling.”

“You…you wanna do it to me?” Jimin asked in return, breathing hard and fast so that his chest shifted with every single breath.
Yoongi nodded at the question, his own chest rising and falling in rhythm with his rapid breathing. There was a slight outbreak of sweat clinging to his skin: on his chest and his brow, and he could feel waves of heat radiating off his cheeks.

Jimin slowly shifted to get to his feet, standing in front of him in just his suit trousers. The position made Yoongi reach up to take hold of his hips, eyeing the front of the trousers to see a flap of material that was hiding the zipper and button from view. He hadn’t even noticed the fact that Jimin had been wearing a belt earlier, having been far too focused on the open collar of his shirt and the snug tuck of his suit jacket around his waist to have seen the thin piece of leather. But now that it was right in front of his face, he was unable to look away from the gleaming buckle; the fragrant scent of leather coming from it.

Yoongi slowly moved to press a kiss against the buckle of his belt, the silver slightly cold against his pouted lips. He pulled his face away to start fumbling at the lengths, his fingers shaking slightly as he did so.

Jimin watched him doing so intently, placing his hands down on his bare shoulders rather than leave them hanging at his sides. His breathing was uneven, which showed Yoongi that he might just be a little nervous, or that he was so excited by what was happening and he couldn’t calm his racing heartbeat down.

After pulling the length of belt through the buckle, Yoongi popped the top button open and then he worked the zipper to open up his trousers. As he pulled the flaps aside, he saw that Jimin was wearing a pair of white Calvin Klein briefs, the thick elastic waistband sitting snug around his lower stomach. Then he let go of the trousers to let them drop to the other man’s ankles in a puddle of fine Italian wool.

“No one’s ever done this to me before,” Jimin said in a soft voice, as he stepped out of his trousers and he knocked them aside with his foot. “Just you, baby boy.”

“Just me?” Yoongi repeated, raising his eyebrow at him as he ran his gaze down his exposed legs.

“Ohuh, the guys that I used to let fuck me, they never did it. They wanted me to do it to them, but they didn’t care enough about me to do it back,” Jimin explained, shifting from his touch when he placed his hands down on his hips again. “I don’t care, they would’ve sucked at it anyway.”

“Jimin, I…I ain’t never done this before, but I’m still gonna give you all of the…the love that you
deserve,” Yoongi said, brushing his thumb along the thick elastic waistband to feel the stitched letters against his skin. “I ain’t gonna be good at it, but I still wanna try and—"

“Baby boy, shush,” Jimin cooed, placing a finger down on his lips to get him to stop talking. “No matter what you do, you make me feel so good. Don’t worry about it, hmm, just enjoy exploring this new feeling with me.”

Just like Jimin had described to him on the phone that night, the briefs that he was wearing really were tiny. His usual briefs cupped his buttocks fully, the edges going down to the very tops of his thighs to cover his hip bones and the waistband sitting just below his navel so that his entire groin was covered. But the ones that he was wearing tonight revealed much more skin, from the much lower waistband to the thin sides.

Yoongi could see the sharp hints of his hip bones on perfect display above the elastic waistband, the sides of the briefs covering just an inch or so of his skin. The front snugly hugged his crotch, the edges now exposing quite a lot of his upper thighs too. It was as if he was wearing knickers instead of briefs, much more revealing and sensual.

As he ran his eyes up from Jimin’s bare feet, up the soft balls of his ankles up to his supple calves and thick thighs, Yoongi couldn’t help but press his face right up against the front of his briefs. He heard Jimin laughing as he placed his hand down on the top of his head, his touch soft and guiding.

The heat of Jimin’s crotch right against his face, the scent of the fresh cotton and the lotion coming from his stomach and thighs - it all mingled together to make him feel weak. Yoongi found himself pressing kisses against his briefs, mouthing along the bulge of his stiff cock until he was tongueeing at the white cotton and making it grow wet from his saliva.

“Oh,” Jimin hiccuped, his laughter turning into a gasp as he tightened his hold in his hair. His grip was tight, not painfully so, but enough to make Yoongi’s cock twitch with a delicious throb in excitement. “That feels good, baby boy.”

Yoongi slipped his thumb under the side of the briefs, playfully tugging at the elastic as he pulled his face away to take a deep breath.

“I-I like how hot that you feel right here, Jimin,” Yoongi said, eyeing the wet patch on his briefs to see that the cotton was starting to turn translucent; revealing a hint of Jimin’s flushed cock through the fabric. “Whenever I’m lying in bed in your arms, I can…can feel the heat between your thighs on my skin. I’ve thought ‘bout what it might feel like to…to have that heat inside of me.”
Jimin let out a breathless sound at this, rolling his head back as Yoongi carried on kissing and licking at the front of his briefs. He could feel his cock stirring and twitching as he did so, the hard throbs of pleasure in his loins almost pulsing against his lips.

“I’ve fantasised ‘bout you thrusting inside of me,” Yoongi moaned, breathing in Jimin’s scent as he grabbed hold of his buttocks to sink his fingers into his soft and firm skin. He exhaled against his trapped erection, feeling the other man’s hips twitching from the sensation. “I’ve wanted to-to slip my fingers inside of myself to pretend, but it don’t feel the same. It ain’t your cock, Jimin, and I want your cock inside of me. I just- I wish that I wasn’t so fucking scared of letting you inside. But, I know that when it finally feels right, you’ll fuck me so good.”

Yoongi paused to tongue at a slightly cool patch of cotton, wetting it with more hot saliva and then taking a quick intake of breath.

“Nnn, more tongue, more tongue, baby,” Jimin watching him from under his half-lidded eyes; hair hanging forward over his brow.

Yoongi nosed around the front of his briefs, following the curve of trapped erection until he was able to find the soft ridge of his head. When he pressed the broad of his tongue against it to start licking at him again, it was enough to make his boyfriend moan throatily.

“Fuck, what would you suck like?” Jimin gasped, pressing Yoongi’s face against his crotch and softly moving his hips to chase after his rapidly darting tongue.

Yoongi managed to catch his head between the cotton so that he could try and do so, so that he could suck at the damp material and tease at him at the same time. He heard Jimin taking a sharp intake of breath at the sensation, but it didn’t feel right to him, and so he pulled his head away from the front of his briefs.

“Take ‘em off, Jimin,” Yoongi suggested, roughly wiping at his damp chin with the back of his hand.

Jimin turned around at this suggestion to start playing with the waistband of his briefs, tugging them down over the full curve of his behind so that the elastic dug into his soft skin. The playful act revealed the deep cleft between his buttocks, along with several tiny freckles in the dip of his lower back, before he tugged the waistband back up again with a husky giggle.
“Jimin, you look so fucking good in those briefs,” Yoongi praised, leaning back on his wrists to watch Jimin’s teasing little act. A nice burst of heat spread out from his loins as he did so. “Just like those swimming trunks too - so beautiful. I can’t believe that you, that everything ‘bout you, is so beautiful.”

When Jimin dropped his briefs to his ankles and he turned to step out of them, the act drew instant attention to his erection. His stiff cock bobbed from the movement, free from the restraining material of his briefs at long last. His groin was completely smooth and free from hair like always, even when he hadn’t been smuggling for some time; his testicles hanging tight and taut between his thighs.

The long stretch of his smooth and golden skin was just begging to be kissed, and so Yoongi moved to take hold of his hips and pull him closer. As he peppered kisses all over Jimin’s lower stomach and the wings of his hip bones, he heard his boyfriend humming contently from the ticklish sensation. He loosely clasped his base in his hand so that he could angle his cock, giving him a cautious and experimental kiss.

One kiss turned to two, to three; Yoongi growing bolder upon discovering that he wasn’t scared of such an act of intimacy. It didn’t make him feel uncomfortable, he actually felt a rush of sexual excitement as he kissed and kneaded at his cock.

“I-I wanna feel you in my mouth,” Yoongi said, swallowing hard and looking up at him. “Just for a lil while. You won’t cum, right?”

“I won’t, Yoongi,” Jimin promised, and he trusted him enough to know that he wouldn’t do such a thing.

Yoongi eyed Jimin’s flushed cock for a moment, and then he parted his lips so that he could take him into his mouth. At first, he just slipped his head into his mouth to see what it would feel like. Jimin’s fingers tightened in his hair as he cheeked his head, feeling his skin stretching around his cock. He had to open his mouth wider to accept his thickness, and that was when Yoongi felt a hot streak of pleasure shooting up into his belly.

The heat and weight of Jimin’s cock on his tongue, the way that his lips were stretched taut around his thickness, the salt of his sweat - it made Yoongi’s entire body shake from the force of his arousal. He sank his fingers into his buttocks as he took Jimin’s length as far into his mouth as he could, moaning deep in his throat as he bobbed back on his cock.
“Oh, Yoongi, baby,” Jimin moaned, his hand applying soft pressure to the back of his head. “That feels so… oh.”

Yoongi knew that he should let go of his cock now, that he should continue kissing and touching him instead, and yet he shouldn’t seem to control himself. All that he could seem to do was slowly bob back and forth on Jimin’s cock, one of his hands dropping down to his lap so that he could take his cock in hand and touch himself; his own cock aching and in want of release. He couldn’t take too much of his length for fear that he might choke or gag, and so he sloppily and noisily sucked at him instead.

This was everything that Yoongi had fantasised that it would be. It didn’t hurt, like anal sex would, it didn’t feel bad or uncomfortable, it felt right.

“No, no,” Jimin suddenly gasped, taking hold of his head to firmly pull him away. “Yoongi, stop.”

Yoongi was pulled right off his cock with a noisy and wet slurp, his slack lips closing around thin air. He could only stare at the sight of Jimin’s cock for a few seconds, his eyes wide with surprise as he rolled his gaze up to look at him.

“That’s too much, baby boy,” Jimin explained, giggling breathlessly as he smoothed his hair down for him. “You almost started giving me a blowjob just then.”

“I’m sorry, Jimin, I- it just felt good,” Yoongi stammered, dropping his gaze to stare down at Jimin’s slick and flushed cock, which was still right in front of his face.

“You don’t have to say sorry, but I’d to stop you,” Jimin explained, as he tenderly wiped at his slick lips and chin for him. “I’m not wearing a condom, baby boy. I couldn’t let you carry on, I might’ve leaked and I know that you don’t want that. You’re not ready for that right now, so…”

Jimin stopped talking for a few seconds, shifting so that he could climb onto his lap and get closer to eye-level with him. Yoongi found himself no longer staring at his erection, the weight and heat of his body settling on his lap so very enticing as Jimin parted his thighs and he slipped his arms around his neck.

“I’ve got some condoms in my bag,” Jimin explained in a whisper-soft voice, his lips brushing against the shell of his ear. “If you want me to get them, just tell me. I can get them, we can use them - if you’re comfortable. If not, let’s just continue like this, hmm? Some gentle sexual exploration with
each other, nothing serious. It feels amazing no matter what you want, baby boy.”

“No, not...not yet,” Yoongi replied, cupping Jimin’s full buttocks in his palms to hold onto him. “I
didn’t mean to go that far. I...it just happened. I think we should just explore things, it’s safer that
way.”

“Sure thing, Yoongi,” his boyfriend said, giving him a quick series of kisses on his cheek and nose.
“Safe and soft sex with you, mmm, that’s perfect.”

Jimin had to climb off his lap again to finally help him out of his trousers, and so he had to lift his
hips up off the bed to let him do so.

Yoongi shifted to get up onto his knees on the bed, just as his boyfriend crawled onto it to resume
kissing him. The new position allowed him to throw his arms around him, to drag him close enough
to press their erections flush together and bring them both even more pleasure.

Yoongi was so caught up in the heady moment of pleasure that he couldn’t even think. All that he
wanted was to carry on pleasuring Jimin, to explore his body with new-found confidence and learn
what made him moan his name and squirm on the mattress. He knew that making Jimin orgasm
would bring him right to the cusp of his own climax, hungrily chasing after his pleasure.

Rather than break their kisses, Yoongi guided Jimin’s hand down to their erections to encourage him
to touch them both. He wrapped his fingers around the both of them under his guidance, just about
able to get a good hold with his smaller handspan.

“This feels so good, hmm?” Jimin asked between kisses, one hand on the back of his neck and the
other wrapped around their cocks, steadily pumping around their lengths. “You know that you’re so
safe in my arms, baby boy, so safe. I won’t hurt you, I won’t rush you; you’re so safe with me.”

“This’ what it’s supposed to feel like,” Yoongi gasped, pulling his head away so that he could cup
Jimin’s face in his hands. “This’ what it feels like when you...you love someone, when you trust
someone to love you completely. It feels so fucking good.”

“Yes, Yoongi, yes,” Jimin almost moaned, his eyes half-lidded to keep the messy locks of hair across
his brow out of his eyes. He kneaded at their erections roughly, the contact making Yoongi swallow
a deep moan. “I love you so much, oh, I still can’t believe that you love me too.”
Jimin made a soft sound as he moved to kiss him again, his lips open in preparation for his tongue. His fingertips snagged in the bottoms of his hair, tugging at the wispy strands as he tenderly kissed him.

Before he could control the urge, Yoongi reached down so that he could gently knock Jimin’s hand away from his cock. This allowed him to take himself into his own hand, and so he slowly slipped his foreskin back up his length.

Jimin stopped kissing him to watch him curiously, allowing him to press their cock heads flush against each other again.

“Jimin, can I…can I try something?” he asked in a quiet voice. “I-I wanna try it, I trust you so much to do this with me, but I dunno what it’ll feel like. I’ve never done it before, I’ve only ever…seen it in pornos, but I think that it looks…intimate.”

“Yeah, Yoongi, you can try it,” he confirmed in a soft voice. “We can try whatever you want, so long as we communicate during it and we both feel comfortable.”

“Lube, there’s lube in the drawer,” Yoongi whispered, and so Jimin moved to retrieve the small pump bottle of lube for him.

Yoongi carefully lined their cocks against one another, applying lube to Jimin’s cock and around his exposed head. Then he rolled his slick fist forward, spreading the remains onto his foreskin as he smoothed it back in place. As he slipped Jimin’s head inside of the fold, he stretched his foreskin so that he could roll it over the length of his cock too. The stretch around his girth was considerable, but he was almost able to tug it over most of his length: both of their cock heads rubbing together within the thin fold of his skin.

“Oh,” Jimin almost hiccuped, his free hand instinctively seizing hold of his hip as he looked down at their cocks. “That feels…that feels good, Yoongi. Does it feel good for you?”

Yoongi could only make a guttural sound at this, unable to properly vocalise because there were no words that could possibly explain the sensation.

From the way that Jimin’s thickness stretched his foreskin tautly around his width, to the heat and weight of his cock trapped inside - Yoongi couldn’t possibly find a way of describing to Jimin what it really felt like.
For a moment, Jimin experimentally twitched his hips back and forth as he tried out this new sensation. The friction was enough to make Yoongi bite down hard on his lower lip, lightly lubricated skin against skin. Then he reached down to feel at his foreskin, his fingertips skating across his stretched skin and the bump of their heads that were trapped inside of it. He gave the bump a soft knead, which made Yoongi swallow a moan.

“What does it feel like?” Jimin asked curiously, as he reached down to take both of their cocks in hand again.

“Fuck, it’s like you’re inside of me,” Yoongi groaned, watching Jimin’s now lube-slick fists rapidly pumping around their shafts. “I cuh-can feel you - the stretch- huh, it’s so fucking good. D’you like it, huh?”

“Yeah, Yoongi, I really like it.”

Jimin pumped his fist around his cock for him, shifting his other hand up to their heads so that he could cup them and gently massage at them. The joint stimulation had Yoongi gasping for breath, burying his face against his neck so that he could press kisses against his freckled skin; tasting sweat and cologne on his tongue.

Yoongi had to reach down to knock Jimin’s fist away from his cock after a moment, just to stop him from getting too carried away and accidentally slipping his cock free. He was jerking his wrist far too fast, the friction fantastic but also dragging at his foreskin so that it was starting to roll back.

“Fuck, Jimin,” Yoongi hissed, wrapping his hand around their trapped heads to keep his foreskin in place. “Hold your cock, hold it steady for me like- shit, like that.”

Jimin kept his fist in place right around the base of his cock, helping trap it in place so that Yoongi was able to knead and massage at their heads without worrying about too much movement. It felt so much better than usual because of his swollen head rubbing against both Jimin’s cock head and his sensitive foreskin, and he hoped that it felt so good for his lover too.

“Huh-uh,” he gasped, pressing their brows together and closing his eyes from the intense pleasure. “Kiss me, Jimin, please.”

Jimin still had his hand resting on the back of his neck, and so he applied a hint of pressure to bring
their faces together again. Kissing Jimin during sexual intimacy always made Yoongi feel that little bit more excited, always helped him reach powerful orgasms that left him feeling so full and content afterwards.

After some gentle kneading at their heads, Yoongi moved his hand away so that he could edge himself around his orgasm. He didn’t want to climax so suddenly, not when he could edge around it and enjoy the sensation of Jimin inside of him for as long as possible. It felt so good that he didn’t want it to end just yet, not when they could still explore new sensations with each other.

“D’you like being touched here?” Yoongi asked between kisses, as he cupped his testicles in his hand. “D’you want me to hold ‘em like this?”

Jimin made a noise to let him know that he liked it, shifting his hand from his base so that he take hold of one of his buttocks and roughly knead at it. So Yoongi cradled his testicles in his palm to gently stroke at them, massaging at their cocks in turn with his other hand.

Yoongi felt a sudden hot wetness against his head; dribbles of precum slipping free into the fold of his foreskin as it was unable to smear free onto his palm. It just added to the pleasurable sensation, as it created even more heat and wetness. He couldn’t even tell if he had leaked or if Jimin had leaked, for they both might have done so in their joint excitement.

“Oh, it’s so wet, baby boy,” Jimin moaned against his mouth, his fingers sinking into his neck deeply enough to dimple his skin. “You’re so wet, fuck. Can I thrust again?”

Jimin softly rocked his hips back and forth, just like he had done so earlier. This time, he was much more confident in his movements, the motion more fluid as he slipped out by an inch or so and then thrust forward. His brow twitched from the friction, his lips quivering as his breath escaped them in soft gasps and moans.

Yoongi had to hold his foreskin in place to let him do so, just to keep his cock trapped inside at all times. He placed his other hand in the dip of his lower back to keep him close, his blunt nails scratching at his tanned and smooth skin.

The glide of precum meant that the friction was so much better - wet and hot in a way that made them both gasp and moan against each other’s mouths. But the glide also meant that Yoongi had to to drag Jimin close after some time, reaching down to wrap his fingers around their trapped heads before his boyfriend could accidentally slip free.
As a result of the slick pooling of precum trapped inside of his fold of skin, Jimin had almost pulled back too far and slipped right out; the ridge of his head distending and rubbing against the inside of his foreskin enough to make Yoongi groan. He didn’t want to stop feeling that wonderful stretch and friction that Jimin’s cock created, he wanted to orgasm with his cock still inside of him.

Yoongi had to hold onto Jimin’s base with his left hand, using his right to alternate between massaging at their heads and lengths, to cupping his testicles to give them a soft stroke that made his boyfriend moan against his lips.

“Oh my god, Yoongi, I think I’m gonna cum,” Jimin gasped, his eyes widening in something that seemed to be surprise. “I’m so close, please, keep touching me. Please, baby, it feels so good.”

Yoongi took hold of Jimin’s wrist so that he could place his hand against his chest, to silently encourage him to play with his nipple. His boyfriend moved his other hand down from his neck to his chest, his thumbs rubbing soft and gentle whorls around the hard nubs of nipples to help him draw closer to his own orgasm. The contact made tingles of pleasure spread down into his thighs, which were coated in sweat from the intensity of their love-making.

Yoongi felt Jimin pushing forward against him as much as he could, forcing his head up against his so that they rubbed together hard inside of his foreskin. The contact made Yoongi moan deeply, shifting his hand up to massage at their lengths roughly again.

“Fuck, Jimin,” Yoongi groaned, his hips twitching in anticipation of his building climax as he rolled his head back. “I’m so close, huh!”

Jimin whined as he dropped his head to drag his lips across his skin, barely even able to kiss him in his desperation. His tongue darted out to lick at his nipple messily, his usual perfect rhythm a mess as he was unable to control himself. His hands moved down to seize hold of his buttocks, his hips twitching as he weakly bore his weight down on him.

Yoongi managed to keep his foreskin in place as his back hit the mattress, but only because of Jimin’s position. He was lying right between his spread thighs, his head resting against his chest as he rocked on top of him: their cocks trapped between their shuddering bodies.

Jimin pinned his hands down onto the covers, entwining their fingers together to hold his hands as he frantically thrust his hips. With every inhale, his lover gasped for breath, and every exhale left his quivering lips in a weak groan. His hair was hanging forward over his eyes, each tousled lock bouncing at the end of his frantically rolling hips.
Yoongi wanted to squirm underneath his weight from his own building climax but he couldn’t do so, for fear that the act would finally free Jimin’s cock from his foreskin. All that he could was rock underneath him encouragingly, his heels digging into the mattress beside Jimin’s knees for purchase.

“Huh-happy birthday, Jimin,” Yoongi moaned, his quivering lips curling up at the corners as he let out a breathless laugh. “I love you-”

As the final word left his lips, Yoongi felt a tightening in his loins that signalled he had finally achieved his orgasm. The tightening turned into a series of rapid throbs, an explosion of heat surging through his system until his very brain almost seemed to set alight. Oh, his fingers and toes curled up from the powerful pulses, a searing at the base of his cock that almost verged on painful in parts.

Underneath the roaring pound of his heartbeat in his skull, Yoongi heard soft cries of pleasure escaping his slack lips. He couldn’t even see because his eyes were squeezed shut, sparks of colour lighting up the darkness behind his thin eyelids.

Jimin orgasmed moments later with a hard grunt, his body trembling on top of his and his fingers squeezing hold of his painfully tight. His eyelids fluttered shut as his eyes rolled up underneath them, his expression falling slack from the intensity of his pleasure.

“Oh, baby…” Jimin groaned, dropping his head down against his chest as he rode out the strong waves of pleasure. “That was the…the best birthday present I’ve ever had.”

Yoongi laughed breathlessly at this, pulling one hand free from his so that he could place his hand down on his head. He scrunched tight handfuls of his sweat-soaked hair between his fingers, his own hair plastered across the sweaty brow.

Jimin shifted to lie beside him on the covers, his soft cock finally slipping free from his foreskin to flop around limply. His skin was flushed with heat and coated in sweat, his muscles relaxing as he stretched out across the massive bed.

When Yoongi pulled his foreskin back to roll it down his length again, semen oozed and dribbled down onto his lower stomach and fingers. He had to clean the mess up with some tissues, carefully ensuring that he got as much semen free as possible to avoid any discomfort. Jimin watched him doing so, his eyes half-lidded with pleasure and his lips slick and flushed from their kisses.
“I ain’t had sex in this bed before,” Yoongi breathed out, as he rolled his head to look at him and hold his gaze. “That’s the first time I’ve orgasmed in my bed without masturbating, Jimin.”

“What a coincidence, baby boy, that was my first orgasm in this bed too,” Jimin replied with a quick grin, slipping his arm around stomach to hold onto him. “But, you know what? There’s gonna be plenty more orgasms in it, hmm? So, don’t think about it like that. Every single one counts, not just the first one.”

“That’s the…the seventh time that I’ve, y’know, cum ‘cos of you, Jimin,” Yoongi said in a whisper-soft voice, feeling the corners of his lips twitching upwards into a hazy smile.

“Are you keeping track, baby boy?” Jimin asked him, before he burst out laughing. “Then we gotta hurry up and get that figure into double digits, hmm?”

“I can’t help but keep track, ‘cos I think ‘bout every single one,” Yoongi sighed, stretching his own legs across the cool surface of the bed covers. “You’ve made me cum seven times, Jimin. That’s…that’s kinda crazy when you think ‘bout it.”

“You’ve made me cum six times, personally, and a dozen more thanks to those Polaroids,” his boyfriend remarked, before quickly adding. “Not bad for a guy that hasn’t had sex since 1979, huh?”

Yoongi gave him a lazy push to the arm at this, guffawing at the dirty joke and the mischievous grin that lit up Jimin’s face. He was starting to reach that wonderful level of post-coital bliss that made him feel so warm and content, that made him fall asleep with a smile on his face rather than filled with anxiety and fear.

“Baby boy, whatever that was you just did - that was fucking hot,” Jimin admitted, letting out his own laugh as he rolled onto his stomach. He cocked his weight up onto one elbow to look at him, his head balanced in his palm and his free hand settling on his chest.

“Oh, yeah?”

“Seriously, Yoongi, that was the sexiest thing that I’ve even done with another man before, and I’ve had guys try and experiment with shit a couple of times. It felt so…I dunno,” Jimin mumbled, as he stroked his fingertips across his chest. "It was intimate. I was inside of you, in a way, but not like I’ve ever been inside of another man.”
“It felt good?” Yoongi said in a heavy voice, suppressing a yawn against Jimin’s upper arm.

“Yeah, it felt good, it felt really good,” Jimin said with a soft nod, his earrings twinkling in his black hair like the few stars visible through the sunroof above their heads. “I can’t explain it, baby boy. There’s just something about it that felt…good.”

“I think it’s…really intimate,” Yoongi suggested, as he rolled onto his side to slip his arm over his waist. “Only…only men can do that to each other, y’know? With anal sex, men and women can do that - with fingers and toys or whatever. It ain’t just men pleasuring other men. But only two men can do that to each other, so, it’s the most intimate thing for us to share, I think.”

“I think that’s it,” Jimin agreed, as he let him tug him close as he settled down on the mattress again. “It’s so intimate and special, I feel like there’s a lot of trust involved and-”

“Mmm, so much trust,” Yoongi sighed into his hair, slipping his legs between his to get that little bit closer to him.

“and I’m so happy that you’re the one that taught me such an intimate thing, Yoongi,” Jimin finished, snuggling up in hold. “I wish that I could do the same for you, to let you inside of me like that too, but I can’t. My parents had me circumcised when I was a baby, apparently it’s really big over in Korea these days. I dunno why, but they had me circumcised. I heard that it makes you less sensitive, so, I can’t help but wonder what sex would feel like if it’s so different. How come you weren’t circumcised too?”

“Mmm, my grandparents moved here, ‘member? My father’s parents did, and my mother’s family moved right around the war. Maybe it’s ‘cos of that lack of influence?”

Jimin just hummed at this, folding his arm up in the space between their two bodies comfortably. He did so so that he could study his ring, a soft smile on his face.

“What time’s it, hmm?”

“Uh,” Yoongi checked his Rolex quickly, squinting at the face to track the ticking finger for a few seconds. “It’s almost midnight, darling, so, it’s still your birthday.”

“You sleepy, baby boy?”
“Kinda, why?”

“Let’s check the camcorder footage out, yeah?” Jimin suggested with a quick grin, shifting on the bed so that he could cock his weight on one elbow again. “I wanna see what it looks like on screen!”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment, seeing the look of excitement on his boyfriend’s face. He was somewhat tired, but now that he had mentioned the camcorder recordings, he found that he wanted to watch all of the different films too. He shifted to get out of bed, crossing the room to switch the television on, collect the camcorder and turn off the room lights.

Yoongi had to retrieve the cable that connected the camcorder into the television, a long cable that had a scart head on the end that plugged into the back much like his VCR player. Luckily enough, it was long enough to reach the end of the bed, meaning that they were able to stay seated and lying on it for extra comfort. He had to plug the charger wire into the camcorder too, so that the device would turn on and allow them to use the playback option.

The television screen was a hissing blur of static and white noise, the light flashing off the walls to illuminate the dark bedroom.

Jimin had to rewind all of the tapes one by one in the camcorder before they could play anything. He hit the rewind button several times to speed up the process, the reel spinning round and round until it stopped and the button popped up to signal that it was back to the start of the tape.

The entire process took several minutes, and when it was finished, he examined the camcorder and the assorted tapes. He spread them across the covers as he tried to locate the first one. He didn’t necessarily have to play the tapes in chronological order, but it made more sense to do so.

After some thought, Jimin selected one and he popped the tape deck open so that he could slip it inside. He hit the play button just like Namjoon had suggested, and a moment later, the static cut off to be replaced with a black screen.

When the video started playing, it was obvious that Jimin had picked the wrong tape. That was because the backdrop to the recording was a near pink and cloudy sunset rather than a late morning of deep blue sky. So he stopped the tape and he popped it out of the deck to select another one.

This time, the opening shot happened to be what looked to be Namjoon’s folded legs, judging from
the denim shorts and the flash of tanned skin. That meant that he had located the first tape, and so he placed the camcorder down on the bed in front of his own folded legs so that he could leave the tape playing.

Yoongi could hear his own voice suddenly coming from the television, the audio good but slightly distorted as a result of the background static of the ocean waves and wind. Just a second later, the screen became heavily blurred as the camcorder was quickly moved, and then his face popped up. The sudden sight made them both start laughing.

Even though he was leaning so close to the camera on the recording, Yoongi saw that the autofocus was good. The image wasn’t blurry at all from the close distance, nor was the colour weird or off in anyway. It wasn’t as bright as reality, of course, and it was rather a little dull in parts, but the recording looked pretty damn good.

“Oh, Yoongi!” Jimin exclaimed, clapping his hands against his cheeks as his lips curled up into a wide smile. “Oh, you look so cute on camera! Look at you!”

Yoongi felt his cheeks flooding with heat at this and he let out a laugh, seeing himself hiding away on the television screen behind his hands. He couldn’t believe that he was actually looking at himself right now, not in a photograph or a mirror but on a television screen. It was the first time that he had ever used to a camcorder to record anything, never mind himself.

“Hey,” he said on the television screen, lowering his hand to reveal his face again and giving the both of them a tinkling wave.

The act looked so campy to Yoongi that he found himself surprised. He hadn’t ever thought that the mannerism would look so…effeminate, and yet he saw that it was. He couldn’t help but wonder what other gestures he did might just look like to other men, gestures that might make him look camp and possibly homosexual to their eyes.

The thought filled Yoongi with a sudden surge of discomfort before he realised that he was just being stupid. Jimin had been unable to detect his sexuality during their dinner together until he had made it well known to him, and Jimin was much more versed in spotting real gay and bisexual men out of a crowd for company, sex or safety over his heterosexual business partners and associates. Therefore, he had no reason to worry about such things, especially not since he had only done the gesture in the company of his lover and friends.

“Hey, baby!” Jimin exclaimed, throwing his own hand up to wave back at the recording. He was grinning from ear to ear, the flashing lights from the television screen playing off his eyes, teeth and
earrings so that they glinted in the darkness of the bedroom. “Oh god, you’re so fucking cute, Yoongi.”

When Jimin popped up onto the screen, it was enough to make his boyfriend burst out laughing again. He didn’t seem embarrassed at all by the sight, rather he seemed to find it far too hilarious to feel awkward or shy.

Yoongi thought that Jimin was so incredibly photogenic, so much so that he almost felt jealous. From the happy grin on his face that showed not a hint of nerves, to the way that he held himself - he just looked so beautiful on the television screen.

After Jimin’s impromptu mini interview by Namjoon, the young man turned the camcorder around in an attempt to record himself and the two of them in the same frame. For a few seconds, the screen wobbled as he tried to get it into a good position, and then the two of them appeared on either side of him. The camera steadied as Namjoon let out a cry of joy, and then he started talking about how great the device was.

“Wow, it actually worked,” Yoongi said in wonder, looking at the three of their faces on the television screen. The camera was still panned out, and so there was no unfocusing or blurring on the recording. “I thought that he might’ve been holding it wrong, but he really got it right.”

On the camcorder recording, Namjoon was starting his birthday message, and so Yoongi fell silent to let Jimin listen to it. It had only been several hours since he had said it to him, but he imagined that Jimin might like to listen to it again.

Just like earlier, Jimin smiled at the warm and affectionate message that Namjoon had recorded just for him. On the recording, he moved to embrace Namjoon and made the camcorder shake ever so slightly. In reality, he moved to slip his arm through his to cosy up against his side with a content sound.

“Namjoon’s a good friend,” Yoongi remarked, glancing away from the screen to look at his boyfriend. “I know just how close that you are, you’ve told me before ‘bout how that. But today, I feel like I really got to see it. It’s a beautiful bond. It makes me wish that I’d a friend like that too.”

“What about Hoseok, Yoongi? Don’t you two have a bond like that? I thought that you did,” Jimin said, planting his chin down on his bare shoulder to look at his profile.
“We used to, we used to have a deep and brotherly bond, but it’s changed now,” Yoongi explained in a quiet voice, focusing back onto the television screen. “We got older, I got colder, and Seokseok, he blossomed into someone else. He used to be spoilt as hell, sure, but he never used to be so… unstable. I ain’t saying that he ain’t my best friend - he is. I trust Seokseok with my life, he’s loyal as fuck. I just wonder what our friendship would be like if we hadn’t grown up sometimes.”

Jimin thought this over for a moment, before the sound of voices coming from the television caught his attention. He turned his head to look at the screen again, just in time to start watching Yoongi’s birthday message.

Watching it on the television screen, hearing his words said aloud again, Yoongi couldn’t believe that he had said those things so openly. Not only had he said them to Jimin, he had said them in front of Namjoon too. It made him think about how Jimin had told him that he was starting to get better, that he was the strong and brave one that was overcoming his own fears and past self-hatred.

When Yoongi looked into his own eyes and he listened to himself say “Jimin, happy birthday, I love you”, he could see that his boyfriend was right.

Jimin had to pause the camcorder the very second that he had finished saying his birthday message, the bedroom falling completely silent. It seemed like he was going to say something, yet he looked to be struggling to do so - his lips moving but no sounds coming out of them.

Yoongi could do no more than look at him until Jimin moved to slip his arms around his neck and he pulled him close. Just like that, Jimin’s lips found his own to kiss him deeply, the contact soft and tender rather than passionate and rough. It was a kiss that said more than words ever could, that conveyed emotions that Yoongi didn’t even think had words.

“I love my baby boy so much. In fact, I love you more,” Jimin whispered in a husky voice, peppering kisses across the wide span of his cheekbone towards his ear. “There aren’t even words that can describe my love for you. Is that OK, do you like hearing that?”

“Shit, Jimin, I like hearing it so much,” Yoongi sighed, melting into his hold until he was completely ply to his boyfriend’s soft touch and kisses. “I can’t believe that it feels so good now, after everything. The first time you said those words to me, I wanted to run away, I wanted to hide ’cos I didn’t know what to do. Your words, they made me feel so raw and-and vulnerable, and I hated feeling that way. It took me so long to understand that I only felt that way ’cos I was tryna block it all out - my feelings.”

“You were defensive, you built up a wall, baby boy,” Jimin said, once more showcasing that
preternatural ability of his to know exactly what he was thinking and trying to say. “We all do that, it’s likely because of your parents. Don’t feel bad for trying to protect yourself from further harm. The good thing about walls is that they can be climbed over, or even knocked down in time.”

“Yeah, you smashed my wall to fucking pieces,” he agreed with a soft laugh, hearing Jimin humming softly and feeling the sensation through his chest. “But once I found out that I could…stop blocking my feelings out round you, towards you, it was like…everything started changing. I trusted you before that point, Jimin. I trusted you, I loved you in my own way, even when I wasn’t able to show you or tell you that good. But when I broke down that morning and my wall crumbled on me, and you were there for me, that’s what started changing me.”

“I know, I felt that change too, baby boy. I felt it and I got to witness it,” Jimin replied in a soft voice, his fingers slipping into his hair to stroke and play with it. “I know that I told you before, but I’m just so proud of you, Yoongi.”

After a prolonged moment of tender hair stroking, Jimin hit the play button on the camcorder to resume the tape. Their quick kiss was caught by Namjoon, though he did almost drop the camcorder a moment later with a yelp. That was when the first recording ran out, the screen going black as the camcorder loaded the second recording.

Over the duration of the film watching, they had to switch the tapes several times - Jimin taking charge of the responsibility. They got to see panned shots of the beach and Jimin and Jungkook messing around in the water; Tigger trying to lick the lens and bouncing around the frothy waves with that tireless energy of hers. They got to look at the starfishes and crabs again, which had excited Jungkook and Namjoon enough to make them both smile and laugh fondly, and they got to see how the day had progressed from late morning to the early evening over the dozens of small recorded clips.

Every now and again, a black line would quickly shift down the screen that seemed to signal something. Maybe, it had something to do with the battery or tape, Yoongi didn’t know as he wasn’t a professional cameraman. It was jarring at first, but he quickly got used to it just like he had gotten used to the slightly faded colours and sometimes distorted sound.

The final recording that happened to be on tape was the one of him and Jimin lounged on the sand close to sunset. Jimin had recorded extended shots of their bare legs before shifting the focus up to his face, and after just a mere moment of deep kissing, the recording abruptly finished because the battery had died.

That was it, just over two whole hours of recording watched together.
Yoongi stared at the softly flickering screen for a moment, and then he turned his head to look at Jimin. His boyfriend had fallen asleep at some point, his cheek squished up against his forearm and his lips parted so that he could hear his soft breathing escaping them. He didn’t want to wake him up to get him to settle down in bed properly, and so he just collected one of the pillows from the top of the bed; gently lifting his head up so that he could prop it up on the pillow.

“Good night, darling,” Yoongi whispered, as he brushed his hair back off his face to press a kiss against his brow.

14th October, 1984, 5:34am: Pacific Heights, San Francisco, United States of America

When Yoongi opened his eyes for the first time, he saw that the bedroom was still mostly dark. His eyelids were so heavy that he couldn’t seem to keep them open for longer than a few seconds, and he moved his tongue around his mouth find that it was incredibly dry and in want of a glass of water to soothe it.

The air was so silent that he couldn’t even hear the faded white noise of the outside world bleeding in through the open windows. All that he could hear was the softest sound of breathing coming from behind him, slightly out of rhythm with his own breathing.

Yoongi wanted to move to look at Jimin, but his body was far too heavy for that. He could barely even keep his eyelids open, and so the thought of rolling over just didn’t seem possible. He forced his eyes open long enough to check the time on his watch, his vision blurry for several seconds until he was able to focus on the face.

5:34am.

Yoongi rolled onto his back with a soft grunt, squinting through his eyelashes to look up at the sunroof. He could see hints of sunlight starting to break through the darkness, which signalled that the sun was starting to rise soon enough. It felt like he hadn’t been asleep for long at all, and he guessed that he had probably gotten four or so hours of sleep. That likely explained why he felt bad, but not exhausted, as he had once been used to such terribly small amounts of rest every single night.
After studying the dawning sunrise through the window tiles for a few seconds, Yoongi rolled his head to look at the younger man.

Jimin was lying on his stomach, one arm folded under his pillow and his legs stretched out across the mattress. The covers were tossed over him to cover his nakedness, light falling across the cotton from the window to illuminate the soft bumps of his lower body. His dark hair was strewn across his face in a messy tangle, but it wasn’t thick enough to obscure his features from view.

Jimin’s heavy and oftentimes droopy eyelids were fully closed, but his eyes were still shifting around under his thin lids as he drifted in a dream. Yoongi hoped that it was a good dream, one that he was in that made him happy. His slack lips moved every now and again, his tongue sometimes rolling out to lick at them or a soft slapping sound escaping him as he pouted them out in his sleep.

As he studied his face, Yoongi noticed that his left hand was lying close to the pillow, his palm against the cotton so that his ring was on full display. His promise ring, Yoongi was starting to think of it as, or perhaps his couple ring - seeing as they were both sharing the promise as a couple. It really did look perfect sitting there on Jimin’s ring finger, the cold platinum and diamonds against his tanned skin quite the sight to behold.

Yoongi had considered purchasing him a gold ring, the perfect adornment for his ‘darling Adonis’, but he had decided against it; feeling that gold might seem a bit too much for such a ring. In the future, a golden ring encrusted with diamonds or whatever stone that Jimin adored the most would be the perfect accompaniment to his promise ring - the both of them sitting together on the same finger.

Yoongi lifted his own hand to stare at his ring too, eyeing the double platinum bands and the lightly sparkling diamonds that were set into the top band. They caught the dim sunlight that was coming in through the sunroof and distant wall of windows, and he found himself smiling at the sight as he rolled onto his side.

“Jimin?” he asked in a whisper-soft voice, softly planting his chin down onto his shoulder. He breathed in the faded scent of his cologne and lotion coming from his warm skin, which had almost been masked by the powerful tang of sweat and semen from last night.

Jimin stirred at his voice, shifting under the covers and letting out a soft sound that showed that he had heard him.

“D’you wanna watch the sunrise with me, mmm?” Yoongi asked, shifting on the bed so that he could cock his weight up onto one elbow and look down at him. “It’s gonna rise soon, I thought you might like it.”
“M’kay,” Jimin hummed, pressing his face against his pillow. “Just gimme a couple of minutes, hmm. Go make some coffee, baby boy.”

“’K,” he mumbled, leaning close to press a kiss against the crown of his head. “I’ll be right back, darling.”

Yoongi slowly shifted to slip his legs over the side of the bed, feeling a tender ache between his thighs as he got to his feet. He reached down to cradle his testicles for a moment, before realising that the dull ache wasn’t coming from there exactly. It was probably the result of what had happened last night, from stretching his foreskin for the very first time. That would explain the sensation, and so he shifted one hand up to check around the head of cock. Sure enough, he felt a hint of tenderness around it, but it didn’t hurt too badly.

Though there was an ache in his groin, Yoongi was able to walk without a great deal of discomfort. That was probably a sign that he hadn’t torn the fragile skin in anyway, which was highly relieving right now. That meant that he wasn’t at risk of any infections, or contracting anything - even when he knew and trusted that his boyfriend was clean, like he had told him he was. His thigh and stomach muscles felt a little sore too, but they usually did after making love with Jimin.

As he passed the dresser, Yoongi dragged it open to grab something, anything to wear to cover his nakedness from the cool morning air. His fingers felt something soft and cotton, and so he just pulled it free and proceeded to drag it on over his head without much care for what it was. When the lengths fell down to skirt around his lower hips, he discovered that it was one of Jimin’s tee-shirts; fragrant with the faded scent of detergent and shockingly white in shade.

Well, it was soft, comfortable and it would keep away the chill, and so Yoongi just pushed the drawer shut with a yawn and he moved to cross the bedroom to leave.

Before going down the stairs, Yoongi paused on the top step to look back over his shoulder at Jimin. He was still lying in the same position as he had been a moment ago, curled up under the covers with his face pressed into the pillow; using the bottom of the bed as the top because he had fallen asleep that way. All that he could really see from this distance was his head of black tousled hair and bare shoulders, and so he gazed upon the sight as he let his breath out in a soft sigh.

Jimin, lying in his bed, living in his home with him.

Wow, what a perfect thing to wake up to this morning.
Yoongi went down the stairs at a slow pace as to not aggravate his sore groin, his bare feet padding on the polished wood to make a funny sound just like Cleopatra’s paw pads would do so. Upon reaching the ground-floor, he entered the kitchen to boil some water on the stove. The kettle was still placed on it from last night, much like their two coffee cups were on the table in front of the settee.

For some reason, this made Yoongi chuckle as he collected the cups and he thoroughly cleaned them in preparation for the new serving of coffee. It was probably because the sight of the two cups reminded him of what Jimin had said last night, his sweet remarks about domestic bliss together. Seeing two coffee cups on the counter of a morning, or their shoes placed side by side on the shoe rack by the door, or even their toothbrushes placed together in the cup on the rim of the bathroom sink - these things were likely going to bring a soft smile to Yoongi’s face for a very long time.

Whilst the coffee brewed in the cafetière, Yoongi opened the refrigerator and he retrieved the punnet of fresh strawberries that had been delivered to his home just yesterday afternoon with the rest of his weekly fresh groceries. An assortment of fresh fruit and vegetables were stored inside: from huge and fragrant oranges, to ripe and soft peaches and grapes, to crisp lettuce and carrots, tender broccoli, and flavoursome onions and shallots. They were stored inside of the fridge with bottled water, creamy organic milk and eggs, and an assortment of condiments and sauces that he used on the rare occasion that he prepared an evening dinner for himself.

Yoongi set about washing and plucking the leaves free from them, placing them into a dish because he knew that Jimin would appreciate them with his morning coffee. They weren’t breakfast, but they would serve as a nice treat as they watched the sunrise together.

From upstairs, Yoongi heard the softest thumping sounds that seemed to signal that Jimin was moving around. He might have been doing so to enter the bathroom, or to head downstairs after him in a sleepy state.

Whatever the case, by the time that Yoongi was stirring a splash of milk into their two cups of coffee, there was no sign of Jimin at all. He just searched his cupboards to find a small serving tray, placing the two cups and bowl down on them so that he could carefully carry them up the stairs and onto his study floor.

The sight that Yoongi was greeted by as he ascended the stairs was Jimin already sitting at the table beside the bay window, waiting for him.

Jimin was wearing his Valentino blouse, the cream one that he had worn last night with the scalloped collar and sleeves and the pearlescent buttons. He must have collected it from the floor of the bedroom before wandering downstairs, grabbed from the pile of their expensive suits that were going
to need to be dry-cleaned now. He had fastened just a couple of the buttons, his nudity not even hidden as he sat lounged back in the study chair with his legs spread wide open in total comfort.

The contrast between the cream material and his golden skin and black hair was like art to observe, and so Yoongi came to a stop at the top of the stairs to spend a moment just observing him.

Jimin was too busy looking out of the window to notice him for a moment, the dim sunlight casting over his face to bathe him in shades of red and deep orange and thread its way through his hair. His left hand was cradling his head in his palm, his right hand placed on the soft curve of his stomach.

When Jimin finally caught sight of him out of the corner of his eye, he turned his head to smile at him. His eyes were just about open, swollen from sleep and yet still catching the light from the window to sparkle at him in that usual mischievous fashion.

Yoongi moved to get over to the table, placing the serving tray down in the centre beside his letter box. Then he shifted to cup Jimin’s cheek so that he could give him a chaste morning kiss. The feel of his lips pouting out to meet his with a soft pucker made him hum under his breath contentedly.

“Hmm, your hands are cold,” Jimin crooned in a husky voice, his shoulders lifting up as he let out a little shiver. The Valentino blouse rustled from the movement, slipping down on one side to reveal the naked ball of his shoulder. His neck and shoulder were still marked with soft blemishes from last night’s passionate kisses which had yet to fade, and one or two might just deepen into light bruises. “Let me warm them up, baby boy.”

Yoongi let Jimin take hold of his hands, trying his very hardest to envelope them within his own even though he was unable to fully do so. He pressed his palms together to gently massage at the backs of his hands for him, his touch soft and warm.

Jimin noticed their rings now that they were so close together, a smile lighting up his features as he gazed down at their hands. Hair was hanging down over his eyes, but he made no move to brush it back off his brow as he was far too focused on warming his hands for him. The heat from the coffee cup would do so with ease, but Yoongi took much more enjoyment from letting him do so.

As soon as Jimin had decided that his hands were warm enough, he lifted them to his lips to give them a quick kiss. He made sure to press a kiss against his ring too, softly giggling as he did so.

Yoongi sat down in the spare chair facing him, folding one leg over the other like he often did so
when he was comfortable. He tended to avoid doing so in front of most men, especially his father. But he always found himself naturally falling into the sitting position when he was relaxed and content.

Jimin retrieved his cup of coffee from the tray so that he could nurse it, eyeing the fresh strawberries before glancing out of the window again. The sight of the distant bay had clearly captivated him, just like he had known that it would have.

Yoongi collected his own cup, loosely clasping it in both hands and holding it beneath his lips. It was too hot to drink currently, but he would brave a slight sip soon enough to wet his dry palate.

“You were right, baby boy,” Jimin said in that same husky voice, the somewhat sensual tone making a delightful shiver run down Yoongi’s spine. “The sunrise from this window really is the most beautiful thing in the world.”

“'Cept for-”

“You,” they both finished in tandem, grinning at each other from across the table.

Yoongi turned his head to look out of the bay window too, the scent of coffee wafting up from the surface so that he breathed in the invigorating scent with each inhale.

Just like every single dawn, the view outside of the window was beautiful to observe. The sloping hill that stretched down for what seemed like miles on end was almost bare of traffic at this still dawn hour, just the occasional car and bus rolling down the roads below. The trams hadn’t even started trundling around the city yet, but they would start doing so in time. The powder blue dawn sky was washed in shades of lilac and pink, the clouds turning golden in the beams of rising sunlight to create colours that no artist could ever truly replicate.

The most obvious aspect of the view that had enchanted Jimin was the sight of the bay stretching out below them. The waters were still dark rather than that magnificent shade of rich blue, but the dawn sunlight reflected off the choppy surface to make it it glow red in parts.

It was the kind of view that Yoongi knew Jimin would have thought of when he had found himself missing home during his smuggling trips to Korea and Hong Kong. That same kind of view that was impossible to describe to others because it had to be seen to be believed and appreciated.
Yoongi looked away from the window after a moment, looking across the table at his boyfriend. The younger man was still studying the view, his eyes shifting as he presumably tracked a vehicle across the wide road below.

“Jimin, yesterday…”

Yoongi paused for a second, wetting his lips with the tip of his tongue. He knew what he was trying to say, the words were all there and yet he just hadn’t sorted them out into coherent sentences yet.

“Yesterday, I, uh, I…”

“Yoongi,” Jimin said in a soft voice, dragging his gaze away from the window before also pausing to think about something. “Wait, you finish what you were gonna say, baby boy. That was rude of me to interrupt you.”

“No, it’s ‘k. You can talk, darling, I’ll wait,” Yoongi said, swallowing a quick sip of scalding coffee with a slight wince and then lowering his cup down to the table. “What’s on your mind, mmm?”

“I just wanted to tell you that yesterday was…well, it was the best day of my life, Yoongi,” Jimin admitted with a soft smile, a waft of steam curling up from the surface of his coffee cup. “The best part about it is that I know that I’m gonna keep saying it. Soon enough, I’ll be saying it again, and again, and again, but for now - the best day of my life.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, Yoongi,” he reaffirmed with a vigorous nod. “Today, I’m twenty years old. I’m in a stable, loving relationship for the first time in my whole life. I’m sharing a home with you. I’ve got a job, sure, it’s not exactly legal, but that doesn’t matter.”

Yoongi laughed at this little joke, finding his lips curling up at the corners as he listened to his lover talking.

“What matters is that my life is good right now. I came from nothing, I always thought that I’d amount to nothing my entire life. I’d no dreams at all to hope for because I’d no means of achieving them. But I’ve finally been given a shot at something perfect, and I’m getting to share it with you, Yoongi.”
“What’s your dream now, mmm?” Yoongi asked in a soft voice. “Now that you’ve got the means to achieve something?”

“Oh, oh, I dunno, baby boy,” Jimin admitted with a laugh, reaching up to play with his earring. “I guess…finally finishing high school through college would be a good start.”

This made them both laugh heartily, Jimin bumping his feet against his under the table from the force of his giggling.

“Yeah, I should work hard and study on the side, and then I could…go to university or something. I’m actually really smart, baby boy, I’m really great at maths - no jokes. I could earn a degree, I could get a good job.”

“Mmm, like an accountant?”

“Like whatever pays good,” Jimin corrected with a cheeky grin, bringing his cup to his lips to take a quick sip of coffee.

“Tell you what, you work hard, you study hard, there’s always room for accountants in the real estate venue,” Yoongi remarked, reaching over to pluck a strawberry out of the dish. “I could set you just right for the family company: fantastic pay, great health and dental insurance, a real legal job.”

“Seriously, baby boy?” Jimin asked in a soft voice, his eyes growing round with surprise. “You’d do all of that, for me?”

Yoongi nodded as he popped the strawberry into his mouth, the soft berry bursting to flood his mouth with sweet juice when he bit down into it.

“Then I better start studying,” Jimin finished with a happy smile, moving to also grab a strawberry. “What were you gonna say, hmm? What’s on your mind that you wanna talk about, Yoongi?”

“Yesterday…was an important day for me, Jimin. I knew that it was gonna be important, but I’d not really accepted how much until now,” he explained in a quiet voice, as he peered down into his cup of coffee. “Yesterday, a part of me finally died. It was a part of me that used to control my entire life,
that used to…to make me feel like living really wasn’t worth it.”

Yoongi let go of his coffee cup to press his palm against his brow, closing his eyes as he took a quick intake of breath. He could feel Jimin’s gaze on him the entire time as he was listening to him intently, just like always.

“It was a disgusting lil…tumour inside of my brain that was rotting away and destroying everything. I kept feeding it, I kept letting it grow and grow with all of my anger, my hatred, my fear. But, today, it’s gone. I finally cut it out, I fucking dissected it, and-and-”

Jimin reached over to silently place his hand down on top of his, his palm warm from his coffee cup. The comforting squeeze that he gave his hand was enough to make Yoongi carry on talking; drawing power from the soft gesture.

“it hurt, Jimin. It hurt me to cut that shit out, and I’m bleeding and hurting right now. But it’s gonna get better, I…I know that I can heal in time ‘cos I’ve seen you do it. I’ve watched you healing right in front of my eyes - inspiring me to just do it, to just let go of all of that pain. Today, I…I’m starting to live my life the way that I always should’ve lived it. Today, I’m moving forward and I ain’t looking back. No, no fucking way, I ain’t ever going back to that. I ain’t jumping outta the fucking closet screaming “look at me!” or anything like that, but I’m…accepting who I am.”

“Self-acceptance is the most powerful kinda acceptance, baby boy,” Jimin said with a smile. “You already know that you’re accepted by me, Namo, Jungkook, Hoseok; you’ve got that support behind you, always. All this time, you’ve needed to accept yourself.”

“I know, I know, darling. I think I can do it, I really think that I can start accepting myself.”

“You know you can, Yoongi.”

“I know I can,” Yoongi repeated in a mantra, nodding to himself as he did so. “Yesterday was a test for me, to see if I really could commit myself to you, to us, to getting better. There were times when I was anxious, when I was scared that this might just fall apart on me - y’know, this perfect thing that we’ve started building together, our…our love. I was scared, Jimin, but it didn’t stop me. I conquered that fear and today, we’re drinking coffee and watching the sunrise together.”

Yoongi let out a soft laugh at this, reaching up with his free hand to roughly wipe at his eyes. They were stinging, but no tears had started fully welling on his lash line.
“I let fear rule my life for so long that I didn’t even feel like I was living a life at all. Today, I start being brave and I start living again,” he finished, sniffing hard and letting his breath out in a soft sigh. “I’m gay and I’m fuh-fucking happy, Jimin.”

Yoongi had only just finished speaking when Jimin dived out of his seat, gently tugging him to his feet so that he could throw his arms around him in an embrace.

“We’re gay and we’re fucking happy, baby boy!” Jimin cheered, jostling him in his hold so that Yoongi started laughing even as he felt the first sob trying to escape his lips. “We love each other, we love ourselves, we’re so fucking happy!”

Jimin moved so that he could shower him with kisses, his lips peppering sweet kisses all over his cheeks, nose and mouth.

Yoongi’s strangled sobs turned into laughs from the contact, until he buried his face against the warm expanse of Jimin’s chest to try and calm down.

“Oh, Yoongi, you’re so strong. You’re so strong and brave,” Jimin praised in a soothing voice, as he tenderly stroked at his hair. “You’re the strongest man I know.”

“I-I am?” he gasped, his voice muffled against the soft rise of Jimin’s breast.

“Uuhuh, you make me feel strong when I’m with you, Yoongi,” his boyfriend whispered. “You’ve been through so much pain but you’re still standing tall. That’s real strength, baby.”

As quickly as the tears had overwhelmed him, Yoongi found himself calming down. It was almost as if there had been a little bubble of emotion trapped inside of him that had finally popped, spilling it all free to bring him sweet relief. He sat back down in the chair to nurse his coffee, finding that it was finally cool enough to drink without burning his tongue.

Jimin joined him at the table, also savouring his morning coffee over strawberries.

The study fell silent for several minutes, nothing but the occasional rumbling engine from outside bleeding in through the glass. It was a pleasant silence to Yoongi; one brought about because they
were so comfortable in each other’s presence to not keep breaking it to ease any tension. He was starting to greatly enjoy these little moments of tranquility more and more.

“Yoongi, can I make us some breakfast?” Jimin asked around a plump strawberry, sucking a hint of juice free from his thumb. “I know that we need to get ready for work soon, even though I’d rather climb straight back into bed with you and sleep for the whole day-”

“Shit, me too, Jimin,” he agreed.

“but, I wanna make us breakfast,” he finished, slipping his thumb free from his pouted lips with a liquid pop. “Can I, baby boy?”

“I ain’t got anything in the kitchen to make breakfast with,” Yoongi admitted after a moment of thought. “How ‘bout this? We go to Mickey’s Joint for breakfast for a few days, I’ll add extra ingredients onto my grocery order for the week, and then we can start making breakfast together when the goods arrive?”

“OK, but here’s an idea,” Jimin replied, perking up in his seat and plucking another large strawberry from the dish. “Today, we go to Mickey’s Joint for breakfast, and this evening, we go shopping together for the first time to buy breakfast ingredients instead of relying on your servants?”

“‘Servants’?” Yoongi repeated with a snort, watching his boyfriend popping the strawberry into his mouth. “Mmm, alright, let’s do that instead, Jimin.”

“When’s the last time that you went shopping, baby boy? Not including shopping with Hoseok, that doesn’t count,” Jimin quickly added, talking over him before Yoongi could reply. He had to stop talking for a few seconds, which made him laugh. “You actually need a moment to think?”

“It’s been a long time, Jimin, too long,” Yoongi admitted in a quiet voice. “What can I say, I used to live a very…sheltered life before meeting you. Never mind hiding in the closet, this house is my closet. I’d work, return home, maybe go for a drive - but I’d spend a great deal of time alone. Not ‘cos I actually enjoyed being alone, but just ‘cos it was easier on my mind.”

“Today’s that new start of yours, baby boy. Time to start stepping out of the closet with me,” Jimin said with a sweet smile. “What better way to start than with small steps like this; normal, healthy steps.”
“No, you’re right. We’ll start doing those things together, Jimin,” Yoongi agreed with a nod. “Shopping, going on walks and drives together, taking care of Tigger for the kid when he’s at school - shit like that. Normal, healthy steps a day at a time, with you by my side.”

“Oh, we’re gonna go to that huge supermarket over on California Street, the one with all of the fresh produce and fancy organic shit in it that rich white people go nuts for. I’m gonna climb into the trolley, so, you’ll have to push me around in it.”

“You’re too big for a trolley, darling,” Yoongi remarked, cupping his chin in his palm so that he could rest his rolled-up fingers against his lips.

“Listen, neither of our short asses are too big for a trolley, baby boy,” Jimin disagreed with a fervent head shake, which made him laugh against the backs of his fingers. “Then, we’ll pop into Japantown and grab some authentic food with flavour, hmm.”

Yoongi couldn’t help but guffaw at Jimin’s antics, loving the natural and camp flair that he exuded that reminded him so much of Hoseok when he was riled up about something.

“We’ll buy breakfast ingredients and fresh bento boxes and sushi, and just spend the evening relaxing together,” Jimin finished with a huge smile. “I’ll tell you all about my first day at work over a head massage or something - perfect, right?”

“It sounds like heaven to me, Jimin.”

After finishing their coffee and the dish of strawberries, Jimin carried the tray downstairs for him with the promise to clean everything. The sound of water running echoed up through the flooring a moment later, followed by his boyfriend’s soft humming as he started cleaning up the kitchen.

Yoongi went upstairs into the bedroom to tidy it up, collecting their suits from the flooring and hanging them on the front of the wardrobe. He would need to arrange for them to be dry-cleaned, now that they were heavily creased from spending the night in a puddle on the floor.

After ensuring that the floor was clean and the bed covers and pillows were neatly stacked in place, Yoongi entered the bathroom to ready the shower and heat up the water.

Jimin finished cleaning up the kitchen in the time that it took Yoongi relief himself and prepare the
hot shower. He entered the bathroom to examine everything, from the massive bathtub and the gilded and gleaming taps, to the spotless floor and wall tiles with floral decorations and blue trim around them.

Before joining him in the shower, Jimin had to retrieve his little travel bag of toiletries from his holdall bag in the bedroom. He emptied the contents out onto the rim of the sink and bathtub as he tried to find the best places to store everything.

First, his red toothbrush and paste went into a small cup beside the tap with his own. Then he added bottles of shampoo and body cremes onto a shelf on the wall by the large shower system, all of them creamy shades of white and pink that seemed to signal the scents inside. Finally, he popped open the medical cabinet over the sink so that he could store his makeup, deodorant and cologne inside of it. He had many little tubes and pots of lip balm and eyeshadows in shades of brown and cream, and little thin pencils for adding smokey smudges of eyeliner around his eyes.

Jimin paused in the act of placing his bottle of *Jules* cologne on the top shelf, eyeing another identical bottle that was already sitting there beside Yoongi’s usual bottle of *Antaeus* cologne. He turned his head to look at him, his expression slightly puzzled.

“I, uh, I bought that a while ago,” Yoongi explained, watching him place the glass bottle down beside the other colognes. “I like the scent. I spray it on my pillows, sometimes. It helps me sleep.”

“You know what helps me sleep, baby boy?” Jimin asked, as he reached up to start unbuttoning the Valentino blouse. “Watching you fall asleep first.”

Yoongi got into the shower, Jimin stepping in after him and wrenching the curtain around to trap in the heat and water. The temperature was at that high level of heat that he relished, and as he stood under it and he let the stream crash down onto him, Yoongi couldn’t help but let out a low moan of pleasure.

Under the constant stream of water, they did more than simply help each other shower. Jimin cradled him in his arms for several minutes just to hold him close, softly kissing at his neck and tonguing beaded water free until Yoongi almost melted in his tight hold. In turn, Yoongi massaged at Jimin’s buttocks and thighs until the lather was dropping down in thick suds to wash down the drain, so lost in his deep kisses that he didn’t even realise.

By the time that they stepped out of the shower, Yoongi’s head was foggy from the heat and soft pleasure. He splashed cold water on his face to wake himself up, Jimin lounged on the edge of the tub beside him with just a towel around his shoulders to catch the water that was running down from
his soaked hair. His full cheeks were flushed pink from the heat, much like how Jimin’s golden tan had turned ruddy in parts.

After brushing their teeth, moisturising their skin and finishing up their bathing routine with spritzes of cologne and deodorant, they both went back into the bedroom to start getting dressed.

Yoongi sat down on the edge of the bed to slip his watch and ring on first, checking the time to see that it was drawing close to 6:30am. It was early, very early, but at least he and Jimin had plenty of time to get dressed and enjoy breakfast together before they had to part ways for work.

Jimin retrieved one of his day suits from the wardrobe, unzipping the dust cover so that he could place it down on the bed beside him. It was black, British-cut and fitted rather than loose like the current trend for suits. The jacket had nice notched lapels and a single breast, the trousers had a high waistline and loops for belts rather than suspenders. He grabbed a shirt from the wardrobe to add to the look, a black one with a low neckline that he would most certainly not button up fully.

“Mmm, you’re making me wanna wear a suit too, darling.” Yoongi almost rumbled, still foggy from shower heat so that he was fighting off the urge to lie back in bed and just relax.

“Why don’t you?” Jimin asked with a smile, as he finished towelling at his slightly damp hair. He had yet to slip into any briefs, completely comfortable with his nakedness as he wandered around the bedroom - his skin supple and moist with lotion.

Yoongi thought this over for a moment as he watched Jimin slipping into his Calvin Klein briefs. He had to reach back to fix them in place, the material cheekily catching between his buttocks. Then he got off the bed to also go over to the wardrobe and peruse the contents.

Jimin got dressed in his all black ensemble, the outfit surprisingly not washing out his colour at all. It actually enhanced his tan, made him glow as he fixed his diamond earrings back into the piercing holes and then racked his damp hair back with his fingers.

Yoongi found himself also slipping into a black day suit, though he did so with some uncertainty. He worried between a white shirt and his seashell patterned Valentino blouse in turn until Jimin moved to place the plain shirt back into his wardrobe with a soft smile. He fretted at the idea of wearing a belt or some suspenders before settling on a belt because the other look seemed far too formal.

By the time that Yoongi was finished getting dressed, Jimin was sitting on the bed watching him: all
dressed save for his shoes.

“How’d I look, huh?” Yoongi asked with an uncertain smile, shoving his hands down into the trousers pockets in an attempt at looking casual.

Jimin got up off the bed to fix his collar and lapel for him, smoothing them in place before kissing him in the corner of his mouth.

“You look like Prince Min,” Jimin replied, his full lips splitting into a sunny smile.

After exiting the home and locking up, Jimin gratuitously accepting a spare key that he slipped down safely in his inner jacket pocket with his wallet, they had to walk across just several blocks before entering Mickey’s Joint.

At the current early hour, some businessmen and women were still in the act of finishing breakfast before starting their early shifts. But they were able to enter and sit at their favourite table of choice; Yoongi holding the door for his boyfriend just to earn himself a thankful smile. The air wasn’t silent as some of the other diners were conversing with one another, but there wasn’t a hectic or packed feeling coming from the interior. It meant that by the time that they were starting their breakfast, most of them would have left to commute to work.

Over their usual large breakfast, Jimin talked about his upcoming new job role. He confided in him that he was nervous about it all, but that Hoseok had already told him that everything was going to be fine; which Yoongi firmly agreed with from over the rim of his glass of orange juice. He shared little anecdotes about his time spent running to clients in Pacific Heights, people he referred to as ‘suburban nightmares’ and made the both of them laugh, and he occasionally lapsed into moments of silence in which he just observed him from across the table - his head cocked to the side and resting in his hand as he just absorbed the sight in front of him.

In turn, Yoongi told him about how things in Korea were starting to recover again and how the profit margins were expanding once more. He expressed his relief at the fact that Jimin was no longer a mule, that he was actually much safer working his new role. He fed his boyfriend little bites of omelette from the tines of his fork as he glanced between his face and the road outside, so deeply absorbed in their conversation that it nothing else in the diner seemed to matter to him.

It was edging close to 8:00am when the car finally pulled up outside.
In that time, they had finished their shared breakfast, the plates clean of everything save for smears of grease, blobs of whipped cream and dribbles of meat and fruit juice. Yoongi had downed another coffee alongside the meal, Jimin having decided to savour a milkshake instead with that childish sweet tooth of his.

Yoongi eyed the car to see that it was a Mercedes-Benz 200, sleek black just like the one that his father owned. The main difference was in the hubcaps, which weren’t ridiculously decorative to show off wealth. A man climbed out of the driver-seat to stand on the curb, waiting for Jimin to exit the diner and climb into the spacious backseat.

“That’s your ride, darling,” Yoongi explained, folding up a napkin so that he could gently wipe at his mouth for him.

Jimin let him do so, falling still in his seat and pursing his lips so that he could wipe away any hints of grease, syrup or cream from the corners of his mouth and chin. The way that he did so made Yoongi laugh to himself, finding his expression incredibly endearing.

“You’re gonna start working with a man called Hoon, ‘k, and he’s a professional,” Yoongi explained, dropping the napkin down onto the plate for him. “He’ll tell you everything that you need to know, he’ll ease you into the role.”

“I hope I don’t fuck something up on my first day,” Jimin said with a laugh, and it was hard figuring out if he was telling a joke or voicing a serious worry.

“Don’t worry about it, Jimin,” Yoongi said in a soft voice. “You answer to me now, and me alone, so, ain’t nobody gonna punish you for making a mistake.”

“OK, I’ll work hard today, Yoongi,” Jimin promised, leaning across the table in what was an obvious sign that he wanted a goodbye kiss.

Yoongi moved to cup the back of his neck in hand, bringing their lips together in a deep kiss. It wasn’t a quick peck, a chaste kiss that he hoped that no one noticed. It was a proper kiss, one that made Jimin moan softly into his mouth as their tongues brushed together teasingly. Jimin even chased after the kiss to give him another quick one, their noses bumping together.

“I’ll see you tonight, baby boy,” Jimin said, shifting to get off the bench and slipping his suit jacket on. He checked the inner pocket before tugging down on the lapels - looking every bit as smart and
beautiful as he had done so last night. “Remember your promise.”

“Shopping over on California Street, dinner from Japantown, a promised head massage,” Yoongi replied, giving his lover a fond smile. “Bye, Jimin.”

Jimin gave him a parting wink as he turned on his heel to leave the diner, hitting the street to climb into the vehicle. He walked with that usual powerful confidence of his: his head held high, his shoulders up and his back straight. It was almost believable that he wasn’t even nervous just watching him go, but he knew that he was a little anxious over the new and important job role.

Yoongi watched the car pulling away from the curb a mere minute later, Hoon behind the wheel escorting Jimin across the city for the entire day. He would take him to all of the private properties and educate him on how to leave drugs behind and collect parcels of money - little face-to-face deals required for a great deal of their wealthy clients. Whenever Jimin needed to talk business, he knew that he could handle himself perfectly well.

Yoongi was so distracted looking out of the window that it took him a moment to notice that Annika had come over to clean their table.

“Your boy looks as handsome as the devil in a suit,” she remarked with a smile, as she finished placing the used dishes on her serving tray and she moved to cross the diner once more.

As Yoongi watched her go, he thought about the fact that she had referred to Jimin as ‘his boy’ in such a casual fashion. It made him think about how Jimin had joked about how he thought that the waitress might just have known that they were a couple that first morning they had had breakfast together in the diner. It seemed like he had been correct with his observation.

Just several minutes after Jimin had left in his ride, Seokjin’s bright red Ferrari came smoothly sailing up the road to pull up to the curb outside. He climbed out of the vehicle to step onto the sidewalk: wearing a light grey day suit under his cream mac, a Burberry scarf around his neck and his favoured calfskin loafers on his feet. He sauntered into the diner looking as expensive and handsome as always, not a single dark hair out of place on his brow.

“You’re wearing a suit, Yoongi.” Seokjin remarked, as he came to a stop right beside the table. “You look good. You look handsome, in fact, like a true businessman. Imagine what your father would think if he saw you today.”
Yoongi thought about the fact that Jimin had helped him select his suit from the wardrobe for him today; the pair of them having showered together before getting ready for work. Another man had fixed the lapels of his suit jacket in place for him and had kissed him in the corner of his mouth so lovingly.

“I imagine he’d be shocked,” Yoongi replied, struggling to keep a smirk off his face as he got to his feet.

Yoongi collected his wallet from his inner pocket to cover the costs of breakfast, holding $20 out to Annika as a tip as she passed the table. Seokjin looked at the small bundle of cash on the table with little interest. He slipped the wallet back into his pocket and then he tugged at the lapels to smooth out the lengths of his suit jacket.

“Let’s go to work, Seokjin.”
Chapter 16

20th October, 1984, 4:53pm: Presidio Heights, San Francisco, United States of America

The cool breeze bleeding into the car interior smelled strongly of greenery, which was coming from the sprawling acres of private land that filled the neighbourhood. The scent actually overpowered that of the close shores of both Baker Beach and China Beach.

The fresh and woodsy air was pleasant, just not as refreshing as the tang of the bay was to Jimin’s nose. He knew which scent that he preferred by far, but the breeze was still pleasing on his skin. It was nice breathing in something other than noxious exhaust fumes coming from the more packed neighbourhoods, for sure. He took a deep breath to hold it in his lungs for a few seconds; watching the low-hanging branches of a towering apple blossom tree softly dancing. A scattering of loose, white petals dropped down to land on the hood of the black car.

Jimin shifted in his seat to glance over at Hoon; the other man in the act of driving the car. He was so absorbed in the current task that he didn’t even look over at him to return his gaze, his thin eyes squinted against the sunlight streaming in through the front window. His leather gloves creaked when he let go of the steering-wheel to reposition his hands, so that he could smoothly curve the vehicle around an upcoming corner.

After a moment of silently studying the older man, Jimin glanced back down at the notebook that was placed in his lap.

Jimin had been rereading the dozens of pages of notes for the umpteenth time, just to try and ensure that he fully memorised the contents. The quicker that he did so, the quicker that he could show Hoon that he was capable of assisting him with dead drops and exchanging the goods - utilising memory alone, instead of constantly asking questions and scanning the notebook for extra assistance.

The pages of the notebook were pristine, filled with line upon line of very neat, blue ink that he assumed to be Hoon’s handwriting. At least the pages weren’t just solid blocks of text, for whoever had written the notes had ensured to use short bullet points to be concise.

Each line was filled with information, no unneeded words or flowery prose present to distract or confuse. As a result, he found it incredibly easy to recall entire pages of information without a single
Jimin had been riding in the passenger-seat for several days now, rather than the backseat because it seemed more professional. It wasn’t for the sake of conversation, for his new partner wasn’t the kind to talk much at all. It just felt like he was supposed to sit in the front with him, and so he had started doing so. Hoon hadn’t told him that he should sit in the backseat, which Jimin was taking as a sign to stay in the front from now on.

Maybe soon, Jimin would be able to show Hoon that he was ready to start working the job as a partner, rather than an assistant. That was why he needed to memorise everything as fast as he could, so that he could feel like he was actually being helpful and not just following the other man around like a puppy.

When the vehicle rounded a street corner, Jimin felt himself shifting in his seat; his seatbelt growing taut around his side. As he turned the page of the notebook, he glanced up to see that Hoon looked to be heading towards an upcoming property along the wide road. He eyed the building for a few seconds, and then he closed the notebook to place it down on the dashboard.

The building that they needed to enter was a massive mansion with a set of front gates, which needed to be opened from a security booth to grant them passage. Though Jimin had never entered this particular mansion before, it looked incredibly similar to some of the ones that they had visited over the last few days. That meant that the layout was likely similar, or so he hoped.

If so, it would help Jimin learn the exact locations of each room, which would cut down on time spent exchanging goods inside of the properties. In turn, this would ensure that they didn’t have any minor delays in their schedule.

Hoon slowed the car down to a stop right in front of the gates, and he shifted to lean out of the open window. He didn’t call out, he didn’t even wave his arm to draw attention to them, for the CCTV camera mounted on the top of one of the towering stone walls was trained right onto the front drive at all times. All that they needed to do was wait for a moment, and then the gates would open up to let him drive inside of the property.

After several seconds of waiting, the front gates swung inwards - the man inside of the security booth having granted them access onto the private land. They didn’t make a metallic creak, but rather groaned as they slowly opened.

Jimin turned his head to look at the small security booth as the car rolled forward onto the drive. He found himself wondering how much it paid to sit in that booth all day long, even when the property
wasn’t currently in use. It was probably a lot of cash, with it being a private security job. The guy was probably an ex-cop, ex-bodyguard, or something like that. Judging from his large frame and grizzled appearance, he could have even been in the military at some point in his life.

Hoon guided the car along the manicured and tarmac-lined drive, rolling it towards an area that looked to be a parking lot for visitors.

Whilst his partner parked in one of the empty spots, Jimin glanced off across the sprawling front lawn to get a good look at the property.

The lawn grass was clipped down to a short length, perfectly neat and straight all over so that not a single blade of grass stood out from the rest. The hedges that lined the stone walls had been pruned into artful animal shapes, which he thought might be lions, dogs and horses - it was hard studying them from his current position. The drive wasn’t even made of dirt, but consisted of light-grey stone flags that had been swept free of any hints of dirt by hired housekeepers.

When the engine cut off, Jimin moved to pop his seatbelt free. He could hear Hoon doing so too, his partner climbing out of the vehicle first. He copied his actions, stepping out of the passenger-seat and hearing dust crunching under his shoe soles.

Jimin fixed his suit jacket by tugging at the lapels and ends, just to stop any creases from settling into the material. The suit was charcoal grey, which almost blended into the black shirt that he had matched it with. His leather gloves and shoes meant that he was almost dressed in black from head to toe - a look that he knew that Yoongi was very fond of.

After checking his reflection out in the side mirror, Jimin went around to the boot to join his partner.

Hoon popped the spacious boot open so that he could collect the goods, which were stored in a secret compartment. This was to make sure that they were hidden from sight at all times, should they ever find a police cruiser pulling them over. He had to lift up a fake, rubber boot layer to reveal the assortment of briefcases and a crowbar.

Hoon collected the crowbar as he leaned forward to peer inside and examine the selection; turning over tags that had been attached to the handles, along with keys. He located the one that they needed, and so he dragged it out and slammed the boot shut. Instead of speaking, he just gave Jimin a curt nod to let him know that they were ready to enter the mansion.
Jimin followed him across the front path, unable to stop himself from looking all around them at the sights inside of the mansion grounds.

Yoongi’s mansion was a beautiful home: large and clean, with a garden pool and lovely guest rooms. But it looked small in comparison to the kind of homes that filled Presidio Heights, which reeked of that dramatic opulence that always managed to make Jimin feel like poor trash.

These mansions somehow seemed bigger than the apartment block that he had grown up in; the block that had housed over a hundred people in its tiny, squalid rooms that had spanned just eight storeys high. Yet, the mansions housed just one person most of the time - two to four at maximum, should the owner have a partner, and maybe even one or two kids running about the place.

These homes had acres, had enough land to feel like a goddamn park. They had bedrooms in the double digits too, which made very little sense to him because there was no way that every single bedroom would ever be in permanent use. There was a pond in the front garden of this particular property, filled with colourful and no doubt expensive fish. Jimin was willing to bet that the garden would have golf greens, or something else as equally absurd.

It seemed fitting that Yoongi wouldn’t live in one of these massive mansions. Much like him, Yoongi seemed to dislike such flagrant displays of wealth; preferring moderation in regards to many things in life. His mansion might be smaller than these homes, but it was all that he needed. Therefore, there was no need for anything more than that.

After all, before Jimin had moved into his home with him, Yoongi had admitted that he had hated living alone in such a large house.

Hoon went up the front steps of the mansion to unlock the door, using the spare key that was attached to the briefcase handle to do so.

Just like that, they were inside of the building and able to exchange the goods for their client in the agreed location. Said location happened to be the master bedroom, which Jimin had memorised from his notebook. He also knew that they were exchanging cocaine for cash in this particular deal, a rather large amount of cocaine at that.

Jimin followed his partner across the foyer to go up a sweeping set of stairs, their shoe soles clipping and squeaking on the marble and wooden flooring. They entered the master bedroom along the stretch of landing, which contained a California King Size bed with silken sheets and luxurious brocade covers, and plenty of authentic, wooden furniture. But none of the interior decor caught his attention right now, for there was something much more important inside of the bedroom.
Jimin stepped across the flooring very slowly, carefully placing his foot down toes first and then rolling his foot so that his heel came down with a soft sound. The rubber soles of his black, leather Oxfords occasionally rubbed against the polished wood, making a slight squeak that was somewhat distracting. He closed his eyes to try and help him concentrate; one hand held out in front of him to ensure that he didn’t walk into a wall, or bump into any items of furniture.

As he did so, Jimin could sense that Hoon was observing him from across the room. The other man didn’t say a single word, nor did he move to assist him, as he had clearly realised what he was doing.

For the first time since he had started working this new job role, Jimin was finally trying to do this particular trick on his own. He had watched Hoon doing it many times already, had listened to his advice and had memorised it, and now it was time to test if he could actually do this.

Every time that he stepped down onto the floorboard, Jimin consciously felt how it moved underneath him; how firm or springy that it was. Though his squeaky shoe soles were irritating, he could still hear the way that the wood creaked under his weight. He was so deeply focused on the task that he cocked his head subconsciously, furrowing his brow in little twitches as he listened to every single noise that the flooring made.

Jimin came to a sudden stop after a moment, taking a step back and dropping his gaze down to the floorboard that he had just stepped on. He eyed the thin seams that were visible between the pieces of wood, seeing no hints at all to alert him to whether or not it was the correct board. He shifted his weight back onto the singular board, just to test it again.

The floorboard underneath him felt different, felt more springy than the other ones had. That, combined with the slightly hollow echo of his footstep when he had stepped down onto it again, was enough to make him stop and look over at Hoon.

“Here, right here,” Jimin said, pointing down at the floorboard beneath his foot.

Hoon moved to hold the crowbar out to him without a single word, his face completely free of expression.

Jimin wouldn’t know if he was right or wrong until he pried the floorboard up - supposing that Hoon was willing to let him make a massive mistake for the sake of learning, rather than intervene and stop him. He thought that it was entirely possible that Hoon wouldn’t intervene even if he was wrong, and that was why he had to pray that he was right.
Jimin accepted the tool from Hoon, moving to hunker down on one knee and get into position. He ran his gloved fingers across the seams between the floorboards, just to be completely certain that this was the right board to remove. It did look like there was enough room for the crowbar head to slip in, but the seams all over the flooring were so thin and uniform that it was hard to tell.

“Let’s hope for the sake of Judge Goldstein’s floor that you’re right,” Hoon remarked, moving back a step to observe him.

“Well, I’m sure that he can afford new flooring,” Jimin joked, as he slipped the curved end of the crowbar into the slit between the floorboards.

This actually earned him a dry chuckle from the other man, the first one that he had managed to draw out of Hoon so far over their workload. It was enough to make Jimin glance up at him for a moment, pausing in the act of readying the crowbar.

For six days now, Hoon had been teaching Jimin all about his new job role. There were several aspects to learn that were different from his previous roles in the gang, though some similarities still remained. The older man was his teacher in a way, much like how Namjoon had once been his teacher before they had ended up as partners with an equal balance of knowledge.

Primarily, Jimin needed to memorise their list of affluent clientele, so that he could ensure that he never made a mistake during their exchanges and transactions.

Jimin was used to memorising such things over the duration of his previous job roles. From learning all of Namjoon’s regulars, their habits, their orders, and their private lives during his running days; to smuggling drugs and ensuring that the deal was exactly what was quoted, even with inflation taken into account - he had gotten used to utilising his fantastic memory skills.

Right now, Jimin had his notebook filled with information about them all to assist him, which he had been poring over in the passenger-seat of the car whilst they had been travelling from location to location.

However, it wasn’t just the clients and their addresses that Jimin needed to memorise, but also many other details. From their orders - which he needed to learn the exact amount, price and demand for, to the exchanges themselves; Jimin had a lot of facts to memorise.
Most of their exchanges and transactions happened in secretive locations: fronts disguised as legitimate businesses for them to exchange goods in; second or even third homes, like this mansion - with hidden safes and fake floorboards. That meant memorising each safe combination for every client that owned one. It meant learning which one of a hundred floorboards in the bedroom or kitchen flooring could be removed to reveal a hidden compartment.

In short, Jimin had a lot to learn, and it was going to take time for him to grow confident with his new profession. That was why his partner, Hoon, was important, as he was either going to help him adapt to his new role with ease and confidence, or he was going to hinder his progress through lack of assistance and guidance.

So far into their interactions, Jimin quite liked Hoon, though he didn’t know why exactly he did so. He was a tall man, with wide shoulders and an athletic, but still slim build. He had light facial hair, which was groomed rather than unruly, and his hair was short, but long enough to need to be parted to the side and held in place by some gel. A tanned complexion, thin eyes, a strong jawline - Jimin supposed that Hoon could be considered attractive, in that mature kind of way. But that wasn’t why he liked him.

It was probably because Hoon had a slightly…uncle-like vibe coming from him - an adult male figure that wasn’t fatherly enough to remind him of his dad, but had a sense of silent guidance and authority. He had yet to get close to raising his voice in his presence, for the other man always spoke in a low voice that carried well through the silence of the homes and offices that they exchanged goods in. He was quiet, talking only when he needed to, and he didn’t smile much at all, but this seemed fitting considering the job role.

After all, Jimin was hardly going to have a partner like Namjoon or Taehyung for such a professional job. They weren’t cut out for such a thing, not because they were unprofessional or in anyway immature when it came to business, but just because it was far too strict.

Namjoon thrived off business that involved the human aspect: dealing, talking, being out there on the streets, living a day at a time. Taehyung was in his element travelling through foreign countries with only his basic grasp on language to get by: fearless of getting lost, adventurous, and highly adaptive.

Yet, Jimin found that he could take to this new job role with startling ease. From utilising his memory and maths skills, to no longer needing to push himself to the edges of his physical and mental limits smuggling drugs inside of his body - working dead drop locations was a wonderful break from his old routine. He knew that he could master this role in time, much like he had mastered his previous professions for Moon Tiger Mob.

On account of the fact that Jimin was unable to drive, the other man was going to stay as his partner to escort him around the city. That might just change in time, he didn’t really know, but he did know
that he was more than content to let Hoon escort him around for the foreseeable future. They could make a good team, though he knew that they wouldn’t become ‘friends’ over time, rather remain entirely professional.

Jimin felt the crowbar sliding through the seam without resistance at all, which allowed him to angle his wrist to catch the piece of wood with the crooked ends.

When he applied a hint of pressure, the board groaned and popped up with a thumping sound, and so Jimin grabbed the edge of the floorboard with his free hand. After slipping the crowbar free, he pushed the board up, and he watched it swinging back until it came to a stop on an obtuse angle; groaning loudly as it did so.

Stale air wafted out of the hidden space, strongly musty in a way that made Jimin lift his arm up to press his nose against the sleeve of his suit jacket.

There, underneath the flooring so that no one would possibly be able to see it, was a small hinge that had allowed them to lift up the floorboard with ease.

Jimin looked up at Hoon as he placed the crowbar aside on the flooring, giving him a pleased smile that he couldn’t even hope to suppress. He had selected the fake floorboard correctly on his first attempt, and it had given him a wonderful boost to his confidence.

“Well done,” Hoon praised from his position close to the bedroom doorway. “You should find it easier to locate them in the future now, and faster too.”

Jimin reached down into the hidden space in the flooring, pulling a manilla envelope free that he hastily tore open. A decent-sized pile of bundled-up bills landed on the floorboards in front of him, all neatly secured together with elastic bands. He gestured at Hoon to hand him the suitcase as he picked up the first roll.

One by one, Jimin thumbed through the rolls of cash just to ensure that they weren’t short of a single $100 bill. He placed each roll inside of the briefcase, a brick of freebase cocaine currently still inside that would go straight into the hidden space as soon as he had checked that the payment was exact.

Judge Goldstein seemed to have quite the nose for cocaine, and he also had a penchant for throwing swingers parties - which Jimin had no doubts about would be flooded with the substance. It would be a nice big orgy of debauchery, all orchestrated by one of the leading federal judges of the city,
who had all kinds of links to Hollywood film producers, politicians, and elite businessmen all over the city.

Got to love a hypocrite.

“Hey, Hoon?”

Jimin glanced up to look at the other man just as he slipped the final bundle of bills into the briefcase. He had to reach up to knock his hair back out of his eyes, tucking a thick fall of locks behind his ear.

“How come there’s a bottle of champagne on that table?” he continued, shifting his gaze to eye the bottle that had been left on a small display table.

It was obviously there for a reason, seemingly a gift from what Jimin could discern. All that was missing was gift wrap and a label, for no one would be stupid enough to leave such extravagant bottles of champagne lying around their mansion like this. The kind of man that had secret floorboards for storing cocaine wasn’t the kind of man to do such a thing. The bottle belonged in a wine cellar, safely stored away to keep it cool and drinkable.

“Judge Goldstein seems to have an…unfavourable habit of trying to befriend us,” Hoon explained, as he moved to stand beside the table and he looked down at the bottle. “He leaves bottles of champagne out for us in the hopes of swaying us into accepting it. Once you start accepting gifts, you start liking a client more than those that don’t leave you gifts because you start to think that this client is your friend; that they appreciate you. You become more favourable towards them in turn.”

“Oh?” Jimin hummed, quickly figuring out that Hoon was describing something that sounded like a bribe.

“The previous man that worked this job with me, he got too fond of accepting these little gifts in return for private deals on the side, working out of the best interests of Moon Tiger Mob. Prince Min saw to it that he was replaced by you instead. A team is much more beneficial for this particular job, I find. It ensures that neither one of us will fall sway to such amateur attempts like this.”

“Hmm, I get all of the champagne that I need at home,” Jimin remarked with a quick smile, as he slotted the brick of cocaine inside of the space in the floorboards. “Bribes don’t work on me.”
Jimin had no clue if Hoon was aware of the fact that he and Yoongi were in a relationship with one another, or if it was just a strictly business partnership that they had going on. He had collected him from Yoongi’s mansion each morning since their second day of work, which should have been a sign of their relationship to most people.

But had Jimin not moved into Yoongi’s home, then Hoon would have been collecting him from Namjoon’s house every morning instead. Being in his home didn’t necessarily mean that they were a couple, for he guessed that some might just assume that he was briefed by Yoongi before starting his job for the day - however unusual that this might just seem to be.

Yet, that seemed a rather ignorant assumption to Jimin, and he was more than aware of the fact that Hoon was an intelligent man. If his partner collected him from Yoongi’s mansion every morning, with the scent of fresh coffee lingering on his breath, and he dropped him off outside of it every evening, then Hoon must be aware of the fact that they were in a relationship.

Not too long ago, that would have made Jimin a little bit worried, and he knew that it would have scared the shit out of Yoongi. Their relationship had been secretive from the very start, and it still was in some ways. But since learning that Yoongi had admitted to his parents that he was in a homosexual relationship, and seeing his boyfriend still blooming everyday even through his hardships and fears, it had alleviated a lot of Jimin’s worries too.

So what if Hoon might just know that they were in a relationship? It wasn’t going to change a single thing between them, for Yoongi clearly trusted the other man enough to allow him to collect him from his home each morning.

As soon as the cocaine brick was secure within the secret space, Jimin pulled the fake floorboard down to apply pressure to get it to snap back in place. Satisfied that it was fully shut, he closed the briefcase and he grabbed hold of the handle.

There, the exchange was complete, and it was time to move onto the next deal.

Jimin followed Hoon out of the mansion. He locked the front door shut again with the key, and then he crossed the lawn to get back to their car. He stored the briefcase in the secret compartment, along with seven other briefcases that were already filled with cash, and one that still contained a stash of drugs. After fixing the fake boot lining in place, he slammed the boot shut and he joined his partner in the front seat.

To exit the property, they needed to wait for the front gates to swing open again. After a few seconds of waiting, they did so. Hoon rolled the vehicle forward to pass through the exit, the car moving
slowly as he followed the soft curve of the drive. They had only just curved onto the main road again when the gates started closing behind them, sealing the property shut once more.

As Hoon guided the car down the streets of Presidio, Jimin couldn’t help but let his mind wander whilst he watched the sights outside of the window. They blurred into little more than tree-filled streets, almost free from pedestrians and vehicles at this current hour; a cool breeze blowing in through the open window to play with his hair.

Naturally, his wandering mind ended up thinking about Yoongi, as it was apt to do so these days. More often than not, Jimin found himself thinking about his boyfriend whenever he wasn’t too busy working to delve into his thoughts. Even if it was only fleeting: a little thought about how he hoped that Yoongi wasn’t too stressed out, or that he was taking a moment to have a break in his usual heavy workload - he still thought about him.

Over the past week, Jimin had started adjusting to his new life living with Yoongi. It had been perfect so far, for his boyfriend seemed to be handling the big change well. It felt much like living with Namjoon had, save for the obvious differences.

For one, they often went out together in the evening: to go shopping for groceries; to buy fresh seafood over on the pier on The Embarcadero, or bento boxes and sushi in Japantown; to go cruising for a little while in the car before returning home. They were currently too busy working to go on proper dates, but Yoongi had promised him that they would spend their Sundays together - no work able to get in the way and ruin their plans for an entire day.

Jimin couldn’t wait, for he enjoyed their evenings together so much, even when they weren’t exactly dates. He would be content to just simply spend his entire day with Yoongi in his mansion: from lying in bed with him whilst his boyfriend was engrossed in a book - one hand holding it up in front of his face, and the other hand buried in his hair to stroke and tease at it; to lounging around in the pool and on the deck chairs - relaxing in the mild, autumn sun.

Another obvious difference was the fact that Jimin woke up early every single morning; sometimes right before dawn. He was no longer exhausted waking up before noon after a hard muling trip, for he felt like he had much more energy now. They shared proper breakfast over coffee: from the usual fry-up with French toast and coffee, to other dishes like dakjuk with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, and delicately poached eggs, and it powered him through most of the day.

Yoongi had actually gained a small bit of weight over the last month or so from eating more regular meals, though his boyfriend didn’t seem to be aware of this fact. It was nice, Jimin thought, seeing the way that his stomach was still that same soft curve of skin over his sharp hip bones, but also knowing that he wasn’t running on just breakfast and half a bottle of whisky every single day.
The final difference? The sex, of course; the wonderful and intimate sex that he and Yoongi were now sharing together on a more regular basis.

No longer were there any worries about Namjoon accidentally catching them in the act, and there was no need to feel like they had to rush and be quiet. It wasn’t even happening in a strange hotel bed across the city to grant them more privacy. They were finally able to enjoy their intimate moments together like every other normal relationship - free from worries, free to explore every little thing, just so that they could bring each other pleasure.

There was nothing quite like thigh-fucking Yoongi in the predawn hours, tangled up in his warm limbs and the heat from under the covers; hazy with sleep and the building, burning pleasure growing in his loins. Passionate kisses, soft gasps against his mouth and the pillow as Yoongi guided his fist in lazy pumps around his powerful morning erection, with the lilac-tinged sunlight washing over his naked skin from the sunroof over the bed - Jimin didn’t think that it could get better than that.

Then there were the evening massages after sharing showers and soaking in the bathtub together; Yoongi kneading at his muscles to loosen any little knots for him. He seemed to like just touching his body, particularly his thighs, buttocks and biceps, which he kissed, squeezed, and praised in a husky voice dripping with arousal.

Jimin loved it when Yoongi told him that he looked like Adonis, that he was thick and strong with muscles. He liked clamping his thighs around his waist when Yoongi was rutting against him, trapping him in place and squeezing tight enough to make him gasp in surprise until he reached down to sink his fingers deeply into his taut muscles.

Oh, it felt so good sharing such intimacy with Yoongi in their own home. It felt much more special that way, and it made their relationship feel more substantial too. Now, Yoongi wasn’t picking him up or visiting Namjoon’s house; worrying that Jimin might think that he was only coming to scratch an itch and nothing more than that.

Some days, Jimin finished working several hours before Yoongi did so. That had given him plenty enough time to visit Namjoon or Jungkook in their respective neighbourhoods of Haight-Ashbury and Western Addition, and then return home to await his boyfriend’s arrival.

Jimin had chilled with his best friend in his home; taking turns to try and beat each other’s high records on the Atari 5200 SuperSystem over plenty of junk food. He had also played with Tigger in Alta Plaza Park until he and Jungkook had collapsed on the grass in a sweaty, laughing heap.
Jimin still got to experience the things that he had used to enjoy before moving into Yoongi’s home, which pleased him immensely. His life had changed, and solely for the better.

The one person that Jimin had been unable to see, had been unable to contact since early September, was Taehyung.

Jimin had returned from his last smuggling trip with the younger man on September 17th (almost the 18th in Kowloon, as they had parted ways for processing and had boarded their different flights in the evening hours). It seemed strange thinking about how long that they hadn’t seen each other for, after well over a year of frequent companionship. All of the travelling had helped them form a tight bond with one another, one that was unaffected by their long distance.

Jimin hoped that Taehyung was doing good right now, wherever he might just be. Be it Seoul, Kowloon City, wherever - his friend had better be doing good. Hopefully, he wasn’t causing too much trouble at protest rallies, and he was still enjoying gorging on Burger King burgers whenever he landed in Hong Kong with his new partner.

In that same vein, Jimin also hoped that his new partner was nice to him; was funny, kind, and smart in a way that meant that Taehyung would enjoy himself during their smuggling trips. It would be terrible if his friend had ended up with an asshole for a partner, but there was little way of him finding out about all of that right now.

Maybe, in time, Jimin could find out about Taehyung through Jungkook’s letters? Until the two of them found a way to speak to each other on the phone, which was somewhat pricey because of the charges for international phone calls, then all that he could do was keep track on Taehyung through Jungkook’s letters.

Taehyung might not talk about such things with Jungkook, gang-related things, but he might just do start doing so if Jungkook were to talk about him in his letters.

Jimin was so deep in his thoughts that it took him a moment to realise that they were drawing close to their final exchange point. He shifted in his seat to glance out of the front window, pretty certain that they were now passing through Richmond. He reached up to brush a stray lock of hair back off his brow, squinting at the glare from a passing car as sunlight bounced off a chrome hood ornament.

After several minutes of driving, Hoon rolled the car into a public parking lot, and then he killed the engine with a sharp twist of the keys. Not too far away from this parking lot, Jimin knew there were
multiple office blocks and a slew of businesses, nestled in between the packed residential streets. He eyed one such block as he removed his seatbelt, seeing a small building made of glass and concrete.

“Do you think you’re ready for your first run - no assistance?” Hoon suddenly asked, turning in his seat to look at him.

There was nothing on Hoon’s face that showed that he was being condescending, that he was in any way mocking him for his slow introduction into his new job role. If anything, Jimin thought that he could see something on his face that looked like encouragement, that looked like the man thought that he was more than capable.

Jemin returned his gaze for a few seconds, and then he turned to glance out of the window beside him.

“Um, this is the safe house for deals with that Hollywood talent agency, right?” Jimin replied, shifting in his seat to spread his legs wide and lounge back in a way that made him look comfortable and not at all nervous. “I forgot the name, but that’s not important right now. I need to exchange the cash for the goods, that’s all.”

“Go on…”

“The building’s a front, a small office connected to the talent agency through some money-laundering deal. There’s a safe inside, a combination safe, behind a photograph on the wall of the office manager’s room. That’s where I’ll find the cash, that’s where I store the goods. I go in, I don’t talk to anyone, I don’t look at anyone - I just do my job.”

“I think that you’re ready, Park,” Hoon said with a nod.

Jemin took this as a hint to get out of the car, going around the back of the vehicle to pop the boot open. He retrieved the final briefcase from the secret compartment, getting it into his right hand so that he could drag the boot shut with his other hand. Before exiting the lot, he moved to stand beside the driver-seat window.

“3-7-9-1,” Jimin said through the open window, just for the sake of it.

Hoon gave him the slightest of nods to confirm that that was the combination code.
“I’ll be right back.”

Jimin exited the parking lot at a brisk pace, getting onto the sidewalk so that he could walk along the street. The office building was on the opposite street, many posters tacked in the glass windows that helped it stand out from the plain buildings.

Although there was the occasional client that they met face-to-face, most of Jimin’s job role revolved around exchanging bundles of cash for parcels of drugs. He had yet to fully interact with their clients, for Hoon was currently in charge of those interactions; just until their clients were familiar with his face, and they knew that they could trust him.

Jimin actually preferred the lack of interaction right now, as it gave him time to grow in confidence. He didn’t want to take charge of anything just yet, not until he had observed the ways that Hoon interacted with their clients first.

Upon reaching the building, Jimin shoved the revolving glass door open to step inside. He saw a woman sitting behind a desk close to the front of the office, perhaps a secretary of some kind. The rest of the workers were in a large area at the back of the building, which he had to pass to reach the office manager’s room.

The office was flooded with illegal immigrants, working for below minimum wage in a money-laundering business that he had very little knowledge about. They worked all day under the guise of legal business; had countless cabinets filled with files, ringing telephones, typewriters - the whole deal. But what they actually did…that was what Jimin had no clue about.

Whatever the case, none of that mattered to Jimin. No, all that he had to do was walk through the office, collect the cash and plant the drugs, and then leave again.

Jimin passed the front desk without saying a single word. The presumed secretary didn’t stop him, for she just turned her head to watch him go as she typed away on a large and clunky typewriter. After going through the wide door, he crossed the office floor to get to the private office room. He felt dozens of pairs of eyes on him as he did so, tracking his movement in a way that was more curious and cautious, than hostile and guarded.

After stepping into the office manager’s room, Jimin closed the door shut behind him, and he dragged down on the blind that was attached to the glass window. Though the glass was frosted, he wanted to ensure that he had complete privacy during the exchange.
The office manager’s room was empty; nothing more than simple furniture placed inside of it to make the room look like it was used.

Jimin went around the desk to get to the framed photograph that was hanging on the wall. It was a black and white shot of a city skyline, one that most certainly wasn’t San Francisco. It might just be part of the New York skyline, judging from the massive skyscraper buildings. The frame was heavy, had considerable weight to it so that he had to heft it up and then carefully place it down against the wall by his feet. If he dropped it, it might just break his toes, or shatter into pieces.

On the wall behind the photograph frame, there was a small wall safe. The front of the safe had a dial that needed to be twisted a select way to open the thick, metal door. Just like Hoon had taught him, he leaned close to examine the dial so that he could start the process of opening the safe.

Jimin had been shocked to discover that combination safes were much more complex than he had originally thought, as he had just assumed that all one had to do was twist the dial a couple of times until it unlocked - incredibly simple.

Yet, Jimin had been taught that combination safes weren’t as simple as that; that they had several steps that needed to be followed. The dials required twisting both ways in a select order, along with an exact amount of rotations before stopping on each digit. Otherwise, the safe wouldn’t yield - even if one entered the right four digit code.

First, Jimin twisted the dial around four full turns, coming to a final stop on the first digit: 3. Next, he turned the dial to the left, passing the second digit twice and then stopping on the third turn: 7. The third step required turning the dial to the right again, passing the third digit once and then stopping on it on the following twist: 9. The final step required twisting the dial to the right to stop on the last digit: 1.

3-7-9-1.

Just like that, the safe cracked open with a soft click, allowing him to take hold of the handle and pull the metal door open.

Jimin opened the safe to eye the contents, seeing a pile of cash that had been left in the space, rather than sealed in an envelope. He placed the briefcase onto the desk, pressing his thumbs down on the metal buttons to pop it open and reveal the stash of drugs. They had been placed into baggies, an assortment of gritty powders and pills, and so he turned his attention back to the safe.
The first thing that Jimin did was empty the safe of cash first; grabbing the bundles and stacking them onto the desk beside the briefcase. As soon as the wall safe was empty, he checked each bundle to ensure that the right amount had been left for the transaction.

Each bundle was secured with money bands: stacks of $1,000 bills wrapped in yellow paper bands, and stacks of $100 bills wrapped in deep blue paper bands. He thumbed through them, happily humming to himself as he finished counting the different stacks and found that everything was exact.

Although Jimin doubted that anyone would be reckless enough to try and get away with cheating them out of cash, it was always better to check and ensure it was all there before exchanging the goods.

Jimin quickly moved to stash the drugs in the safe. He placed swollen baggie bricks of cocaine, Adderall, and tranquillisers inside before sealing it tight again.

There, the goods had been exchanged. Now all of the agency’s talents could resume their secretive habits - numbing themselves to the crash and burn reality of celebrity stardom.

Jimin snapped the briefcase shut and he left the office manager’s room, pulling the door shut behind him. He crossed the office floor once more, keeping his gaze focused straight ahead to ignore the stares of the office workers.

After exiting the building, Jimin walked along the street to enter the parking lot again. There were just several cars parked inside, which made it incredibly easy to spot the black Mercedes-Benz 200. He went around the back of the vehicle to stash the briefcase in the boot, and then he climbed into the passenger-seat.

“That was the last deal, right?” Jimin asked, fastening his seatbelt in place across his ribs.

Hoon nodded as he twisted the keys, quickly disengaging the handbrake to reverse out of the parking spot.

Though that might just have been the last exchange of drugs for the day, Jimin knew that there was one final place that they needed to visit. They had to pass through several districts to get to Chinatown and visit a nail salon, so that they could leave the briefcases of money in a safe stored in the backroom.
As soon as they were finished exchanging goods for the day, Hoon always escorted them to the same salon. It was one of Yoongi’s many money-laundering locations - was owned by a man called Pyo, who oversaw laundering the unmarked bills for a small cut of profits.

Jimin didn’t know where exactly the cash went after Pyo had trickled it down through dozens of falsified businesses and aliases, but he simply assumed that it helped keep the IRS at bay.

Just like Jimin had thought so, Hoon drifted down Anza Street, taking a left onto 23rd Avenue and then a quick right to get onto Geary Boulevard. From that point, it was practically a straight drive across several neighbourhoods to reach Chinatown, save for some final quick turns here and there.

It would take almost thirty minutes to reach their location, and so Jimin collected his notebook so that he could resume reading through the dozens of pages. It was best to do so rather than just stare out of the window, as Hoon wasn’t exactly the type to have deep conversations with during lengthy car rides.

When the car finally slowed down to pull up against the curb, Jimin closed the notebook and he quickly glanced out of the window to eye the building.

The nail salon was situated in a multi-storey building, the ground-floor of a small block that contained tiny office spaces that Jimin had never seen anyone entering or exiting. The largest sign was set above the door in Hangul characters: big, hot pink characters declaring “The Art of Beauty”. In English, however, the sign was far less fanciful. The small and bold, black letters underneath the Hangul characters simply read: ‘nail salon’.

Through the window, Jimin could see a variety of women that were in the act of working: giving manicures and pedicures, hand and foot massages. As a result, the air inside of the salon always smelled of a combination of nail varnish and fragrant mineral soaks. He saw that most of the women were young, and they would be considered pretty or even beautiful to some men and women. They were the kind of immigrants that took very enthusiastically to American culture, for some of the women were wearing ridiculous fashion that looked to have come straight out of music videos and television shows, and some had dyed hair.

Jimin had been shocked to discover that the nail salon operated as a real business, much like how Jungkook’s parents ran both a card club and a restaurant. He had assumed that it would have just been for show like that Hollywood talent agency’s office front, but there were always women inside receiving makeovers whenever they entered the salon.
Hoon had explained to him that Yoongi had employed the women to work the front for him, and they were paid a fair wage to live on without any worries about paying taxes back to the mob. That might just be why they looked to be rather happy whenever they entered the salon, why the atmosphere inside of the building was light with conversation and pop music. The ladies were actually working a honest job, even if there were secretive laundering deals going on in the backroom.

Jimin climbed out of the car just as Hoon did so, the pair of them going around the back of the vehicle. His partner quickly scanned the street before he lifted up the fake layer of rubber to reveal the briefcases, just to ensure that no one was watching them.

Jimin copied his actions, seeing pedestrians walking up and down the opposite sidewalk in their own worlds, and vehicles lazily drifting along the street beside them. They had nothing to worry about, but it was always better to stay vigilant. In some places, it might not be at all unusual for men to carry multiple briefcases inside a building, but a small and unassuming nail salon was the kind of establishment that might raise suspicions should they be seen entering it.

Hoon carried four of the seven briefcases himself, holding two under his arms and two by the sturdy handles. Jimin retrieved the final three briefcases, placing one down at his feet so that he could reach up and slam the boot shut. Then he moved to hold the door for his partner, the both of them entering the nail salon.

Their arrival made a couple of the workers glance over at them, the sound of the front door being pushed open catching their attention. But as soon as they had noticed that they weren’t customers, they went straight back to working. They were talking amongst each other in soft and quiet voices, speaking in Korean rather than English; the mixture of their dialects musical in nature. It was hard hearing what they were talking about underneath the loud pop music that was blaring from the radio across the building floor, and so it just sounded like background static to Jimin’s ears.

The scent of nail varnish and varnish remover was incredibly strong, hanging in the air in a way that made Jimin wince and instinctively hold his breath to avoid breathing it in. Sadly, the smell bled into the backroom, which meant that they would need to put up with the headache-inducing scent for as long as they were inside of the building.

Upon entering the backroom, Jimin placed the briefcases down on one of the small desks, popping them open to display the cash that was inside. He had to empty the briefcases onto another desk, so that Hoon could pack the money into the cash counting machine and check that the amount was exact. The machine would make a lot of noise as it worked, quickly flicking through the bills and then beeping loudly when it was finished.

Jimin snapped the elastic bands free from the rolled-up bundles, placing the bills aside for Hoon to
pack into the machine. The other man did so, placing the first large stack inside and hitting the button so that it would start counting it.

After checking the first briefcase of money, Hoon jotted down several things in his own notebook; no doubt keeping track on all of the different amounts of money. A quick glance at the page showed Jimin countless scores of numbers and equations, so many that he couldn’t even attempt to figure out what he was keeping notes on.

One by one, Jimin removed the elastic bands and money bands from the rolls and stacks of cash. It would speed up the process, would make it easier for Hoon to pack the money counter, which in turn would mean that they would quickly finish this particular task.

After the counting the many piles of earnings from today, Hoon opened the wall safe so that he could collect the previous five days of earnings. He was likely going to check it all over once more, just to ensure that everything was correct before he stored it all in the safe for good.

Jemin didn’t like hanging around the backroom whilst Hoon was working away like this, always worried that he would distract the man whilst he was busy juggling multiple duties. It meant that he either had to stand in the corner of the room and hold his tongue, or exit the backroom and wait until his partner called him back inside.

Rather than wait around, Jimin decided to wander into the front of the nail salon. He could wait here for a few minutes, as he could just sit on one of the spare reclining chairs and wait for Hoon to finish tallying up all of the money. It was going to take longer than usual, on account of the amount that he had to check today.

As he lowered himself into a chair in the far corner, one that had an empty foot bath to the side, Jimin saw that the owner of the salon was making her way towards him. Her name was Nayoung, and she was a woman of perhaps thirty or so years with permed hair that she kept pulled up in a high ponytail. Unlike the younger women, with their vibrant clothing and dyed hair, she was somewhat more reserved - her hair coal black, her clothing consisting of a denim pinafore dress over a hot pink jumper.

“Would you like some tea?” Nayoung asked him in Korean with a smile, passing him by with a tray that was covered in used hot towels. “We have tea: green, persimmon, ginseng?”

“Oh?” Jimin hummed, surprised that she would offer him such a service. “Ginseng tea would be nice, thanks.”
Nayoung disappeared into another room at the back of the salon, one where they no doubt stored all of the towels and beauty goods. She returned a couple of minutes later, carrying a small teacup that she placed down on the arm of the chair for him.

“Your partner, he doesn’t talk very much, and so we don’t know his name,” Nayoung said, as she lingered beside the chair for a moment. “We often refer to him as ‘businessman’. But the girls seem to like you, probably because they think that you’re handsome. They call you ‘little prince’.”

“‘Little prince’?” he repeated, before letting out a laugh.

That was a pretty great nickname, he had to admit.

Jimin lifted up his teacup to eye the contents, seeing that the tea was a rich reddish-brown in shade. It had been quite some time since he had had ginseng tea, for Taehyung had never stocked his kitchen with it; preferring beer, Pepsi, and the occasional glass of green tea instead.

“My name is Jimin, but I do like ‘little prince’ a lot.”

“Jimin?” Nayoung said, making a soft noise under her breath before continuing. “Well, Jimin, the other man that used to come here, I didn’t like him. He used to try and proposition my girls. He would offer them money and gifts if they would have sex with him, but my girls aren’t stupid. They never accepted his offers, and the atmosphere was very tense whenever he would come here. Your partner was never present when he acted in such a way, he was always far too busy working. But I get the feeling that he wouldn’t have approved of such behaviour - he seems very professional.”

“Yeah, he’s a true professional,” Jimin replied with a quick smile, hovering his teacup in front of his lips. “As for you and your girls, you don’t need to worry about anything like that now. We’re not here to harass you, we’re just here for business, that’s all.”

Jimin turned his head to watch Nayoung crossing the nail salon, and then he shifted to lounge back in the chair with a sigh. He couldn’t wait to get back home and just relax for a little while, to wait for Yoongi to finish work so that they could spend some time together.

Whilst he waited for Hoon to finish the money counting and tallying, Jimin nursed his cup of ginseng tea and he watched the ladies across the salon working away. He did so discreetly, not wanting to be caught staring at them lest he give them the wrong impression. There was nothing else to look at
right now save for them, even if all that they were doing was attaching fancy, false nails and giving pedicures.

After a couple of minutes, Nayoung crossed the floor to go into the backroom. She emerged shortly afterwards, carrying a tray that was covered with more varnishes and creams.

“Your partner would like to see you again, Jimin,” Nayoung explained, cocking her head in the direction of the backroom.

Jimin moved to place the empty teacup aside on the arm of the chair, shifting to get to his feet to enter the backroom. He saw that Nayoung was right, for his partner had finally finished the important task.

Hoon had counted all of the weekly cash with the money counter machine; each rolled-up bundle now a neat pile secured by colour-coordinated Kraft paper money bands. Almost all of them were in shades of mustard to signify that each pile was $10,000 in total. He saw a lot of stacks placed across the desk, enough to make him want to whistle in wonder.

“Is everything alright?” Jimin asked, moving to lean on the desk and eyeing the spread of money. “It all adds up right? No mistakes?”

“Everything is correct,” Hoon confirmed, as he started moving the stacks of cash into the safe. “The weekly earnings are exact, each client paid the correct amount - not a single dollar unaccounted for. I’ve calculated our profit margin, and I’m sure that Prince Min will be glad to hear that we’ve both amassed quite a decent profit.”

“Oh, yeah? What kinda profit?”

“180,000 dollars from deals that should amount to…150,000 dollars - street value, of course,” Hoon replied, as he finished filling up the wall safe with the money.

“We made 30,000 dollars of profit? In one week?” Jimin asked dumbly, unable to keep his surprise off his face. “Are you kidding me, Hoon?”

“30,000 dollars is an impressive amount,” Hoon said, sealing the safe door shut; the metal clunking loudly in the silence of the backroom. “The average amount is usually 25,000, though the earnings did drop as low as 18,000 one week. That was when my previous partner made the mistake of
allowing a certain past client to rob us blind on a deal. Luckily, he didn’t get to make that mistake again. Whatever the case, I’m certain that Prince Min will be pleased to find that we’re an efficient team.”

“Hell, yeah! We’re a fucking efficient team!” Jimin agreed with a grin, unable to stop himself from letting out a laugh. “30,000 dollars! That’s amazing, Hoon!”

Jimin saw that Hoon had a slight smile on his face as he moved to sit back down at the desk. He shifted his chair to sit in front of a small typewriter, which he started typing on at a rapid speed. There was still a small amount of money left on the desk, which he hadn’t placed in the wall safe for some reason.

“What’s that cash for, Hoon?” he asked curiously, hearing the typewriter keys clacking away.

“2.5 percent of weekly earnings go to each of us, that’s 5 percent of the total amount,” Hoon explained, as he moved to split the stacks of cash into two different piles. “That’s your payment, Park.”

Jimin rolled his eyes up from the money to stare at his partner for a moment, his words having taken him by total surprise.

2.5%?

Back when Jimin had been muling with Namjoon, he had earned just roughly 1% from every single key of cocaine and half a key of heroin that he had smuggled across the globe - $500. It was such a small amount of money to make, considering how much money that he had been bringing in for the gang as a result of his smuggling.

Yet, Hoon was telling him that he had just earned himself 2.5% of the earnings that they had just amassed. Not only was that a much higher percentage, it was also a much higher profit margin.

Jimin dropped his gaze to the desk to eye his so-called payment; the sound of the typewriter still clacking away.

There were five piles of cash on the table for him: four of them wrapped in bright yellow money bands, and one wrapped in red. The red pile was smaller, consisted of different currency than the
In just a single week of working this new profession, Jimin had earned $4,500 - $4,000 over his usual $500 per smuggling trip payment. That was enough to leave him reeling, and he struggled to understand what the other man was telling him.

Hoon got to his feet after a moment, moving over to the fax machine that was placed in the corner of the room. It was so he could scan the sheet, which was probably a note to send to a superior, or even Yoongi himself, that would tell them about their profits.

“No, I’m not questioning your maths, Hoon. I know that your maths is perfect, I meant - are you sure that I’m supposed to get this much?” he asked, reaching up to start playing with one of his diamond earrings.

The fax machine started whirring at a shockingly loud volume, which made Jimin jump and look up at the other man. He saw that Hoon was pressing buttons on the large machine, which probably controlled which machine would receive the message. He didn’t really know, he had never used a fax machine before.

“You sound surprised?” Hoon remarked, as he finished pressing buttons and he turned to look back over his shoulder at him.

“I’m used to getting 500 dollars for every single smuggling trip. Maybe 1,000 dollars, if I could squeeze two trips in a month,” Jimin explained. “So, yeah, 4,500 dollars in a single week? I’m really surprised.”

“Well, not anymore, Park. Now, you’ll be making real money,” Hoon replied, the fax machine still whirring away beside him. “You earned that payment.”
Jimin felt like he had hardly done anything at all, except for being a general assistant. But he was hardly going to complain. He had worked much harder for much less cash, and so being paid such a high amount for basic work was a pleasant change.

As soon as the fax machine had finished scanning the sheet of paper, Hoon moved to accept his own pile of cash. He slipped it inside of his inner suit jacket pocket, and so Jimin copied his actions. The money had some weight to it, more weight than he had expected, but it felt good.

Jimin followed Hoon out of the nail salon, climbing into the passenger-seat so that they could leave the area. The final stop of the day for him was home, and so he settled back comfortably in the seat as Hoon started the engine and rolled the vehicle back into the lane.

Over the duration of the ride, Jimin thought about what he should do as soon as he was finished working. The obvious choice seemed to be to go out to see his friends, just to waste a couple of hours. Yet, he arrived at the conclusion that he should just wait for Yoongi to get back home, even if it might take some time. He was exhausted and he felt like he might just nap for a little while, which would easily pass the time.

After a ten minute drive along Broadway, Hoon stalled the car on the curb right outside of the mansion.

Jimin popped the door open so that he could climb out of the car, slamming it shut and moving around the front of the vehicle. He didn’t go up to the front door just yet, for he could see his partner moving behind the wheel.

“I’ll be here to collect you - Monday morning, 8am,” Hoon called through the driver-seat window. “Until then, I hope that you have an agreeable weekend, Park.”

“Thanks, you too, Hoon,” Jimin said, waving his partner off and watching the car slowly reversing down the drive.

As soon as the car was out of sight, Jimin unlocked the front door with his key, stepping inside of the home. He slipped out of his shoes to place them down on the rack beside the door, and then he started rapidly undressing as he moved to go over to the leather settee.

Why go upstairs to nap when the settee was so big and comfortable?
When Jimin shifted to lie down on the cool, black leather, he let out a satisfied sigh. Oh, it felt so nice on his warm skin that he just had to roll onto his stomach and stretch out to fully savour the sensation. He closed his eyes as he placed his head down on a plush, silken throw cushion, and just like that, he found himself drifting off within mere seconds.

It was the sound of the front door opening that brought Jimin out of his nap; the dry rasp and click of the lock working as Yoongi twisted his key to unlock the door. He lifted his head up off the settee cushion before he even managed to open his eyes, hearing the soft sound of the other man’s footsteps as he entered the mansion.

“What’re you doing on the settee, huh, Jimin?” Yoongi asked him, a warm smile audible in his voice.

There was something else in his voice too, something that sounded like exhaustion, which wouldn’t at all be a surprise seeing as he had been working all day long.

“Napping,” Jimin replied, finding that his mouth was dry and his voice was husky. He shifted so that he could sit upright on the settee, folding his legs on the cushion and reaching up to rub at his eyelids. He dropped his fists down into his lap a moment later with a soft grunt. “Are you OK, Yoongi?”

Jimin forced his eyelids open so that he could look at his boyfriend properly, seeing that he looked to be rather worn-down in parts. He had removed his suit jacket at some point, which was now hanging from one shoulder like a cape, and his shirt looked to be wrinkled and coming loose from his trouser waistband. It wasn’t just his dishevelled clothing that gave off an air of tiredness, but also his face. His eyelids looked to be slightly swollen and discoloured from lack of sleep.

“I’m ‘k, Jimin,” he said, as he balled-up one fist to rub at his eyelids. “It’s just, y’know…”

“Is it a bad day today?” Jimin asked, taking hold of his couple ring so that he could give it a series of slow twists.

“Yeah, it was a bad day. Not a bad day, not like that, just…a lot of fucking business,” Yoongi explained, as he reached up to gently massage at his brow with one hand. “I’m just tired, darling, that’s all. Don’t worry ‘bout me, yeah, I’m fine.”
“Do you want me to make us some dinner? You can just sit back and relax, baby boy,” Jimin offered, shifting to get to his feet so that he could move to stand in front of him. He slipped his arms around his neck, able to feel his tension as his muscles were stiff and taut through his wrinkled work shirt. “I’ll make us something nice.”

“No, no, I wanna go out,” Yoongi replied, shaking his head and making the kinked mess of black hair across his brow shift from the movement. “Going out with you, going on a drive, that’ll help me let go of some stress.”

“You wanna go out? You’re totally sure that you wanna go out, Yoongi, and you’re not just saying that because you think that it’ll make me happy?”

“I’m sure, Jimin,” Yoongi confirmed with a slow nod. “It’ll make us both happy, I know it will. I ain’t gonna sleep tonight unless I let go of some of this stress, so, let’s go out; yeah?”

“OK, then let me just go and slip into some clothes,” Jimin said with a smile, as he leaned close to give him a quick kiss in the corner of his mouth. “I’ll be right back, Yoongi.”

“Take your time, darling.”

Jimin raced up the stairs so that he could go into their bedroom, going straight over to the dresser to drag the top drawer open. He slipped into a pair of jeans and one of his loose white tee-shirts, wanting to be nice and comfortable. He contemplated adding his denim jacket on top to fight the chill, but decided against it. After all, even if it was a little cold outside, the heating system in the car would keep it at bay.

Jimin almost skipped back down the double flight of stairs, seeing that Yoongi had left his suit jacket hanging up on a coat hanger beside the door. He had neated up his wrinkled shirt too, having tucked it back into his trousers to look more presentable, as well as having rolled up the sleeves.

“Almost ready,” Jimin said, tugging his sneakers on and shoving the laces inside rather than knot them tightly. He made sure to search through his suit jacket pockets, which was still lying on the floor. He pulled his bundle of cash free and he shoved it into his jeans pocket. “OK, I’m ready!”

Yoongi held the door for him, allowing Jimin to step out of the house first so that he could pull the door shut behind them both. He hit a button on his car key fob to unlock the doors, the BMW flashing with a quick beep.
“So, where are we going, baby boy?” Jimin asked, slamming the passenger-seat door shut behind him and then dragging his seatbelt in place. His boyfriend had also climbed inside of the car, the keys shoved in the ignition. “You got anything in mind, or are we just cruising for the fun of it?”

“Uh, we should probably head on over to California Street, to get some food from that supermarket you like,” Yoongi explained, as he slowly reversed out of the front drive and onto the street. Whilst the car did so, he quickly fixed his own seatbelt in place across his body. “There ain’t no meat in the kitchen, I noticed this morning when I was making breakfast. We’d have been eating strictly vegetarian if you’d have made us dinner, darling.”

“Oh, god no,” Jimin gasped theatrically, placing a hand against his chest for added effect. “If I’m cooking dinner for us, baby, that means I’m cooking us something good. Good means meat, means plenty of meat.”

“You should try cutting down on all of the meat, Jimin. It’s bad for you,” Yoongi suggested, talking to him in a scholarly tone that was highly reminiscent of Namjoon. “It says so, in the papers - gives you cancer and shit.”

“Everything’s bad for us these days, Yoongi. Live a little,” Jimin retorted cheekily, which made his boyfriend snort and give him a quick smile. “You love it when I cook meat for dinner! You love my bulgogi deopbap, don’t lie!”

“Mmm, I do, darling,” Yoongi hummed in agreement, twisting the steering-wheel to guide the car onto the road. “You’re getting pretty good at cooking; y’know that?”

“Besides, you love beating my meat too…”

It took Yoongi a few seconds to realise what Jimin had just said, the vulgar joke almost shooting right over his head because he was so focused on driving right now. But when it did so, he let out a deep groan that made Jimin smile to himself.

“**Jimin,**” Yoongi drawled, shooting him a look that showed that he was more disgusted than amused. “That ain’t even funny, or smart. That was just nasty, it was fucking disgusting.”

“I thought that it was pretty funny,” Jimin retorted, still grinning from ear to ear as he turned his head to look at him.
“You would.”

The car fell silent for a moment as Yoongi shifted gears, slowly picking up speed to roll down the hilly slopes of Pacific Heights. Even when it wasn’t too dark outside, the dashboard clock telling Jimin that it was 6:19pm, he moved to hit a button so that the twin headlights illuminated the road in front of them. A cool breeze came in from the crack in the passenger-seat window, but it wasn’t cold enough to make Jimin roll the window up.

“Do you seriously think that I’m getting better at cooking?” Jimin asked, shifting in his seat to fully look at his boyfriend’s profile.

“Yeah, Jimin. I think that you’re getting better at cooking every single day, ‘cos you’re getting more confident with it; y’know? At first, you used to go so slow when you were slicing everything up, or when you were stirring and frying. You were stiff, you were nervous ‘bout burning it and ruining the meal. But now, you’re starting to loosen up, and you’re getting playful too.”

“Hmm, like when I was juggling the eggs yesterday morning before I cracked them?”

“That was nice, Jimin. I like seeing you playing ‘round like that,” Yoongi agreed, his lips curling up at the corners in a warm and fond smile. “Sure, I thought those eggs were gonna end up smashed all over the fucking floor, but—”

Jimin let out a giggle at this, reaching up to cover his mouth with his fingers. His laughter mixed in with Yoongi’s soft chuckle; his boyfriend’s eyes deeply crinkling at the corners as his lips parted to reveal his teeth.

“But you juggled ‘em like a pro,” Yoongi finished, shifting his hands on the steering-wheel to follow a soft curve in the road. As he did so, the ceiling light played off the small diamonds in his ring, glinting back at Jimin’s eyes. “I, uh, I feel like I’m doing that too - getting more confident. Y’know, with…with sex.”

“Oh, baby boy, you’re getting so confident,” Jimin said, feeling his own lips splitting into a wide smile. “You really are. You’re finally starting to embrace pleasure, and you’re starting to seek it out and not just wait for me to initiate it for the both of us. I can’t even explain how much I love it when I know that you’re turned on, Yoongi, and you give me that look? Or when you sit down on our bed, and you just call my name in that soft whisper?”
Yoongi stuck his tongue out to wet his lips at this, his cheeks turning a soft shade of pink just like always. The blush spread across the high curve of his wide cheekbones, almost reaching his ears to turn them bright pink too.

Yes, Yoongi might just be getting more confident in regards to sex; both in terms of his confidence in performing sexual acts, and his confidence in letting Jimin know that he was sexually excited. But he still found a way of blushing and avoiding his gaze whenever the subject came up outside of the bedroom. It was a normal level of shyness, however, one that Jimin knew was just a result of him being a quiet and reserved person - rather than a sign of his long-lasting past with sexual repression.

“I love it, Yoongi, like I love you,” Jimin finished in a soft voice. “I just love feeling like I’m wanted, like I’m loved too.”

Yoongi slowed the car down at a set of red lights, turning in his seat to look at him. After a few seconds, he shifted to cup the back of his neck with his hand; his palm cool and dry against his warm skin.

Jimin allowed him to do so, allowed him to apply a hint of pressure to the back of his neck to bring him closer.

It was usually how Yoongi initiated kisses - cupping his neck in hand, rather than his cheeks; or by supporting his chin with his fingers so that his thumb could brush over his lower lip teasingly before he kissed him. Sometimes, Yoongi slipped his arms around his neck to bring him close instead. But that was only when they were in the sanctuary of their home and he felt safe and comfortable to do so.

Though their seatbelts got in the way, Yoongi was able to bring their faces together to give him a chaste kiss on the lips. He didn’t even seem to care about the material digging tautly into his chest, not when he was craving a moment of sweet intimacy.

Jimin felt his upper lip catching between the both of his, so that Yoongi could suck the most softest kiss around his full lower lip. His boyfriend didn’t deepen the kiss, he just stayed in place for a few seconds to savour it before gently breaking contact.

“I love you more, Jimin,” Yoongi whispered, giving his cheek a gentle caress with the backs of his fingers. His touch was so tender that his fingers felt like the brush of silk bed sheets against his skin; soft and light. “I’m starting to feel better already - fuck stress, fuck bad days.”
“Hmm, don’t let go of all of that stress just yet,” Jimin teased, turning his head to press a quick kiss against his fingers. “I can help you relax so much better tonight, baby boy.”

“Oh, yeah?” Yoongi asked, moving to take hold of the steering-wheel again. A few seconds later, the traffic light switched to amber, and so he got ready to roll the car forward again. “How’re you gonna help me relax, huh?”

“You and me, the bedroom lights switched off and some of those gorgeous, scented candles of yours burning. A glass or two of red wine, and a whole bottle of that coconut massage oil,” Jimin said, dragging his voice out into a husky whisper - just because he knew just how much that Yoongi liked it. “The glide from that shit is amazing, baby boy. It almost puts lube to shame.”

Jimin could see that Yoongi was listening intently, that he had hooked him in - even when he was pretending to be entirely focused on the view out of the front window.

“I was thinking about wrestling; you know, like play fighting? It’d feel so good just wrestling with you in that massive bed of yours; all the light grappling and squeezing. We could turn it into a game, if you wanted to? Or, we could just roll around in the sheets until we’re so desperate that we’ve gotta touch each other to finally get off?”

Yoongi’s cheeks turned so red from this that Jimin fancied he could feel waves of heat coming from him. It was enough to make him giggle, unable to help himself because he found his flustered response so endearing.

Oh, what Jimin would do to be able to peek into Yoongi’s mind and see the kind of mental images that he was having right now. Like their oily limbs, taut with muscle and straining hard in exertion; like the thin surface of skin on the backs of their hands cabling with veins, as their fingers were dug in deep and tightly squeezed around biceps and calves.

“Yeah,” Yoongi finally said, swallowing hard enough that Jimin heard him gulping. “I—I’d like that, Jimin.”

The car fell silent at this, save for the sound of the traffic coming in through the cracks in the windows. Underneath the rumbling engines and beeping horns, the distant sound of shouting voices echoed on the early evening air.
“Talk to me, baby boy,” Jimin sighed, placing his hand down on his thigh to hold onto him. “Tell me about your day, hmm, tell what about what’s got you so stressed.”

The ride was only a brief one, one that would last barely five minutes in total, but it still felt nice to touch his lover like this - soft touches, a lingering intimacy that Jimin had only recently started getting to feel. It was an intimacy that he now craved, for Jimin couldn’t seem to be in Yoongi’s presence anymore without needing to hold onto his hand or thigh, to place his head on his shoulder or chest, or securely cradle him in his arms.

“Get it all off my chest, huh?” Yoongi said, glancing away from the road to give him a quick look. “Y’know, you wouldn’t believe how much better it makes me feel just talking ‘bout shit with you, Jimin.”

“I know, I’m better than any therapist, baby,” Jimin replied with a soft smile, giving his thigh a firm knead through his smooth, wool trousers. “You wouldn’t believe how much better that you make me feel whenever I just look at you, Yoongi. You don’t even need to say any words, your existence alone just makes me smile.”

“Shit, darling, that was…that was pretty gay,” Yoongi joked, letting out a soft laugh as he checked the road in front of them.

Jimin just smiled at this, rather than reply. It was so funny hearing Yoongi joking about such things, now affectionately mocking his endearments as being ‘gay’, when he had once struggled so much with simply saying the word that it had been like the single syllable had gotten trapped in his throat each time.

“Alright, so, there’s a lot of shit floating ‘round Chinatown right now from 14K, some knock-off of Sacramento Snow. It’s causing trouble, it’s a fucking thorn in my side,” Yoongi slowly explained, taking a left on Divisadero Street to finally get onto California Street. It was packed with traffic, which meant it would take them some time to reach the supermarket. “It ain’t as much trouble as the real deal, but we’re losing clients and dealers ‘cos of it, and I want it gone. I got this guy working as a snake for me, but it ain’t turning up any facts right now. I’m getting impatient, and I hate it, Jimin.”

“It’s OK to feel impatient, Yoongi, but don’t let it take over to rule your mind and ruin your day,” Jimin suggested, giving his knee a gentle squeeze. “Things take time sometimes, and that’s perfectly fine. You want everything so fast, baby, you gotta slow that shit right down.”

Yoongi let out a soft laugh at this, which showed Jimin that he really was starting to let go of some of his tension; that he was unwinding slowly but surely. Hopefully, by the time that they arrived back
home, he would have completely forgotten about whatever had irritated him today.

“Also, I’m still waiting on updates regarding Sacramento Snow. My father said he’d handle the matter for me, he made me beg like a dog on my hands and knees that day I went to see him for business,” Yoongi continued, slowly rolling the car forward through the traffic lights. “So far, I got nothing - no phone call, no fax, not even a word from any men. I dunno if that’s ‘cos he ain’t finished sorting it out yet, if he’s done it but he don’t wanna talk to me right now, or if he’s refusing to do anything after…what happened.”

“If he made you beg, surely he can’t go back on his word, Yoongi?” Jimin remarked, to which his boyfriend scoffed loudly. “That’s dishonest and disloyal.”

“My father’d do anything to go back on a deal with me, Jimin,” he disagreed with a quick head shake. “Trust me, dishonesty means nothing to him when the chance to be petty arises.”

Jimin thought this over for a moment, struggling to think of something to say in reply because he had never met Yoongi’s father before. He had no plans to do so, for he knew enough about Father Min to know that he never wanted to meet him; not only because he was the current head of the Moon Tiger Mob empire, but also because of his severe disapproval and rejection of homosexuality.

“It’s OK, baby boy,” Jimin finally said, softly patting at his knee as he did so. “You don’t need him. You don’t even need his help. Just focus on keeping your districts clean, and let him do whatever he wants with the rest of the city.”

Upon reaching the supermarket, Yoongi slowly guided his car into the parking lot at the back of the building; weaving around parked vehicles until he was able to locate a spot to park in. He stopped the car, the pair of them securely rolling up the windows before climbing out and quickly crossing the lot.

_Rainbow Fresh Produce & Deli_ was a sprawling supermarket, a long stretch of automatic glass doors and walls revealing the interior to everyone that passed. It sold everything from fresh fruit and vegetables, free from preservatives and pesticides, to dairy and meat - organic, lactose-free, vegetarian and vegan alternatives. This made it a favourite store for fitness freaks, hippies, overly cautious mothers terrified of the thought that junk food would give their kids brain cancer and make them morbidly obese, and consumers that were able to splurge out extra for basic staples that others in the city could barely afford to purchase.

Of course, there was also the ‘world food’ aisle, which was split into different sections. One such section was seriously labelled ‘oriental’ - packed with a random assortment of predominantly
Chinese food items, which were packed into jars and boxes emblazoned with leering dragons and colourful Chinese characters that might just be total nonsense for all that Jimin knew. There were also jars of powdered, instant curry covered in photographs of the Taj Mahal that never failed to make Jimin roll his eyes from the sheer stupidity of it all.

As a result, Yoongi had suggested that they avoid that aisle, just to stop him from causing another scene over the extortionate charge for a single block of silken tofu.

No thanks, they would stick to authentic, imported goods from Japantown and Chinatown instead of what this supermarket had on offer. It was better to have authentic ingredients than a pale, expensive imitation of a proper meal.

Jimin might just appreciate the superior flavour of the fresh goods, having grown up too poor to savour such simple things. But even then, he still cringed at the sight of some of the price labels stuck onto the shelves. Once or twice, Yoongi had deliberated between two choices before selecting the cheapest option, almost as if he had sensed his discomfort and worry at the thought of how much money their trolley or basket was going to amount to. Even if it was unneeded, even if it was silly, Yoongi still did it - just for him.

Stepping inside, a cold waft of refrigerated air hit them both in the face. It made Jimin’s skin breakout into goosebumps, Yoongi shivering beside him with a soft sound.

The aisles were massive and wide, filled with glass and metal display units that were packed with goods. Everything was so white and shiny, gleaming under the powerful, fluorescent bars on the ceiling to give off a sense of utmost cleanliness…and sterile coldness. People wandered up and down the aisles with huge, green baskets in hand, or pushed around trolleys packed with produce and noisy children.

There was a line of shopping trolleys right beside the automatic doors, along with stacks of baskets. Jimin eyed them for a few seconds, and then he twisted to look over at his boyfriend with a mischievous smile.

“No, no riding in the trolley, darling,” Yoongi declared, gently tugging him away from the line of shopping trolleys like a mother would reign in an unruly child. “I ain’t in the mood to get stared at tonight, I’m apt to punch somebody in the mouth.”

Jimin gave him a teasing pout and whine that showed that he really wanted to ride in the trolley, but he allowed him to collect one of the baskets instead.
The first time that Jimin had climbed into the trolley for a joke whilst they had been shopping, Yoongi had found the act both hilarious and endearing. He had enjoyed pushing him up and down the aisles whilst they had been browsing the wide array of fresh produce; giving him soft strokes to the head as he had tried to decide what kind of dressing would have been ideal for adding to a fresh salad.

Or at least Yoongi had enjoyed it, until people had started staring at them. Then he had started visibly shrinking under their watchful eyes from a mixture of discomfort and his own constant, internalised monitoring as a result of his sexuality. He had stopped stroking at his hair, he had lowered his voice down to something close to a whisper - just so that no one would have overheard him calling him ‘darling’. Even his smile had completely disappeared for the entire duration of the ride back home.

Therefore, Jimin understood why Yoongi wanted to avoid such a thing happening again. It was silly, it was immature, and that was most likely why people had been staring at them. It was his fault that Yoongi had been made to feel so uncomfortable, and so he knew that he was going to have to control his immature side whenever they were in public from now on - no matter how much fun riding around in a shopping trolley might just be.

“Goddamn, why’s it always so fucking cold in here?” Yoongi muttered to himself, getting the basket into his right hand.

Jimin felt something brushing against the back of his hand, and so he turned his hand to reveal his palm to Yoongi - allowing him to silently take hold.

Walking up and down the aisle of the supermarket, Yoongi’s free hand entwined within his own, Jimin couldn’t believe just how happy that such a simple thing made him feel. It wasn’t a happiness that was instantly detectable, but rather a feeling of lightness in his limbs that meant that he felt so relaxed and content. It made each step a bounce, so that he lightly swung their hands back and forth in a childish fashion.

Jimin just loved being able to do normal things like this with his boyfriend - normal, daily things that finally made him feel like he was a functional adult. He wasn’t the only one that was benefiting from it, for Yoongi was also starting to leave his mansion ‘closet’. He was slowly embracing and accepting his sexuality, and starting to be more social too.

They weren’t spending evenings in private dining-rooms and gay hotels where no one could see Yoongi in the company of another man, but going out shopping in supermarkets, and sharing dinners on The Embarcadero pier surrounded by hundreds of locals and tourists from all over the world.
Sure, it wasn’t going to be easy for Yoongi. He still got anxious if he noticed that people were staring at them, even if they were complete strangers. But over time, he should start getting used to such minor things until he paid it all no heed.

Shopping together in some fancy, organic supermarket, almost no one stared at them unless they were making too much noise (or riding in trolleys). In the most strangest of ways, Jimin realised that they crossed paths with several gay couples whenever they visited the place.

There were the young men that were clearly health and fitness freaks, with their ripped, beach-ready bodies and perfect tans - their arms slung around each others’ waists, or their hands shoved into the back pockets of their jeans and shorts to comfortably cup buttocks. There were older lesbian couples, who sometimes had children in tow with them that might just have been from failed marriages, or planned pregnancies so that they could raise a family together - both strikingly butch, and femme in appearance.

It was nice, Jimin thought, finding a place that wasn’t built in the middle of The Castro, but was still frequented by gay folk who felt safe and comfortable being themselves. That might just be a good sign of things to come, or so he hoped.

“OK, baby boy. What’d we need to buy other than meat, hmm?”

Jimin scanned the first aisle that they happened to start wandering down. It was one of the largest aisles in the store, the one that was dedicated to fruit and vegetables - some of which Jimin had never even heard of before.

What the actual *fuck* was okra?

“You said you checked the fridge this morning; so, what was inside it?"

“…I can’t remember,” Yoongi replied after a moment of thought, coming to a slow stop in the middle of the aisle.

“*Yoongi,*” Jimin drawled, cocking his head at him to give him a look of sheer disbelief.
His boyfriend had requested that they go shopping this evening, and yet, he had no fucking clue what they even needed to buy. Jimin didn’t know whether he wanted to laugh, or give him a hard elbowing in the ribs.

“Alright, let’s start with the basics - fruit and vegetables,” Yoongi suggested, as he moved to draw closer to a shelf that was filled with crates of large heads of lettuce and cabbage. “I know we need that. You go through the strawberries so fast, Jimin. You eat ‘em up like they’re lines of blow…”

“I’ll go get them!” Jimin said in a sing-songy voice, almost bouncing down the aisle to get to the vast array of fresh berries at the far end.

“Grab some cherries too!” Yoongi called, lifting up one of the lettuces to check its freshness. He must have found it satisfactory, for he placed it down into the basket a moment later.

It was easy locating the crates of fresh strawberries and cherries on account of their vibrant colour. Jimin selected several of the small, plastic punnets because Yoongi was right - he did have a great love for the sweet berries. He was just about to go back down the aisle to his boyfriend when a sudden idea flirted through his mind, which made him gasp under his breath.

“Oh, Yoongi, what about a barbecue?!” Jimin suddenly asked, twisting to look down the aisle at him with wide eyes. “I can whip up a huge batch of marinade for the meat. We could have it with tons of rice, grilled vegetables…or maybe, some potato salad. You can grill the meat like a cool guy?”

“Oh, yeah? A cool guy?” Yoongi remarked with a lopsided smile, moving to cross the aisle and stand beside him.

“I love a man that can cook,” Jimin said, returning the smile as he placed the punnets of strawberries and cherries down into the basket. “Which’s why I love you so much, Yoongi.”

“Alright, so, what’s the marinade good for, Jimin?” Yoongi asked, quickly glancing along the aisle to ensure that no one was staring at them.

There was nothing to worry about at all, for the closest customers were all of the way down the aisle. The other customers were too busy going from aisle to aisle to even pay them any attention, quickly passing with their squeaking shopping trolleys and heavy baskets. No one had heard his little declaration of love, and so Yoongi could let his guarded breath out in a sigh of relief.
“So many things, baby boy! Grilled chicken! If you add gochujang to it, you can make spicy barbeque pork! Even salmon bulgogi, which you can cook in the oven! You’d be surprised by what you can make with it.”

“You ever made it before?”

“Uuhh, I used to help my mum in the kitchen, sometimes. I’ve helped her make the marinade before, I know how to make it. It’s not that difficult at all, if I can remember the ingredients. We didn’t have much to eat with the meat, except for boiled rice and eggs, and so she used to use it whenever she could. She’d reuse a lot of the ingredients she had to boil for the stock too, to try and make a side dish or two. Sure, my version mightn’t taste as good as her marinade did, but I’ll give it a shot.”

“Barbeque it is, Jimin.”

“OK, then I’m gonna need to grab a few things…”

After Yoongi had added more fruit to their shopping basket, in the form of bananas, massive oranges, juicy peaches and pears, Jimin went back down the aisle to check out the selection of vegetables. One thing that he knew for certain that he would need was onion, and so he quickly scanned the aisle to locate the selections.

Jimin juggled several of the loose onions just to make Yoongi laugh, placing the largest one inside of the basket. His boyfriend put the basket down by his feet so that he could copy his actions, selecting three of smaller onions from the crate.

Unlike Jimin, who could juggle with relative ease, Yoongi seemed to be a little more shaky. He didn’t toss the onions too high, fumbling them from hand to hand in a way that showed he wasn’t too confident in his skills. When he did give one of the onions a hard toss, hoping to look cool, he ended up throwing it a little too far to catch again.

“Oh, shit!” Yoongi cried out, fumbling to try and catch the onion…only for it hit the floor with a soft thump.

Jimin couldn’t help but burst out laughing at this, hunkering down to snatch up the poor onion whilst Yoongi shoved the other two back into the crate. The skin had split slightly from the drop, but the onion looked to still be perfectly fine to his eyes. So what if the skin had touched the floor? It wasn’t like the skin mattered, after all.
“Do we buy this one instead?” Yoongi asked, taking it out of his hands so that he could carefully examine the damaged onion.

“Just put it back on the shelf, and walk away,” Jimin said with a grin. “No one saw a thing, baby boy.”

Yoongi looked like he had just committed a criminal act as he placed the dropped onion back on the shelf; glancing around to ensure that no one had just caught him dropping it on the floor. He let out a mischievous laugh as he grabbed their basket, his cheeks flushed pink with embarrassment.

“Don’t try that with the eggs; OK, baby boy?” Jimin suggested with a wink. “Not unless you drop them in the frying pan…”

After some searching, Jimin added shallots, a bag of garlic cloves, a soft and ripe apple, and a single lemon into their basket - searching his brain for memories of the ingredients that his mother had used to boil to create her marinades. He knew that there wasn’t too much that went into the pot, but he wanted to make sure that he had everything.

Jimin recalled that he needed dried mushrooms and kelp, which the supermarket stocked. Along with a bottle of dark soy sauce, a tub of gochujang, and a shaker of gochugaru, he was also able to find some rice wine - all of the ingredients luckily in the ‘world food’ aisle. Sure, the labels were silly, and they were ridiculously overpriced, but they were authentic produce according to the label. There was no corn syrup available, but he knew that he could substitute it with honey, which he would also be using as a replacement for sugar.

“Honey?” Yoongi said in surprise, eyeing the assortment of glass jars and plastic squeeze bottles on the shelf in front of them.

“It’s better than adding sugar,” Jimin explained, as he carefully placed a glass jar of organic honey into the shopping basket. “You get a nice, sweet note, and it feels much smoother too.”

Yoongi made an interested noise at this, once more showcasing his lack of knowledge about Korean food. After all, he hadn’t even sampled tteokbokki before they had met one another, and so it didn’t surprise Jimin that he was clueless about how good honey was in the kitchen - both for sweet and savoury flavours.
“OK, time to go grab the meat…”

Upon reaching the massive deli counter across the supermarket, Yoongi studied the selection of meats that were displayed behind the glass counters with great interest. Most of it was packed in ice, and there was also dried goods hanging on hooks above the counter.

Yoongi settled on asking for two pounds of boneless chicken thigh, and a pound of pork loin - which would be more than enough for a barbeque, with some meat left aside for dinner the following evening. He also asked for a pound of salmon fillet, no doubt because he was eager to sample some of Jimin’s promised salmon bulgogi too.

Jimin found the wrapped-up parcels of meat pretty funny for some reason. The way that the cuts of meat were tightly secured in layers of grease-paper and twine kind of reminded him of parcels of drugs - especially when they were exchanged for quite the amount of cash. He thought about mentioning this to Yoongi, just to make him laugh, but decided that it would be much more fun to make the joke at home instead.

“I’m paying for us tonight, baby boy,” Jimin declared, slipping the bundle of cash free from his jeans pocket so that he could thumb a single, crisp $100 bill free. “Guess who got paid?”

“Oh, yeah?” Yoongi asked with an amused smile, pausing in the act of massaging his stiff neck. “How’s payday looking, huh?”

“4,500 cold, hard dollars,” he replied, earning himself a sharp whistle from his boyfriend. “That was my cut. The overall payday for you was 30,000 dollars of profit, baby boy.”

“Payday for me means most of that cash goes straight into another deal, another property - same old shit,” Yoongi muttered, giving his neck a final, hard knead before shifting his hand over to settle it on his lower back. “You worked hard for that cash, Jimin, like a good boy.”

“I’m only good for you, Yoongi,” Jimin promised, shoving the rest of the cash down into his pocket again.

“I guess I’m gonna need to set up a good bank account for you,” Yoongi remarked, watching the deli worker expertly slicing through the chicken thighs to debone them along the counter. “Mmm, I’ll get Dohee onto it. She’ll sort it all out, she’ll make sure there’s no unmarked bills floating ‘round. You might just end up with an AmEx soon enough, darling.”
“An AmEx?” Jimin repeated, before letting out a laugh. “No way, baby boy! I ain’t gonna make enough cash to own one of those babies!”

“You so sure, huh? 52 weeks in a year, more or less. The potential to make 4,500 dollars a week, or more. You do the maths, darling. You’re good at it, right?”

Jimin took a moment to do so, fiddling with the $100 bill as he studied Yoongi’s profile. He found himself quickly realising that the amount was a lot higher than he had been expecting.

“That’s, like, 200,000 dollars and counting in a single year. 230…no, 234,000 if I’m calculating roughly 4,500 dollars a week,” Jimin said, the realisation leaving him awestruck. “Yoongi, baby, what am I supposed to do with that much cash?”

“Get some fucking health insurance,” Yoongi retorted, the quip making the both of them laugh. “Be smart with it, darling, and the world’s yours.”

“What about banking it though? I can barely bank what I used to make without raising suspicion - I used to live cash in hand, Yoongi. This much cash going into my account? That’s real fucking suspicious to the tax man.”

“I’ll purchase a commercial property, like a bar or something, and I’ll put the property in your name as the beneficiary owner,” Yoongi suggested, whilst they waited for their order to be prepared. “Then, under Dohee’s guidance, and the work of one of my best launderers, I’ll trickle your payments through it under the guise of a completely legit business you’re legally profiting from.”

“Seriously? You’d do that, just for me?”

“I gotta do it, Jimin. I gotta keep us both clean, or else the FBI start following me ‘round in their big, white vans. I can’t take any risks, so, you gotta have your own legal, legitimate business too.”

“Oh! Oh my god! Buy a bar over in The Castro, Yoongi!” Jimin exclaimed, his eyes growing huge as he cosied up against his side. “Buy a gay bar!”

Yoongi burst out laughing at the suggestion, throwing his head back so hard that Jimin could see his
back teeth. It seemed like his idea had really tickled him, and he found himself also laughing at his amusement.

“Oh, oh, oh! You’ve gotta let me pick the name, baby boy!” Jimin almost begged, tugging on his arm. “I'll pick the best name!”

“What? Like ‘Beat The Meat’?” Yoongi retorted whip-crack quick, and that just made them start laughing all over again.

Jimin paid for the meat at the deli counter as soon as their order had been prepared; shoving the change from the single bill down into his pocket. He accepted the plastic bag from the worker, which was packed with the wrapped-up parcels and had a nice amount of weight to it. Then they had to go and pay for the rest of their food, joining a small queue at one of the many, busy tills back by the front of the supermarket.

After paying for their shopping, Jimin and Yoongi had to carry the packed, paper bags to the car; storing them in the boot for safekeeping.

Yoongi started the car, slowly weaving his way out of the parking lot so that he could drive them back home. It took just several minutes to do so, and then Jimin was following him inside of the mansion to go into the kitchen and start preparing their dinner.

Jimin wanted to hurry up and start the barbeque because he was starving. But sadly, he still needed to prepare the marinade for Yoongi, so that he could slather it onto the chicken and pork that he would be grilling. It was going to take some time to get it ready, maybe something close to an hour or two because of all of the boiling, soaking and marinating that he needed to do.

First, Jimin had to boil most of the stock ingredients in water - save for the kelp, rice wine, and sliced lemon. He left the pot boiling away on the stove for roughly thirty minutes, and then he added the kelp and rice wine; the liquid turning coloured and fragrant from the mixture of ingredients. After another ten minutes, he turned off the heat to leave it to cool; removing the solid ingredients and dropping slices of lemon into the liquid to let them soak whilst it cooled down.

As soon as the marinade was cool, Jimin placed the chicken thighs in a dish, and he poured a liberal cupful of the liquid over them. He did the same for the pork loins, but he mixed in the gochugaru and gochujang to give it a nice, spicy kick. He left the two dishes in the refrigerator for a little while, to let the meat soak up the liquid. The meat wouldn’t soak up too much of the marinade, but they were both far too hungry to care about that. So long as it had some flavour, that was all that mattered to him.
Whilst Jimin did all of this, Yoongi sat at the counter: working his way through dozens of taxes with a mug of steaming coffee at hand. He remarked on how nice that the cooking smelled; his pen scribbling across a spreadsheet so that he could circle things and jot down notes. He was so engrossed in working that Jimin had assumed he wouldn’t have even noticed when he brushed his hair back behind his ear for him, but Yoongi reached up to take hold of his hand and gave it a tender squeeze.

Jimin boiled the rice, and he washed and sliced up the vegetables for the grill, which Yoongi would sprinkle with salt and pepper to give a little more flavour. He left the meat to marinate whilst he did so, until he had everything prepared.

“OK! Time to barbeque!” Jimin declared, as he gathered up some of the dishes to cross the ground-floor and go into the garden. “I hope you’re hungry, baby boy!”

Yoongi’s mansion garden looked small in comparison to the vast gardens that Jimin had seen all over the city over the last week. It was smaller than some of the lawns had been, but it was still a decent-sized stretch of land that contained a patio, on which the barbeque and furniture was placed. There was also a swimming pool, and a patch of perfectly manicured grass that Tigger would no doubt love to roll around in. There were flower beds in the patch of grass, and Jimin assumed they were maintained by hired gardeners - though there was a chance that Yoongi might like tending to the flowers himself.

It seemed like something that Yoongi might like, Jimin thought. Tending to the flowers would be a meditative experience, good for relieving stress and anxiety. He seemed to be very house-proud in regards to interior decor, after all, and so he might just take pride in his garden too.

Whilst Yoongi got the barbeque all fired up, Jimin slipped out of his clothes so that he could dive into the swimming pool. He found that the water was chill on his skin, chill enough to make him swim his way back up to the surface and let his breath out in a gasp. He slowly kicked his legs back and forth as he reached up to slick his wet hair back off his face, glancing up at the sky and blinking water out of his eyes.

The evening was now closer to night, and so the sky was a wash of dark purple above the golden clouds that were floating across the horizon. He saw a plane drifting across the sky, heading off absolutely anywhere in the world - maybe, just to another state; or maybe, all of the way to Korea and beyond.

Jimin twisted in the water, hearing it lapping against the sides of the pool. The barbeque was illuminated from the burning embers of the charcoal briquettes, casting a reddish glow over Yoongi
as he spread the meat and vegetables across the hot grill.

“You should come and join me, baby boy!” Jimin called from the side of the pool, folding his arms up on the edge so that he could place his chin down on them.

“If I do that, the food’s gonna get burnt to a crisp!” Yoongi called in reply, giving him a quick grin as he turned over a chunk of marinated chicken. “Think I’ll pass, darling! This smells too good to burn!”

The meat was starting to sizzle and spit in the heat from the grill, the scent of it cooking mingling in with the smokey, charcoal aroma that was coming from the barbeque. It made Jimin’s stomach rumble in appreciation, as he lay back to float in the pool water.

“Look at that sky, Yoongi,” Jimin sighed out, lazily kicking his legs to keep him afloat. “Talk about beautiful.”

“I can see something beautiful, alright,” Yoongi remarked with a smile, watching him floating in the pool from across the patio.

As soon as the meat and vegetable was grilled, Yoongi transferred it onto the plate, and so Jimin dragged himself out of the pool to join him at the table. His boyfriend retrieved a towel from inside the home for him, swaddling him in it and then gently kneading at his upper arms with the soft cotton to try and warm him up.

Jimin could only smile at him, dragging the towel up to rub at the tip of his nose and wipe a bead of water away. He let Yoongi dry at his hair for him too, scrunching tight handfuls to squeeze the pool water free.

“You’re gonna catch your death if you keep doing that, darling,” Yoongi said, leaning forward to press a quick kiss on the tip of his cold nose.

“I can’t help it, baby boy. Whenever I see a pool, I’ve just gotta jump into it,” Jimin retorted, letting the towel settle around his shoulders like a blanket. “One night, you’ll join me - I know it.”

The patio table was covered in the spread of food: a platter covered in barbeque, grilled chicken, spicy pork that was a vivid red colour from the marinade, and salted leaves of lettuce to wrap it all in;
bowls of boiled rice, and a variety of grilled vegetables.

Whilst Jimin packed a leaf of lettuce with pork and vegetables, Yoongi grabbed one of the chunks of chicken to take a huge bite. He cheeked it, letting his breath out in a huff from the heat and then lifting his fingers up to his lips to lick them free of marinade.

“Oh, that’s good, Jimin,” Yoongi almost moaned around the bite, chewing and swallowing the mouthful so that he could take another bite. “I ain’t had barbeque like this in a long time.”

“When was the last time, huh, baby boy?” Jimin asked, lifting the lettuce wrap to shovel it into his mouth.

The taste of the pork, infused with the spicy and sweet marinade, was so much better than Jimin had been expecting. The hint of the apple and lemon gave it a creamy, tarty taste that reminded him so much of his mum’s old recipe. It was strange tasting it right now, after so long - as none of the barbeques that Jimin had savoured in Seoul with Taehyung had tasted anything like her cooking.

“I went to visit Seokseok’s family, back in the summer last year. They’d a huge evening barbeque like this,” Yoongi explained, licking his lips clean as he also started filling up a leaf of lettuce. “The Jung clan love their barbeques, but not my parents.”

“Why not?”

Yoongi just shrugged at this, showing that he didn’t really know why. He ran his tongue around his mouth, distending the skin as he chased after a hint of flavour.

Jimin thought this over for a few seconds, coming to the conclusion that it might be because barbeques were supposed to be family affairs. He watched his boyfriend sampling the lettuce wrap whilst he tucked into his serving of fluffy rice, Yoongi having to open his mouth incredibly wide to do so.

“What about the pork, hmm? Is it good?” Jimin asked with a soft smile, balancing his chin on the backs of his fingers.

Yoongi nodded because he was unable to reply, far too much food shoved in his mouth. Seeing the way that he eagerly chewed the food, a dribble of sticky marinade caught in the corner of his mouth
that he had yet to clean free, made Jimin smile at him fondly.

“The meat tastes much better if you soak it overnight, but-”

“But it already tastes fucking amazing,” Yoongi said around the lettuce wrap. “Seriously, Jimin, this’ so good.”

Jimin wiped the dribble free from his mouth for him, sucking it free from his thumb with a pleased hum.

Yoongi clearly enjoyed the barbeque, for he devoured quite a lot of the spicy pork and lettuce wraps - far too busy eating to attempt much conversation. There was nothing left but smears of sauce and sticky grains of rice by the time that they were finished eating, which pleased Jimin immensely because it meant that his boyfriend really had enjoyed their dinner.

On account of the fact that Jimin had done most of the cooking, Yoongi volunteered to wash all of the dishes for them. He filled the sink with scorching water and plenty of liquid soap, needing the mixture to budge all of the grease from the plates and dishes.

Whilst his boyfriend tidied up the kitchen, Jimin soaked the salmon in more of marinade, placing it in the fridge to prepare it for dinner. He selected a bottle of wine, eyeing the front to study the label. Château Yon~ Figeac, 1981, Saint Émilion, the label declared, with a golden logo emblazoned on the white background. He didn’t have a clue about wine, and so he decided to just open this bottle - trusting that Yoongi would have only stocked his wine rack with the good stuff.

After popping the cork free, Jimin retrieved two glasses from a rack set above the sink, and then he skipped up the stairs to go into their bedroom.

Jimin moved some of the candles from the bathroom, placing them down on the dresser so that he could light a match and set them all alight. They created just enough illumination to not need the bedroom lights switched on, which was so perfect. He filled up the glasses with a liberal splash of the wine, which was the same shade of rich red as the throw cushions on the bed, and then he stretched out across the mattress with a pleased hum.

From downstairs, Jimin heard the sound of the sink being drained, and a loud yawn as Yoongi toddled his way up the double flight of stairs. He heard him grumbling the entire time, seemingly talking to himself.
Yoongi stopped in the bedroom doorway for a moment, letting out a soft laugh as he looked at him. He reached up to cover his grin with his fingers, unable to hide his amusement.

“Talk ‘bout romantic, Jimin…”

“I didn’t have any rose petals, sadly,” Jimin remarked, shifting to sit up on the mattress. “But I’ve got candles, wine, massage oil…and the only other thing I need is you, baby boy.”

When he held his hands out to him invitingly, Yoongi moved to cross the bedroom to stop at the foot of the bed.

With Jimin’s assistance, and plenty of soft, open-mouthed kisses along his chest and stomach, Yoongi slipped out of his work shirt and trousers to join him on the bed.

“I know that the best way to forget about bad days is to take care of yourself,” Jimin said between soft and deep kisses; Yoongi’s hand cradling the back of his neck to angle his face. “That means plenty of pampering and…and treats, baby boy.”

“What kinda treats?” Yoongi asked teasingly, peppering quick kisses along his cheekbone to his temple.

“The best kind.”

“Mmm, I think you’re the best treat of ‘em all, darling.”

Jimin let out a pleased sound at this, something close to a purr as his boyfriend trailed his lips along his jaw to his throat. Like always, he found those little sensitive spots around his freckles that made him tense up with a gasp of delight - spots that Yoongi loved teasing during slow bouts of lovemaking.

“I promised you a massage,” Jimin said, gently knocking Yoongi’s hands free so that he could retrieve the glasses of wine. He held one out in offering, lifting his own glass to take a sniff of the contents. “I know how much you love massages, Yoongi.”
Yoongi hummed as he took a sip of wine, which Jimin discovered had an earthy flavour, with woody and smokey undertones, and a hint of tart blackcurrant. It lingered on his taste buds, a strangely enticing flavour. His boyfriend let it settle on his tongue for a moment before swallowing, clearly savouring all of the notes.

After swallowing the single sip, Jimin placed the glass aside so that he could collect the bottle of massage oil. The scent of coconut wafted from it the very second that he popped up the lid, a scent that he greatly liked. He got a liberal amount into his palm, seeing Yoongi turning around to expose his back to him like usual.

The candlelight played off his spine, casting his tiger tattoo into shadows and highlights so that the pouncing beast looked even more deadly. It was almost as if it was going to leap right off his back, bursting free from his skin like it would tear through the undergrowth of the jungle.

Jimin got in place behind him, slotting his spread thighs around Yoongi’s hips so that he could settle down on his heels comfortably. He spread the oil between both of his hands, coating them thoroughly and warming up the runny substance. Then he placed his hands down on the slope between his neck and shoulders to start the massage.

“Shit, right there, Jimin,” Yoongi sighed, his shoulders lifting and falling in a soft wave. “Mmm, that’s so good…”

Jimin pressed his thumbs into the tight muscle at the base of his neck, kneading at it for him. Just like always, Yoongi was carrying so much stress in his neck and shoulders, likely from constantly tensing up when he was anxious or irritated. He also carried a lot of it in his lower back, as a result of sitting behind the wheel of his car and slouching all of the goddamn time.

“Just close your eyes and relax, baby boy,” Jimin cooed, feeling the massage oil gliding across Yoongi’s skin under his fingers and palms. “Let go of all of that stress, or you’ll never fall asleep.”

Jimin slowed worked his way down Yoongi’s back, kneading at the usual spots to help alleviate stress. He loved getting to his waist to do so, feeling Yoongi wriggling from the ticklish sensation; and he also loved pressing kisses on the balls of his shoulders, tasting coconut on his lips and tongue.

From his back, Jimin moved onto his arms - rubbing firm circles from his biceps to his sharp elbows, and his forearms down to his very fingertips. Then he went down to his legs - fondling his soft thighs, kissing the bony bumps of his prominent kneecaps, and kneading at his calves until he was
purposefully tickling at the arches of his feet.

Yoongi savoured every single second of the massage like always: sipping at his wine with his eyes closed. His lips parted with soft sighs, or to whisper words of praise when he found a particular spot. As soon as Jimin was finished, he grabbed the bottle of massage oil so that he could return the favour.

Jimin didn’t particularly need a massage, as he was feeling free from stress and stiffness. But Yoongi’s massages were incredibly enjoyable and sexually stimulating for him. Therefore, he was more than happy to allow him to give him a slow, but firm massage as he also sipped at his own serving of wine. Especially when Yoongi liked to focus on his thighs and buttocks the most, pressing his fingers into his skin just right.

By the time that Yoongi was finished with his massage, Jimin’s skin was slick with lingering oil. It was all over Yoongi’s skin too, glistening and warm, and he wondered if he remembered what he had said to him during the car ride earlier.

“Where do you think you’re going, baby boy?” Jimin asked with a smile, snagging his arm around his waist before his boyfriend could get off the mattress.

“I was gonna pour out some more wine,” Yoongi replied, straining against his hold for a few seconds. “Don’t you want some more, huh?”

“Oh?” Jimin hummed, raising his eyebrows at him and giving him a playful look. “But I want you to stay right here, Yoongi. Forget about the wine, hmm?”

It took Yoongi a few seconds to realise what he was doing, to figure out that Jimin was trying to gently ease his way into a play fight with him. It was a pretty childish attempt, but Jimin wanted it to be light and playful.

“Make me,” Yoongi said, as he reached down to pull his arm off his waist and he shot him the most enticing look.

Oh, just hearing Yoongi’s provocative retort made Jimin let out a laugh. It was so cheeky, in that perfect way that Yoongi achieved when he was feeling playful and mischievous. It sounded like a true challenge, and so Jimin wasn’t going to disappoint.
“Come back here, baby boy!” Jimin called out, crawling along the mattress so that he could slip his arms around his waist and pull at him just as he managed to get off the bed.

“Jimin!” Yoongi cried out with a laugh, throwing his head back so that it landed on his shoulder. “I thought you were a good boy?!”

“Hmm, even good boys are naughty sometimes,” Jimin retorted, turning his head so that he could suck a kiss right against a sensitive spot on his boyfriend’s neck.

“Oh,” Yoongi hiccuped, tensing up in his tight hold from the ticklish contact for a few seconds. Then he turned limp in his arms, giving up his short-lived attempt at freeing himself just like that.

Jimin dragged him straight back onto the mattress, placing a hand against his stomach so that he could give him a playfully rough shove.

Yoongi hit the mattress hard, his breath leaving him in a laugh. He bounced from the impact, his hair spreading out across the covers in a kinked mess, and his half-hard cock weakly flopping between his splayed thighs.

Jimin found it startlingly easy to roll him onto his side, spreading his thighs wide so that he could straddle his body and ‘pin’ him down on the mattress. It seemed like Yoongi wasn’t going to playfully fight back, or at least not yet. He stayed still underneath him, rather than wriggle or kick around.

“Do you like this, hmm?” Jimin asked, lightly applying his weight down onto him with his hips; one hand cupping his shoulder and the other holding onto the covers. “Do you wanna wrestle with me, baby boy? I promise to go nice and soft on you.”

“Don’t go soft on me,” Yoongi replied, turning his head to look up at him. “If you wanna wrestle, darling…let’s wrestle.”

Which was exactly when Yoongi threw his hand up to give him a hard shove to the chest, the push catching him by complete surprise.

“Ah!” Jimin cried out, clapping a hand against his chest to rub at it. “Oh! You wanna wrestle? You wanna wrestle, baby boy?!”
Yoongi bucked underneath him to free his lower body, knocking his hands away so that he couldn’t grab hold of him again. Just like that, the pair of them were tussling on the mattress - laughing and gasping for breath as they tried to get a strong enough hold to tackle one another.

Jimin didn’t know why he enjoyed wrestling with Yoongi so much. It was probably because it was such a masculine activity; a strong, male bonding act that had lingering hints of homoeroticism underneath it that the playfulness couldn’t fully disguise.

It was the kind of bonding activity that most boys grew out by the time that they were teenagers, unable to get too physical with one another under the strict, watchful eyes of their parents and elders. If boys enjoyed the rough and tumble, physical intimacy that wrestling created, well then, they must be gay or something.

Why else would they enjoy such things?

It was a mindset that Jimin hadn’t understood growing up before fully becoming aware of his sexuality; having observed the wonderful, physical intimacy between young girls that they were allowed to display without such worries or assumptions. Holding hands, embracing, kissing each other on the cheek - women could be so affectionate with one another, but not men; never men.

Playful grappling and pinning one another down during wrestling matches strangely changed over time for boys; from innocent displays of macho toughness to impress one another, into perceived pseudo-sexual acts that were no longer ‘acceptable’. As a result, the lack of physical bonding forced so many young men apart, until they were frightened to even embrace their male companions, or show any form of affection which might threaten to destroy their delicately crafted, painstakingly controlled heteronormative persona.

But Jimin and Yoongi were going to be able to bond with each other from the physical play, whilst also getting to achieve sexual satisfaction. That was likely why he enjoyed it so much - the freedom to act like a man and to enjoy pleasure with another man, without any fears.

Jimin was going to get to tackle, grapple, and hold Yoongi down against their bed, which Yoongi could do to him in turn. He was also able to kiss him, embrace him, make love to him - if they wanted to. It was that wonderful blend of masculinity and sexuality blurring together once more, just like when Yoongi had introduced him to the pleasure of stretching his foreskin over his cock.

“Wow, I didn’t know that my baby boy was this naughty!” Jimin teased, as he managed to knock
Yoongi’s hands aside and he dived forward to tackle him.

The impact knocked Yoongi straight onto his bed, the mattress springs bouncing under their combined weight. Jimin grabbed hold of the balls of his shoulders, holding on tight in the hopes that his boyfriend wouldn’t be able to dislodge him.

“Ten…nine…eight…seven-”

Yoongi wriggled underneath him in a bid freeing himself before he reached zero. With a great deal of lower body strength, he managed to roll them onto their sides, but not enough to get Jimin onto his back. No, all that he could do was roll him onto his side, leaving the both of them grappling at each other.

“And, ah! You’re too slippery!” Jimin exclaimed with a hard laugh, losing his grip on Yoongi’s biceps because of the thick layer of massage oil that was all over him. “Oh, no! I made a mistake! I made a mistake!”

Yoongi dived on him just like that, able to climb on top and straddle him now that Jimin was unable to hold him at bay. He snagged hold of his wrists, managing to hold them down onto the bed in a rather weak attempt at a pinning move.

“Ten…nine…eight-”

“Oh, no, you don’t!” Jimin exclaimed, wrapping his thighs around Yoongi’s hips to squeeze tight hold of him.

With a powerful buck of his hips, his stomach muscles flexing hard, Jimin was able to flip Yoongi right back onto his back without even needing to use his hands. His boyfriend lost his grip on his wrists with another breathless laugh, wriggling and kicking underneath him so that Jimin was unable to hold onto him.

Jimin made sure to be gentle with Yoongi; to not use his full strength on him because he didn’t want to hurt him, or scare him by being too dominant. He didn’t know the full extent of Yoongi’s physical strength just yet, and so he didn’t want to exert too much power on him in case he was unable to break his grip; or hurt him by accident when he tried to wriggle free from his grapples.
After all, Jimin knew from experience that playful sex games could quickly get out of hand, and that it was sometimes hard to tell a partner to stop in the midst of it all. He didn’t want Yoongi getting uncomfortable, so uncomfortable that he was scared of telling him that he wanted to slow down or stop. He wanted Yoongi to enjoy the game just as much as he was, if not more - which meant going gentle with him, even after he had told him that he really wanted to wrestle.

Yet, Yoongi didn’t seem to be intimidated by the playful grappling and fondling in the slightest. He seemed to be having plenty of fun; was laughing and grinning from ear to ear as they tussled with one another.

Jimin managed to snag his arm around Yoongi’s ribs after some struggling, holding him tight against his chest so that he was unable to move his arms above his elbows. This time, when he tackled him down onto the mattress, he slipped his thigh over his legs to press his knee down and keep him in place.

Yoongi was finally pinned again, lying on his side in a position that he wasn’t going to be able to free himself from. He was breathing hard and fast in a way that showed that he might not have much strength left in him to wrestle, and so he was probably going to submit to defeat instead.

Jimin reached over with his free hand to brush Yoongi’s hair out of his eyes for him, feeling that it was starting to clump from sweat that had broken out on his brow. They were both coated in oil and sweat. It had made the act of wrestling incredibly difficult, as they had been unable to get a proper grip on their slippery arms and thighs.

Jimin ran his fingers down Yoongi’s stomach, feeling the swell of his lower stomach between his hip bones. His belly fit into his palm perfectly, rounded out from the sharp curve of his spine and just begging that he press his fingers into the yielding mound of soft skin. He did so, kneading at his stomach before moving his fingers down to his stiffening erection.

Yoongi took a sharp intake of breath at his touch, shifting to curve his back that little bit more and almost inviting him to touch him again; his hips chasing after his fingers.

Jimin grasped hold of his cock so that he could start slowly teasing him. His palm was slick from massage oil, meaning that his fist pumped smoothly around his shaft without much friction.

Yoongi reacted instantly to his touch; curving his back in an attempt at following his pumping fist because he was unable to fully move as a result of Jimin’s pinning move. All that he could really do was move his lower legs, curve and arch his back, and tense up his shoulders.
“Why ain’t you counting down?” Yoongi asked in a strained voice, before letting out a soft moan against the covers. “Huh…”

“I’m counting down your moans,” Jimin replied, whispering against his ear and feeling his lover trembling in his hold. “Starting with that one. Ten…”

“Jimin,” Yoongi said with a husky laugh, tightly squeezing his thighs together. “I ain’t gonna let you win, y’know that?”

“We’ll see about that, baby boy…”

Between the steady pumping of his fist, Jimin buried his face against the curve of Yoongi’s neck so that he could find another way to tease him. He could feel his heartbeat racing against his lips with every kiss, the taste of coconut and sweat on his tongue as he sucked teasing nibbles against the sharp curve of his jaw, and the lobe of his ear.

Yet, Yoongi didn’t make a single sound, save for breathing hard and fast. His brow twitched whenever Jimin kneaded around the base of his cock firmly, showing that he greatly enjoyed the sensation. His tongue also slipped free to wet at his lips, which he was roughly gnawing at.

“Are you trying to not moan, baby boy? Are you seriously holding them in?” Jimin asked with a giggle, seeing the way that Yoongi’s throat worked as he swallowed something that might just have been a moan. “Ah, you’re so naughty!”

When Jimin shifted his fist up to his head, roughly stimulating it to bring him more pleasure, Yoongi finally let out a quick series of moans - a string of breathy gasps that he couldn’t hope to suppress.

“Nine…eight…seven…six,” Jimin counted down rapidly with a laugh.

“Shit, Jimin, let go,” Yoongi moaned, shifting in his hold in a way that showed that he was starting to get desperate. “Lemme touch you too.”

Jemin did as he requested, relinquishing his pinning position because Yoongi wanted to stop wrestling in favour of more heated play. There might not be a winner for this particular wrestling
match, but they would both get to enjoy celebrating.

Yoongi rolled onto his side to face him, slipping his arm around his neck so that he could pull him close enough to kiss him. His cheeks were flushed with so much colour and heat that Jimin could feel waves of warmth radiating off his sweaty skin.

It was only when Jimin felt their lips brushing together that he realised that this would be the perfect way to win a wrestling match. He had completely lowered his defences to the other man, had left himself vulnerable and open to an attack.

Which was exactly when Yoongi tackled him, of course.

Jimin let out a yelp at Yoongi’s surprise attack, rolling straight onto his back from the push. It quickly turned into a burst of giggles, which bordered on squeaks from the intensity.

“You big cheater! That’s cheating, baby boy!”

Yoongi managed to keep hold of both of his wrists with one hand, holding them down against the mattress so that he could seize hold of his hip. With a hard shove, Jimin was rolled right onto his stomach, and so Yoongi mounted him to pin him down again.

“Youngi!” Jimin exclaimed between his gasps for breath, feeling a throb of arousal in the pit of his stomach at the weight and heat of Yoongi’s groin settling down on his buttocks.

“Ten…nine…eight,” Yoongi started counting, a grin audible in his voice as he did so. “C’mon, darling, I’m gonna win.”

“Ah! I’m gonna break free!” Jimin declared, giving his legs a little kick before snagging the covers between his toes. “I’m gonna break free and win! Only losers cheat, Yoongi!”

Jimin found that he actually couldn’t break free from under Yoongi’s weight, not when he was holding his wrists down onto the bed and he was stuck in such an awkward position. All that he could was lie beneath him, breathing fast and shallow as he tried to catch his breath. It looked like he was going to have to accept defeat this time.
“Four…three…two…one,” Yoongi finished, as he let go of his wrists. “I win, darling.”

“Hmm, you got me, baby boy,” Jimin breathed out, turning his head to the side so that his cheek was pressed against the soft pillow. His hair was in his eyes, strewn across his face and starting to stick to his skin from the light outbreak of sweat on his brow. “My baby boy’s so tough; such a tough fighter. Who’d have thought so, looking at that pretty, little face?”

“You let me win.” Yoongi argued, his voice uneven as he tried to catch his breath. He reached down to stroke his hair back off his face for him, his touch as tender as always - even when he was currently pinning his body down on the mattress with his weight.

“Maybe?” Jimin teased, as he curved his back to bring his hips up off the mattress. He felt his buttocks rubbing up against his groin, which made his boyfriend grunt in surprise.

Yoongi reacted to his grinding completely on instinct, pressing himself down against his buttocks, just to seek out that little bit more friction; to enjoy some more heat from the thick oil that was coating his skin.

“Maybe, I just wanted to get you like this, baby boy?” Jimin continued, rolling his hips in a tight circular motion to tease him.

“Shit, Jimin,” Yoongi gasped, shifting off him to snatch up the bottle of massage oil off the mattress.

Jimin moved to get into a better position, getting up onto his elbows and lifting his hips up high until his back was fully curved - the pose somewhat feline. He wiggled his hips invitingly, looking back over his shoulder at Yoongi to stare at him from under his half-lidded eyes.

Yoongi liberally coated his hands in more massage oil, which he slathered all over Jimin’s buttocks and upper thighs. He made no move to massage it in, for he wanted it to stay runny and fluid. But he did give his buttocks a hard knead that made Jimin’s cock give a soft throb.

Yoongi spread his thighs wide around his, settling his crotch down on his buttocks because he had found the perfect angle for rutting against him. He leaned forward to almost lie on top of him, settling down on his curved back until his chin was digging into his shoulder; one of his hands settling on top of his to tightly entwine their fingers together. He shifted his other hand over his hip, his fingers brushing against his stomach until he was able to take hold of his cock and start pumping his fist to share the pleasure.
The added layer of massage oil was just what Yoongi had needed, adding a slickness between their two bodies that allowed him to rut against him with better friction. Jimin could feel the oil starting to run down the backs of thighs, the runny liquid ticklish so that it felt just like Yoongi’s fingers; like his lips, whenever he pressed delicate kisses all over his skin.

“I can’t believe that you…cheated,” Jimin sighed, closing his eyes and sinking his fingers tightly into the bed sheets until the silk wrinkled from his grip.

The slick heat of Yoongi’s fist around his cock was unbelievable, was exactly what Jimin had been craving for so long now. The wrestling had been highly enjoyable, had been a form of foreplay for the two of them - especially when their bodies had met together; thighs sliding between thighs during tackles to rub just right, hands squeezing and lightly spanking buttocks whilst they had been tussling on the mattress.

“I always cheat at games, Jimin,” Yoongi replied with a breathless laugh, picking up his rhythm to a more fluid speed. “It’s the easiest way to win.”

“Don’t you like the challenge? Don’t you like it when it’s… hard?” he teased, finding his lips curling up at the corners in a mischievous smile. “I know I like it when it’s hard, baby boy.”

“Mmm, I like it soft,” Yoongi said, turning his face so that his nose bumped against his throat; his breath hot on his skin. “When it’s easy to…to have fun - that’s the best. You get to enjoy it too, darling.”

Yoongi started rutting against him so hard and fast that Jimin found it difficult keeping his hips up off the mattress for him. His weight was bearing down on him, his boyfriend lying stretched over his body so that he could press his face into his hair, or bury it in the crook between his neck and shoulder.

But the pressure just added to his excitement, for Jimin rocked with him until his muscles started to burn from the exertion; until the heat trapped between their bodies made sweat start to run down his inner thighs, and roll down from his hairline to soak into the pillow.

Oh, if only Jimin could get to feel the added sensation of being penetrated. If not for the missing sensations: the burning stretch, the fullness inside of him, the hard rub of his cock against his prostate sending throbs of pleasure up into his belly, this is what would it would feel like to have sex with Yoongi. So much heat, so much pressure bearing down on him until it was so easy to get lost in his
sexual fantasy.

“Baby boy, please fuh-fuck me like this,” Jimin moaned, struggling to gasp for breath against the pillow. “Please, mnn-”

“Just like-like this?” Yoongi asked, his own voice ragged as he tried to catch his breath. “You want me to…to wrestle with you, ’til you’re so excited, you gotta fuck?”

Jimin could only moan at this, feeling a surge of tingling pleasure shooting up into his belly. Hearing Yoongi talking dirty never failed to bring him pleasure, for it sometimes made him finally reach his climax from excitement.

“My good boy wants a hot, fuh-fast fuck?” Yoongi teased, and it was hard discerning if his stammer had been the result of him gasping for breath, or if it had been a flare of hot shame coursing through him.

“Your good boy wants to get pounded, Yoongi,” he gasped, struggling to hold onto the pillow because his fingers were shaking so much.

Jimin was so close, so close that he couldn’t even think. He was so deeply entangled within his pleasure, so lost in the intense heat between his thighs that he could only focus on the sensation; on the building throbs of pleasure that were starting to take over. He couldn’t even open his eyes, far too desperate for the tiny sparks that were starting to flash behind his eyelids to turn into explosions of colour. His entire body was trembling in anticipation, a rush spreading through him that just couldn’t seem to reach full power.

Oh, Jimin enjoyed that searing, long stretch of building pleasure, but he wanted to orgasm so badly. His hunger for it just seemed to make it harder for him to attain his climax, dragging on for so long that it was almost like the build-up would never stop.

Did he want this sensation to end in favour of an explosive orgasm? Or did he want it to last all night long, constantly edging close but never reaching it?

“Almost, almost,” Yoongi gasped, also desperate to orgasm judging from his frantically bucking hips and hard breathing. “C’mon, fuck.”
Yoongi shifted on top of him, trying to find the angle that would help him climax. It took him some wriggling, but he seemed to find it at last, sighing out a breathless ‘yes’ as his cock glided in the build-up of massage oil that was caught between Jimin’s buttocks. After several experimental rocks, he fluidly picked up his pace until he was back to that frantic, fast speed. His spread thighs squeezed around him, his muscles twiching as he finally found the raw pinnacle of his climax.

Hot strings of semen landed on Jimin’s back when Yoongi ejaculated; shooting out across the valley of his curved spine so that he felt it splashing down onto his skin. The sudden sensation of heat made him moan, the sound mingling with Yoongi’s deep grunt of orgasmic pleasure against his throat.

“Huh-huh-fuck,” Yoongi groaned, his hips giving several more sloppy, frantic bucks before he fell still on top of him. “Oh, Jimin…”

Yoongi shifted his fist up to his head, firmly kneading at it until Jimin was almost keening between his teeth from the sensation. The rough stimulation was electric on his slick cock, his swollen head incredibly sensitive to touch. It was exactly what he had been craving, finally bringing him right to the cusp of his climax.

Jimin orgasmed with a sharp cry of pleasure, reaching down to snag hold of Yoongi’s wrist. His nails scratched at the back of his hand as he tried to grab hold of him; torn between slipping his fist down to his base to knead him through his climax, or keeping it in place to get him to carry on stimulating him.

“Hmm - oh, baby boy,” Jimin whined, dropping his heavy head down onto the mound of pillows to ride out the waves of pleasure. “Fuck!”

“Good?” Yoongi asked, breathless from his own intense orgasm. His breath puffed out against his neck, the scent of wine still lingering on his tongue.

“So fucking good,” Jimin moaned, letting out a husky laugh when Yoongi pressed a series of light kisses against his sweaty cheek and brow. “That was…oh, that was the kinda orgasm that you dream about, Yoongi.”

Yoongi laughed at this too, shifting so that he could settle down on top of him and keep him trapped in his hold. He seemed to be enjoying kissing him right now, floating in post-coital bliss and overwhelmed with the need to give care; just like how Jimin savoured giving him tender care right before Yoongi drifted off to sleep in his arms.
“Hmm, I’m being serious,” Jimin mumbled, moving underneath his weight to fully relax from his tender kisses. “That was…intense.”

“It sounded intense,” Yoongi said between his kisses, reaching up to knock more sweaty strands of hair back behind his ear. “You really liked that, huh?”

Jimin hummed in reply to this, far too content to attempt to talk right now. He had wrestled with other men before Yoongi, but those wrestling matches hadn’t been as fun, nor as playful. Finding himself ending up in something close to an unbreakable chokehold after just a couple of playful shoves had most certainly been something that Jimin hadn’t enjoyed.

After another moment of care, Yoongi shifted to lie down on the bed beside him. He let his breath out in a soft grunt as he did so, brushing his own hair back out of his eyes.

“Shit, we’re covered in massage oil,” Yoongi remarked, running his fingers across the still liquid wetness of his spine. It was going to take forever to soak into their skin now, and most of it would end up soaking into the bed sheets instead. “Shower?”

“Run a nice, hot bath, baby boy,” Jimin suggested, rolling onto his back so that he could watch his boyfriend climbing off the bed. He grabbed one of the candles, carrying it into the bathroom so that he could use it to light the rest. “We can share it; hmm?”

“Sure thing.”

Jimin stretched out onto the bed, listening to the sound of Yoongi moving around the en-suite bathroom. He heard clattering sounds, followed by the soft roar of the water as he started filling up the bathtub. His head was still foggy from pleasure, so light and airy that he felt like he could just drift off to sleep. But first, he needed to clean all of the massage oil free from his skin, or else he might just slide right off the bed in his sleep.

When Jimin entered the bathroom a moment later, he saw that Yoongi was perched on the edge of the porcelain bathtub. His hand was stirring at the water, the tap still running to fill the tub with scorching hot and fragrant water; bubbles foaming from the gentle movement of his wrist. The scent that was coming from the surface was jasmine, that delicate and soothing fragrance that he knew that Yoongi loved because it aided him in falling asleep.

Yoongi’s skin was glistening from the light of the candles placed around the bathroom, the thick
layer of massage oil stubbornly clinging to him. He pulled his hand free from the bathwater, a creamy mixture of foam and milky soak coating his skin. When the water was deep, the bathtub starting to get close to full, he turned off the tap so that he could climb in first.

“Oh, fuck,” Yoongi moaned, as he sank down into the scorching hot water. It lapped over him, licking against the sides of the bathtub and luckily not sloshing out onto the floor. “That feels so good.”

Jimin moved to climb into the bathtub with him, finding that the water really was scorching hot. He let his own breath out in a sigh of pleasure, lying back against the slope of the bathtub so that he could rest his head and one arm up on the lip.

Yoongi sank back against him, just taking a moment to savour the pleasurable sensation of the hot water lapping over his body. His head settled down on his chest, using it as a pillow as he moved his legs around to get comfortable. The water licked over his thighs, leaving the very tops of his knees exposed.

Even though he couldn’t see his face, Jimin knew that Yoongi had closed his eyes. He could tell just by the way that his breathing had softened and slowed down, the rhythm edging close to the one that he used when he was drifting off to sleep. He lifted his hand from the water so that he could place it against the side of his head, to gently stroke at his skin and hair.

“What’re you thinking about right now, baby boy?” Jimin asked in a whisper-soft voice, as he threaded his fingers through his damp hair.

“Mmm, I’m thinking that when we get out the tub, we just…make out ‘til we fall asleep…how does that sound, huh?” Yoongi replied, his voice heavy because he really did seem to be drifting off right now.

“That sounds nice,” Jimin agreed with a soft laugh, as Yoongi slowly shifted to sit up to retrieve the bar of soap from the shelf on the wall. “Here, let me help; hmm?”

Jimin lathered the soap with a washcloth, to start cleaning the thick mixture of massage oil free from his back and shoulders for him. It was where most of the oil was still lingering, out of Yoongi’s limited reach so that he would be unable to wash it free on his own.

“That’s nice,” Jimin agreed with a soft laugh, as Yoongi slowly shifted to sit up to retrieve the bar of soap from the shelf on the wall. “Here, let me help; hmm?”

Jimin lathered the soap with a washcloth, to start cleaning the thick mixture of massage oil free from his back and shoulders for him. It was where most of the oil was still lingering, out of Yoongi’s limited reach so that he would be unable to wash it free on his own.

“Hmm, you’re so tired today, baby boy. Did you sleep good last night? You fell asleep before me, I
know that you did because I watched you falling asleep. I love watching you do that, it helps me fall asleep too,” Jimin said, as he finished scrubbing Yoongi’s back for him. Then he started cupping handfuls of water to wash the mixture free, the suds running down the lines of his tattoo.

“I, uh, I couldn’t sleep too good last night,” Yoongi replied, shifting when he brushed his hand over a ticklish spot around his waist to clean the soap free. “I kept waking up in the night, I dunno why. Bad dreams, maybe? I can’t ‘member anything, but it was probably that.”

“Bad dreams? I hope that you don’t have any bad dreams again tonight, just sweet dreams instead,” Jimin said, leaning forward to press a soft kiss against the jutting knob at the base of Yoongi’s neck.

Yoongi sighed at the contact, his shoulders lifting and falling as he did so. He shifted to lie back against him once more, melting into his hold whilst Jimin focused on cleaning his arms and chest for him.

After finishing up their cleansing routine in the bathroom, Jimin followed Yoongi into the bedroom. His boyfriend went straight over to the bed, crawling up onto it so that he could sit with his legs loosely folded to the side.

Jimin moved to stand right beside the bed, placing his hand down on the top of his head as he looked down at him. He saw that Yoongi was just about ready to fall asleep, yet he seemed to be trying to stay awake for some reason; his head held low, and his eyelids struggling to stay open.

“I’ll make you some tea, hmm?” Jimin suggested, giving him a soft kiss on the rounded ball of his shoulder. “That’ll send you off to sleep just fine, baby boy.”

“Thanks, Jimin,” Yoongi mumbled, rubbing at his heavy eyelids with his bunched-up fist.

Jimin exited the bedroom to go down into the kitchen. He saw that it was spotless, Yoongi having cleaned up just as good as a maid service would do so: the dishes stored away, the counter free from dirt, and the sink dry and gleaming in the ceiling lights. He prepared a large mug of chamomile tea for him, making sure to fully clean up after himself as to not make a mess. It was hard doing so whilst also trying to not disturb Yoongi, but he managed to store the kettle and strainer away without making too much noise.

Jimin entered the bedroom again just a couple of minutes later, a steaming mug of fragrant tea in hand, only to find that Yoongi was already curled up in bed and seemingly deeply asleep.
Jimin stopped in the doorway, nursing the mug in both hands as he eyed his boyfriend. The sight of him slumbering away in bed brought a soft smile to his face; waves of fondness flooding his body.

Rather than leave the tea to go cold and wasted, Jimin decided to drink it. He extinguished the candles and he slowly slipped under the covers as to not disturb Yoongi’s slumber, settling back against the stack of pillows. He stared up at the night sky through the sunroof over the bed whilst he drank the tea, seeing nothing more than total darkness hanging over them both.

As soon as he was finished drinking the tea, Jimin lay down on his side to face Yoongi. He found himself also ready to fall asleep, his body having reached that wonderful sense of heaviness that had started in his eyelids before spreading out across his limbs.

“Next time we wrestle, I’ll beat you for sure,” Jimin teased, giving the underside of his chin a soft stroke with his fingertips. “I won’t go easy on you, no matter what.”

Yoongi didn’t reply to this because he was so deeply asleep; the wine, sex, and hot bath having helped him succumb to slumber.

Jimin settled down beside him, folding one arm under his pillow and slipping his other arm over Yoongi’s waist. At some point in the night, Yoongi would no doubt uncurl from his tight ball, waking up just long enough to find a comfortable sleeping position in his arms before falling straight back to sleep again.

“I know that you probably can’t hear me, Yoongi, but I don’t care. I just wanted to tell you that I love you,” Jimin whispered, tightening his hold around his waist and hearing Yoongi making a soft sound under his breath; his tongue having pushed up against the roof of his mouth. “Sweet dreams, baby boy…”

When Jimin sank down into slumber, he didn’t find himself dreaming like usual. He often had dreams, varying in vividness and clarity upon waking up once more. Yet, he was so deeply lost in the blackness behind his eyelids that not a single dream crossed his resting mind.

Not that Jimin got to slumber for too long, for a sudden and loud noise cut through the air that made him wake up again with a surprised gasp.

Yoongi let out a sound that could only be described as a scream as he shot upright in bed. The sound
wasn’t shrill or feminine, but was actually hoarse and cracked as it ripped out of his throat.

Just hearing his scream made Jimin’s skin erupt in goosebumps, a horrible shiver racing down his spine. He jerked in bed, his body spasming in shock as he tried to sit upright. He struggled to do so for a moment as he was still waking up, his body heavy with sleep and his reactions sluggish.

In bed beside him, Yoongi had since stopped screaming, but he was breathing raggedly - the covers tightly clutched in his fists. Every inhale whistled in his throat, and every exhale left him in a weak gasp. His body was shaking, as if a live current was jolting its way through his system, and he was hunched forward so that he was almost folded in two.

“Heard, baby, what’s wrong?” Jimin gasped, finally sitting upright and knocking the covers free from his body so that he could get up onto his knees.

“Shit, Jimin, shit,” Yoongi wheezed, his back so severely curved that the knobs of his spine were protruding against his soft and lightly tanned skin. “I’d a nightmare, I’d a bad fuh-fucking nightmare.”

“It’s OK, baby boy. You’re safe, hmm, you’re awake and you’re safe now. Dreams can’t hurt you. Just take nice, deep breaths,” Jimin cooed, shifting to slip his arms around his waist and planting his chin down on his shoulder. “Shush, I’ve got you, I’ve got you, baby.”

Yoongi stayed stiff in his arms for a moment, but then he slumped to lean against him for support. He didn’t slip his arms around him to return the embrace, for he was still tightly holding onto the covers; his tendons rippling the skin on the backs of his hands from the strength of his clenching.

“Oh, fuh-fuck, ” Yoongi groaned, his face pressed against his chest. “I feel like I’m guh-gonna die, Jimin. My heart, it huh-hurts, I cuh-can’t breathe.”

“Breathe, Yoongi, even if it hurts. Just breathe,” Jimin instructed, pulling away from him so that he could look at his face. “Close your eyes and breathe. Think about the waves, hmm? Think about how soothing and peaceful that they are.”

“Talk, Juh-Jimin,” Yoongi gasped, so breathless that his voice was little more than a whisper. His eyes were squeezed shut tight, so tight that deep folds had formed at the corners of his eyelids. “Puh-please, just-”
“You’re so safe with me, Yoongi, and I won’t let anyone, or anything, hurt you,” Jimin spoke over
him, the words just flowing off his tongue naturally. “I’ll protect you because I love you, and I know
that you’d do the exact same for me. You’re so brave, Yoongi, but even brave people get scared,
sometimes. It’s OK to be scared, but don’t let your nightmare take over. Nightmares can’t hurt you,
not like that - not when you’re awake.”

“But my muh-muh-mind can,” Yoongi stammered, furrowing his brow as he did so. “My mind’s a
fucking…minefield, Jimin.”

“No, your mind’s the ocean, baby boy,” Jimin disagreed with a firm head shake, locks of hair falling
free to hang over his eyes annoyingly. “There’s a bad storm happening right now, but it’ll pass soon
and the waves will become gentle once more, hmm?”

“The storm’ll puh-pass,” Yoongi repeated in a mantra. “The storm’ll…pass, the storm’ll pass…”

It took Yoongi a few minutes to get himself under control, struggling to regulate his breathing
because he was still so shaken from his nightmare. But his whistling gasps for breath eventually
softened into silent breathing once more; his chest rising and falling with every inhale and exhale. He
slowly opened his eyes, peering at him through his thick and tightly curled eyelashes.

“I’d a nightmare that…that you got AIDS, Jimin,” Yoongi confided, his voice hoarse from exertion.
“You didn’t give it to me, you didn’t infect me. But I-I watched you growing sick and weak, ‘til you
looked like a-a fucking skeleton, like the guys in the warning posters, and I-I couldn’t help you, I
couldn’t save you, I-”

Jimin shifted a hand up to cup Yoongi’s cheek, his touch making his boyfriend stop talking with a
choked sob. He stroked his thumb across his cheekbone, finding that his skin was clammy to the
touch. Then he moved to slip his arms around his waist again, pulling him close.

This time, Yoongi returned the embrace by slipping his arms around his neck. He didn’t hold him so
much as squeeze him, a desperation in his crushing embrace.

“Yoongi, I’m not gonna get AIDS, OK?” Jimin promised, gently massaging at his lower back with
one hand. “You don’t need to worry about that. I’m not shooting up drugs. I’m not having sex with
anyone but you, and we’re having safe, protected sex. It’s just a nightmare, hmm? You used to have
nightmares about catching AIDS. Now, you’re having nightmares about me catching it instead,
because that scares you too.”
“Scares me suh-so much,” Yoongi agreed, his voice muffled because his face was buried against his chest. “I know that you ain’t gonna get AIDS, but, shit, I still worry ’bout it a lot. Even after I-I looked at those leaflets that Namjoon had, even after you taught me the truth ’bout the virus and how gay men ain’t dormant carriers. It’s, like, I’m scared that it’s all wrong somehow, y’know?”

“I know, baby, I know,” Jimin whispered, pressing a soft kiss against the crown of his head. “I understand that you’re still scared, because it’s all still so new to you. You’ve spent so many years blind to the truth about AIDS that it’s gonna take you awhile to adjust and accept the facts.

“Please, Jimin, don’t get AIDS,” Yoongi almost pleaded, his voice cracking because he sounded seconds away from tears. “If you get AIDS, I-I dunno what I’d do. You’d die, Jimin, you’d die so fast. Some guys, they only get a couple of months before it kills ‘em. I don’t wanna spend a couple of months with you, I wanna spend as long as I can.”

“What’s got you thinking about AIDS again, baby boy? Is it your parents, hmm? Did something happen that you’re not telling me about?” Jimin asked, moving so that he could try and get a look at his boyfriend’s face again. “Talk to me. I know that something must’ve upset you to make you start having nightmares again.”

“I…I was out with Seokseok yesterday, for his weekly shopping spree. We were having lunch in some place over in Presidio, and we were sitting outside ‘cos the weather was kinda nice. There was this group of people out on the streets, causing a fucking scene. They’d fliers and placards, and they were preaching about ho-homosexuality and going to hell,” Yoongi explained slowly, pausing for a few seconds to wet at his lips. “I don’t give a shit ‘bout God, Jimin. I don’t give a shit ‘bout heaven or hell. But they just got to me, y’know? Like, what they were saying ‘bout AIDS being some kinda punishment - it got right under my skin ‘til I could feel myself starting to panic.”

“You know that’s total bullshit, Yoongi,” Jimin said in a soft voice, as he ran his fingers through his still damp hair to rake it back off his face for him. “AIDS isn’t any more a punishment than cancer is, or any other illness.”

“I know, but I-I kept thinking ’bout how you getting AIDS would be my personal punishment. Like, it’d be the kinda punishment that my parents’d rejoice over,” Yoongi replied, sniffing hard and then gasping for breath. “I’m a bad son, Jimin. I’m a bad person, I think. So many people suh-suffer ‘cos of me. Sometimes, I think that I gotta suffer in return. If that happened to you, it’d fucking destroy me, never mind make me suffer.”

“Shush, Yoongi,” Jimin cooed, tucking lightly curled locks of his hair back behind his ear for him. “You’re not a bad son, OK. Your parents are bad parents. They make you feel like a bad son, and they’ve buried that idea deep inside of you from back when you were just a little boy. You don’t deserve to suffer for them not loving you, and you don’t deserve to suffer for loving someone either.”
“I…don’t, do I?” Yoongi asked, reaching up to roughly wipe at his nose.

“No, you don’t. You deserve to be loved and to feel love, Yoongi - just like everyone else. You deserve this happiness,” Jimin stressed, cupping his chin with his fingers. “Listen to me. I’m not gonna get AIDS as some form of punishment because of you; OK?”

“K…”

“No matter what other people might tell you - they’re wrong. They’re ignorant, disgusting people, and their very ignorance about AIDS might just lead them into contracting the virus. But people like us, Yoongi - people that know about it, that understand it? We’re the ones that are going to stay safe from it; OK?”

Yoongi didn’t reply to this, just made a soft sound at the back of his throat to let him know that he had been listening to him.

“Come on, lie down again,” Jimin suggested, shifting to lie down and smoothing his hand over the sheets invitingly. “Let’s just lie down and forget all about bad dreams and horrible lies; hmm?”

“I love you, Jimin,” Yoongi whispered, as he moved to lie down with him.

“I love you more, even if you just ruined my beauty sleep,” Jimin joked, pulling his boyfriend close and feeling his chest settling down on his chest; their legs tangling together under the covers.

“You don’t need beauty sleep, you’re already beautiful,” Yoongi said with a soft sigh, his eyelids fluttering shut once more. “It’s impossible for you to…to get more…beautiful.”

Jimin didn’t fall back asleep again, rather he just went between staring up at the sky visible through the sunroof above the bed, to glancing down at Yoongi whilst he slumbered away on his chest. He saw the sky shift from black to shades of deep blue, to soft blue tinged with lilac; the limited stars fading away in time as the clouds started to roll in with the dawn.

It was hard sleeping again when he was scared that Yoongi might just have another nightmare; that he might wake him up with another scream of horror. He would rather stay awake, just in case, so he
would be able to keep an eye on him and whisper soothing words to him should he start moaning in his sleep again. The initial shock had left him unable to fall back asleep anyway, for it took him quite some time to calm his uneven heartbeat down to a more regular rhythm.

Yoongi finally stirred right before sunrise, his body clock working on complete instinct. He shifted on the mattress with a soft sound, which was trapped between a moan and grunt. He bumped his face against his chest before lifting his head up to look at him. His eyelids were so swollen that he could barely keep them open for more than a few seconds, his lips severely pouted out.

“Good morning, sleepyhead,” Jimin said, finding that his voice was a little hoarse and husky. “You awake for good, hmm? Or you gonna nap a little while longer?”

Yoongi kept his eyes shut for a few seconds, letting out a deep grumble at the back of his throat. Jimin felt the vibrations through his chest, as he knocked his messy hair out of his eyes for him.

“Coffee,” Yoongi finally croaked, slowly moving to climb out of bed. He snatched up his wrinkled shirt from the flooring to drag it on, toddling out of the bedroom on his unsteady legs.

Jimin followed him downstairs rather than wait in bed, deciding to sit in Yoongi’s study so that he could look out of the bay window.

The usual sight of the sun sitting across the horizon was visible through the window, buried in a bank of clouds that were stained golden from its rays; the light reflected off the still dark waters of the bay. Traffic was lazily drifting up and down the bottom of the sloping roads of Pacific Heights, but very few vehicles rolled their way through the residential neighbourhood.

The dawn sunlight cast over the cream walls of the study, warming up the early morning air. Hanging on the wall, on display but far away from the window, was Jimin’s framed vinyl record. There was no need to worry about the sunlight damaging or fading the cover, for Yoongi had been sure to find the perfect spot on the walls for it to hang.

Jimin found his gaze settling on the framed vinyl, his tired mind going completely blank of thoughts. It was only when Yoongi returned with coffee a couple of minutes later, silently joining him at the table, that he managed to shake off the momentary sleepiness.

“How’re you feeling right now, hmm?” Jimin asked him in a soft voice, cocking his head to look at him from across the study table.
Yoongi took a moment to reply, studying his mug of coffee with a high level of interest as if he was trying to discern his answer from the steaming surface. The predawn sunlight washed over him in shades of gentle lilac, which Jimin thought made him look absolutely beautiful; the soft shade casting over his equally soft and rounded face.

“I feel like shit, but...I feel better, in a way,” he replied, glancing up at him at long last. “I just couldn’t stop thinking ‘bout that stupid shit I saw. I didn’t wanna upset you, Jimin, so, I kept all of the negativity inside of myself to try and fight it on my own. But it got too much for me, and I couldn’t fight it. I’m sorry, I should’ve just told you in the first place and none of this would’ve happened.”

“You don’t need to apologise, I’m just glad that you let all of that negativity out, Yoongi,” Jimin said, reaching across the table to hold his hand out to him in offering. “I understand why you wanted to try and fight it on your own. You’ve come so far, and you want to be able to take control of your thoughts, emotions, and fears, all on your own. You wanted to try and be brave, and that’s good.”

“It’s stupid. I feel stupid for letting ‘em get to me like that, Jimin, but it’s like I’d no control over it. There was just this niggling thought stuck inside of my brain, and even when I tried to block it out, it wouldn’t go away. I knew what they were saying was total bullshit, but I kept hearing their words over and over, in her voice, and that scared me.”

Jimin knew that by ‘her voice’, Yoongi was referring to his mother. That was just one of the many voices that Yoongi often heard in his mind when he was having bad thoughts: his angry, yelling father, his disappointed, crying mother, and his own voice - distorted with disgust and hatred.

“There’s no shame in struggling with these things, Yoongi. Don’t feel like you’re stupid for doing so,” Jimin said in a soft voice, giving his hand a comforting squeeze.

“I know...”

“You’ve cut so much negativity out of your life, and so it’s only natural that some more is gonna try and get back inside again. There’s nothing wrong with being scared of things either, Yoongi. The most important thing is that when the negativity feels too much, or when your fear starts to make you lose sleep - you tell me about it. OK? Tell me everything, even if you think it’s stupid. I promise you that I won’t find it stupid, and that I’ll be there to listen.”

“You’re too good to me, Jimin. Y’know that?” Yoongi said in a whisper-soft voice, as he closed his
eyes and he held onto his hand tight. “I don’t deserve you.”

“No, you do deserve this, Yoongi. You deserve me, the same way that you deserve happiness and love,” Jimin argued with a staunch head shake. “I’m good to you because you’re good to me.”

The study fell silent at this, as Yoongi thought his words over intently. He stared down into his mug of coffee as he did so, his expression hard to read. After a moment, he brought the mug up to his lips to sip at his coffee; his shoulders lowering in a way that Jimin knew meant that he was starting to relax again.

“OK?”

“Yeah, I’m ‘k, Jimin,” Yoongi confirmed with a slow nod. “Thanks for listening, like always.”

“You’re welcome, baby,” Jimin said, shifting to lean across the table to press a soft kiss in the corner of his mouth.

Yoongi turned his face to give him a proper kiss, pouting his lips out against his ever so softly. The scent of coffee was strong on his breath, so very familiar to Jimin because it was the scent that he had breathed in every single morning before leaving for work; mingled with the cologne against his throat when Yoongi leaned in for a final kiss.

Jimin let his upper body settle down on the table, just so that he could hold onto Yoongi and give him more kisses. He could sense that his boyfriend’s anxiety was starting to melt away as a result of the intimate, physical contact.

“When I fell asleep again, I think I’d another dream,” Yoongi said between kisses, cupping the side of his throat with his hand. “I can’t ‘member most of it, just the sound of your laughter and the smell of sand.”

“The smell of sand? Does my baby boy wants go to the beach today, hmm?”

“Oh, it’s Sunday,” Yoongi sighed, pulling his face away to hold his gaze. “Today’s the special day, Jimin. Just me and you, all day long.”
“Oh, I’ve been waiting for Sunday all week long,” Jimin gushed, still very much leaning across the table to nuzzle against his cheek again. “What’d you wanna do today, hmm? We can go out for a little while; maybe to the beach or park, just to enjoy the last of the nice weather? We can go out for lunch over in Presidio, or Marina - my treat? Oysters out on the promenade, hmm, that’d be so nice.”

“Uh…” Yoongi let his breath out in a soft huff, which disturbed his sleep-tousled hair. “I think that I just really wanna lie in bed with you all day long, darling.”

“Just lie in bed?” Jimin teased, seeing his boyfriend’s lips twitching upwards at the corners to return his smile. Then he shifted to get out of his chair, so that he could cross the study. “Hmm, OK. I’ll go and make us some breakfast, you go and curl up under the covers again.”

“Breakfast can wait,” Yoongi said, reaching up to take hold of his waist so that he could pull him down onto his lap.

Jimin let him do so, slipping his arms around his neck so that he could hold onto him. He ended up folding his legs to the side, casually lounged in his boyfriend’s lap.

Jimin could feel Yoongi’s stiffening erection trapped between their bodies, digging into his bare buttocks. It caught him by surprise because he hadn’t been realised that he gotten aroused as a result of his playful kisses and nuzzling. But now that he knew that he was, Jimin could feel a nice heat starting to pool in the pit of his stomach too.

Wow, morning erections really were something.

“Oh, my baby boy’s hungry for something else, hmm?” Jimin asked, pulling his lower lip in to sink his teeth into it. He shifted on his lap, softly grinding in a way that made Yoongi’s fingers tighten their hold around his waist. “Do you wanna stay in bed and just fuck all day long, Yoongi? Because I do, I really do.”

Jimin let Yoongi slip his hand under his knees, lifting him up off his lap so that he could get to his feet. He tightened his hold around his neck in response, rolling his head back with a throaty giggle as his boyfriend carried him in the direction of the bedroom stairs.
When the car pulled up beside the bench, Taehyung shifted to get up to his feet so that he could go down the sidewalk. There was just a single slice of kimbap left in the Styrofoam container in his hand, and so he speared it onto the toothpick to shove it into his mouth. He trashed the container in a nearby bin, wiping his hands off roughly. Then he quickly went around the front of the Hyundai *Pony II* sedan to wrench the passenger-seat door open and jump into the car.

Yoo was sitting behind the wheel, just like always. He had a rolled cigarette shoved between his lips, the pull-out ashtray filled with crushed stubs that had probably been amassed over just a couple of days. He had a bit of a chain-smoking habit, which became rapidly apparent whenever he let out a rattling cough.

“What’ve I missed?” Taehyung asked around the bite of nudeu kimbap, lounging back in the passenger-seat so that he could spread his legs open comfortably. “Anythin’ I should know ‘bout, huh?”

For the past week, Taehyung has been unable to work because he had been bed-stricken with the flu - which was making its way around the capital at a ridiculously fast speed. At least the flu was better than one of several outbreaks of sickness that had occurred since the flooding. But the aftereffects of the disaster were still hindering treatment for a great deal of the capital, as it was spreading like wildfire through areas that still had homeless citizens housed in temporary camps.

The flu had rendered Taehyung useless for all of their deals, as he had been unable to travel to Hong Kong in his sick state. He hadn’t even been able to manage to get to his bathroom from his bedroom without needing to sit down to catch his breath, and so travelling on planes had been strictly out of the question.

But now that he had more-or-less recovered from his bout of flu, Taehyung was back to working the usual deals once more. He was also back to grabbing food from the local street market whilst he waited to get picked up by Yoo; happily gorging himself on whatever junk that he could find, even if that might be a bad idea right now.

Oh, well. If his sensitive stomach kicked off because of the strong spices and rich meats, at least he had gotten to enjoy eating all of the food before he shit his pants.
“How should I know?” Yoo retorted brusquely, turning his head to glance at him as he pulled the car away from the curb. He gave him one of his usual Busan guy looks - his jaw jutted out in that constantly confrontational way that only men from that city could seem to achieve. “I don’t fuck around with the Hong Kong deals, man.”

Taehyung snorted at this, holding his hands out in front of the heating system to try and warm himself up. The toothpick was still caught between his lips, and so he chewed on it rather than toss it away.

“Typical, Yoo, just typical,” Taehyung muttered, giving the other man a knowing look as he tutted out of the corner of his mouth. “You and Ahn, you dunno what the word ‘business’ means; d’you?”

“Ah, if I wasn’t driving this car, I’d whoop your ass, punk,” Yoo spat, but Taehyung knew that he was messing around, just like always. “You don’t even smuggle the fucking drugs, you just shove your fingers up another man’s ass like a homo.”

Taehyung felt his smile dying on his face at this, even as he let out a forced and rather flat-sounding laugh in response to Yoo’s words.

Boy, was Taehyung glad that Jimin hadn’t been present to hear that remark. It would have done one of two things - angered him, until he would have ended up arguing with the other man about his ignorance; or upset him, so that he would have fallen silent in the backseat for the entire duration of the ride.

As it was, Jimin hadn’t stepped foot in Korea since mid-September for deals of any kind; shortly after the flooding had occurred. It seemed that he was no longer smuggling cocaine into Seoul for the time being, or that he might just have found a new profession for himself that was much less dangerous, and paid a whole lot more.

Taehyung assumed that that was the case, because he hadn’t heard anything at all through the gang about Jimin being caught before finalising the heroin deal - something that most certainly would have been brought to his attention. It wasn’t just this reason that made him certain that Jimin hadn’t been caught, but also the knowledge that Jimin was too goddamn good to get caught like some amateur mule.

Maybe, Jimin wasn’t working at all these days? Maybe, he really had gotten lucky enough to hold onto Prince Min like he had been hoping all long; to have bagged himself an incredibly rich boyfriend that meant that he didn’t need to lift a finger for anything anymore?
Wow, that would be pretty swell for him, and Taehyung found himself hoping that that might just be the case.

Taehyung had watched Jimin suffering to smuggle drugs for over a year now - the constant, crippling laxative purges that had him crying from the stabbing pains in his belly, the travelling that had made him lose so much weight and so many hours of sleep, and the threats of physical violence, of course. After all of that, he hoped that Jimin was doing great right now. His friend deserved a break from it all, even if only for a little while.

Sure, he missed the other man like hell. But if Jimin was living a much better life over in America, Taehyung was old enough, and man enough, to be happy for him.

Prince Min better be treating him good, and he better be making him happy too.

As Taehyung warmed his hands in front of the heating system, he found his gaze shifting to look over at Yoo.

Should he say something to Yoo on Jimin’s behalf, even if he wasn’t here to hear it? Was it smart to tell the other man that he was ignorant, that he was a bit of a dick; or was it for the best to just hold his tongue and keep his thoughts to himself?

Sure, Yoo needed to be told that calling him ‘a homo’ was a bad thing, or else he was never going to learn about his ignorance. He would keep doing so over and over, maybe not even knowing that what he was saying was offensive towards men like Jimin because it was one of the limited words that he happened to know. Not even Taehyung had known that there were nice words to call such people, until Jimin had taught him to say ‘gay’ instead - that funny-sounding word.

Therefore, Yoo might just simply be unaware, and he might just change his language after being told that it was offensive.

But…there was a chance that Yoo actually wanted to be offensive, and that he didn’t like gay people at all. That wouldn’t be a surprise to Taehyung, for most guys that he knew had an issue with it. He didn’t know where it stemmed from exactly, for his parents sure as hell didn’t raise him to hold such beliefs. It just seemed rife among older guys that he had met over the years, particularly the gangster types - who embraced macho culture to a sometimes disturbing extreme.
If Taehyung said something to him, then Yoo might start calling him ‘a fucking homo’ too, and not even in an attempt at joking around with him. He might seriously think that he was homosexual, and that wasn’t a risk that he was so sure he wanted to make.

The last thing that Taehyung needed was a bunch of gangsters thinking that he was homosexual, as he might just find himself minus a few teeth after a future drinking session.

Maybe, they might just kick his goddamn head in.

Just thinking about getting the shit kicked out of him was what made Taehyung decide that he should hold his tongue. He knew that it was pathetic, but he didn’t want to risk his own skin over such a thing. It seemed smarter to not talk about such things with his work partners, just to stop them from thinking that he was homosexual.

From the street market, it didn’t take very long at all until they were at The Mayfair Hotel. During that time, Taehyung nibbled on his toothpick; his gaze focused on the road outside of the window so that he could watch the sights go blurring past. He found himself completely empty of thoughts, the music coming from the radio little more than white noise to his ears.

After several annoyingly long stops in traffic jams, Yoo was finally slowing the car down to a stop outside of the hotel entrance gates, and so Taehyung moved to look through the other window.

The sight that he was saw was Ahn standing on the other side of the gates, along with another man that didn’t look that old at all - that might still be a boy, in fact. Ahn towered over him, just like he did so with Jimin, but even Jimin wasn’t that short - jokes aside.

“The fuck’s that, huh?” Taehyung asked, shifting in the seat so that he could lean around Yoo and eye the new mule. “Is this guy Jimin’s replacement or somethin’?”

“That’s our new guy,” Yoo replied, eyeing the new mule as he and Ahn crossed the sidewalk to get to the vehicle. “Yeah, you could call him Jimin’s replacement.”

“A new guy? Wait, I thought we already had a new guy? What happened to him? Did he get caught already?”

“The new guy only carries half a key, this guy too,” the other man explained. “We still ain’t gotten
word about the first guy yet, whether he made it through the Hong Kong deal and airport security. He was...jumpy, not good at all. I don’t think he’s gonna last too long before he gets caught. So, let’s hope he does so in Hong Kong to save us the fucking trouble."

“That’s ‘cos no one can replace Jimin,” Taehyung remarked, turning his head to track the other man and mule; as keen as a hawk. “Jimin ain’t like other mules - no-fuckin’-way.”

“I can agree with that, man,” Yoo mumbled, hitting a button to unlock the back door for the two other men.

Taehyung studied the new mule as he climbed into the backseat, unable to stop himself from staring at him. He saw that he really was young, with a face that screamed ‘high school dropout with no future’ to him at first glance, rather than ‘university student trying to make some quick cash’.

The boy had longish hair which was hanging loose around his face, like some of the student protesters that Taehyung was used to seeing - the ones that liked to carry around guitars and sing folk songs to keep up spirits during long rallies (and impress the ladies, of course). He had faint acne scars clinging to his cheeks, which just added to his youthful appearance. He was dressed in double denim, with some logo tee-shirt underneath his jacket that was emblazoned with words that Taehyung couldn’t understand.

If Taehyung had to guess, he was pretty sure that he was older than this kid, even if only by a couple of months. He might just be wrong, but he doubted that their new mule was an adult.

“What’s your name, bro?” Taehyung asked, smoothly rolling the toothpick into the corner of his mouth.

“Steven, Steven Yang,” the boy replied, his accent sounding just like Jimin’s - that nasally Californian sound that Taehyung tried so hard to replicate. “What about you, huh?”

“...Jang Jeongmin,” Taehyung said, holding his hand out to him in offering because he knew that Americans liked to shake hands and bump fists for some reason.

Steven eyed his hand for a moment, and then he moved to take hold. He did so gingerly, barely any effort in his grip or shake as he gave him a rather weak handshake. Then he dropped his hand back down onto his travel bag, which looked to be bulging with goods.
“Yoo, Ahn,” Taehyung explained, gesturing at the two other men so that Steven would know their names. “You speak, uh, Korean?”

“Yes, a little,” Steven replied, zero confidence in his tone that showed that ‘a little’ might just mean ‘no, not really’.

Taehyung shifted to sit back in his chair at this, satisfied that he at least knew the new guy’s name. Upon first meeting Jimin, they had been able to talk all about the job with ease. But seeing that Steven didn’t know much Korean, and his English was very limited, he knew that he was going to be unable to explain such things to the new mule.

Hopefully, Steven had already been educated on what was going to happen before leaving America. Otherwise, this was going to be a difficult deal to complete, especially if there was an issue with the agreed exchange price, or the quality of the goods.

Upon reaching the apartment block over in Apgujeong-dong, Taehyung got out of the car and he lingered on the sidewalk for a moment.

Yoo and Ahn took the lead, the former entering the block first, and the latter retrieving a briefcase from the boot of the car. Steven hesitated, watching the two of them entering the building, and then he decided to follow after them; leaving Taehyung to take up the rear.

The thing that struck Taehyung the most was that Steven didn’t look to be uncomfortable in anyway. There was no slight limp or wince as he ascended the flights of stairs, nor did he look as exhausted as poor Jimin had every time that he had smuggled drugs across the globe. It was something that he couldn’t help but notice as he followed him up the stairs and into the apartment room.

Ahn placed the briefcase down onto the table, and so Taehyung moved to go over and retrieve the pair of latex gloves. He snapped them on, glancing up at their new mule expectantly because they were waiting on him to start the transaction.

But Steven didn’t seem to know what he was supposed to do, for he looked completely blank of thoughts.

Wasn’t Steven going to ask them about the price for the deal? That was important, was quite possibly the most important part about the entire procedure - save for smuggling the actual drugs into the country. Yet, the new mule hadn’t said a single word about the price for the deal, almost as if he…
had forgotten.

Taehyung looked over at Ahn and Yoo at this, wondering if they too were confused by what was happening right now. Until something was said about the price, they really shouldn’t start the transaction.

Should they talk about the price with him, or should they leave it? Jimin had always made sure to ask about the price before offering to exchange the parcels, but not Steven. Maybe, that had just been Jimin’s way of doing things - showing a high level of professional skills that the boy was currently lacking? Or maybe, Steven didn’t have a clue what was going on because this was his first time as a mule, and he needed a little assistance?

“Where’s the bathroom?” Steven suddenly asked - finally asking a question, just not the one that they had been expecting.

Steven’s voice cut through Taehyung’s thoughts so that he jumped in surprise and he twisted to look at him. It took the boy a few seconds to realise that they didn’t understand what he had just asked, the language barrier kicking in for the first of what was going to be many times.

“Bathroom? Where?” he tried; his Korean good, but not good enough for forming entire sentences.

“Bathroom?”

“The drugs,” Steven explained, gesturing as he spoke by placing a hand against his stomach and rubbing at it. “I…swallowed the drugs, I need to get them out.”

Taehyung stared at him dumbly for a few seconds, before shifting his gaze back over at the two other men.

Steven had swallowed the drugs?

“Go downstairs,” Taehyung explained slowly. “Room, three left to stairs, no lock.”

“Unlocked door, third from left - got it,” Steven said, flashing him the ‘OK’ sign with his fingers as
he crossed the apartment room to get to the door.

Taehyung watched him go, struggling to understand what was going on right now.

“He swallowed the drugs?” Taehyung asked in shock, glancing between the two other men. “What the fuck? You can swallow ‘em?”

“Some mules swallow drugs,” Ahn replied with a shrug, his gravelly voice echoing off the bare room walls. “It’s a new thing now. I heard you gotta shit them out though.”

“Well, fuck, good thing I got some gloves, huh?” Taehyung muttered, which made the two men snort laughter. “What ‘bout the price, huh?”

“I’ll make the call as soon as you check the goods,” Yoo said, shifting to stand close to the telephone. “I don’t think the kid’s got a fucking clue about the price.”

“Yeah, me neither…” Taehyung muttered, as he slipped his flick knife free from his jeans pocket.

When Steven returned several minutes later, Taehyung saw that he had all of the baggies in hand. He must have removed the ones taped to his body without any assistance at all, because there was no possible way that he had swallowed all of those baggies.

When Steven placed them down onto the table, Taehyung saw which one he had swallowed. It was a condom, a much smaller condom than the one that Jimin smuggled internally. It was wet, having been rinsed clean under the bathroom tap.

Taehyung stabbed the parcels one by one, filling up the measuring bowl to check the weight and quality of the cocaine. After ascertaining that it was exactly half a key, and that it looked to be fine and not gritty, he gave Yoo the all-clear to let him know that it was good to call in the transaction. Hopefully, the deal was still set at the same price as always (including some changes for inflation), as there was no way in hell that they were going to be able to argue prices with Steven.

Ahn moved over to start shifting the cocaine into baggies for transportation, quickly spooning the lesser amount out of the measuring bowl with great efficiency.
“Do you know how to get to Dosan-daero, uh, Jeongmin?” Steven asked, as he moved to grab his travel bag and he tossed it up onto his shoulder.

“Dosan-daero?” Taehyung repeated, before humming to let him know he knew the street. “Why?”

“I’m staying there, in a hotel, or something,” Steven explained, knocking his too-long hair back off his face. “But I’ve never been to Korea before, so, I’m fucking winging it here, man. You know?”

“I go with you, you need, uh, you need taxi,” Taehyung replied, reaching up to scratch at the nape of his neck. “Gonna take time.”

“Oh, OK - cool,” Steven said with a series of slow nods, lingering beside the door to wait for him.

Taehyung stripped the latex gloves free, dumping them down onto the table because he was technically finished with the deal now.

This was usually the time in which he and Jimin left together: to grab some food, or to go back to his place to let his friend clean up and get some rest. But it seemed that Steven would be staying across the district for the next couple of days before they went to Hong Kong together, which was just another unneeded complication to add onto the growing list.

Taehyung had been partnered up with a mule that barely understood a word that he said, that didn’t seem to know how to do business very well, and was completely new to the country. He was going to have to take a lot of responsibility for potential future mistakes because of these facts, seeing as he was going to have to take charge.

“You guys good to go? It’s a done deal?” Taehyung checked, seeing Yoo nodding to let him know that the transaction was underway and running smoothly.

“Go have fun babysitting,” Ahn replied, as he sealed up the first baggie and he dumped it into the briefcase.

“Yeah, yeah,” Taehyung said with a quick smile, the toothpick still caught between his lips. “Don’t fuck up the deal without me, man.”
The sound of the fax machine suddenly coming to life across the office made Dohee pause in the act of retrieving one of the files from the sizable stack in front of her. She wasn’t expecting any faxes from her work associates right now, and so she couldn’t help but wonder who was contacting her at this early morning hour.

Dohee paused in place for a few seconds, her eyes shifting from over the tops of her squared reading glasses. Then she gave her chair a slight push to get closer to the machine, patiently waiting for the fax to finish printing. A quick glance at the machine informed her that she was receiving it from Yoongi, straight from his home fax machine - and this fact just left her feeling somewhat confused.

When the fax was finished printing, Dohee moved to grab it and she pulled it free from the machine for study. She was far too curious to find out what Yoongi was contacting her for today to possibly delay checking his message in favour of other business matters.

The fax was a scanned image from some property listing in a newspaper that he seemed to be interesting in - a building over in The Castro that had just been fully renovated in preparation to be opened as a bar, or perhaps a small restaurant - judging from the wide amount of open space.

Dohee studied the fax for a moment in confusion, hearing the machine whirring away once more as it started printing something else. It was such an unusual thing for Yoongi to send her out of the blue like this, for he never looked into buying such commercial buildings, like bars and clubs.

Salons and massage parlours? Sure. Small restaurants and tea shops? Most certainly. But a bar, over in The Castro of all places? That was highly unusual, as it was more like something that Hoseok would want to purchase for fun.

As soon as the fax machine had finished printing, Dohee moved to pull it free and check it. The paper was warm against her fingertips, and so she was careful to not accidentally smudge any of the still wet ink.
‘I want to purchase this property, giving the beneficiary ownership to another. I’d like you to oversee the professional account, and Seolhyun to manage business, staff, etc. Contact me for details of the beneficiary when required. Thanks. Love you.’

It appeared that Dohee’s assumption was entirely correct - Yoongi did indeed want another business purchasing, one that her personal team of real estate experts, accountants, and elite business people would personally oversee on his behalf. It might just be a legal property for the sake of ensuring that he had even more revenue from which to make profit, or it might just end up being a laundering business in the future, like a great many investments that Yoongi made.

But purchasing the legal rights and handing beneficiary ownership to someone else?

Hajoon had bought multiple apartment complexes for their three children, just like how Yoongi had inherited a ten million dollar beneficiary from birth as a result of Taesoo’s property investments in his name (which had since doubled in price over the years).

However, Yoongi had never done such a thing before. He had had no reason for purchasing property for another person because he had no children, no siblings that could gifted such things, and he most certainly wouldn’t have done such a thing for his parents.

So…who exactly was going to inherit this particular property purchase? It was a bar property over in The Castro, a highly controversial investment for Yoongi to make considering the area and the clientele that his property would attract - which would greatly anger his parents.

Yoongi wanted to purchase a property right in the middle of The Castro, and he would be gifting the legal ownership of the property to another person? Dohee was completely confused by the entire situation, but she knew that it would be for the best to simply do as Yoongi had requested, rather than make any enquiries.

“Dohee.”

Miyoung’s voice brought her out of her momentary musing, and so Dohee looked up from the fax to see that the other woman was hovering in the doorway of her office. She still had her apron tied around her waist, which was likely a sign that she had only just finished cleaning the kitchen after breakfast.

“Yes, Miyoung?”
“You have a visitor. It’s Miss Bang, Dohee,” Miyoung said in a quiet voice, reaching up to start fiddling with the lengths of her plaited hair. “She’s here to see you.”

“Sora?” Dohee said in surprise, placing the faxes aside on her desk so that she could get to her feet. “What could Sora possibly be here for?”

“She didn’t say, but I knew to not keep her waiting,” Miyoung replied, turning on her heel to move back down the hallway.

Dohee slipped her reading glasses free, the beaded chain catching in the lengths of her short hair, and she placed her glasses down onto her desk, rather than leave them hanging around her neck. She followed Miyoung out of her office, going along the landing and down the stairs; her house slippers softly slapping against the wood.

When Dohee got to the open door, she took hold of it so that she could pull it inwards to greet the other woman.

Sora was standing there on the front porch, in her full fur get-up and sunglasses like some old Hollywood starlet. Her round eyes were hidden behind a pair massive sunglasses that were sitting on her button nose. They were no doubt covered in heavy makeup behind the darkened lenses, ringed with liner and mascara until she looked more like a doll than a human. She had her arms folded over her chest to hold the black furs in place, the lengths of which were hanging down from her shoulders like a cape.

“Please, come in, Sora,” Dohee invited, stepping aside to gesture that she was welcome to enter the home.

Sora stepped inside without a single word, the lenses of her sunglasses so dark that Dohee was unable to see her eyes. They were no doubt flitting across the foyer to examine every little detail, from the interior design, to any hints of dust that might just be present so that she could make a biting remark about it.

Sora removed her furs first, moving to hang them on a hook on the wall. She revealed the dress that she was wearing underneath the coat: a fitted, black dress with a nipped-in waist and capped sleeves of sheer lace. It looked expensive, just like everything else about the woman. Around her neck, there was a string of fat, flawless pearls, and a statement necklace filled with diamonds that matched the massive stone set into her wedding ring.
Dohee felt rather plain in comparison to Sora, considering the fact that she was wearing a simple, cream blouse and wide-legged, black suit trousers. Her jewellery consisted only of a single necklace that had been a gift from Hoseok, her engagement and wedding rings (which looked absolutely tiny next to the gleaming boulder that was sitting on Sora’s finger). Finally, she was wearing champagne gold watch - which she required for keeping an eye on the time whilst she was working, rather than just to make a fashion statement.

Sora Bang was a small woman, shorter than she was, if her usual pair of towering heels weren’t taken into account. She made no move to step out of said heels, which clicked like the fingers of a clock when she turned around to look at her. Then she reached up to pull her sunglasses free, revealing her full face to her.

There were many similarities between Sora and Yoongi’s faces, certainly more similarities than there were between Taesoo and his son. From her rounded eyes, to her small, button nose and mouth, to her high cheekbones - there was no mistaking that she was Yoongi’s mother. They even had a very similar smile, though Sora didn’t seem to smile anymore. Yoongi’s smiles seemed to have gotten incredibly rare too.

“Would you like something to drink, Miss Bang?” Miyoung asked from across the floor, keeping quite the distance away from the other woman.

“Green tea,” Sora said, making it sound more like an order than a request because she didn’t even add ‘please’. “Just green tea, nothing else. I must have green tea with every meal, just to keep the fat away.”

Looking at Sora, Dohee thought that the other woman could do with a little fat on her frame. She was thinner than ever, but that was no surprise. To gain fat required eating fatty food, and it seemed like Sora didn’t even eat much more than cigarettes these days. Assuming that she hadn’t given them up because they would age her skin, of course.

Like mother, like son, for it was apparent that Yoongi had developed his bad eating habits from her. He was just as terribly thin as she was in parts, mostly his legs - which had looked apt to snap the last time that Dohee had laid eyes on them. Next time that he visited the family home for business, or just to check up on them all, she knew that she would need to watch him eating a whole meal, just to put her worries at ease.

Dohee closed the door behind Sora, and then she moved to cross the foyer to go into the leisure-area. The other woman followed her, the sound of her clicking heels out of rhythm with her own footsteps. She sat down on one of the leather settees, gesturing that she should join her.
Sora settled on sitting on the opposite settee, maintaining distance between the two of them.

“So, how have you been, Sora?” Dohee asked, hoping to sound amicable. “It seems like it’s been forever since we last saw one another.”

“I haven’t been too well at all, Dohee. I’ve started going to church on both Saturday and Sunday,” Sora replied, shifting to fold one of her thin legs over the other and primly fixing her dress back in place. “I felt like I had to, on account of the terrible torture that Yoongi’s been putting me through these days. I needed guidance, I needed spiritual healing after our last conversation.”

“Yoongi’s visited you recently?” Dohee asked in surprise, completely unaware of the fact that such a thing had happened. “I thought that…well, I assumed that Yoongi had been keeping a great distance ever since that…unfortunate disagreement during his last visitation.”

“Taesoo required him for some silly matter - business. Typical men, completely obsessed with business.”

A quick glance back over her shoulder showed Dohee that Miyoung was still in the act of preparing the tea. She turned her attention back to Sora, watching her folding her hands in her lap. She sat with a certain air of rigidness, her shoulders set high and her back perfectly straight so that she didn’t slouch in the slightest.

“Anyway, Taesoo and I wished to discuss private matters with Yoongi. But the boy had another one of those hysterical, mental fits of his. You know the kind - the ones that make him start yelling and breaking things, like some street thug. I was bedridden for days because of him, Dohee,” Sora declared in that usual, dramatic way that only she could achieve. “I don’t know what’s so wrong with his brain for him to be both homosexual and mentally ill, but it seems that I’m being tested by God.”

“You’re being tested by God?” Dohee repeated, raising her eyebrows at the other woman. “Whatever do you mean by that, Sora?”

“God’s testing me by providing me with such a sinful son. He wants me to teach him how to stop being a sinner. It’s one of His great tests, for God provides us all different challenges to overcome during our lives, Dohee. I guess that your own son is also one of your challenges, considering the fact that he’s queer too.”
Dohee heard Miyoung gasping in shock from the kitchen, yet she managed to keep her expression completely free from emotion as she studied Sora.

Oh, if Sora thought that calling Hoseok ‘queer’ could hurt her in anyway, she was sorely mistaken. The other women would get no sick kick of twisted excitement from insulting her only son to her face, because she couldn’t help but find something so incredibly amusing in Sora’s pathetic behaviour.

Sora treated her own son worst than a dog, therefore she had zero right to even consider herself superior to her in any way. The fact that she had the cheek to even call herself a mother was an insult to motherhood. Her words had no stinging barbs to them, they were just bitter and weak.

Mostly, Dohee just felt sympathy for the other woman. She had never been ready to be a mother, and she had secretly confided her disdain and fear of sex to her in the past; when they had been much younger and their sons had been mere babies.

Sora was no mother to Yoongi, and she was a manipulative and horrid woman. But Dohee still struggled to find it in her heart to despise a woman that had been forced into a loveless marriage by her parents when she had been just eighteen, who had never experienced any form of love that was meaningful and enriching to her life.

Well, Sora could have earned the undying love of her only son, had she have loved him from the start. But there had been some kind of problem in her mind ever since she had given birth, and Sora had never received any form of treatment for it that Dohee was aware of. She had just suffered and grown twisted from it, until her suffering had spread onto Yoongi to try and twist him too.

But Yoongi wasn’t going to become twisted. No, Yoongi was a good son, which was what Dohee and her husband truly thought of him as after all of these years. Even when he had been afflicted with so many disorders because of his troubled upbringing that had left him depressed, anxious, and suicidal, he was still a kind and wise soul.

Yoongi was getting better and healing his wounds over time; doing so in ways that Sora and Taesoo never could, and this made Dohee’s lips twitch at the corners as she tried to not smile.

“Well, I don’t see children as tests, Sora. I see children as a blessing that makes life special. There’s truly nothing more wholesome than teaching children how to become adults, and how to take care and love themselves so that they’re ready to go out into the world,” Dohee said, allowing herself a
slight smile because she could feel how cutting that her words were to the other woman. “‘Mother is the name for God in the lips and hearts of little children’, I believe that’s the saying. It’s one that I can’t help but agree with.”

Miyoung brought the tea over to them on a tray, placing the saucers down onto the coffee table for them both.

Dohee saw the way that Miyoung gave her a cautious look, almost as if she was advising that she be careful with her words around the other woman. But she wasn’t going to be humble, or be made to feel threatened like this. She had every right to voice her thoughts without fear in her own home, even if the other woman was the wife of the current head of Moon Tiger Mob.

“Perhaps, but Yoongi has always been so…strange that it’s hard to see him as being a blessing,” Sora said, as she moved to retrieve her teacup. “I didn’t know that a child could cry as much as he had when he had been a baby. He never stopped screaming, this horrible, gut-wrenching scream that just sickened me.”

“Yoongi probably cried because he had wanted your attention, Sora, and not that of a maid,” Dohee pointed out, seeing the way that the other woman’s lips pulled in tautly at the corners. “Maybe, your test isn’t to teach Yoongi to stop being a sinner? Maybe, your test is to learn to love him?”

Sora didn’t reply to this, rather she just stared at her from across the coffee table.

“Has it ever crossed your mind, Sora, when you’re praying, that perhaps God made Yoongi just the way that he is? Have you ever pondered on the chances that God wanted Yoongi to be homosexual, and that God loves Yoongi just the way that he is? Just like you should too?” Dohee suggested, cocking her head ever so slightly as she looked at the other woman. “I’m not exactly well versed with the Bible, but I seem to recall something about how God loves all.”

“God made all of the other sinners, Dohee. God made murderers, and rapists, and homosexuals,” Sora pointed out, before scoffing softly. “God makes sinners, but He also forgives them, in time. That’s why I’ve been praying for Yoongi, in the hopes that He might hear my prayers and help Yoongi become right again. He never used to be this way. He was a strange boy, yes, but he wasn’t homosexual. He didn’t give off any of the warning signs as a child, like pretending to be a girl. Something made Yoongi think that he’s homosexual, but that means that he can also be made to realise that he isn’t.”

Dohee had to look away at this, finding the corners of her mouth pulling down in a bitter grimace.
Yoongi hadn’t given off any warning signs as a child? Why did his mother talk about him in such a way, like he was a nuclear bomb, or a wildfire that was going out of control and destroy everything in sight?

“I thought that maybe the homosexual cancer might make him realise just how wrong and dirty that he is; that it might make him seek forgiveness and change his ways,” Sora continued in an earnest tone, as if she genuinely believed what she was telling her was right. “But it’s not working. Every day, he becomes more and more bold. Why, soon, he’ll be wearing high heels and makeup like some of those strange men that you see protesting on the news channels.”

It seemed that Sora still wasn’t very up to date with her own knowledge on the current epidemic, for she was still referring to AIDS as ‘cancer’, which Dohee hadn’t seen used in quite some time in the coverage of the virus.

No, it had since been discovered that AIDS and Kaposi’s Sarcoma were two different things completely, and that the cancer and the virus - though often contracted together, were completely distinct.

But finding out that Sora didn’t know any of this really didn’t surprise Dohee. Especially not after she had just espoused all of that nonsense about God, sinners, and the healing power of prayer.

“We are aware of the fact that Yoongi has a…my, I hate even saying this because it’s so absurd,” Sora said, lowering her teacup back down onto the saucer so that she could place her hand against her breast.

“Am I aware of the fact that Yoongi has ‘what’, Sora?”

“Yoongi claims to have a ‘lover’,” the other woman replied, dragging the word out in a way that made her lips drag down at the corners in a brief sneer. “When he last visited the family home for business matters, he threw a tremendous tantrum and he shouted such a thing right in my husband’s face. Oh, I fainted in shock just hearing it. Even now, thinking about it makes my heart ache.”

“Yoongi is in a relationship?” Dohee asked in shock, unable to keep her expression neutral. “Why… no. No, I wasn’t aware of such a thing. He told me no such thing when we last saw one another. He spoke about how he was hoping to befriend some new acquaintances, and that he really wanted to make some new friends. He did voice an interest in one of these other men, and he seemed to have strong feelings for him.”
“And you didn’t tell me or Taesoo?”

“Why should I have told you both?” Dohee asked with a soft shrug. “Yoongi’s private life should remain that way - private. If Yoongi wishes to make friends, if he finds himself a boyfriend, that concerns Yoongi and Yoongi alone.”

“No, it concerns the clan,” Sora argued, shifting on the settee in a rather agitated manner. “You came from nothing, Dohee. I think that you might forget that, when you look around a house like this and you see all of this…glamour. You seem to have forgotten what you owe.”

“No, Sora, I think that you’re mistaken,” Dohee disagreed, unable to stop her lips from quirking up at the corners. “I don’t owe anything to anyone but myself. I got where I am because of myself - my dedication to working, my intelligence, my commitment to my husband and raising my children. I started from nothing, yes, but I’ve come very far in life.”

“Regardless of what you claim, you owe a great deal of respect and deference to the clan,” Sora continued, moving until she was close to being perched on the edge of the settee cushion. “Which is why I have a proposition for you, Dohee, one that I think you should find highly agreeable. How do you feel…about the possibilities of arranging a marriage between Miseok and Yoongi?”

“I’m sorry…what did you say, Sora?”

“A marriage, between Miseok and Yoongi. Now, I know that Miseok is plainer than Eunseok, who I much would have preferred marrying Yoongi because they would have had such beautiful children together. Miseok can’t possibly do better than my son - he’s rich, he’s handsome, when he stops scowling. Just think, we could share a grandson, Dohee. We could unite our clans together, and then everyone wins; mmm?”

Dohee was so stunned by what Sora had just said that all she could do was stare at her. There were so many things that she wanted to say, and yet, she couldn’t seem to find the right words.

“You come into my house…you insult my daughter’s beauty to my very face. You speak of your own boy like he’s a monster; and yet, you expect me to agree to your plans?”

Dohee paused for a moment, finding herself overcome by such a sudden wave of anger that she couldn’t possibly hope to suppress.
“Get out, get out of my house you…you bitch,” Dohee whispered, her voice dripping with so much venom that she could taste bitterness flooding her mouth. She had to place her teacup aside for fear that she might toss the contents over the other woman. “You’re insane, you’re completely insane.”

Sora had the audacity to look shocked at the fact that she had said such things to her. It was almost as if she had thought that there was a chance that she would have agreed to her insane proposition.

“I will not condemn my daughter to suffer the same fate that you did, Sora, and though my heart aches for you, I will never forgive you for what you just said to me. You are evil, and I will have no part in your madness,” Dohee continued, getting to her feet. “I must ask you to leave my house now.”

Sora moved to get to her feet too, fixing her dress skirt in place with a series of sniffs. She looked between her and Miyoung in turn, and then she crossed the leisure-area to go into the foyer. She collected her furs to sling them around her body, and so Dohee pulled the door open for her.

“Youngi is my son,” Sora said, turning to look back over her shoulder at her as she folded her arms over her chest. “You can’t own him, not in your heart. Oh, I know just how much you wish that he was your son, but you can’t have him, Dohee. He’s my boy, and he always will be. I’ll bet that stings, mmm?”

“How unfortunate for him that he should be cursed with a mother like you. That boy has suffered his entire life because of you. I’ll bet that he wishes that he never had to call you his mother.”

“I’m going to tell Taesoo about this,” Sora threatened, slipping her sunglasses back up her nose.

“Tell him. Tell him everything, and whilst you’re at it, Sora, tell him that a man that can’t admit his own failures is no man at all; just another boy that thinks he’s a man. Taesoo failed that boy just as much as you did, if not more so. You both failed your boy from the very start, and I hope that your ‘sins’ hurt you both for the rest of your miserable lives!”

Dohee slammed the door without another word, wanting to be rid of Sora before she ended up fighting with her. She found that she had to turn around and lean back against the door for a moment, taking a slow and deep breath to try and steady herself.

“Oh, Dohee!” Miyoung almost sobbed, worrying at the front of her blouse as she struggled to get
herself under control. “I’m so sorry for what she said to you. Please, don’t believe her cruel words and lies. Miseok is a beautiful young woman, and whoever she marries will be blessed to have her for a wife. Miss Bang is so obsessed with herself that she can’t see beauty in anything that isn’t her own face.”

“I won’t believe a single word that she says,” Dohee promised, as she moved over to the other woman to take hold of her elbow. “Sora is a witch, every word that she utters is a curse. Sit down, Miyoung, please.”

Miyoung did as she requested, lowering herself down onto the settee with a soft moan. She was so shook up and upset from what had just happened that her hands were shaking in her lap.

Dohee went into the kitchen so that she could retrieve the kettle from the stove. She filled another teacup up with the still hot remains of the green tea, which she carried back over to the other woman.

“Please, drink this,” Dohee said, as she held the teacup out to her. “Drink and forget about what Sora said. Her words mean nothing to me, Miyoung. I only value the words of those that I hold dear to me, much like I valued your wisdom in raising the children.”

“Thank you, Dohee,” Miyoung said with a grateful smile, accepting the teacup from her and tightly wrapping her hands around it.

Dohee gave her a soft stroke to the cheek, one that she hoped would help soothe the other woman’s nerves. Then she crossed the leisure-area to go out into the foyer, going over to the telephone set close to the front door so that she could make a call. She nursed the receiver between her head and shoulder as she hastily typed in the other number, taking the receiver in hand whilst she listened to the dull droning sound of the dialling tone.

“Hello?”

“Hoseok, honey, I need to talk to you,” she said, shifting from foot to foot as she did so. “Are you available right now?”

“I’m always available for you, mother,” Hoseok replied, his voice foggy in a way that signalled that he might just have been swallowing more pills again - the pills that he didn’t even know that she was aware of. “Even if I was in the middle of urgent business, I’d drop it all just for you. What do you need to talk about, hmm?”
“Does Yoongi have a boyfriend?”

“Now, why would you ask me such a thing, mother?” Hoseok asked, his reply so smooth that there wasn’t even a hint of a stutter or a pause in his voice.

Oh, Hoseok was hoping that his reaction sounded completely natural. It was a smooth attempt, he had a talent with charm, for sure. But it didn’t work on Dohee, for she knew her son like the back of her hand. Oftentimes, she felt like she knew her children more than she knew her husband. Perhaps, it was because she had created them, and so it felt like they contained some part of herself deep down inside of them.

“I know for a fact that he has a boyfriend, Hoseok,” Dohee said, feeling no need to beat around the bush with her son. “It just recently came to my attention, and I also know that you must have known about it. Yoongi must have told you. In fact, I’m certain that you were the first person that he would have told, because you mean that much to him.”

“Well…shit,” Hoseok sighed, the sound of him shifting coming from down the line. “At least you never found out through me, so, Gigi can’t get pissed off with me about that.”

“Hoseok, honey, do you happen to know where Yoongi’s boyfriend lives?” Dohee enquired, knowing that her question was highly unusual, but hoping that her son might not pick up on it.

“Oh, I know where he lives, mother,” he replied without a hint of hesitation, quickly adding. “I know where he used to live, and where he resides currently - Yoongi asked him to move in with him.”

“Yoongi’s living with his boyfriend now?” Dohee asked in surprise, pausing in the act of playing with her necklace pendant. “That’s awfully fast; don’t you think so, honey?”

“It’s fast, but you should see the way that they act around each other, mother. I haven’t seen Yoongi smiling like that since he was a baby; it’s kind of crazy. I think he really loves him, like, not just sexually. His boyfriend too? God, he gushes about Yoongi all of the time when we’re together, it’s all he ever talks about. Talk about gay…”

“Yoongi sincerely cares for this other man that much?”
“Oh, mother. I don’t use the word often, because I think that it’s a load of nonsense. But Yoongi? Boy, oh boy, Yoongi’s in love with his boyfriend. I’m kind of jealous, they make it seem so nice to be in love; you know? Even when they act gross sometimes, and I want to smack their heads together.”

Hoseok sighed theatrically at this, no doubt lounging on whatever piece of furniture that he happened to be sitting on right now - most likely his bed. He probably had his cat lying across his stomach like usual, still wearing his silken robe or pyjamas at this early morning hour.

“Mother? Why exactly are you asking me about Yoongi’s boyfriend?” Hoseok asked, finally realising just how unusual all of these sudden questions were. “Don’t get me wrong, I love a good gossip. I kind of promised Gigi that I wouldn’t talk about it too much, but I know that I can talk to you. I’m sure that Yoongi doesn’t mind, he loves you to death, mother.”

“Well, Yoongi mentioned having an interest in someone the day that he came to see your father for business. Upon finding out that he had a boyfriend today, I just wanted to confirm it all with you, honey. Oh, I’m so happy for him,” Dohee said, having to force the enthusiasm out right now to cover up her discomfort and worries. “I hope that Yoongi feels comfortable enough to introduce him to the family one day; don’t you?”

“Oh my god, he’s got to bring him home for the holidays!” Hoseok agreed with completely genuine enthusiasm. “Imagine sharing the holidays with the two of them. That would be adorable! The girls are going to love him, hell, you and daddy are going to love him - I love him.”

“Anyway, I should probably go and check on business,” Dohee said, wanting to finish the call now that she had all of the information that she had required. “Take care, honey, and I mean it. Don’t keep drinking so much wine.”

Dohee ended the phone call after Hoseok had mumbled out a feeble attempt at a promise, placing the receiver back down into the cradle. She glanced across the foyer to see that Miyoung was still nursing her cup of tea; terribly shaken from Sora’s threatening words. She decided to go upstairs so that she could talk to Hajoon, quickly crossing the landing to reach his study.

As expected, Hajoon was seated at his desk with a spread of files, papers, and faxes all over the surface in front of him. His typewriter was close at hand, as was his telephone and a calculator - which he had no doubt been crunching hundreds of equations into for the entire morning. There was no cigar currently perched between his lips, but the remains of one was crushed in the ashtray on his desk; the scent of it hanging heavy on the air.
Hajoon noticed her after a few seconds, glancing up just as he turned over a sheet of paper. He gave him a quick smile that looked so much like Hoseok’s smile - filled with a hint of mischief, but mostly warmth, that Dohee felt a strange pang in her chest.

“Did I just hear the front door being shut?” he asked, placing his pen down and flexing his likely stiff fingers. “Did we have a visitor, or was it just more of Miseok’s fabric deliveries - like always?”

“Sora just came to visit,” Dohee said, lingering in his study doorway just in case he was busy working.

“She did? Why didn’t you alert me, Dohee? I should have greeted her,” her husband said, gesturing that she was more than welcome to enter the room. “It’s been quite some time since I last spoke to her, why…it must have been the last art exhibition that she curated - back in the spring.”

“Believe me when I tell you that you’re glad that you missed her, Hajoon,” she remarked, stepping inside of his study and folding her hands across her stomach. It felt like there was a knot trapped inside of her gut, one that was twisting and tightening with every passing second. “Dear, did you know that Yoongi’s in a relationship right now? With another man?”

“I had…an inkling,” Hajoon replied, moving to sit back in his chair as he cupped his chin in his hand to run his fingers over his shaven skin. “The night that Taesoo arrived to discuss pressing business matters, he was unable to locate Yoongi. That was why he asked me to summon Hoseok, in the hopes that he would be able to assist the two of us. Hoseok pretended to not know his exact whereabouts. However, it was obvious to me that he knew something more than what he was alluding to Taesoo. He wouldn’t tell me, but he said some things that led me to believe that Yoongi might just be pursuing someone. I’m happy for him, that boy needs someone to help him take care of himself; God knows that our efforts weren’t working very well.”

“Yoongi has let him move into his home. It’s been, oh, I don’t know, less than two months since they met each other? Maybe, exactly two months?” she estimated, shifting her gaze across the study because she found it hard to focus. “Yet, they’re already living together. It reminds me of us, in a way.”

“My goodness, that was fast!” Hajoon exclaimed, letting out an amused chuckle. “Yoongi must sense something serious from it. He’s not the kind of man to make rash decisions. He calculates everything that he does down to a decimal point - human interaction included. Who knows, one day in this city, there might just be marriage in the cards, honey. Wouldn’t that be a hell of a thing?”

“Hmm, it would, dear,” she agreed, forcing out a smile that felt more like a grimace. “Though I dread
to think such things right now, I thought that Yoongi might be trying to make this relationship feel substantial in the face of the constant threat of the…ongoing AIDS crisis. Perhaps, Yoongi’s frightened that he won’t get long enough time to spend with his lover to do such things in the future. He’s terrified of catching AIDS, Hajoon. Hoseok told me about how much that it terrifies him.”

“You think that he’s progressing the relationship to such a serious stage so fast, just in case something should happen to him or his boyfriend,” her husband deduced.

“Like I said, I don’t want to think of such morbid things when I should be happy for him. Perhaps, Yoongi just truly loves him, and the feeling is mutual?” she suggested, finding herself starting to pace even though she had been trying so hard to suppress the urge.

“Honey…what’s wrong?” Hajoon asked, picking up on her anxious signals. “I can tell that you’re worried about something.”

“Hajoon, they know,” Dohee said, finding that her voice left her lips in a quiet whisper. “Taesoo, Sora - they know that Yoongi has a lover. I’m not sure why at all, but Sora said something about him telling the both of them that he has a boyfriend. I can’t imagine what drove him to do such a reckless thing, such a dangerous thing.”

“‘Dangerous’?” her husband repeated, his brow furrowing as he did so.

“Yoongi has always been so careful around the two of them. I can’t believe that he would do such a thing now of all times, Hajoon. To expose his relationship to his parents? I-I just can’t fathom why, and-”

“Honey, nothing is going to happen to Yoongi,” Hajoon spoke over her, shifting to get out of his wingback chair so that he could cross the study. “I know that you’re worried right now, but Yoongi is perfectly safe. There’s no danger, there’s nothing to be scared of at all. His parents wouldn’t do anything to hurt him.”

“They’ve hurt him his entire life, Hajoon,” Dohee argued with a staunch head shake. “Maybe not physically, but I watched their hatred drag that boy down until they broke him into pieces - just like you. A part of me thought that they might just drive him to suicide after that massive fight that they had. Yoongi managed to pull through in time, but that night made him turn into something close to a recluse until quite recently. According to Hoseok, Yoongi’s only just started going back out into the world. It took him that long to recover. You might think that they wouldn’t hurt him, but I know that they won’t stop their bullying ways until they destroy him.”
“Dohee, you must calm down,” Hajoon stated, taking hold of her upper arms to hold onto her. “Sora must have said something to you to work you up into this state; yes?”

“Hajoon, please,” Dohee said in a stern tone. She hated talking to him in such a way, like he was her son and not her husband, but she needed him to understand just how serious that she was being. “Listen to me, as a mother, I can’t help but feel these things. I don’t care if Yoongi’s perfectly safe, I’m still going to worry about him, like I worry about Hoseok and the girls. Right now, I feel very uncomfortable. Sora’s little confrontational act has worked, she’s frightened me, even when I hate to admit it.”

“What did she say to you, Dohee?”

“She wanted to try and arrange a marriage between Yoongi and Miseok, Hajoon. She insulted our daughter’s beauty too. She said that she was plain, and that she couldn’t possibly marry a man better than Yoongi because of this fact.”

Dohee saw something flitting across her husband’s face at this; his mouth twitching at the corners until he was able to reign himself in. But she knew that he had just felt a flare of anger shooting through him; anger that someone would dare to insult their child in such a way.

“…I’ll have a word with Taesoo,” Hajoon finally said, moving one of his hands from her upper arm to place it on the back of her head. He gave her hair a soft stroke, which made Dohee let her breath out in a sigh of relief. “I have no doubt that he’ll be shocked to hear about such a thing. Sora must have taken it upon herself to visit and suggest such a ludicrous thing. Taesoo doesn’t even think about Yoongi enough these days to scheme such things. He’s more-or-less emotionally disowned the boy. Taesoo has been considering attempts to have another child - boy or girl. He’s mentioned the idea to me several times over these last few months, though it seems like it would be difficult at this point in their lives.”

“Then it makes sense that Sora would seek marriage for Yoongi. She’s getting desperate. She doesn’t want another child, Hajoon. If Taesoo made her carry another baby, she’s apt to swallow poison,” Dohee muttered to herself, folding her arms across her chest as she did so. “I’m just so worried for Yoongi. He’s been trying so hard to let go of his pain these last few months. Now, the pair of them are poised to cause him even more grief. I just don’t feel like he’s…safe right now.”

“What do you want me to do, Dohee? Hire men to watch Yoongi’s home from afar, day in, day out, like bodyguards? What if Yoongi notices them? What if he feels like we’re invading his privacy; or worse still, he thinks that Taesoo is spying on him?”
“I don’t know, Hajoon,” Dohee replied, wishing that she understood her own emotions right now. “I fear for his safety more in the mental and emotional aspect, than the physical. I don’t even know his lover, but I’m equally as scared for him. It’s just… I feel it inside, right here.”

Dohee pressed a hand against the curve of her lower stomach, holding it in place there so that the warmth of her palm spread through the thin material of her trousers. She was more than aware of the fact that she was touching around her womb rather than her stomach, but that was exactly where all of her anxiety seemed to have settled.

“I’m not going to let them both hurt him again, Hajoon. I swear it on my life that I will do everything within my power to keep them away from Yoongi,” Dohee said, knowing that her words were incredibly disrespectful to Taesoo, but not caring at all. “Sora made the mistake of picking a fight with a mother, because mothers will protect their children to the death.”

Hajoon didn’t say anything against this, rather be just gave her hair a final stroke before leaning forward to press a quick kiss against her forehead. He didn’t point out the fact that Yoongi wasn’t their child - not that that correction would have meant much to her.

“I should get back to work,” Dohee said, taking a deep breath and gently knocking her husband’s hands free from her arms. “I’ll see you at dinner, dear.”

Dohee exited her husband’s study so that she could go along the landing to her own office. She closed the door shut rather than leave it open, even if she never did such a thing. She just felt like she needed space for a little while, some privacy alone in her study to reflect upon what had just happened.

Dohee sat down at her desk, moving Yoongi’s faxes back in front of her so that she could study them once more. She lifted up the typed message to hold it front of her face, finding her gaze focusing on the final two words. They had been added in that perfect, afterthought kind of way that Yoongi had made a bit of a habit over the years; always said in a quiet mumble.

‘Love you’.

Dohee placed the faxes aside, twisting her chair around so that she could focus on her typewriter. She fed a fresh sheet of paper into the machine, carefully aligning it so that she could start typing up a reply.
‘$250,000 seems upscale for this particular property, Yoongi. I’ll have Soobin contact the current owner and see about the potential of purchasing it at a cut price, preferably in the range of $235-240,000. Please, let me know if you would still like to purchase the property at the suggested listing, should Soobin be unable to lower the price through negotiation.’

Dohee hesitated in front of the typewriter for a moment, her fingers hovering over the keys but making no move to hit them and finish typing up her thoughts. She felt like it might just be a good idea to not add her postscript, as it might seem far too bold for Yoongi. She knew what he was like when it came to his private life, and he might not like the tone of her casual remark.

Yet, Yoongi had told her about his strong, romantic interest in another man the last time that they seen one another. Therefore, she felt like she might just be entitled to leave such a postscript, one that shouldn’t upset or intimidate him because he had already trusted her with such private information.

Dohee let her breath out in a soft sigh, hastily typing up her thoughts before they floated right out of her mind.

‘P.S. I would like to meet the special beneficiary owner one day. Perhaps, for lunch on the date of your choosing? Take care, Yoongi, Hajoon and I love you too.’

Dohee slipped the sheet of paper free from the typewriter, carrying it over to the fax machine so that she could place it down on the screen. She hit several buttons, the machine coming to life with a bright light and a series of whirring noises as it scanned the sheet and readied it to be sent across the city.
Chapter 17

26th October, 1984, 8:08pm: Kowloon City, Kowloon, Hong Kong

There was fly trapped in the room.

For the past ten minutes now, Taehyung had been staring up at the bug, which was annoyingly darting around the naked bulb that was dangling from the ceiling. It was a fat creature, its raisin-like body buzzing in a way that constantly got under his skin. He wanted to stop looking at it, but he couldn’t quite seem to do so. It was as if the fly had hypnotised him, and he couldn’t even recall the last time that he had blinked.

Across the apartment room, Taehyung could see that Steven was still pacing up and down. It was a habit of his that he had suddenly become aware of over the day. There was a franticness to his pacing that he greatly disliked, for Taehyung had gotten used to being relaxed for the duration of staying in Hong Kong. Back when Jimin had been his partner, and everything had been so much simpler.

Taehyung dragged his gaze away from the buzzing creature to look over at Steven, lazily rolling his head to do so. He was lounged back in the chair, which was balanced on the back legs to allow him to softly rock back and forth every few seconds. He paused in the act of rocking so that he could study the boy, watching him turning on his heel to resume his constant pacing.

After a moment of study, Taehyung considered trying to talk to the boy; to ask him if he was feeling alright. But he had tried that several times today already, and his questions had been met with brusque replies that didn’t really sound right to him.

Steven had told him that he was ‘fine’, that he was ‘cool’, and even ‘A-OK’.

Taehyung didn’t think that he was telling him the truth, not even remotely.

For the past two days now, Steven had been showing signs of what seemed to a cold, maybe even the flu. He had seemed fine the first day that they had met in Seoul, if not a little slow on the uptake. He hadn’t been the most talkative because of their obvious language barriers, but he had still
attempted to talk to him whilst they had been stuck together in the taxi.

As a result, Taehyung had since decided that Steven wasn’t a bad partner, he was just not going to become his friend in the future. There was nothing bad about this realisation, for not everyone that he had to do business with would end up being his friend. He didn’t even think of Yoo and Ahn as friends, just Jimin - the outlier in all senses regarding the mob.

But ever since they had boarded the flight to Hong Kong yesterday afternoon, Taehyung had noticed that Steven seemed to be coming down with a sickness of some kind. He sniffed and wiped at his eyes and nose a lot, and he had seemed uncomfortable during the brief plane ride because of his stiff and sore muscles.

Steven kept telling him that he was fine, but to Taehyung, it looked like he was starting to get ill. There was no mistaking his symptoms for anything other than sickness, for he had felt the exact same way right before he had ended up stuck in bed for a near week.

There was a high chance that he might have caught the flu during his brief stay in Seoul, as the outbreak really was something. He might have even gotten sick from making some rookie mistake - drinking water from a tap, not bottled; eating certain food at a street market that his body wasn’t used to. There were so many things that might have made him get sick, and being sick whilst smuggling was a risky combination.

Maybe, the boy was aware of this fact, and he telling him that he was fine because there was nothing to worry about? After all, so long as Steven was able to smuggle the heroin to America, there was nothing to worry about.

Taehyung was probably just worrying because the boy was his new partner, but he couldn’t seem to help it. He had only just met him for this first smuggling trip, and he had developed a habit of constantly comparing him to Jimin in his mind. As a result, he just couldn’t seem to warm up to, or trust Steven enough to consider him his partner just yet.

First of all, Steven didn’t look like Jimin. That was a rather silly reason to find himself not warming up to the boy, but it was true. Jimin just had this look that made him highly likeable to others, some roguish charm in his grin that had made Taehyung sense a kindred soul deep within him when they had first met - an instantly likeable kind of guy.

Steven didn’t have roguish charm, or any charm at all, come to think of it. It might just be because he was unable to talk to him properly on account of their language barriers, but Taehyung still felt like there was something...off about him. The boy looked to be completely out of it most of the time; not
paying attention to what was going on, and seemingly unable to focus on anything for longer than a couple of seconds.

Second of all, Steven wasn’t friendly, funny or talkative like Jimin was. After the initial taxi ride together, he had barely said much to Taehyung that he hadn’t needed to, preferring to just mumble and hum in response to his attempts at talking to him. The little that he had said to him had mostly been in English that Taehyung had struggled to understand, or terribly fractured Korean that had also made little sense to him.

Steven had stayed in some small hotel across the capital, rather than share his home for the two days that he had been in Seoul. This fact had probably added to Taehyung’s inability to bond with him so far, as it had created an instant sense of distance between them both.

Steven clearly saw this as a strictly business-only kind of arrangement, whereas Jimin had been more than happy to share his home, meals, and spend time alone with him.

Hell, they hadn’t even went out together to explore Kowloon City yesterday, for Steven hadn’t ‘felt like it’. He had arrived in the city for the first time in his life, a city filled with sights and sounds unlike any other…and yet, he had had no interest at all. He had left the apartment block just once for a brief amount of time, possibly to go get food or something - Taehyung was clueless, Steven hadn’t let him go with him.

Lastly, there was just something about Steven that he couldn’t quite put his finger on, but he didn’t like. Taehyung wished that he could figure it out, but all he knew was that he was getting ‘bad vibes’ from his behaviour today.

Jimin had first introduced him to the concept of ‘bad vibes’, something that seemed to be an Americanism for that strange sensation that one felt in certain places, or around others, that they couldn’t quite explain. That ‘funny feeling’ in the gut, in other words. Jimin had said it often when he had felt uncomfortable with something, like “this place is giving me bad vibes, Tae”, and “that dude over there…is he following us or something? I’m getting real bad vibes, brother…”.

As a result, Taehyung had started thinking of that strange feeling in his gut as being ‘bad vibes’ too, and right now, he was getting all kinds of uncomfortable. He had been getting the feeling ever since Steven had returned from his brief trip out of the block, and though he knew that Jimin would have joked about it being the result of him eating far too many goddamn Burger King burgers - Taehyung knew that it wasn’t the burgers.

“Shit, it’s cold,” Steven suddenly said in English, as he came to a stop and folded his arms over his
chest. He did so to rub at them, seemingly to try and produce some warmth.

Taehyung found himself highly confused by this statement, as he was pretty certain that Steven had just remarked upon the weather being cold.

If there was one thing that could be said about Hong Kong autumns and winters, it most certainly wasn’t that they were cold. The subtropical climate meant that the autumnal period was incredibly dry and warm, somehow hotter than it was during the spring. It didn’t even get close to cold in the heart of winter, which was something that Jimin had loved about travelling to Kowloon during the colder months of the year.

“Don’t you think it’s cold, huh?” Steven asked, his entire body trembling from what looked to be a strong shiver.

“Hot,” Taehyung replied with a lazy shrug, grabbing hold of the neckline of his tee-shirt to fan at himself. “So hot, man.”

Steven let out a mumble at this, resuming his constant pacing as he rubbed at his arms. After a minute or two, he moved to go into the bathroom without another word, the sudden act catching him by surprise.

Taehyung let his chair drop back down onto the floor, his weight making a soft thumping sound as it did so. He sat up from his slouching position to track his partner’s movements, wondering what was going on with the boy. He was set to board a twelve hour flight soon, and if he had a sudden sick turn on him…

“Goddammit,” Taehyung muttered, as he got to his feet to quickly cross the apartment room. He hovered in the open bathroom doorway, noticing that his partner was sitting down on the floor for some reason. “You OK, bro?”

At this sudden question, Steven jumped to twist and look at him; his expression that of complete surprise.

Taehyung heard the sound of an object hitting the floor, a soft clattering which signalled that he had been fiddling around with something. He didn’t have a clue what his partner was doing right now, as there was no discernible reason for why he was suddenly sitting on the bathroom floor. It all just added to his growing sense of discomfort.
“Yeah, I’m OK; why wouldn’t I be OK? What’s that supposed to mean, huh?” Steven retorted, sticking his chest out at him in what was obviously meant to be a challenge. There was a strange sense of hostility coming from him that confused Taehyung, for he had no need to act in such a way. “God, asking questions all the goddamn time, bugging me and following me around...like a fag or something...”

Taehyung stared down at Steven at this, wondering what the boy had just mumbled about him under his breath. He hadn’t understood many of the words, but it sounded like what he had said might just have been muttered in annoyance, judging from the tone of his voice. He had learnt a lot about tone just by listening to Jimin over the last year or so, and he could tell when he was happy, shocked, angry, or irritated - even if he had no clue what he was talking about.

What the fuck did Steven have to be so annoyed about? He had just wanted to check up on him because he seemed to be unwell, but it seemed that the boy didn’t want to talk to him right now. He seemed to be in a bad mood - maybe because he was getting sick?

Taehyung really didn’t know, and he watched Steven retrieving a lighter from the flooring so that he could fidget with it. All he did know was that the boy was starting to look peaky, and this was a bad sign.

“Goods,” Taehyung said, hoping that Steven would understand what he was trying to say. “Get goods, yeah, man?”

“Oh, you should go and collect the goods,” Steven suggested, as he resumed fiddling with his lighter; his thumb running along the wheel to spark a light. “You know, you can get the goods, and I’ll, uh, I’ll wait here.”

Taehyung hovered in the doorway for a moment, trying to figure out what he had just said to him.

Reading the tone of his voice, and his body language, Taehyung sensed that Steven wasn’t going to leave the bathroom with him right now; that he was clearly planning on staying behind for the deal. It made no sense to him, and so he felt like he had to say something else to emphasise the fact that they needed to leave.

“Go now,” Taehyung said out, reaching up to knock a stray lock of hair back out of his eyes. “Go now, man, deal time.”
“I’m not going.” Steven stressed in Korean, clearly figuring out that this was the best way to get him to understand.

Taehyung stared at his partner in confusion at this, his fingers still buried in his hair.

Had Steven just refused to come and collect the heroin with him?

What the fuck was going on right now?

Taehyung was willing to accept the minor inconveniences that had happened in Seoul with the first part of the smuggling deal - the lack of price haggling and such. That had been unprofessional, but at least it hadn’t negatively affected the deal in any way. But refusing to collect the heroin with him? That made no sense whatsoever, and it was this obstinate refusal that made his final nerve snap like thread.

“Ah, you gotta come and get the fuckin’ goods, man,” Taehyung argued, switching back to Korean without much thought because he was so irritated. He couldn’t control himself, even when he knew that it was a bad idea to get confrontational with the boy. “This’ your job! You gotta come get ‘em - you’re a fuckin’ mule!”

“I can’t understand you,” Steven retorted in a petulant voice, staring at the flickering lighter flame instead of holding his gaze.

“…Fuck you, man,” he drawled, quickly adding. “And I know you understood that!”

Taehyung knew that it was pointless trying to argue with Steven because it was obvious that he wasn’t going to listen. The boy wasn’t going to come with him to collect the smuggling goods, and so, he was going to have to complete the deal on his own. If he didn’t hurry up and leave, they were going to miss the deadline for the deal, and then they would miss their flights. He couldn’t let that happen, even if Steven was supposed to come with him and undergo the deal for the two of them.

After crossing the apartment room, Taehyung stepped into his sandals; coming to the decision that it was for the best to just leave Steven behind. He exited the block at a quick pace to hit the street, still muttering under his breath about the boy. He was so irritated right now, but he guessed that he would be free from Steven soon enough - free to return back home to Korea and get some goddamn peace.
Taehyung just needed to get this heroin deal accepted, help his partner prep himself for the smuggling journey and escort him to the airport, and then it was finally done. They could part ways, and hopefully, he would never have to see Steven again for another smuggling deal in the future.

From the apartment block, Taehyung had to cross several bustling streets to enter an acupuncture store. He was supposed to meet their new supplier there, Ju-Long: the man that had replaced Chow he had yet to officially meet. That was the only information that he had been given about the deal - he was only an assistant to the smuggling process, not the goddamn mule.

Steven was supposed to have all of the facts, not him; much like how Jimin had always taken control during deals in Hong Kong for the pair of them.

Good, reliable Jimin, who had never pulled any crazy shit like this.

Just like every night, the streets of Kowloon City were packed with a sea of bodies. The roads were also filled with a variety of vehicles, from cars and buses, to scooters, bicycles, and rickshaws to entertain tourists. The city didn’t ever seem to sleep to Taehyung, who was used to nightly curfews back home in Seoul. As a result, the air was filled with the constant buzz of conversation in a multitude of languages, punctuated by beeping car horns every couple of seconds.

As he hastily cut across a wide road, taking advantage of a slight traffic jam, Taehyung couldn’t help but think about the situation that he was currently stuck in. He couldn’t believe that he had gotten himself paired up with the most stubborn and useless mule imaginable, and that he was now completely in charge of the Hong Kong deal.

Taehyung knew what was supposed to happen, as he had watched Jimin doing deals enough times over their partnership. It wasn’t not knowing what to do that made him feel anxious, but rather the fact that he had limited English skills with which to interact with their dealer.

What if he tried to cheat him out of money again, like Chow had done to Jimin? It would be easy to do so, should their supplier realise that he was clueless about the deal.

Taehyung wouldn’t be able to do anything if the other man tried to cheat him, as he couldn’t argue like Jimin had been able to do so. However, he thought that Steven wouldn’t have been much use to the deal either, for the boy just didn’t seem cut out for this kind of work.
Maybe, Steven might just stop after this first attempt; after he had discovered that muling was a difficult, frightening task, and not as easy as he had been led to believe.

That would be for the best for the both of them, but Taehyung doubted that that would happen. After all, Steven needed a reason to be muling for Moon Tiger Mob in the first place.

Taehyung had started working for Moon Tiger Mob because he owed the gang a great deal. From getting him out of Daegu and up to the capital, to giving him falsified documents and a whole new identity - the gang had saved him from ending up in prison, but at a cost. He owed them so much; was in debt to them as a result of their assistance, which was why he helped smuggle drugs into Korea, and out of Hong Kong.

For Jimin, he had started working for the gang because he hadn’t finished high school, and he had needed a job to survive - a job that he had learned he was a master at. Jimin had been so good that he had had no need to quit and find a safe job. His skills were just perfect for smuggling drugs; both on the streets and through the skies.

But Steven? What reason could Steven have for smuggling drugs for the gang - especially when he seemed to be so bad at it? Someone he knew had either talked him into the idea, had groomed him for the gang with the promise of easy cash; or he owed someone big time, and taking on the job was the easiest way to pay them back. They were the only two reasons that Taehyung could currently think of, and neither one was particularly good for Steven.

Upon reaching the acupuncture store, Taehyung gave the street a final scan before pushing the door open and stepping into the building. The scent that hit him was that of strong, fragrant incense - a thick scent that almost seemed to have solid substance to it.

Standing behind a counter across the storefront, there was an elderly man that looked to be the owner of the establishment. He had a head of thinning, white hair, and his thin, rheumy eyes were almost lost within the deep wrinkles at the corners of his eyelids; much like how his mouth was almost hidden underneath his drooping moustache.

Upon hearing him enter the store, the man slowly glanced up to look at him. They held eye-contact for several seconds, and then he looked back down again without a single word. He was packing a pipe with tobacco, his gnarled fingers working at a slow but steady speed.

The elderly man didn’t say a word to him in greeting, didn’t even look at him again, and so Taehyung moved to go past the counter and enter the backroom. He shoved a curtain of beads aside to do so, eyeing a rickety-looking set of stairs, and a small storage space that looked to contain all of
the different needles and incense that the owner would use. He studied an array of needle-filled jars for a few seconds, and then he went up the stairs in search of the dealer.

Taehyung located the other man in a room up on the second-floor, a small room that was most certainly not used for acupuncture. Upon stepping inside, he was surprised to see that their dealer wasn’t alone, for there were two obvious goons standing in the corner of the room - judging from their wide frames and grizzled faces. One of them was holding a briefcase in hand, the one that would contain the heroin for the deal.

On the table, Taehyung could see an electronic scale that had already been set-up in advance, along with a telephone on which he could contact their partner over in America. That would make the process quicker for the both of them, at least.

“I thought there were two of you?”

Ju-Long was sitting at the table, a cigar perched between his lips as he lounged back in his chair. He was wearing a white suit with a vivid, pink shirt, and the top buttons were open to reveal a thick, golden necklace chain around his neck. He looked like the most typical gangster that Taehyung had ever seen, and he struggled to read the dealer at a glance - to tell if he was trustworthy or not.

Taehyung had been in the act of sitting down at the table when he had asked him this question. He found himself freezing up in surprise, trying to process his words because he had spoken in English. That was better than Mandarin or Cantonese, for sure. But he still struggled to understand his accent because it was unusual, and he was so used to listening to Jimin’s funny, American accent.

“I, uh...” Taehyung dragged the word out for a few seconds, searching his brain for the right thing to say to the man. “I get goods, he wait.”

“...There isn’t a problem, right? No problems on your end that might...affect our partnership?” Ju-Long asked, hovering the cigar in front of his lips. “I wanna be safe, yes; you understand?”

“Deal time,” he replied, the only thing that he could think of saying to him.

Taehyung was hoping that Ju-Long would understand what he was trying to say; that he was telling him they could start the deal now because everything was fine.
Ju-Long glanced over at the two goons for a few seconds, before nodding in his direction. At this silent request, the goon not holding the briefcase moved over to take hold of his biceps. A quick glance up at the man revealed that he was wearing sunglasses, even at this late hour.

Taehyung was pulled right out of his chair and to his feet with a hard tug. The goon had hardly needed to exert any power, showcasing a shocking amount of strength as he pulled him upright.

Rather than say a single thing, or argue back and risk causing any trouble, Taehyung allowed the goon wrench up his tee-shirt and expose his very much bare midriff to Ju-Long. The only thing that was revealed was his tattoo, the black tiger and moon outline sitting right beside his navel. That seemed to satisfy the dealer, who now knew he wasn’t wearing a wire; that this wasn’t a police set-up of any kind.

Clearly, Ju-Long had been spooked by the fact that he had shown up on his own this evening, as he had been expecting two men. The sudden change was unexpected, so it made sense that the dealer was concerned. It showed that he wasn’t the most trusting of men, but that didn’t really matter right now.

Taehyung was just glad that the goon hadn’t start yelling at him, or had gotten physical. There was very little that he could have said in his defence, that he could have done to lessen the tension. He could feel his heart pounding in his chest, the air tense enough to have weight to it.

The goon let go of him at this, his tee-shirt dropping to cover his midriff in a mess of wrinkles. He was now allowed to sit back down at the table, and so, Taehyung slowly lowered himself down onto the seat.

“OK, no wire. Show him the goods,” Ju-Long said, moving to gesture at the other man. “This is good shit, man. Your supplier is gonna be very pleased with this.”

At the man’s order, the second goon moved to place the briefcase down on the table between them. He popped it open, revealing the contents to Taehyung so that he could see the foil-wrapped brick of heroin, along with the envelope of plane tickets, latex gloves, and other smuggling goods.

Taehyung could only watch whilst the goon weighed the heroin for him; knowing that it was better if he did so, but not wanting to say anything. If he requested that he be allowed to check the weight, it showed a complete lack of trust. The kind that could get him in trouble. He didn’t want the other man discreetly applying pressure to the scale with his thumb, hidden behind the measuring bowl so that he couldn’t see him cheating him out of a full half a kilo, but…
As soon as the foil brick was empty, the measuring bowl filled with the gritty powder, Taehyung eyed the electronic scale to see that it was indeed half a kilo - the exact amount for the deal. That was the first hurdle cleared, and he swallowed a sigh of relief as he shifted to sit back in the chair.

“You like what you see, huh?” Ju-Long asked, the fat cigar smouldering away between his fingers. “This is the best shit you’ll find on the market, guaranteed.”

“Yes, good,” Taehyung said with a nod, eyeing the grainy, brown-tinged powder in the measuring bowl. “How, uh, much?”

“118,000 dollars, Hong Kong dollars,” the dealer replied, blowing a thick ball of cigar smoke out of his mouth. “That’s the agreed price, man. That sound right with you, huh?”

$118,000 was less than the amount that Jimin had been threatened over in the past, most likely as a result of inflation. The price sounded right to Taehyung because he knew that it was less than what they had been paying earlier in the year, and would thus balance out to a similar amount. He felt like it was perfectly fine to accept this deal with zero need for negotiations.

If there were any problems with the price, Steven was just going to have to take the heat for it back in America. It technically would be all of his fault, considering the fact that he was supposed to be doing this deal right now, not him.

“OK, make call,” Taehyung said with a soft nod, as he picked up the receiver to start dialling on the device.

Whilst Taehyung went through the multiple steps required to contact the supplier over in America, the other man just continued smoking his cigar across the table. The pungent scent wafted across to hit him in the face, highly familiar to his nose because he was used to breathing in second-hand smoke in all public places back in Seoul.

Taehyung hated having to go through so many steps, having to listen to automated, female voices speaking in both Mandarin Chinese and English about things called ‘service charges’ whilst he waited to dial the second number. It made the deals drag on for longer than needed, and tonight, it made him feel uncomfortable. He just wanted to get the deal sorted, so that he could get the heroin back to the apartment room and start the final step at long last.
Maybe, one day, making international phone calls would take no time at all? Shit, wouldn’t that make everything so simple?

After several minutes of waiting and quickly glancing between the other men, Taehyung finally heard the call going through. He let his breath out in a soft sigh of relief, reaching up to cup the bottom of the clunky receiver with his free hand.

“Hello? Is this Kim?” came a familiar-sounding voice, one that Taehyung knew belonged to Jimin’s partner over in America - Namjoon.

Namjoon was speaking in Korean instead of English, like he did with all of their phone calls. He had a funny way of speaking, his accent clean like that from Seoul, but also slightly off as a result of his strong American accent.

Jimin, on the other hand, talked like basic Busan trash that grew up on the coast surrounded by fishing trawlers and limited electricity. He didn’t try to make his accent sound clean and respectable, which suited him perfectly fine.

How funny the difference in accents between Namjoon and Jimin was. Sometimes, Taehyung had found himself wondering what else was different about the two of them. He didn’t even know what Namjoon looked like, he only knew his voice and little facts about him that Jimin had told him from time to time.

“Yeah, it’s me. $118,000, Hong Kong dollars,” Taehyung said in Korean, turning his head to watch one of the goons transferring the heroin into a baggie for transportation. “I’m accepting the deal now.”

“Allright, that sounds good to me. Accept the deal, brother,” Namjoon said, a warm lilt present in his voice that was pleasing to listen to. “I’ll contact my supplier on this end, I’ll get the transaction underway. I’ll be ready to pick, uh, Yang up after the flight too. Around 8pm, local time.”

Taehyung ended the phone call at this, dropping the receiver back into the cradle. It made a plastic thunk as it did so, the cream surface heavily scratched and stained from what looked like greasy smears of nicotine.

That was it, the deal had been accepted, the transaction for the goods was set to start rolling any minute from now - it was a success.
“Good deal,” Taehyung said, holding his hand out to Ju-Long to let him know that the deal had been accepted.

As soon as the heroin had been packed into a baggie for transportation purposes, Taehyung accepted the briefcase from the goon to leave the acupuncture store. He couldn’t believe that the deal had went this well so far, as he had been worried that something bad would have happened. The fact that he had been checked for a wire didn’t even bother him, for it had been just a slight hiccup in the otherwise smooth transaction.

Taehyung hit the street, allowing himself a quick moment of smug satisfaction as he weaved his way through a crowd of tourists and locals. The briefcase had some weight to it, swinging from his fist as he hastily crossed the road to enter the apartment block again.

As he went up the narrow, dim stairwell to get to the right floor, Taehyung heard the usual loud mixture of radios and televisions blasting from within the other rooms. The paint was starting to crack and peel free from a great many of the doors, much like how the wallpaper was coming free from the walls; the ceiling stained and damp from cigarette smoke and mould.

Upon reaching the room, Taehyung shoved the door open to enter. He carried the briefcase over to the single table, dropping it onto the surface and turning it around to locate the clasps.

“Steven?” Taehyung called, as he popped the briefcase open; the metal clasps clicking as he applied pressure onto them. “Hey?”

Taehyung glanced around the apartment room to try and locate his partner; seeing absolutely no sign of him. He wasn’t sitting in one of the corners of the room on the single chair, nor was he hanging around the cramped, useless kitchen-area. This meant that he must still be in the bathroom, as there was nowhere else for him to go.

Save for out onto the streets, that was.

“Steven?”

From the bathroom, there came no reply; not even a soft sound to signal that the boy was still inside of the apartment room right now.
Taehyung paused in the act of lifting the latex gloves out of the briefcase compartment, turning to look back over his shoulder again. He saw that the bathroom door was almost shut, just a thin crack visible through the frame. There was no sign of movement through the gap, and he couldn’t hear anything coming from the other room.

Oh, Taehyung could feel the bad vibes growing stronger and stronger right now. There was an eddy growing in the pit of his stomach that made him feel nauseous, and he could feel his fingers starting to tremble.

For a few seconds, all that Taehyung could do was stare at the door, the gloves dangling from his shaking fingers. Then he dropped the gloves back inside of the suitcase, moving over to the door so that he could push it open to enter the bathroom.

Steven had better not left the block again, not this close to the flight. Taehyung needed to prepare him with the parcels and get him to the airport for check-in as soon as possible, and there was no time for messing around now - not when the deadline was looming.

“Hey, man, it's time to…”

Taehyung felt his words trailing off into a mumble as he came to a stop in the bathroom doorway. His gaze slowly dropped to stare at the sight right in front of his feet, his grip tightening around the door handle.

Steven was lying on the floor in a slump, weakly twitching and seemingly unresponsive.

“…Oh, shit,” Taehyung wheezed, as it slowly dawned on him what he was looking at.

Steven had shot up something whilst he had been out collecting the goods for the smuggling deal, something bad, something really bad.

Taehyung could see the needle still stuck in his elbow, and there was something wrapped around his biceps that looked to be made from rubber. Blood was trickling from the puncture, running down his arm in a shocking amount. A small amount of blood was also starting to pool out across the filthy linoleum from where he had smacked his head on the hard flooring.
Several items were on the floor close to Steven: a wrinkled piece of foil, a spoon, and a soggy ball of cotton wool. The lighter that he had been playing around with earlier was also present; lying a few feet away at the base of the toilet.

Steven had taken drugs.

In all his time spent smuggling cocaine and heroin through airport security and across the world, Taehyung had never actually seen drugs in such a way before. Not like this. He had seen people smoking opium across Kowloon City, and inside of the den that he and Jimin had once had to deal in. But that was something completely different - impersonal, just like the parcels that he shifted around the skies.

This was so personal that Taehyung felt his gut twisting up under his ribs in horror. He could see the needle right there, still stuck in Steven’s elbow, along with the shockingly vivid dribble of blood weakly running down his inner arm. The foil packet was just inches away from his toes; the little tab covered in hints of gritty powder that he was certain was heroin - judging from the colour.

Taehyung found himself staring at the foil tab for a moment, his entire body frozen in place from a mixture of shock and horror. It was only when he heard Steven making a weak choking noise that he finally kicked into action, turning on his heel to run out of the room.

In a room several floors below them, there was a man called Xiaodan, who he had been told to contact in case of emergencies. The other man spoke Korean, at least to some degree. Taehyung had never needed to contact him for anything before, as he and Jimin hadn’t ran into such a high level of trouble during their deals in Hong Kong. The police, gang rivalries, drug overdoses - he had never needed to worry about such things before.

Taehyung almost tripped in his haste to get down the staircase. He felt the heel of his foot missing a step, the sudden jolt causing his heart to shoot up into his throat as he stumbled to try and recover. He managed to not stumble, luckily reaching the bottom of the flight without breaking his goddamn neck.

“Oh, shit,” he cursed under his breath, as he shot around the corner to dart along the hallway.

When he reached the door, Taehyung pounded his fist against it. He was so frantic that he didn’t do so in a rhythm of any kind, just a series of hard and fast knocks.
“C’mon, c’mon, open up.”

After forcing himself to take a deep breath and counting to five, Taehyung pounded his fist against the door again - unable to help himself. If he reached ten seconds in his head and the door didn’t swing open, he was more than prepared to start shouting through the door at the other man, just to make sure that he had heard him. There really was a lot of noise coming from the rest of the apartment block and-

When the door swung open a moment later, Taehyung pulled his fist away just in time. He saw that Xiaodan was on the other side of the thin piece of wood, a short and skinny young man who had bleached hair and strongly tanned skin. He wasn’t fully dressed right now, for he was wearing a silken, red robe that was loosely knotted around his hips, and the top was open to reveal a white vest.

“Oh, it’s you: the Korean,” Xiaodan said, speaking in slow but passable Korean. He could understand his accent just fine, which was a blessing. “What’d you want, huh?”

“We got a problem, we got a big fuckin’ problem,” Taehyung replied, talking at such a fast speed that he didn’t even know if the other man could even understand him. “You gotta help me.”

“Calm down, man,” Xiaodan said, holding a hand up to try and get him to stop blabbering. His thin eyes were glazed over, possibly the result of smoking opium just across the block, or even in his own room. “What’s going on, huh?”

“My partner, some new kid, Steven, he’s in the bathroom right now,” Taehyung explained, as he started pacing up and down in front of the other man. “He-he’s taken bad drugs - he’s lyin’ on the fuckin’ floor and he’s bleedin’ pretty bad. I think he overdosed, or somethin’.”

“Oh, he got the bad shit…or the strong shit,” Xiaodan remarked, making a noise under his breath as he softly shook his head. “A lot of foreigners can’t tell the difference here.”

“What’m I supposed to do?!” Taehyung asked in exasperation, struggling to keep himself under control. “He’s my partner, man! I need him to finish the deal by tonight! He’s supposed to be smugglin’ the goods to America, but he’s bleedin’ out on the bathroom floor right now!”

“You think this is the first time this has happened to a guy like you, huh?” Xiaodan asked, before letting out a sudden laugh. “This happens all the time with mules. Ah, Koreans are so stupid…”
“This’ serious, man! What the fuck am I supposed to do?! I think my partner’s dyin’!! I already accepted the deal! I got the fuckin’ goods in the room upstairs, the transaction’s bein’ fuckin’ processed!” Taehyung shouted, unable to keep his voice down because he was so frightened. “If that shit don’t get on that plane tonight to go America, I-I-I’m fuckin’ dead!”

“You’ve already accepted the goods?” Xiaodan said, something suddenly shifting across his features that looked like a bad sign to his eyes. “Ah, that is a problem… Usually, the junkies hit the stuff hard before the deal, it gives me time to sort something out, to find another guy to smuggle the goods in time.”

Xiaodan stopped talking for a moment to think the situation over, leaving Taehyung on tenterhooks. He forced himself to stop pacing because he was making too much noise, noise that the other tenants on the floor might just be able to hear. He reached up to place his hands on the top of his head, sinking his fingers down into his hair as he tried to regulate his breathing.

“Alright, grab everything you need and get out of here, you can’t stay in the block,” Xiaodan instructed, shifting from foot to foot. “You need to get out of here and finalise the transaction, man.”

“What ‘bout Steven? Are you gonna call an ambulance? ‘Cos I think he needs one right now, or he might die.”

“This block is filled with drugs and whores, I can’t call an ambulance,” he argued, shifting to lean against the door frame. “Just leave him. We’ll dump him somewhere, somewhere for a market stall owner to find or whatever - who cares. Another goddamn junkie tourist, ah, there’s a dead one every couple of hours these days.”

“Leave him?” Taehyung repeated, feeling a horrible sinking sensation in his gut. “I can’t leave the kid behind like that, man. I can’t leave him to die, I”

“Either you get out of here and find a way to get the goods on that plane, or you can die like your junkie partner for burning your gang on a good deal, Korean,” Xiaodan interrupted with a lazy shrug. “If I were you, I’d get the fuck out of here, whilst you still got some time.”

“But…but…”

Taehyung felt his words trailing off into a pathetic mumble, his entire body drooping because he suddenly felt so weak. He knew that what was Xiaodan was telling him was the truth: he needed to
get the hell out of the block and get the goods on the plane somehow. But he didn’t want to accept the fact that this meant leaving his new partner behind…leaving him to possibly die.

Steven might just have fucked everything up on him, but the kid didn’t deserve to die like this.

“What…what’d I do? Huh?” Taehyung finally asked, twisting and turning on the spot as he started roughly tugging at his hair. “You gotta help me out here, man. This’ never happened to me ‘fore, I dunno what to do.”

“Go across the block, OK, there’s an opium den around the back of an alley. You know the place?”

“Yeah, yeah, I know it.”

“Ask for Madame Si. She might know a way to assist you, she’s got a lot of connections. But I wouldn’t count on it, not this close to a deal.”

The lack of confidence in Xiaodan’s voice wasn’t exactly comforting, but at least he had suggested something. Without even this small suggestion, he would have been left on his own.

Taehyung had no choice but to do what Xiaodan had told him, and so, he raced back up the staircase to go into the other room. He snatched up his belongings and the briefcase, stopping to search Steven’s jeans so that he could slip his passport out of his back pocket.

“I’m sorry, man, I’m so sorry,” Taehyung whispered, as he shoved the passport down into his own pocket.

Steven didn’t reply to this, not beyond the worryingly loud sound of his weak respiration.

On his way out of the apartment room, Taehyung ended up crossing paths with two beefy men, who were unmistakably enforcers of some kind. He had to squeeze past one to get out into the hallway, neither man saying a single word to him. A quick glance back over his shoulder as he went down the hallway showed him that they were going into the room - which meant that Xiaodan must have sent them down to sort out the mess.
Maybe, they wouldn’t leave him to die in the gutters like Xiaodan had said so.

Maybe, upon seeing that he was still breathing and he just needed urgent medical care, they might just dump him outside of a hospital instead?

Taehyung knew it was just wishful thinking, that he was hoping for such unrealistic things to try and lessen any feelings of guilt. If Xiaodan had said that he was getting dumped somewhere across the city, then that was what was going to happen. The other man worked for a gang, after all, and gangsters weren’t exactly renown for caring about the plights of others.

Taehyung hit the street at a quick pace, having to run across the block to get to the opium den because he couldn’t waste a single second. He tried to weave around other pedestrians as well as he could, but he ended up slamming shoulders and knocking quite a few people aside in his haste. This resulted in quite the commotion, but he didn’t stop or even slow down until he reached the alleyway. He quickly followed the narrow passage between the two buildings to get to the entrance to the den, and he banged his fist on it; leaning against the wall for support as he tried to catch his breath.

Xiaodan had told him to find a way of getting the drugs onto the San Francisco flight, but Taehyung didn’t know what he was supposed to do. He was stuck in the middle of Kowloon City, caught up in the midst of an ongoing transaction. If Madame Si didn’t know a way to help him, then he was on his own. He doubted that Namjoon would be able to help him now, not after he had made the call to his supplier to start the transaction. The money would already be getting wired to 14K somehow by now, and there was no way of going back on a transaction once it had been finalised.

What Taehyung knew was this: he had $118,000 worth of heroin that needed to be smuggled into America, but no mule to smuggle it. He had two plane tickets, along with two passports, but the ticket to America was in Steven’s name. He couldn’t board the plane in Steven’s place because of this fact, and he had no clue at all if he would be able to get another ticket for the same flight this close to check-in - unless there were last-minute cancellations that he could fill. He didn’t even know if he could afford such a ticket, so there was only one solution that came to mind.

After a moment of waiting, the door slid open; the thin wood rattling in the frame as it did so. On the other side of the door, Taehyung recognised the woman because she had escorted him and Jimin into the opium den the first time they had visited it. She was wearing another silken robe with a slit up the thigh. But this time, it was a vivid, emerald green and embroidered with white and red flowers.

“Madame Si, I need Madame Si,” Taehyung explained in slurred English, gesturing at himself as he did so. “Important business, see now.”
The woman looked at him for a moment, seemingly struggling to understand his words. Then she slowly moved to let him enter the opium den, lazily gesturing with her fingers that he should follow after her.

Taehyung did so, quickly dragging the door shut behind him. He followed the woman along the hallway, grimacing at the pungent smell that was hanging in the air before pulling his tee-shirt up over his lower face. He didn’t even care about the fact that he was breathing in the scent of his own sweat - terror sweat - because it was still less disgusting than the fragrance coming from smoking rooms.

The sound of music and laughter was hanging in the air along with the thick smoke. Taehyung spared quick glances into the many different rooms that they passed, seeing people lying on mattresses receiving massages whilst they smoked long, curved pipes; and the rich, foreign businessmen that were being entertained by beautiful women, who were playing various instruments and fanning at them to keep away the heat.

“Wait here, I’ll go and get Madame Si,” the woman said, gesturing at him to enter the backroom. Her voice was as heavy and slurred as last time, which he thought was a sign she might be high from breathing in the constant fumes.

Taehyung entered the backroom, having to stand in the corner because there was no furniture present. He leaned back against the wall, the weight of the briefcase hanging from his fist starting to piss him off. He longed to be rid of it, but he couldn’t do so just yet. He rolled his eyes up to stare at the naked light that was dangling from the ceiling; smoke hanging around the yellow-tinged bulb. The ceiling was stained and cracked from years of use, and so he studied it for a moment whilst he waited for the other woman to join him in the backroom.

“Oh, it’s you,” Madame Si said, as she came to a stop in the doorway a few feet away. “You’re one of the smugglers for 14K, hmm? I recognise you, though I don’t see your partner present this evening.”

“I need huh…help,” Taehyung replied, finding himself once more wishing that Jimin was here to help him out.

But if Jimin had been here, they wouldn’t have been in the mess in the first place.

Wasn’t that the kicker?
“My man…said you help.”

“What kind of help?”

Taehyung placed the briefcase down onto the floor, reaching into his jeans back pocket to retrieve the two passports. He looked between them both, shoving his passport back into his pocket so that he only had Steven’s passport in hand, and then he flipped it open to reveal the documents.

“I need, uh, I need…not him,” Taehyung explained, holding Steven’s passport up at the lady so that she could see the photograph on the document. “Need me, mine now.”

“You require a fake passport?” Madame Si replied, eyeing the object for a few seconds before shifting her gaze to look up at his face.

Taehyung thought this over for a moment, and then he gave her a slight shrug to show that he was uncertain. He didn’t really know what she was saying, but it sounded like she might just understand what he was trying to say. If she hadn’t understood what he had said, then she would have gestured in some way; like a head shake.

“When do you need the passport?”

“When?” Taehyung repeated, thinking the word over for a moment as he tried to figure out the best way to answer. “Now, not long time. I need now.”

“You need the passport tonight?” Madame Si remarked, making a soft noise under her breath. “I know someone, she might be able to assist you…but for a fee.”

“Fuwee?”

“Fee - money,” she clarified, and so Taehyung made a soft sound to let her know that he understood.

Money, he needed money. Of course he needed money, it was essential for all things - legal and illegal.
“2,000 dollars, Hong Kong dollars, and she should be able to help you.”

“2,000 dollars?” Taehyung repeated, lowering the passport. “Wait…”

Shoved deep down inside of his front pocket, Taehyung had his money clip of cash that he always carried whilst he was in Hong Kong.

When Taehyung had been working with Jimin, he had often spent a great chunk of the money on food and alcohol for the two of them, whilst they had had fun travelling around the markets and the city together. This time around, he had spent only a small amount on fast food for himself, as Steven had had no interest in going out to see Kowloon City with him - not even to go drinking, or to even grab a goddamn Burger King.

At first, this had annoyed Taehyung, as he had almost been looking forward to trying to bond with the boy during the trip. But now…now, it might just save his ass.

Taehyung fumbled through the money clip to count the colourful notes; mumbling under his breath as he did so. He was so thankful that Hong Kong dollars were often high in denomination, for a majority of the bills that he had were green $50, red $100, and the rare brown $500 bills - easy to identify for quick counting.

After thumbing through the bills, Taehyung found that he had $2,350 in cash, not including a random assortment of coins that were shoved down into his pocket. He slipped $2,000 free from the bundle, holding the bills out to Madame Si to show her that he had the fee.

“I'll contact her. Wait here,” Madame Si instructed, as she turned on her heel to leave the backroom.

Taehyung couldn’t help but nibble at his fingernails whilst he waited for the woman to return. He was so nervous that he couldn’t fight the urge, for every passing second meant that he had less time to reach the airport and board the plane. All that he could do was try to focus on something else, like getting a falsified passport sorted first and foremost.

Madame Si returned after a minute, pausing in the doorway of the backroom to address him, “Follow me. I’m going to take you to her; yes?”
“OK,” he said, as he snatched up the briefcase and quickly crossed the backroom.

Taehyung followed Madame Si out of the opium den, the woman taking the lead so that she could escort him back out onto the street. He didn’t have a clue where she was taking him, so he had to linger behind her by a few feet to make sure that he didn’t lose her on the crowded street. It would be easy to do so, considering the fact that she was much shorter than him.

After crossing several packed streets, Madame Si came to a sudden stop right beside a photo booth, and he managed to stop before he accidentally bumped into her.

“Go inside,” she said, pulling the booth curtain aside and gesturing at the interior. “*She will need a photograph to work with.*”

Taehyung thought this over for a moment, eyeing the glowing machine as he tried to figure out what she had just said. He let his breath out in a soft sound as he realised what he needed to do, and then he ducked inside of the booth. He had to retrieve the coins from his jeans pocket to slip them into the machine, sitting down on the plastic seat in front of the camera.

Taehyung had to quickly change into another shirt from his travel bag before having his photograph taken in the booth, just so that the agents at the airport wouldn’t notice the fact that his passport image looked suspiciously fresh. He shoved his worn tee-shirt into the bag, slipping a chambray shirt free that he quickly buttoned up. He fixed the shirt in place, reaching up to rake his hair back off his brow to try and fully expose his face, and then he hit the button to get the machine to take his photograph.

Upon exiting the photo booth a moment later, Taehyung collected the thin printout of photographs from the slot. He eyed the multiple shots, hoping that at least one of them was useable for his fake passport.

There was a rickshaw waiting beside the sidewalk, which Madame Si had hailed for them. She climbed up onto the seat, and he quickly climbed up beside her; the worker grabbing the handles so that he could start pulling the carriage for them.

Taehyung had never used a rickshaw before, especially not with Jimin. His friend didn’t like the idea of being pulled around by another human. He thought that it was degrading towards the poor workers, and he had preferred riding around the city in trams instead.
Well, Taehyung didn’t know about degrading, but he was pretty certain that the man pulling the carriage preferred getting paid for his labour, than going home empty-handed because tourists pitied his job.

Taehyung wanted to ask where they were going, but he didn’t have the means to do so. His limited English skills were a hindrance, and so, he could only sit back on the seat and watch the sights passing them by.

The busy, packed streets started to change as they drew closer to the docks, the roads becoming narrower and the sidewalks less populated by tourists. The usual white noise of conversation and traffic faded away, replaced by the distant echo of ship horns, rumbling and rattling machinery, and shouting voices from factory workers that were unloading and filling cargo ships with massive crates of goods.

After several minutes of riding in the carriage, the man came to a stop at what seemed to be their destination. They were so close to the docks that the scent of brine hung thick in the air; Kai Tak Airport visible across the horizon.

Taehyung climbed down from the rickshaw carriage, seeing that Madame Si was in the act of paying their driver. She said something to the man in Chinese, most of which he didn’t understand. He held his hand out to her in offering, to help her climb down from the carriage. She accepted his hand, jumping down the slight step to stand beside him.

“Come,” Madame Si said, cocking her head in the direction of a large warehouse just along the pier. “She’s in here. This shouldn’t take too long. You should be able to board the flight in time.”

Taehyung diligently followed the woman along the waterfront, turning his head to watch the distant sight of cargo ships floating across the black waters of Kowloon Bay. He had visited to waterfront a few times in the past with Jimin, as his friend seemed highly fond of being around water.

Upon entering the warehouse, Taehyung saw towering, metal structures that were filled with wooden crates. The crates were printed with red characters and black letters, which might just be ‘fragile’ warnings. Machines filled the interior, and they were moving the large crates from the warehouse out onto the docks so that they could be stored on the cargo boats. Workers were either controlling the crane machines by hitting buttons and pulling on levers and joysticks, or they were driving forklift trucks back and forth along the aisles to transport the goods.

Far across the warehouse, nestled within the towers of goods, Taehyung could see an elderly woman: a tiny woman with a head of white hair and round spectacles. She seemed to be who they
were looking for, as she was the only person present that wasn’t wearing a yellow hard hat and working one of the many machines.

“Grandmother, I’ve brought him,” Madame Si said in English, as she turned to look back over her shoulder and gestured at him. “He has the passport and photograph, along with his fee.”

“This is him? This is the boy, mmm?”

When the grandmother moved over to him, Taehyung retrieved Steven’s passport to hold it out to her with the strip of photographs. He didn’t know what he was supposed to do exactly, but it seemed like a good idea to give her the objects so that she knew what he needed from her.

“This will do, this will do,” the elderly woman said, accepting the passport and photographs from him. She checked the photograph strip for a few seconds, seemingly to find the best choice. “I can alter this for the boy. It shouldn’t take much time at all, but he would be safer waiting for me create a whole new identity for him, Jiayang…”

“I know, but he doesn’t have enough time, grandmother. He has a flight to board by this evening, and he needs a passport to match the tickets. Otherwise, he’s going to be in a lot of trouble with 14K.”

“14K, ah, those thugs…”

Taehyung followed Madame Si across the warehouse, lingering behind her by several feet because he felt so completely out of place right now. He couldn’t understand what the women were saying, but he knew that they were talking about him and his need for a fake passport.

Hopefully, that was a good sign, and it meant that the grandmother was going to be able to help him.

Taehyung saw that there was many other machines placed around the far end of warehouse, from larger ones that looked like printing presses, to smaller ones that resembled fax machines. He didn’t know what they were for, but it looked like she used them for business.

The elderly woman moved over to one of the fax machines, placing the best photograph down onto the glass screen. She hit a button, which turned the machine on so that it lit up with a series of noises, and then she started hitting other buttons on the machine.
Taehyung didn’t have a clue what she was doing, and all that he could do was hover beside the table and wait to see what was going to happen.

A few feet away, Madame Si retrieved a cigarette holder and lighter from within her robe. There was already a thin cigarette loaded into the ivory holder, one that looked to be hand-rolled and filter-less.

A piece of paper came out of the machine a few seconds later, and Taehyung saw that it was a printed copy of his photograph. The elderly woman retrieved the sheet, shuffling her way over to the table to sit down and start altering the passport.

On the surface of the table, there were several kinds of tools. There was a scalpel, a magnifying glass, tweezers, a cloth, a pot of something that seemed to be glue, and all kinds of different paint brushes. Clearly, these were all tools that she needed to work with, and Taehyung couldn’t help but wonder what each tool was used for.

First, she collected the scalpel, carefully cutting around the printed photograph to free it from the sheet of paper.

Taehyung watched the woman slicing into the very edge of the passport document, her hand moving with steady precision and without a single hint of hesitation, despite her age. She only had to make a small incision into the plastic, one that wasn’t even noticeable at a glance. Then she retrieved her tweezers, picking up the freshly printed image of him with the very tips so that she could carefully insert it.

Taehyung saw that the image looked different to the original photograph. The colours had been slightly altered from the printing machine, which in turn made his photograph look more like the one of Steven that was printed on the document. It looked more authentic, in a way. The colours of the photograph were important in regards to making it look like a real passport, for the photo booth photographs didn’t look right - were too clear and bright.

After getting the printed image perfectly in place, she applied pressure with her left hand to ensure that there was no trapped air caught inside the plastic. She retrieved the thin paintbrush with her right hand, dabbing into the open pot to coat it in a clear, sticky glue. Then she dragged the brush over the slice, to seal the plastic up once more.

Taehyung saw the slight trail of glue that it left behind, which would dry and leave an obvious mark on the plastic. But before he could open his mouth to try and mention this fact, the woman hastily
wiped the excess away with a clean cloth. The plastic was free from any lingering glue - save for what that had gotten into the scalpel slice.

The elderly woman got to her feet, wandering across the warehouse to go over to other machine and presumably finish off the process of forging the passport. Her slippers slapped against the concrete as she did so, the soft sound almost lost underneath the loud banging of the distant cranes out on the docks.

This wasn’t going to work. Taehyung was convinced that this wasn’t going to work.

Sure, he had been using a fake passport for over a year now, but that was different. That passport had had time to be prepared for him, it hadn’t been a rush job like this. He had been given an entirely fake identity, not just an altered passport that consisted of a printed photograph being shoved inside of the document.

‘Jang Jeongmin’ was a ghost in the system, and not a mask that he was going to wear when he assumed ‘Steven Yang’ as an identity.

“Miss Huang usually creates counterfeit passports using special printing machines, depending on her client,” Madame Si said, sparking a light to set the end of her cigarette alight as she leaned back against the wall. “She creates the entire thing: identity, documentation, official seals and all. But she knows her way around fixing up existing passports too. It’s how she started off, after all.”

Taehyung didn’t understand most of what she had just said, but he turned his head to politely look at her whilst she spoke. He had heard the word ‘passport’ at some point, which meant that she was probably talking about what the other woman was doing.

“Passports are starting to get very complicated. American and European passports in particular. They’re using new technology. They’re using digital codes. You’re very lucky that you needed this now, with an old passport, and not in a few months time when the technology spreads all across the world. Otherwise, my boy, you would have been fucked.”

Madame Si pulled the cigarette holder out of her mouth, daintily holding it between her index and middle finger. Smoke wafted up from the smouldering end in a curl, floating up to dissipate before it reached the high ceiling.

“Technology changes. But, my child, the greatest piece of technology is still up here,” Miss Huang
replied, lifting her hand to tap her fingers against her temple. “I’ll figure out a way to crack those…
digital codes, or whatever they are. Passports, visas - I’ll find a way.”

“I’m sure you will, grandmother,” Madame Si agreed, giving the elderly woman a smile and
dropping her head in a way that Taehyung thought showed great respect.

Taehyung watched Miss Huang placing the passport down on another machine. She hit a button so
that a blast of presumably warm air came from it; air that would help the glue dry. She left the
passport in place for a minute, and then she brought it back over to him.

“Here, boy,” Miss Huang said, holding the passport out to him.

Taehyung was shocked to see that the passport looked…acceptable - real, in fact. The photograph of
him completely blended into the background of the legal document, so much so that it looked like it
belonged there. Though he knew that it was a falsified passport, he thought that it would be
incredibly difficult for someone else to notice that it was forged from a glance. Maybe, a trained
agent in the airport might be able to figure out that it was fake, but he wasn’t going to think about
such things right now.

“Thank you,” Taehyung said, as he slipped his bundle of cash free to pay her. “Thank you so
much.”

The rickshaw driver was still waiting outside of the warehouse for them, as Madame Si must have
requested that he bring them back to the opium den. That meant that Taehyung didn’t need to worry
about racing back across the city to get to the apartment block, as there was one last thing that he
needed to do before heading to the airport.

In the brief ride back across the city, Taehyung couldn’t help but study the passport. He got his real
passport out to compare the two, finding that they both looked legal to his eyes. He might just be able
to do this, even when the odds were so terribly stacked against him.

When the rickshaw driver stopped once more, Taehyung could see that the apartment block was just
down the street. He jumped down from the seat, shouting his thanks back to Madame Si as he raced
along the street. Sadly, he was unable to stick around and thank her properly, the way that she
deserved for saving his ass, because there just wasn’t enough time for that.

Taehyung needed Xiaodan’s assistance - not only in getting the parcels prepared, but in reaching Kai
Tak Airport in time to board the flight. He was drawing so close to check-in time, and he didn’t have much time left before he would risk missing the flight.

After bounding up the stairs to get to the right room, Taehyung pounded his fist on the door. He found himself once more wanting to pace up and down the hallway outside, but he managed to suppress the urge. After a moment, the door swung inwards just a crack - Xiaodan visible in the gap in the door frame.

“Hey, man, I need your help-”

“Ah, I told you before, Korean, I can’t help you,” Xiaodan complained, making no move to open the door for him. “Your partner’s gone, that’s all I can do for you! I told you, go and talk to Madame Si!”

“No, it’s good! I got a fake passport! I got one, look-”

Taehyung reached into his jeans pocket so that he could retrieve the passports, fumbling between the two of them before finding the right one. He opened it up, flashing Xiaodan the now falsified version of Steven’s passport.

“She helped me out, like you said, but I need help gettin’ the drugs ready,” Taehyung explained, seeing the other man studying the document. “I can’t do it on my own, that’s why I work with a partner. I need help with the internal parcel, that’s all. Oh, and the ride to the airport.”

Xiaodan thought this over for a moment, and then he moved to slowly remove the chain lock from the door.

Taehyung heard it scraping as he dragged it back, the metal letting out a grating sound as it was removed. The door opened fully, revealing the room interior to him at long last.

The apartment room was filled with men, seven men that looked to be goons from what Taehyung could tell. That was judging from their physical appearance, of course, and the fact that a few of them had machetes and meat cleavers shoved down their belts. Most were smoking: cigarettes and cigars sitting between their lips. They were covered in tattoos and scars, some of them sporting facial hair, others with shaved heads.
Xiaodan moved to sit down on the sofa, presumably so that he could resume counting the piles of cash on the surface of the table placed in front of it. The cash could have come from so many different things: drugs, prostitutes, illegal card clubs - Taehyung had no way of knowing.

“Alright, get him ready with the drugs.” Xiaodan said, making no move to get up off the sofa and offer assistance. He gestured at two of the goons, one that was sporting a shaved head and a neck tattoo, and another that had a rippling scar across his nose and cheek. “The deal’s going to America, it’s important.”

“Wait, gotta do…”

Taehyung found himself unable to think of the right word to say to finish this sentence, and so he just left his words hanging in the air as he moved over to another table to pop the suitcase open.

What Taehyung was trying to say was that he needed to prepare the parcels, not the goons. If they did so, they might do so incorrectly, and it was essential that he had everything correct. The heroin needed to be sorted into three parcels, no more, no less, and the measurements had to be exact - which he had learned to master over his time working with Jimin.

It wasn’t just because Taehyung wanted the parcels to be exact, but he also wanted to ensure that he wasn’t cheated by Xiaodan and the goons. He knew that he was supposed to rely on the other man in case something went wrong, but that didn’t mean that he trusted him. If there was one thing that he had learnt working with gangsters, it was that a great deal of them couldn’t be trusted to not cheat.

Taehyung quickly spooned heroin from the baggie to create three new parcels: the two that would be taped around his upper thighs, and the condom parcel for internal smuggling. He sealed the baggies tight, crushing the air out of them to make sure that they didn’t pop under pressure during the flight. Then he lubed up the condom and double-wrapped it, tightly knotting the end to keep it secure.

Taehyung stripped the slick gloves free, tossing them down onto the table. He eyed the condom parcel with wary eyes, knowing what was coming and completely powerless to stop it.

“OK, I’m ready,” he said with a nod, trying his very hardest to steel himself.

Whilst Taehyung slipped his jeans and underwear down to his ankles, the two goons moved to get over to the table. The one with the shaved head picked up the condom parcel, eyeing it with a hard to read expression.
“Hold him down,” Xiaodan said, and so the other man moved to grab hold of his wrists and pin them against the table.

“Huh? What’s he doin’?” Taehyung asked in confusion, looking between Xiaodan and the nameless goon. “Hey, man, what?”

“It’s OK, man,” Xiaodan replied, lazily waving his wrist so that smoke wafted from the end of his cigarette. “It’s just to keep you still. It hurts, you know, and we don’t want you moving around too much.”

It hurts…

Taehyung thought this over for a moment, finding that he had to swallow hard because there was a large lump caught in his throat. Sure, he knew that it might just hurt, but he suddenly found himself realising that the goons didn’t care about whether or not they hurt him - not like he cared about making sure that Jimin wasn’t injured during his smuggling trips by extensively stretching his muscles to prepare him for the parcel.

Taehyung felt something brushing against his entrance, something cool and slick that didn’t feel like the goon’s fingers. Pressure starting pressing down against him, until the other man stopped and mumbled something at another man. He spoke so fast and in such a guttural voice that he couldn’t understand what he was saying.

That was when Taehyung felt another pair of hands seizing hold of his buttocks, roughly spreading them wide so that the other goon could insert the parcel. Just like that, he was able to shove it forward, forcing it through the tight ring of his muscles hard enough to get the parcel inside of him.

“Fuck!” Taehyung shouted, twisting on the table and feeling the scarred goon’s hands firmly holding his wrists down to trap him in place. In his pain and fear, he couldn’t even hope to try and talk English, for his words spilled free without control. “Fuck, man! Don’t shove it up there, don’t-”

But it was too late, for the goon pushed the remains of the parcel inside of him with enough force to make Taehyung’s words turn into a yelp of pain.

“Fuck! Fuck, man, fu-”
“God, stop yelling. It’s inside now, get used to it,” Xiaodan muttered around his cigarette, his entire demeanour sounding bored and disinterested. Then he said something else to the goon in Chinese, talking so fast that he couldn’t understand a single word he had said.

Taehyung had to turn his face against his arm to try and muffle himself, even when it was useless. It just hurt so much that he couldn’t help but moan in pain, his thighs trembling from the searing burn inside of him. The goon hadn’t even tried to ease it inside of him, he had just shoved it up there without a hint of hesitation; without a single care for how much it would hurt him.

How could Jimin stand this pain?! How had he managed to withstand this agony for so long?!

Oh, Taehyung just wanted to reach behind himself and wrench the parcel back out again, but he couldn’t. Not only because he was still being pinned down against the table, but because he had to smuggle the heroin in Steven’s place. He had no choice, he had to do this, or he was as good as dead.

The goon taped the remaining baggies of heroin right up the insides of his thighs, so close to his groin that he felt the some of the tape sticking to the very edges of his pubic hair.

Oh god, getting the baggies off again was going to hurt.

Xiaodan started speaking in Chinese again, shifting to retrieve a box of tissues and handing them to the goon. The man dragged a bunch of tissues out of the box, shoving them down into his briefs before he pulled them up for him.

Taehyung fumbled for a few seconds as he fixed his briefs in place. He struggled with his jeans too, trying his very hardest to fasten them up. He could feel the thick layer of tissues shoved inside his briefs, which were there with the sole purpose of absorbing any blood that might just escape.

Jimin never needed to shove tissues down his briefs. After being prepped with the parcel, Jimin could move just fine and seemed to feel little pain, and yet, Taehyung could barely even stand upright right now because it hurt so much.

After fastening his jeans, Taehyung grabbed the envelope of tickets, and then the scarred man shoved his holdall bag at him. Just like that, he was being herded out of the apartment room by the goons - Xiaodan in the lead. He was practically carried down the staircase by two of the men, their
grips rough around his biceps but also helping him stand up. Every step made his lower body ache, his muscles clenching around the alien parcel and trying their goddamn hardest to force it out of his body again.

Taehyung was escorted around the apartment block to a car. One of the goons climbed into the backseat, and another one shoved him inside by pushing down on his head. He had to squat down to get into the car, the movement making him cry out in pain and land on the seat in a weak mess. He heard the sound of the door being slammed shut a moment later, followed by the loud rumble of the engine as the vehicle pulled away from the curb.

Taehyung felt like his insides were on fire. It was as if someone had plunged a knife right into his gut, for everything below his ribs was sheer agony. From the horrible heat and constant stinging around his sphincter, to the ache in his belly - all that he could do was press his hand against his stomach to try and nurse the pain. His stomach felt hard against his fingers, likely because he was clenching his muscles so much as a result of the parcel.

When the car turned a corner, Taehyung shifted on the backseat to slump against the window. The sudden movement made him groan, his head pressed against the vibrating glass. He saw Xiaodan turning to look at him in the passenger-seat, but he said nothing to him. He didn’t even ask him if he was feeling alright.

“Christ,” Taehyung moaned under his breath, trying his very hardest to just control his spasming muscles to make the pain stop. “I feel like I’m gonna die, man…”

Several minutes later, the car slowed down a street away from the airport, coming to a stop right beside an alleyway that ran between two buildings. Just like that, the back door was pulled open, and Taehyung found himself being shoved right out of the vehicle by one of the goons.

As he stumbled forward, Taehyung struggled to stay on his feet. He dropped his bag in his bid to not fall, but he still ended up dropping to hit the pavement with a jarring thump, luckily landing on his front instead of his back. He was thankful of this fact, even when he skinned his poor palms on the gritty, stone flags, because at least he hadn’t banged his ass on the hard ground. The rough impact might have damaged the internal parcel, might have split the condom to flood his body with enough heroin to kill him within mere minutes.

“Good luck!” Xiaodan called through the open window, his words like a slap across the face.

Taehyung heard the sound of the wheels screeching as the car sped off, leaving him lying on the street in a goddamn mess. He could see that people along the sidewalk were staring at him: some
with genuine concern, and others eyeing him with knowing expressions that said that he knew exactly what kind of guy that he was.

It took Taehyung a tremendous amount of strength to get up off the ground, both physical and mental. He had to grind his teeth together from the effort, feeling something hot inside of him… something that he hoped wasn’t blood. He got to his feet, staggering forward a few steps to lean against a building wall for support.

“Fuck you,” Taehyung spat, reaching up to rub a hint of grit free from his cheek. He knew that it was pointless because the other men were long gone, but he had been unable to help himself.

Walking along the sidewalk, Taehyung found himself limping because he was unable to walk properly. Straightening up was too difficult for him, for he had to hunch to try and lessen the constant pressure in his gut. He knew that the limp was obvious, and that he needed to try and disguise it before he entered the airport. Otherwise, he was going to attract far too much attention from the airport security, and he might just find himself being dragged into a room to get searched.

But it was just too difficult.

By the time that he was stopping on the outskirts of the parking lot, Taehyung had broken out into a thick sweat, and he had to take a moment to catch his breath and calm his racing heartbeat down. He wiped the sweat free from his brow, seeing that his palm was slick from the substance. He had to wipe his palm on his jeans, feeling more sweat already starting to bead on his hairline.

Taehyung lingered around the parking lot for a few minutes, terrified that airport security would come out and arrest him because he was obviously a smuggler. He didn’t think that he could enter the building because he was so frightened, but he had no choice. He had to get the drugs out of Hong Kong because he had accepted the deal, and if he didn’t complete the deal…

14K would find him somehow, to exact revenge on him for fucking up the deal at the behest of Moon Tiger Mob. There was no way that he would be able to get off radar with the two gangs, not when he was in the possession of $118,000 of heroin.

If Taehyung tossed the drugs and ran back home to Korea, they would find him so easily, but there was nowhere else he could go. He was trapped, no matter what.

Taehyung stuck his hand into his jeans pocket, pulling free his fake passport and wallet. He opened
the wallet up so that he could look at the photograph that was stashed inside it.

“If I don’t make it… I love you, momma, and I’m sorry,” Taehyung whispered, as he stroked his thumb over the clear plastic that was covering the photograph. “I’m sorry for bein’ a bad son. I’m sorry for hurtin’ you.”

Taehyung eyed the photograph for a few more seconds, and then he shoved his wallet back into his jeans pocket. His real passport was shoved down there too, the fake passport tightly clutched in his left hand along with the envelope of plane tickets.

Above the airport, Taehyung watched an aeroplane taking to the sky to soar over the short blocks of buildings. It left twin trails in its wake, the deafening roar of its engine reverberating across the parking lot.

When he opened the envelope, Taehyung pulled the two tickets free to eye them both. There was a ticket made out to Steven, Yang - Kai Tak Airport to San Francisco International Airport, and one to Taehyung, Kim - Kai Tak Airport to Gimpo Airport. He looked between the two of them for a few seconds, and then he moved to place Steven’s ticket inside of the fake passport. He was going to need to dispose of the other ticket, it would serve him no use now.

Taehyung gave the fake passport a final check, eyeing the fresh photograph and the lines of text beside it. After taking a deep breath, he started crossing the parking lot to enter the airport at a slow limp.

There was no turning back now.

26th October, 1984, 7:57pm: San Francisco International Airport, San Francisco, United States of America

As he guided the car into the parking lot, Namjoon scanned the rows of vehicles in the hopes of spotting a free space.
Just like always, the long-term parking spots were filled with a great assortment of vehicles. They could have been there for days now, possibly even weeks, and there was no way of knowing unless he went over to check the tickets shoved under the windscreen wipers. There were always several empty spots in long-term parking, which was annoying as hell because it was much more difficult finding a spot in short-term parking.

A quick glance over at the dashboard clock showed him that it was drawing close to 8pm, which was right on time. The mule should have landed around 7:30pm, supposing that the flight had been on time and there had been no delays. That meant that he would be leaving the airport soon enough, having been fully processed after the long flight.

“Come on, man,” Namjoon muttered under his breath, twisting the wheel hand over hand as the car slowly crawled through the parking lot. “Spot, spot, spot…where’s a goddamn spot?”

Across the parking lot, Namjoon finally spotted a free space that he could park in, and so he let his breath out in a triumphant cry. He even let go of the steering-wheel so that he could pump his fist, so glad to have found a free space this close to the front of the lot.

Namjoon killed the car in the open spot, leaving the keys in the ignition for convenience. He shifted to sit back in his seat with a sigh, folding his arm on the window rest to try and get comfortable. Hopefully, he was only going to have to wait for a small amount of time, and not be left hanging.

As he turned the headlights off, Namjoon saw the way that the walkway flood lights reflected off the puddles all across the parking lot. The scent of rain was still hanging heavy in the air, but it seemed that there was going to be a temporary break between showers, much like there had been sporadic bursts of rain all day long.

Over the following minutes, Namjoon saw many people exiting the airport: locals and tourists alike. Some were clearly businessmen and women, who were smartly dressed even after a potentially long flight and had briefcases or small travel bags in hand. Others were obviously tourists, as they had their cameras out ready to snap photographs despite only just having left the airport - weighed down by their considerably larger bags of luggage and trolleys.

For some reason, the sight of tourists always made Namjoon let out a little chuckle. It was probably because he found their enthusiasm nice; liked seeing their wide eyes and hearing them talking amongst each other about old buildings as they all huddled around out on the sidewalks.
Namjoon turned his head to watch a large group of tourists crossing the airport walkway, presumably heading in the direction of a travel bus that would escort them to a hotel. They were all Asian, which might have meant that they had just gotten off the exact same flight as his mule had. Most of them were young, looked to be couples that had decided to jet off across the world together for a presumably romantic adventure. But there were some older people too, particularly grandmothers with permed hair and loose, garishly patterned pants that looked large enough to smuggle another person inside.

“Pft, those are some crazy pants,” he said to himself, letting out another dry chuckle as he turned his attention back to the front window.

That was when Namjoon noticed a guy hanging around the entrance of the airport -who seemed to be disoriented in some way. He was just standing there, under the floodlights that illuminated the front of the parking lot; with his bag of luggage dangling from his fist and his head held low to obscure his face.

Namjoon felt his attention being completely arrested by him, so much so that he didn’t even glance at the next wave of people that exited the airport.

Was the guy half-asleep after a dreadfully long flight? If he had just gotten off a plane from somewhere in Asia like the rest of the tourists, it would really be no wonder that he was exhausted.

Maybe, he had downed a couple of drinks on the plane that he was now regretting? The thought made Namjoon snort to himself in amusement, but he found his smile slowly disappearing off his face as he watched the other man not budging from his spot.

Was there something…wrong with him?

Namjoon didn’t really know why he moved to hit the car horn, just that it seemed like the right thing to do. As he applied pressure to give a quick and short burst of the horn, the shockingly loud sound cut through the air. He saw the other man looking up sharply at the beep, along with a great many other people out on the walkway.

After a few seconds, the guy shifted, seemingly coming back around to reality. Then he started heading straight for his car, walking at a slow speed with a pronounced limp that made Namjoon slightly furrow his eyebrows. Yes, it appeared that there was something wrong with him, and there was something obviously wrong with the entire situation.
In the bright light from the floodlights, Namjoon could see that the man was wearing a white tee-shirt and blue jeans - the look instantly reminding him of Jimin in a way. Except, his jeans were loose and boot-cut, rather than tight, and he was wearing a pair of sandals instead of sneakers. His hair was pretty long, some of it dragged back off his brow into a small ponytail that stuck up from the crown of his head. This fully revealed his face, save for some strands that had fallen free to hang in his eyes.

Namjoon recalled that the mule he had prepped with cocaine earlier in the week had had long hair. The mule that he seemed to be having difficulty remembering the name of right now. He had had long hair...but he didn’t remember him being this tall or broad. He recalled that he had been fresh out of high school: short, nondescript face, nothing special.

When the guy reached him, he made no move to hunker down and speak to him through the open window. No, he just limped his way over to the front of the car, leaning against the hood because he seemed to need extra support to stay on his feet.

“You, Namjoon?”

The man’s voice was deep and shockingly guttural, clashing against what he could see of his face. Just listening to him talking made Namjoon feel a sudden wash of confusion, as he didn’t sound like the kid that he had helped smuggle drugs into Korea - not even remotely. He had an accent, a strong accent that revealed he wasn’t American born.

“Yeah, I’m Namjoon,” he replied, before letting out an uncertain laugh. “Are you, uh, are you OK, man? You look a little…”

As he moved to drag the back door open, Namjoon turned to track his movement in complete confusion. He wasn’t looking at that rookie kid that he had prepped with drugs just a few days ago, but he still felt like he recognised this handsome stranger, even when they had never met before. There was just something vaguely familiar about him that he couldn’t seem to figure out right now.

With a great amount of effort, the other man was able to get into the backseat of his car. He seemed to be having difficulty squatting down to climb inside, and Namjoon saw him gritting his teeth with a pained grimace as he finally dragged himself across the seat and slammed the door shut. He sagged back with a deep groan, closing his eyes as he breathed hard and fast.

Namjoon saw that there was sweat all over his face, locks of hair plastered across his brow in the slick substance. The scent of it came off him in waves, along with something faint and…dry.
“What’re you doing in my car, brother?” Namjoon asked, as he shifted in his seat to look back at him.

“Drugs,” he replied in that same guttural voice, and there seemed to be a hint of breathlessness to it; a hard pant.

Namjoon thought this over for a moment before turning back to the wheel, realising that that was the best answer he was going to get.

Right now, it seemed like a much better idea to get the hell out of the airport parking lot. They could talk about what was going on during the drive across the city, as it was going to take some time. Maybe then, Namjoon would find out who the hell this random stranger sitting in the backseat of his car was, what had happened to the mule, and how exactly he knew his name.

Namjoon twisted the keys once more, disengaging the handbrake so that he could reverse his car out of the spot. He spared a quick glance at the entrance of the airport as he did so, seeing more people milling out of the massive automatic doors. He had just gotten the car onto the main road when he heard sudden movement coming from the backseat, and he saw that the other man was in the act of struggling out of his jeans.

“What’re you doing?” he asked in shock.

Unsurprisingly, the other man didn’t reply to this question. Rather, he just wrenched his jeans down to his ankles and flopped back on the seats so that he could resume undressing. When he grabbed hold of his boxer briefs, he realised what he was trying to do.

“You can’t do that, man,” Namjoon remarked in surprise, shifting in his seat as he glanced up at the rear-view mirror. “Wait, we’re heading to a place, OK? When we’re at the place, you can get the parcel out. I know that it hurts, that it feels bad, but you can’t—”

In the reflection in the rear-view mirror, Namjoon saw that the stranger’s underwear was filled with tissues, packed full of it and completely soaked through with fresh blood.

“Jesus Christ, man!” he cried out, almost stopping the car in the middle of the road in his total shock. “What happened to you?!”
“Out, out…get out me,” he panted, rolling his head back on the leather seat.

Namjoon could see that the tissues had absorbed a great amount of blood, but they were wet rather than dry. That was a sign that the other man was still bleeding right now, bleeding extensively from what he could tell. He watched him reaching down between his spread thighs with his fumbling fingers, seemingly trying to find the end of the condom parcel so that he could remove it. But he pulled his hand away a mere moment later with a whine, his fingers now slick with blood.

“Hang on,” Namjoon said in Korean, forcing himself to focus on the road in front of them before he ended up crashing. “I’m taking you someplace safe, OK? I’m gonna help you, so, just hang on, brother.”

Namjoon didn’t stop once on the drive back to his home, save for stalling at red lights. He didn’t go to the usual block across Haight-Ashbury to get the drugs ready for Seokjin, as he thought that he needed to get the other man somewhere safe and secure right now. He was in a bad way, a very bad way. He was hurt, bleeding out all over the goddamn backseat, and he was probably in shock of some kind as a result of the pain.

The scent of blood coming from the backseat was so strong and foul that Namjoon struggled to not gag with every inhale. The open window did little to expel it, for the dry and metallic stench just hung heavy in the air. Considering how badly that the other man was bleeding, it was no wonder why.

Namjoon spared quick glances up at the rear-view mirror to check up on him during the drive, seeing that his tanned thighs were covered in wet smears, much like his fingers were; his fingers which were clutching at the ends of his tee-shirt to leave blood all over the white cotton. He was breathing hard and fast, and sweating profusely, but he looked like he was powering through the pain, rather than succumbing to it.

The drive to get back to Haight-Ashbury had never felt so long before, not even when Jimin had been returning from Hong Kong and he had been sick and tired. Even at his worst, Jimin had never been through something like this, and so Namjoon has no idea what he was supposed to do.

Save for getting the parcel out of his body, and trying to stem the bleeding, he didn’t know what he could do. This seemed like something that might just require treatment at a hospital, which meant that he might just find himself stuck in The San Francisco General Hospital in the middle of the night - trying his very best to lie to the nurses about why this young man was bleeding out of his goddamn ass so that he could get free treatment.
Namjoon didn’t like the thought of that…

Upon reaching his home and killing the car on the curb, Namjoon jumped out and went around to pop the backdoor open. The other man was still sprawled on the backseat, his jeans and underwear puddled around his thighs, and his travel bag at his feet.

Namjoon had to get him to hold his pants up, just to cover his nudity whilst he helped him cross the curb and get up the front steps. There might not be anyone out on the streets right now, but he didn’t want someone rolling down the road in their car catching sight of him dragging a half-naked, bleeding man into his home.

Getting him up the steps was incredibly difficult with his obvious injuries. Namjoon practically had to carry the other man because he couldn’t walk properly, hearing him whining in pain from every accidental jostle and feeling his stomach tightening into a knot below his ribs. There was a bitter taste on his tongue that he hated, the kind of bitterness that often preceded vomit.

Namjoon escorted him down the hallway and into the living-room, wanting to get him inside so that he could lie down on the sofa.

Yet, Namjoon had only just dragged the other man through the doorway when his knees gave in, his sudden weight bearing down on him until he found himself leaning forward; his own knees struggling to hold them both upright. He ended up having to lower him down onto the floor, hearing him letting out another pained groan as he slumped down on the wooden flooring.

“Whoa, whoa, OK,” Namjoon said, as he quickly moved to grab a cushion from the sofa. “Here, let me put this right here.”

Namjoon carefully lifted up the other man’s head so that he could slip the cushion underneath for him. It wasn’t exactly ideal that he lie on the cold and hard floor like this, but he didn’t want to disturb him that little bit more to get him up onto the sofa. He lowered his head down on the cushion for him, seeing the way that his thick, sweat-clumped hair fanned out across the cotton.

The other man gave him a grateful look, struggling to keep his eyelids open because he looked to be exhausted.

That was when it finally hit Namjoon who he was looking at right now. He was looking at Jimin’s old partner, the young man that he had seen on several Polaroid photographs hanging around
Namjoon was looking at Taehyung.

There was no way of mistaking his face now that he had finally figured it out, for it seemed so obvious now. The tanned skin and large, deer eyes, the long and unkempt hair that somehow looked cool and attractive on him, whereas it would look lazy and stupid should he grow his hair that long. Yes, he was most certainly looking at Taehyung, and so that meant one thing to Namjoon…

Something must have went wrong with the deal in Hong Kong.

A quick glance down at Taehyung’s lower body showed Namjoon that his jeans were loosely slung around his hips; the zipper undone to show the wrinkled mess of his boxer briefs. Blood was on both the waistband of his jeans and the ends of his tee-shirt, and his fingers still had some tacky remains on them, particularly around his nails and the backs of his knuckles.

Namjoon realised that he was going to have to help the other man get the internal parcel out of his body, the thought of which made him gulp hard. His mouth felt so incredibly dry that he was barely able to swallow, and it felt like there was a lump trapped right around his Adam’s Apple.

“Goddamn,” Namjoon muttered under his breath in English, reaching up to give the back of his neck a quick rub. Then he seized hold of Taehyung’s jeans for him, so that he could drag them down with his underwear. “Let’s get that thing out of you, yeah?”

Taehyung didn’t reply to this, rather he just let out a noise that sounded relieved as he slowly lifted his hips up for him. This allowed Namjoon to drag his jeans and briefs down to his ankles, and then completely free. In the act of doing so, he knocked his sandals free too, and they dropped to land on the flooring with a soft thump.

“Bring your knees up, closer to your chest,” Namjoon requested, giving Taehyung’s knee a soft nudge as he did so. “That position will help me get it out, it should make it a lot easier.”

Though it clearly hurt him to move, Taehyung managed to draw his legs up for him like he had requested. The act of doing so revealed to Namjoon his inner thighs, buttocks and entrance, a horrendous sight that he was likely never going to forget. The blood was just too much, as were the dark bruises that had already started developing all over his buttocks.
Taehyung wasn’t even holding the parcel inside of himself fully, for Namjoon could see why he was in so much pain. The act of exiting the plane and airport after so long spent stationary must have caused his muscles to start shifting the parcel around, for it had actually started forcing its way out of his body. His entrance was stretched taut around the thick, hard object, which had caused tearing to his delicate skin.

Namjoon wanted to look away, but he was physically incapable of doing so. He felt cruel for staring at the other man’s injuries when he should be helping him, but he was shocked to the point of paralysis.

“Please, get it outta me, man!” Taehyung groaned, folding his arm over his face so that he could cover his eyes. His voice jolted him back to reality, breaking his momentary paralysis. “I don’t care ‘bout how much it fuckin’ hurts, I just want it outta me!”

“Just take deep breaths,” Namjoon instructed, as he got hold of the slight, knotted end of the condom. “I’m gonna get it out as fast as I can, brother.”

Although Namjoon had to mostly pull the parcel free, he was certain that Taehyung also aided him by way of contracting and relaxing his muscles - slowly forcing the object out of himself at long last. He couldn’t imagine how much that it must have hurt, but Taehyung hardly made a sound at this point beyond deep, guttural grunts.

The condom parcel finally came free with the usual liquid squelch, but this time, it wasn’t lube that caused the sound. No, Namjoon could see that it was a mixture of lube and blood, which weakly escaped with the parcel to run down his thighs to start pooling onto the flooring. The same substance was all over the parcel too, and Namjoon felt the hot liquid smearing all over his hands.

“Oh god,” Taehyung gasped, pulling his arm away so that he could wipe at his sweaty face.

Namjoon dropped the parcel onto the floor, eyeing his palms for a few seconds in dumb shock. Then he got to his feet to race into the kitchen, his body moving on complete instinct. He tripped over Taehyung’s travel bag and almost landed straight on his face, staggering to slam into the wall beside the door instead. He managed to not touch the walls with his bloody hands, which would have left stains in the paper that would never come free.

Namjoon raced into the kitchen, going over to the counter so that he could snatch up a roll of paper towels, and then he went back into the living-room to tend to Taehyung. He felt so hopeless right now; stumbling around like a fool trying to help, but not knowing what he was supposed to do.
After shoving a wad of paper towels underneath him to try and soak up the blood, Namjoon carefully removed the two other baggies from his inner thighs for him. He knew that it wasn’t the most urgent thing, but Taehyung might want to be free from the parcels at long last after what had happened to him. He pulled at the tape hard and fast, knowing that it was best to get it free and not prolong the discomfort.

Taehyung didn’t react much more than to wince at the burn from the tape, his eyes closed and his forearm resting on his brow. He had stopped groaning for now, but he was most certainly still hurting from his grievous injuries.

As soon as the baggies were free, Namjoon collected them together in a wad of paper towels. His hands were now mostly free from blood, but smears of it still lingered on the backs of his knuckles that he was going to have to wash free.

“I need to make an important call,” Namjoon explained, as he brushed locks of Taehyung’s sweaty hair back out of his eyes for him. “I need to inform my supplier about what happened, OK? Just… uh, just stay here.”

Namjoon was more than aware of how stupid that suggestion had been, but he was so caught up in his panicked state right now that he couldn’t help himself. He got to his feet to go back into the kitchen, placing the parcels down on the sideboard to turn on the tap.

After cleaning the condom parcel free from blood, Namjoon hastily washed his hands under the scorching hot stream. The water would wash away the blood, but he knew that the scent would linger long after - from threads trapped underneath his fingernails, or embedded in the creases of his palms.

Whilst he dried his hands with the dish towel, Namjoon found himself thinking about how he had ended up in this situation: one missing mule, a seriously injured stranger lying on the floor of his home, and half a key of heroin currently residing on the kitchen sideboard. This wasn’t supposed to have happened. This was supposed to be routine - collect the mule and goods, pass the goods along to Seokjin, and job well done.

This was so far from ‘well done’ it was almost laughable, but Namjoon didn’t feel like laughing right now.

“Shit, OK…OK, I can do this,” Namjoon mumbled to himself, turning his head to glance through
the kitchen doorway.

Taehyung was lying on the living-room floor, unmoving save for his rising and falling chest. He had made no move to dress himself again, for he seemed too weak and hurt to do so.

Namjoon looked down at the dish towel, seeing reddish-tinged wet patches on the white cotton. He tossed it aside as he moved to leave the kitchen, hearing it landing somewhere behind him with a soft rustling sound. He crossed the hallway to go back into the living-room and over to the telephone.

Taehyung opened his eyes at the sound of his footsteps, glancing up to watch him making the phone call.

Namjoon hastily dialled Seokjin’s car phone number, knowing that it would be the best choice at this hour. Whilst he listened to the droning dialling tone, he quickly glanced between the device and Taehyung in turn. It took several, painfully long seconds, but then the sound of static crackling down the line signalled that his supplier had picked up.

“Yes, Kim?” Seokjin said as a greeting, no doubt seeing his name as the caller I.D. on the device.

“Hello, Kim, I’m sorry for phoning you like this, but I need to talk to you about the deal tonight. There’s a problem.”

“Is there a problem with the goods? Did the mule not show, did he run off with them?”

“No, I’ve got the goods, Kim. It’s the mule that’s the problem. I know that this sounds crazy, but believe me when I tell you that this really happened. The mule that I sent to Korea? That kid called Steven? He didn’t bring the goods from Hong Kong with him tonight. His partner from Korea did so instead. I’m not sure why, I mean, something must’ve happened to our mule over in Hong Kong that meant he couldn’t bring the goods to us. But the guy that did? Oh, man, he’s hurt real bad. I’d to bring him to my home instead of the apartment block, he needed urgent medical care.”

Seokjin was silent on the other end of the line, not even making a slight sound as he breathed. The only sound that Namjoon could hear was the static from his rumbling car engine, and the heavy silence made him feel uncomfortable.

“Like I said, I’ve got the goods, I’m just not in the location for you to collect them,” Namjoon
continued, just to break the tense silence on the line. “If you need me to head over to the block, I can do it right away. I might be later than usual, but I can still make it there tonight, if you need the goods.”

“I’ll come to retrieve the goods from your home,” Seokjin said after a moment of thought, and Namjoon tried to not sigh in relief. “I’ll require information about the deal from him, so, see to it that he’s capable of speaking to me.”

“I’ll be sure to do so, and once more, I’m sorry about the inconvenience, Kim.”

After dropping the receiver back into the cradle, Namjoon stared at the telephone for a few seconds as he processed what had just happened.

Seokjin was coming to talk to Taehyung about what had went wrong with the deal, whilst also collecting the heroin. At least that meant neither of them needed to worry about raising any red flags in regards to the deal, as that was something that Namjoon would very much like to avoid. In the time that it took his supplier to arrive, he should see to Taehyung: clean him up, tend to his injuries in whatever way he could, and give him something strong to help lessen his suffering.

After a quick search, Namjoon located an unused washcloth in the bathroom, which he liberally soaked with hot water before softly wringing most of the liquid free. That solved one of the problems to a degree, and the sealed packet of Codeine in the medicine cabinet above the sink solved another.

Before going back to check on Taehyung, Namjoon went into the kitchen to grab some things. He found a tray shoved in a cupboard, which he placed the washcloth and packet of painkillers onto, along with a glass of water and a bowl of leftovers that he had stored in the fridge: the chicken pasta salad that Jimin liked so much. Satisfied that he had everything he needed, Namjoon grabbed the tray and he carefully carried it into the living-room.

“Here,” Namjoon said, as he hunkered down beside him to place the tray down on the floor. He grabbed the packet of painkillers, opening it up to pop two white, uncoated tablets free. “Codeine, to help with the pain. You should eat that too. It can cause crazy nausea on an empty stomach, and the last thing you need right now is goddamn nausea.”

Taehyung took the pills from his palm and he knocked them back, dry-swallowing them even when he had a glass of water at hand. He ran his tongue around his mouth, grimacing from the powdery, bitter taste, and then he collected the glass from the tray. He had to roll mostly onto his side to be able to drink the water, just to save himself from spilling the contents all over his face.
Taehyung drained the water in several deep gulps, lowering the glass with pleased sigh. A bead ran down his chin to drip down onto the tray, and so he roughly wiped his chin dry with the heel of his hand. After placing the empty glass aside, he fell upon the serving of cold, chicken pasta salad with a ravenous hunger, devouring it as fast as he could.

Namjoon couldn’t blame him, he was more than used to watching Jimin gorging himself after returning back home from his muling trips. The other man had been stuck on a plane for twelve straight hours, and he had spent almost two more hours being processed for the flight. It was no wonder that he was so hungry right now, and Namjoon found himself wishing that he had given him something hot and more filling than leftovers.

Rather than disturb him during his rushed meal, Namjoon waited until Taehyung had finished eating before he attempted to clean him up. It felt like the right thing to do, for the act seemed invasive. He didn’t think that Taehyung had the strength to be able to move and clean his own body, and so, he felt like he had to do so on his behalf.

It didn’t take Taehyung long at all to devour the serving of food because he was so hungry. He didn’t even leave a single scrap behind, for he made sure to finish every single bite.

As soon as he had placed the bowl down on the tray and shifted to lie back down, Namjoon grabbed the damp washcloth. When he started rubbing it against his upper thigh to try and nudge some tacky, old blood free, Taehyung lifted his head up off the cushion to look at him in surprise. But upon realising what he was doing, he dropped his head again without saying a word.

“My supplier’s coming, he wants to talk to you about what happened in Hong Kong,” Namjoon explained, as he gingerly wiped at his bloody skin for him. “I can only imagine something bad must’ve happened to you and your partner, man.”

“Yeah, it all went to fuckin’ hell,” Taehyung muttered, as he roughly rubbed at his swollen eyelids. “I dunno what he’s hopin’ hear, but I got the drugs here, and that’s all that matters; right?”

“To a businessman like him, yeah. But, if you’re asking me, I think you making it over here in one piece and being arrested or not dying…now, that’s what matters the most,” Namjoon replied, quickly folding the bloody washcloth to resume wiping at his thighs for him. “The drugs mean little to me.”

Taehyung had to cup his cock and testicles in hand to hold them aside for him, so that Namjoon could clean up the last of the blood still stuck to his skin. It seemed pointless trying to clean it all
away when he was still bleeding, but he couldn’t just leave the young man like this. At least when he was clean, he might feel a little better.

Namjoon cleaned away the blood to the best of his ability, forcing himself to ignore the fact that the wad of paper towels was already soaked through. The sight of the blood, so red against the absorbent, white material, worried him greatly.

“OK, that’s better,” Namjoon remarked, as he got to his feet again. “I’m gonna go get you a blanket. You must be cold.”

“Phone?” Taehyung suddenly asked in English, lifting a hand to his ear to mime the act of using a telephone.

“You need to make a call?” Namjoon replied in Korean, grabbing the telephone from the table so that he could carry it over to him and place it down on the floor. “Use it, brother. I don’t care about the charges. Phone whoever you need to, OK? For Seoul, dial 011-82-1, and then the number you’re calling.”

“Thanks, my man,” Taehyung said once more in pretty decent English, shooting him a grateful smile as he placed the telephone down beside him.

Namjoon grabbed the empty glass from the tray and then he went back into the kitchen, tossing the soiled washcloth into the sink. For some reason, he recalled his mother telling him that cold, salty water was best for removing blood stains from fabric. She had meant from the knees of jeans after a stumble, or socks that might get stained from blisters…but the advice was still sound. He filled up the sink with cold water and added a liberal dash of salt, just for the hell of it.

After refilling the glass with more water, Namjoon exited the kitchen to go upstairs. He caught sight of Taehyung through the open doorway as he did so, the other man lying on his side away from him to use the phone. He wasn’t speaking, which was a sign that he must be waiting for the international call to be put through.

Namjoon hastily went up the stairs, searching through a tiny linen closet to try and locate a blanket of any kind. He knew there was one in the house somewhere, for Jimin had brought it back covered in sand not too long ago. After some rummaging, he finally pulled it free with a triumphant cry, folding it across his forearm as to not trip on the long lengths whilst he went down the stairs again. He was about to go back into the living-room when he heard Taehyung speaking, and so he hesitated in the hallway for a moment.
“Hey, hey, Eunhyung, it’s me, Jeongmin,” Taehyung said down the line. “Listen, I know this is fuckin’ crazy, but I’m in America right now, and- yeah, fuckin’ America! I know, man, I know! But that ain’t what I’m callin’ you for! Listen, I need you to carry on checkin’ on Cheonsa for me. I ain’t gonna be back for another day or two, and she’s gonna die of thirst if you don’t do it for me.”

Namjoon could understand a lot of what he was saying, but he had a bad habit of slurring his words because of his dialect. That, and his constant habit of using slang. He quickly figured out that he was talking to a friend, or an acquaintance of some kind, and that he was asking them to care for his dog for him.

Namjoon had also heard him introducing himself as Jeongmin, which made him furrow his brow in confusion. He hadn’t expected that, but he guessed that there must have been a reason for him to have done such a thing.

“Seriously, man, I owe you, big time,” Taehyung said, the relief palpable in his voice. “Yeah, just for a couple more days - I’ll call you up the second I’m back in Seoul, man. Thank you.”

As soon as Taehyung had ended the call, Namjoon went back into the living-room, placing the refilled glass down onto the tray for him. Then he unfolded the blanket to toss it over him, covering his nudity and giving him added warmth and comfort.

“Thanks,” Taehyung said in a soft voice, fixing the blanket in place. “This’ some crazy shit, Namjoon, like, the craziest shit I can imagine. I dunno what I’d do if somethin’ like this happened to me and I were in your shoes, so, thanks.”

“You don’t need to thank me, brother,” Namjoon pointed out, as he moved to sit down on the floor by his feet. He couldn’t help but notice his jeans lying in a puddle within reach, and he moved to pull them closer and quickly check his pockets.

Namjoon pulled the passports free, eyeing them in confusion for a few seconds before he realised why there were two. One was Taehyung’s real passport, and the other must have been a fake - to match the mule’s name on the plane ticket. He flipped one of them open to see ‘Steven Yang’, which was when he finally remembered the mule’s name.

Ah, yes, Steven - the kid that had never smuggled drugs before. He had been a user from what Namjoon had been able to discern, and he wouldn’t have selected him himself based on that assumption. But he hadn’t really had a choice, another dealer had shoved him his way, and he had
just accepted the deal to avoid causing any strife. Now, he realised that he had done wrong, that he might just have made a deadly mistake.

Namjoon studied the photograph of Taehyung for a moment, finding that he couldn’t spot anything about the passport that looked wrong. Hell, even the photograph looked legit, and he found himself wondering how the fake one had been created.

Sure, an airport agent was much better trained at spotting falsified documents. But on a busy evening, moving hundreds of people in and out of the country at a constant, fast speed? It made sense that they too hadn’t noticed the fact that it was fake upon a quick study.

Namjoon closed the first passport, placing it aside so that he could open the second passport. Jang Jeongmin - the name on this document matched the one that Taehyung had given his friend during his phone call. But it still didn’t seem to be a real passport to him, just like the falsified version of Steven’s passport that he had in his possession. Not when he knew for a fact that the younger man was Taehyung Kim - Jimin’s smuggling partner and close friend.

“Jang Jeongmin?” Namjoon remarked, as he studied the photograph. “This is your real passport?”

Taehyung hummed in agreement at this, moving ever so slightly so that he could angle his head to look at him.

“But you’re Taehyung, right?” Namjoon asked, as he closed the passport over to place it down onto the flooring.

Taehyung’s expression shifted at this, his eyes growing rounded and his lips turning slack with something that looked like shock.

“I recognise your voice, and your face,” Namjoon quickly explained. “Jimmy, he’s got some Polaroids of the two of you from Seoul, and Kowloon Walled City. He showed me them one time, and I remember your face. You’ve got a hell of a face - if you don’t mind me saying.”

Taehyung snorted at this, finding it amusing even in his pained state.

“Yeah, I figured it out before, it just didn’t seem like the right time to mention it. But you’re Taehyung, and so that must also be a fake passport.”
“Fake identity,” Taehyung corrected, as he gave his eyes another rough rub. “I got into some trouble back in Korea - down in Daegu, where I come from. Moon Tiger Mob offered me a whole new identity in return for work, so, I took it; had to, ‘cos otherwise, I was goin’ to jail.”

Namjoon thought this over for a moment, finding himself wondering what exactly the other man could have done to have ended up with an arrest warrant. Knowing the trouble in Korea with the government right now, it might not even be something bad. Jimin _had_ told him that Taehyung was a student protester, and so, that was likely the reason.

“You call Jiminnie, ‘Jimmy’?” Taehyung suddenly asked, struggling to keep a smile off his face.

“Yeah, the nickname seemed to fit him pretty well. Jimmy, it’s cute, a little snappy - just like him,” Namjoon explained, which made Taehyung let out laugh. It was a dopey chuckle of a laugh that lit up his face for a second or two before his aching stomach muscles made him grimace.

A curt series of knocks cut through the air, catching Namjoon by surprise. He turned to look at the living-room doorway for a few seconds, quickly figuring out that it must have been Seokjin. He must have been in the neighbourhood when he had phoned him, which would explain how he had gotten here so fast.

“That’s my supplier,” Namjoon told Taehyung, as he got to his feet to answer the front door.

As always, Seokjin looked incredibly neat, even at this late evening hour. Barely a hair was out of place, neatly swept back off his brow to reveal his striking features and strong eyebrows. He was wearing a light blue shirt and black trousers, a black car coat currently slung over his forearm. A leather briefcase was in his free hand, which was required for retrieving the goods.

After stepping inside, Seokjin moved to shut the door behind him, the lock loudly clicking in the silence of the house. He made no move to remove his shoes, his expensive-looking, brown loafers, which was possibly a sign that he wasn’t planning on staying for long.

“Good evening, Kim,” Namjoon greeted, holding his hand out to him in offering of a handshake. “I’m sorry that you had to come all of the way out here tonight.”

“Did you touch him, clean up blood - that sort of thing?”
“Uh, yeah,” he replied with a slow nod. “I did what I could to help him.”

Seokjin glanced at his palm for a few seconds, and then he moved to pass him and go down the hallway.

Namjoon was left staring at the spot that he had been occupying, his hand still extended for a handshake. Then he turned on his heel to follow after the other man, entering the living-room once more.

Clearly, Seokjin didn’t want to shake his hand because he had had blood on it - public enemy number one these days, along with semen.

Namjoon hadn’t even thought about the risks when he had been helping Taehyung remove the parcel, or when he had cleaned him up, but it seemed a little late to worry about such things. The chances were that Taehyung didn’t even have AIDS, so there was nothing to worry about.

When Namjoon entered the living-room, he saw that Seokjin was standing to the side of the door. He was maintaining distance with Taehyung, much like he had done so with Jimin upon first meeting him.

“You’ll have to speak Korean,” Namjoon quickly explained. “His English isn’t very good, Kim.”

“I assumed as much,” Seokjin said, turning his full attention to Taehyung. “What’s your name? What exactly is your…profession within Moon Tiger Mob?”

“Jang Jeongmin,” Taehyung replied, shifting his weight up onto his elbows so that he could respectfully look up at him. He must have realised that Seokjin was someone of great importance, and that meant being respectful at all times. “I work in Seoul, smugglin’ cocaine into a military base - Camp Kitty Hawk. I also assist mules in smugglin’ heroin from Hong Kong to America.”

“Yet, you’re here in America as a mule yourself. What happened in Hong Kong, Jang? Something big must’ve happened for you to end up all of the way here. What happened to our mule; Steven, was it?”
“Steven Yang,” Namjoon said with a soft nod.

“What happened to Yang Steven, hmm?” Seokjin repeated, cocking his head to the side. Not a lock of hair slipped free from the movement.

“He’s dead,” Taehyung replied without missing a beat, his expression surprisingly blank of emotion.

“He’s dead?”

At this, Seokjin turned to look back at him; his expression that of total surprise. It was obvious in the way that his large eyes had widened, and the light creases on his forehead from his raised eyebrows.

Namjoon could only shrug at the other man, silently telling him that he didn’t have a clue what was going on right now either. He hadn’t known that Steven was dead, he was just as shocked as he was finding out this fact.

“I think he’s dead,” Taehyung explained, struggling to keep his head up to hold Seokjin’s gaze. “When we were in Kowloon, right ‘fore the flight, he refused to collect the goods with me. When I came back to our room, he was in the bathroom. He’d overdosed on drugs, and he was just bleedin’ and convulsin’ on the floor, man.”

Namjoon had to look away from him at this, finding it hard to look at the other man. His recollection was just too vivid, too raw for him to handle.

Taehyung looked to be in far too much pain to be having this discussion right now. He needed rest, he needed some peace and quiet to help him deal with what had happened to him.

But right now, there were questions that needed answers, and Seokjin wasn’t going to stop until he knew everything. He needed all of the facts to present to Yoongi at some point, as the other man was no doubt going to be told about what had happened tonight.

“I’d accepted the deal already, the transaction had been processed. I’d to get the drugs onto the plane somehow, so, I’d to smuggle ‘em myself. I dunno what happened to Steven, if he's dead or alive. I wouldn’t hold out any hope for him…”
Seokjin thought this over for a moment, his face completely devoid of emotion. He didn’t look at all fazed by the fact that one of their mules was more than likely dead halfway across the globe; and why should he be? After all, he was probably used to hearing such things by now, as dead mules and arrest warrants were nothing new to international suppliers.

“Tell me what happened that night, Jang. From the retrieval of the goods, to the boarding of the flight. I’d like to have an exact account of what happened.”

“I was supposed to get the drugs from our dealer, around 8…8:15pm,” Taehyung slowly explained, closing his eyes to help him concentrate. “Steven refused to come with me, he was actin’ weird. He’d been actin’ weird all day long, but it was ‘round that time that he really started actin’ funny. So, I went to collect the drugs for us on my own. I got to the place, some acupuncture store across the block, and I met with the guy - Ju-Long. We agreed on the deal, 118,000 Hong Kong dollars, and I contacted Namjoon to finalise the transaction.”

“Yes, my man received the call around 5:20am,” Seokjin confirmed in a quiet voice.

“I, uh, I left the store and returned to the block, and that’s when I found Steven in the bathroom,” Taehyung continued, pausing for a moment to wet his dry, chapped lips. “Like I said, he’d taken drugs - heroin, from what I could tell. He must’ve bought the shit when he went out on his own, earlier in the day. I didn’t know he was takin’ drugs, I didn’t have a fuckin’ clue ‘til I found him in the bathroom, man. Then I…I’d to go and find a guy called Xiaodan, a couple of floors below. He told me to visit an opium den and talk to Madame Si, which was how I managed to get a fake passport. I boarded the flight…and here I am.”

Taehyung’s account seemed to satisfy Seokjin, as he had all the answers that he needed. He knew exactly what had happened to their missing mule, how the transaction had been processed, the amount of cash that had been exchanged for the goods, and how Taehyung had gotten the drugs into the country. Now all he needed was the goods, and all of the issues should have been addressed.

Seokjin turned on his heel to cross the living-room, nodding at Namjoon in a way that signalled that he wanted him to follow. So he did so, following Seokjin into the kitchen to retrieve the half a key of heroin.

“You’ve checked the merchandise, I assume?”

“Oh, uh, I actually haven’t. Not yet,” Namjoon replied, fighting the urge to grimace. “With everything that happened, it just slipped my mind. I’m sorry, I’ll check it right now, Kim.”
“Please do,” Seokjin said, placing the briefcase down on the counter.

Namjoon had to collect the electronic scales from his bedroom, so that he could weigh the goods. He quickly darted down the stairs again, setting the scales up and grabbing a knife from the drawer. He pierced the baggies on by one, filling up the plastic measuring bowl with the gritty, vaguely brown-tinged powder.

“It’s…half a kilo,” Namjoon said, casting a torn condom aside. “The weight’s exact, Kim.”

“Well, at least there’s no problems with the goods,” Seokjin remarked dryly, from his position along the counter. “I was expecting to find that we were missing a great deal of the brown, that Jang might just have offered some of the goods in exchange for assistance. But that’s not the case, he did well not to.”

Namjoon reached inside of the briefcase to collect the thick, plastic baggie, popping it open so that he could store the goods for Seokjin. It was going to feel so good finally getting the heroin far out of his sight, considering how much trouble that the half a key had caused for him.

“I’ll have to contact Prince Min about this issue,” Seokjin said, watching him transferring the heroin into the baggie with keen interest. “Something like this, he’ll want to know everything. At least this is a rather simple matter, unlike some complicated issues…”

“I was actually gonna call him, right after you left,” Namjoon replied, glancing up from measuring bowl to hold his gaze.

“You were going to call Prince Min? You have his private landline number?” he asked, something like surprise audible in his voice.

“One time, I’d to contact him over some trouble. Speedball, it was causing trouble out on the streets, it affected my dealers. So, I’d to reach out to him for assistance, and to give him information, of course. Prince Min likes to keep the line of contact open, just in case.”

Seokjin made a soft noise at this to show that he understood, shifting from foot to foot as he did so.
“Have there been any more signs of Sacramento Snow out on the streets?”

“No, not since the first incident,” Namjoon replied, quickly adding. “You must’ve heard about the trouble over in Antonio’s - with the guy going on a rampage.”

“I know of the incident, yes,” Seokjin confirmed with a soft nod.

“That’s the first, and the last instance of Sacramento Snow being out on my turf. Prince Min said that he’d get to the bottom of the trouble and sort it out, and he did so. He’s a man that keeps his promises.”

“I don’t see any signs of your partner, Namjoon. Park, was it? I expected to see him with Jang, all things considered.”

There was something about this sudden question that caught Namjoon by surprise, as for all of the questions that he had expected…he hadn’t thought that Seokjin would have asked him about Jimin. Jimin was far out of his mind right now, but the question had suddenly brought him right back to the surface - reminded him of the fact that he actually needed to call him about what had happened tonight.

“Oh, uh, Jimin could be anywhere at all right now. But he’s probably at a bar,” Namjoon explained, reaching up to give his neck a quick rub before tightly sealing the baggie. “He’s gonna go crazy when he sees Jang.”

“I can imagine he will.” Seokjin agreed with a soft nod. “A partnership that lasted as long as theirs had, I would think they might just have become mutually acquainted with one another.”

Namjoon didn’t really know why he was lying to Seokjin like this right now, only that it seemed like the right thing to do. He didn’t know if his supplier was aware of the fact that Yoongi was gay, that he was dating Jimin right now, and so, he didn’t want to accidentally expose such secrets to the other man.

Considering just how secretive that Yoongi seemed to be in regards to his sexuality, there was a very high chance that Seokjin was clueless.

Namjoon felt like he had a sacred duty to Yoongi to not expose his secret to Seokjin.
After ensuring that the baggie was sealed airtight, Namjoon moved to place it down in the briefcase. The metal clasps clicked as he fastened it.

Seokjin moved to retrieve the briefcase, exiting the kitchen without a word. The sound of the front door slamming shut echoed throughout the house a moment later.

Namjoon left the kitchen to hover in the living-room doorway, looking down at Taehyung. The other man was lying on the floor, his eyes closed in a way that might just mean that he had fallen asleep… or passed-out from the pain. The deal might just have been completed, but there was still one thing that had yet to be sorted out.

What was Namjoon supposed to do about Taehyung?

26th October, 1984, 8:03pm: Pacific Heights, San Francisco, United States of America

The scent that wafted through the house made Jimin pause in the act of turning the book page. He couldn’t help but turn his head to glance over at the staircase, almost as if he was tracking the aroma like a bloodhound. He detected the unmistakable smell of ginger, along with something that just had to be garlic - the mixture of scents highly intriguing to his nose.

From the kitchen down below, Jimin could hear the sound Yoongi moving around as he cooked, from the soft clattering and thump of a knife dancing across the chopping board, to the hiss of running water. His boyfriend was humming to himself as he worked, which was something that he rarely did when he was deeply focused on a task at hand.

Usually, Yoongi was completely silent when he was concentrating, and he had a habit of falling as still as possible. But tonight, he seemed to be in the mood for making some music, and Jimin found himself cocking his head as he tried to figure out the exact tune he was humming.

Yoongi was humming the saxophone intro from ‘Careless Whisper’ - Jimin was completely certain
The song been playing on Music Television earlier in the day whilst they had been in their bedroom, and the catchy tune must have gotten stuck in his head. It was really no wonder that it had, the song was that good.

“Oh my god, Yoongi, could you get any more gay?” Jimin said to himself, letting out a frothy burst of giggles as he turned back to the book he had in hand.

Yoongi had requested that he avoid entering the kitchen for a while whilst he prepared dinner for the two of them - the meal rather late because they had had a large brunch earlier in the day. As a result, Jimin had been left upstairs on his own, with very little to do to pass the time but to read, or stare out of the bay window and watch the sights down below until his boyfriend called him for dinner.

The problem was that Yoongi had so many books stored on the towering bookshelves in his study: some thin, some thick; the spines telling him very little about the contents within. Paperback, hardcover, fiction, non-fiction - it was far so hard distinguishing what was what from a single glance.

As a result, Jimin had struggled for quite some time. He had pulled copies free to eye the covers, finding that most of them were pretty plain and they didn’t interest him at all. He had opened some up to flick through the pages, words jumping out at him from massive paragraphs, but failing to catch his attention.

The one book that had finally caught Jimin’s eye over the rest had been an old, battered collection of Korean fairy tales and folklore that he had found nestled on one of the many shelves - Tae Hung Ha’s ‘Folk Tales of Old Korea’. The front cover of the worn-down paperback had caught his eye first, a charming coloured illustration of a man fully decked in hanbok riding a leaping horse over what looked to be the very top branches of a tree. When he had flicked through the pages, he had discovered that there were pages of illustrations.

Jimin had decided to give it a try, charmed by the simplicity and nostalgia that the stories might just bring him. He could just about remember the bedtime stories that his mum had told him when he had been a mere baby, and reading the book might just trigger the memories back to the surface - be they good, or bad.

The publication date inside of the book was 1962, which meant that Yoongi could have been a year or so old at the time. It had been a gift from his grandmother, for there was a beautifully written dedication on the front page just for him.
Dearest Yoongi,

May this book bring you untold hours of pleasure, and may it also enlighten your soul with its many virtues and wisdom. I pray that our lovely cub grows into a strong tiger one day.

With eternal love, Hyojoo

Jimin had read the dedication over several times, running his fingers over the aged, black ink as he had done so. He had been able to sense the powerful love radiating from the book from just those simple lines, both from Hyojoo to her beloved grandson, and Yoongi towards his caring grandmother.

The fact that Yoongi still owned the book after twenty-two years said a great deal about him. It was that powerful sentimentality of his, his want to keep hold of conversations and experiences that he treasured dearly from his loved ones.

In twenty-two years time, would Yoongi still possess the things that he had given him? Only time would tell, but Jimin wanted more than anything in the world for the answer to be: yes, Yoongi treasured every little thing, from the gifts to the future love letters and poems, to the memories and all of the emotions. He hoped that he would still be by his side in time too, but once more, such revelations were sadly unknown to him.

Just like he had been hoping, Jimin had delved deep into the countless stories, finding magic stored within the yellowed pages that had captivated him from just several pages in. He had barely even looked up from the book once, save for moving to grab his glass of water every now and again. But now, he found that the spell on his concentration had been broken in favour of his rumbling stomach.

Jimin placed the book aside on the study table, getting to his feet so that he could cross the floor and get to the staircase. He crept down several of the steps, coming to a stop to hover around the halfway point. He knew that his boyfriend wouldn’t nag at him from this distance - not like when he had tried to fully go down the stairs earlier to get a glass of water and had nearly ruined the surprise.

“Is dinner finished yet?” Jimin called, just for the sake of it. He had been trying his very hardest to be patient, but his rumbling stomach was starting to grow too strong to ignore.

“Almost!” came Yoongi’s echoed reply, followed by a series of clattering sounds as he pottered around in the kitchen.
“Ah, the suspense is killing me!” he theatrically exclaimed, hearing his boyfriend chuckling from downstairs. “I can smell something good, but I can’t taste it yet! It’s torture, baby boy, it’s sheer torture!”

“All that anticipation’s gonna make it taste even better, darling!” Yoongi called, clearly teasing him for fun because he knew how hungry that he was. Judging from the faint hissing sounds that were coming from the kitchen, he was in the middle of frying something. “Trust me!”

Jimin moved to sit back down at the study table at this, bringing his legs up to rest his feet on the seat. He was currently clad only in a loose tee-shirt and briefs, so when he placed the book on his bare thighs for balance, he felt the cool cover against his warm skin.

Yet, after just a couple more pages, Jimin closed the book again with a weary sigh. He couldn’t focus now that he was aware of how hungry that he was, nor could he ignore the sounds of Yoongi pottering away down in the kitchen. All that he could do was turn his head to look out of the bay window whilst he waited for his boyfriend to call out again.

Tonight, there was a light shower of rain currently falling from the black skies. There wasn’t a sign of a single star right now because of the thick bank of clouds taking up most of the horizon, and the moon was almost buried behind their oppressive wall. The rain had been on and off all day long, and it had fallen in a particularly hard shower to hammer down against the sunroof panel for quite some time in the early morning hours.

Whilst they had been caught in someplace between sleep and reality, Yoongi had told him that he enjoyed listening to rain sound, that he found it soothing. He had pressed his lips against his hairline to whisper about how listening to the rain made his body feel so light, until he was ready to just float off to sleep. Jimin had found himself drifting off in his arms, mesmerised by how much the sound of rain reminded him of waves.

The temptation to open the bay window to try and breathe in the bracing scent of the rain was incredibly strong. But Jimin didn’t want to let the chill air bleed into the home too, and so, he had to resist the urge. If the rain kept falling all night long, he would be able to breathe in the scent with ease tomorrow whilst Hoon was driving them both around the city.

“Alright, dinner’s finished!”

At Yoongi’s sudden call, Jimin got upright to almost skip across the study; eager and excited. He bounded down the stairs, his bare feet softly padding on the wood as he descended to go into the kitchen-area. He saw that his boyfriend had just finished setting the counter: plates, napkin-wrapped
cutlery, and empty wine glasses placed on the dark wood.

Yoongi had covered the dishes so that he couldn’t see what was for dinner just yet - a crafty move on his end. But he hadn’t covered the open bottle of wine that he had left on the counter.

Jimin saw that it a bottle of white wine - Chardonnay, in fact, which signalled what the meal might just contain. Chicken or fish seemed the likely options, and knowing just how much that they both enjoyed seafood…

Jimin sat down on the stool, and he was about to lift up the dish cover when Yoongi suddenly moved to cover his eyes with his hand. The mischievous act caught him by surprise, made him gasp and bring his shoulders up high. But then Jimin let out a laugh when he realised that he was playing around with him, that he was just teasing him.

Yoongi’s hand smelled strongly of the ingredients that he had been cooking with: ginger, scallion, and soy sauce. His palm was cool against his skin, his touch sending a little shiver down his spine.

Jimin reached up to gently wrap his fingers around his wrist, not to pull his hand away, but rather to just hold onto him for a moment. As he did so, he heard Yoongi shifting to lift the cover from the plate for him, and then he moved his hand away from his eyes.

“Oh!” Jimin exclaimed, eyeing the spread of food in front of him in wonder.

Yoongi had prepared seasoned, steamed white fish - most likely halibut, considering how much that he liked it. It had been cooked in a sauce of garlic, ginger and soy sauce to make it flavoursome, and hot sesame oil and cilantro had been drizzled over it for garnish. Along with the fish, there was a serving of rice and vegetables to the side of the plate.

The meal was colourful and intensely aromatic, and Jimin took a deep inhale to savour the powerful notes of ginger and soy sauce that wafted from the fish.

“It smells so good, baby boy,” Jimin said, his lips curving up into a smile as he looked up at him. “I can’t wait to eat every single bite, I’m starving!”

“Yeah, I gotta admit, it does smell good,” Yoongi agreed, returning the smile as he retrieved the bottle of wine.
“But why the surprise, hmm?” Jimin asked, as he held his glass out to him so that he could fill it up.

“Uh, I dunno,” Yoongi honestly replied, stopping in the act of pouring to check how much wine was in the glass. He hesitated for a second or two before adding another slight tipple, the golden liquid splashing with a musical note. “I thought it’d be…nice; y’know? D’you like it?”

“I love the surprise, baby boy. I was just asking because I could’ve helped you with preparation. But a surprise dinner is perfect. I didn’t have to do a thing, but I still get to eat!”

Jimin’s wisecrack made Yoongi snort laughter, as he finished filling up the other glass and he sat down at the counter beside him. He removed the dish cover to place it aside, his own serving of dinner on display.

“Surprise dinners are supposed to be romantic,” Yoongi said in a soft voice, revealing his real motive to Jimin at long last. “I just thought you deserved the treat, for working so hard these past two weeks, and for…for making me feel so good inside.”

“Oh, baby boy,” Jimin said with a smile, reaching over to place a hand on the back of his neck. “Thank you for this lovely treat, and thank you for making me feel like the luckiest guy alive.”

“Yeah? The luckiest guy?” Yoongi asked, trying his very hardest to curb his happiness at hearing such a thing. “You really mean that, Jimin?”

“I do,” Jimin confirmed with a soft nod, taking great delight in the way that Yoongi’s face lit up. “I’m so lucky - blessed, even.”

Yoongi smiled at this as he retrieved his cutlery, slipping the napkin down the open front of his white shirt. He seemed to have greatly loved hearing this, and Jimin made a mental note to say it again in the future to make him smile over and over.

Jimin didn’t slip his own napkin down the front of his tee-shirt, rather he spread it across his bare lap - just to stop himself from accidentally dropping any beads of hot oil onto his skin. There, he was ready to sample some of the delicious-looking dinner now, and he got his knife and fork in hand to do so.
“When does Jungkook start school again?” Jimin asked, cutting into the halibut and seeing waves of
steam billowing up into the air. “When I was went to restaurant yesterday, to check up on him, Mijoo
mentioned that she needed to take him out shopping to get a uniform. I’d to explain to her that
Jungkook didn’t need a uniform here. But apparently, they stopped uniforms over in Korea about a
year ago too, so, she wasn’t too surprised.”

“Uh, November, November 5th,” Yoongi replied, as he brought his own fork up to his lips. “He’s a
late student, but he should fit in just fine with his skills.”

Jimin hummed in agreement at this, spearing a chunk of the steamed halibut onto the tines of his fork
to sample it. He found that it was incredibly moist on his tongue, a flakiness to the meat that was a
sign of tenderness, rather than dryness. The warm, spiciness of the ginger blended with the salty tang
of the soy sauce, balancing out the sweet notes to perfection.

“Oh, wow,” Jimin moaned, letting the flavour settle on his tongue before he swallowed. “This is so
good, baby boy. You need to show me how to prepare fish like this.”

“That salmon bulgogi you made was amazing, darling,” Yoongi pointed out, slowly chewing as he
gathered up some vegetables on his fork. “You don’t need to learn, you’re already good enough.”

“Wait, so, if Jungkook starts school in November, you know what that means; right?” Jimin
remarked around the bite, moving to retrieve his glass of wine. “It means that we’re gonna have to
puppy-proof the house…”

Yoongi glanced up at this, pausing in the act of chewing a mouthful of halibut and bok choy. His
expression shifted as he thought his words over, and then he swallowed the bite and ran his tongue
around his mouth to chase after any hints of flavour.

“Tigger’s gonna tear the ever-loving shit outta this place, darling,” Yoongi pointed out, gesturing
across the floor with his fork to draw attention to the sitting-area. “I don’t think that’s a good idea.
We’ll both be working the entire time the kid’s in school, so, we can’t keep an eye on her either.”

“Tigger can’t be left alone in their apartment, or she’ll go wild. Maybe, she should stay with Namo
for the morning hours?” Jimin suggested, curiously sniffing at the glass of wine. “He never works
mornings, so, she’d be perfectly fine with him. He loves dogs, I’m sure that he won’t mind
babysitting for Jungkook for a couple of hours.”
“I think that’s for the best. Maybe, on Fridays, he can bring her over after school or something? He could come visit, spend the evening here, and then I could drive him back home.”

“Oh, that’d be nice, Yoongi,” Jimin said with a soft smile, lifting his glass to take a sip of the wine. “I think that Jungkook would like coming to visit to see you. He misses you, you know?”

“I know, shit, I miss the kid. I’ve barely had enough time to even see Seokseok ‘cos of work. He’s gonna be so grumpy with me. How’s he been, huh?”

“Hoseok? He’s…well, he’s the same as always,” Jimin replied, placing his fork aside so that he could reach up and start fiddling with his earring. “Hoseok’s drinking a lot, taking pills a lot - that sort of thing. He seems outwardly fine, but…I think he’s going through a hard time right now, Yoongi.”

“What’d you mean, Jimin?”

When Jimin glanced up from his plate, he saw that Yoongi was looking at him with a hard to read expression. He seemed to be concerned from what he could discern, like he was worried about what he had suggested.

Perhaps, he hadn’t noticed any signs coming from Hoseok, and that was why he looked so concerned?

Or maybe, Yoongi too had been worrying about his best friend, and his words had struck a chord within him?

“I dunno, it’s just a hunch,” Jimin said with a soft shrug, forcing himself to stop fiddling with his earring. “Hoseok smiles so much, but I feel like…there’s a darkness behind it. The sun casts deep shadows, right?”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment, his fork prodding around his plate but making no move to spear any of the food on the thin tines.

“Seokseok…he’s just the way that he is,” he said in a quiet voice, his eyes focused on his plate to avoid holding his gaze. “I’d talk to him ‘bout these things…but I ain’t exactly good at that, Jimin. I’d say something wrong, I’d hurt his feelings or upset him - me and my big fucking mouth.”
“I’m sure that Hoseok would appreciate the fact you were there to listen to him, Yoongi,” Jimin said, as reached over to place his hand down on his leg. He gave his thigh a firm squeeze, feeling the warm, softness of his skin yielding to his touch through his thin trousers. “I mean, I can try talking to him the next time I see him, if you want? Hoseok mightn’t wanna talk to me about anything - if there’s even anything wrong - but I can still try.”

“I’d like that, Jimin. I think that you got a better…affinity for these kinda things.”

For the duration of dinner, neither one of them decided to break the silence that had settled in the air. Jimin would have thought that he had touched a nerve by bringing Hoseok up in such a way, but he knew that the silence was entirely natural and not at all the result of anything negative - that wonderful, natural silence that didn’t need to be broken. The silence actually meant that they could fully focus on the meal, savouring every single bite to appreciate the flavour and effort that Yoongi had put into creating the meal.

Jimin speared the final piece of halibut onto the tines of his fork, bringing it to his lips with a pleased hum. He saw that Yoongi was also finished eating, nothing more than a few sprigs of leafy greens left on his plate.

“Baby boy, that was delicious,” Jimin praised, shifting to lean over and press a quick kiss in the corner of his boyfriend’s mouth. “That was the best, surprise dinner I’ve ever had.”

“Mmm, there’s more to come in the future,” Yoongi replied, turning his head to allow him to give him a proper kiss.

Jimin did so, adding a playful ‘mwah’ to it to make his boyfriend laugh. Then Yoongi grabbed a napkin so that he could daintily dab at his mouth for him, wiping away a slight hint of sauce that had gotten caught in the corner of his mouth. He sat still to let him do so, childishly pouting his lips out in a way that made Yoongi smile.

“Someone’s feeling playful today, huh?”

“I’m always ready to play with you, baby boy,” Jimin teased with a wink, seeing the way that his cheeks turned that wonderful, soft shade of pink as he finished wiping at his mouth for him.

Yoongi gave his own mouth a quick wipe with the napkin, bunching it up and dropping it onto the
“There’s a lil wine still left,” he remarked, as he lifted the bottle up to check its weight. “D’you want it, darling?”

“Top me up,” Jimin requested, holding his empty glass out to him in offering.

Yoongi gave him a quick smile, pouring out the remains of the wine into his glass for him. It splashed against the deep sides, the golden liquid filling it up almost halfway.

As soon as the bottle was empty, Yoongi placed it aside on the table and then he started collecting the dishes together. He carried them into kitchen, placing them inside the sink and twisting the tap to start filling it with hot water.

“Hmm, baby boy,” Jimin purred with a smile, shifting to sit down on the settee across the ground-floor. He folded his legs to the side on the smooth, cool leather, lounging back against the stack of silken, throw cushions with a soft hum. “This is the life.”

“What? Hot food and half a bottle of wine?” Yoongi joked, sparing a quick glance back over his shoulder as he started washing the dishes.

“I meant sharing a perfectly-cooked, filling meal with the man I love,” Jimin corrected, hearing the other man chuckling. “But now that you’ve mentioned the wine…”

Jimin took his time drinking the wine like he was supposed to, taking small sips and letting it settle on his tongue for some time before swallowing, rather than just gulping it down hard and fast to get drunk. He was trying to get used to drinking for the sake of enjoying it; for learning all of the different notes of each variety, and how to match it with meals to please the palate. He knew that his habit of excessive drinking just because he was bored was bad for him, much like how Yoongi’s past with binge-drinking to handle emotional trauma had been a dangerous habit.

So far, it had been tricky navigating dinner with just a glass or two of wine, rather than most of the bottle, but Jimin was starting to adjust. He had allowed himself the occasional treat glass here and there over the past two weeks, which Yoongi had also shared with him - over massages, lounging by the poolside, or soaking in the bathtub.
After all, Jimin wasn’t going to bars and getting drunk for the sake of a little spark of excitement anymore. He had discovered new forms of entertainment with Yoongi instead, and he found it kind of funny just how much that he was starting to like relaxing evening drives and dates out on the beach and pier, and lazy Sunday mornings in bed with nothing more than his lover for company.

It was probably being around Hoseok so much that had made Jimin want to cut down. The sight of a glass always in the other man’s hand whenever they relaxing were in his home, the scent of champagne always lingering in the air around him - it had made Jimin consciously aware of his own alcohol consumption.

At least he wasn’t knocking back glass after glass with dozens of Valium pills every day like Hoseok was, but still…

Jimin swirled his wrist to make the wine lap against the sides of the glass, finding himself drifting off into his thoughts as he did so. From across the floor, he heard splashing sounds as Yoongi washed all of the dishes, quickly followed by the loud gurgle of water being drained from the sink and soft footsteps.

“Jimin, look at this.”

Jimin looked up from the glass of wine at Yoongi’s voice, twisting on the settee to look over at him. He saw that his boyfriend was in the act of retrieving something from the small area he used as an office - a thin manilla envelope that had been left on the surface of the desk.

“What’chu got there, huh, baby boy?” Jimin asked, moving to place his glass down onto the coffee table whilst he sat down on the settee beside him.

“These came earlier, but we were a lil too busy…y’know?”

Yoongi gave him a knowing look at this, one that had a hint of mischief to it. He reached up to give his ear a quick tug, the gesture highly familiar to Jimin by now. Just like his habit of licking his lips when he was nervous, or the way that he would rub his nose when he was trying to disguise a fond smile; Jimin knew that his ear tugging habit was a sign that he was playing around.

“A little too busy…what?” Jimin teased, giving his boyfriend a little nudge on the thigh with his toes whilst he opened the envelope.
“Recording our shitty attempts at singing along to Music Television,” Yoongi continued, shooting him a wide grin that made Jimin start giggling. “Those high notes. Shit, darling, don’t lemme try singing high notes again.”

“No! The high notes were the best part!” Jimin argued around his laughter. “If I took you down to a karaoke bar over in The Castro, everyone would love you!”

“Mmm, speaking of The Castro, these are the legal documents for the bar,” Yoongi explained, as he moved to spread the different pieces of paper across the coffee table. “All of ‘em are ready to be signed and submitted to finalise the transaction. In just a couple of days, it’s all yours.”

“Seriously, baby boy?” Jimin asked in wonder, shifting to sling his arms around his neck and hold onto him. He planted his chin on his shoulder, breathing in the scent of his cologne. “We’re gonna own a bar?”

“No, you’re gonna own a bar, darling,” Yoongi corrected with a quick smile, as he grabbed his pen. “Which means you’re gonna have have to hire an interior designer to spruce the place up; get it ready for business.”

“Interior design? What, you mean like what the bar looks like?” Jimin asked, making a soft noise under his breath. “I don’t need to hire someone for that, Yoongi. I can do that all on my own.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Uhuh, I can make the place look great with some professional help,” he explained, slowly kneading at Yoongi’s shoulder through his tee-shirt. “I can’t do the electrical work or anything like that, but I can design what it’s gonna look like, and do basic things.”

“You’re gonna paint the walls and shit?” Yoongi asked with a lazy smile, as he quickly scanned the first document. He scrawled his signature on the dotted line, the pen scratching across the surface, and then he retrieved another sheet of paper. “It ain’t as easy as you think, y’know that, right?”

“I know, but that’s the fun part,” Jimin argued, giving him a quick and playful jostle before he brought the pen to the fresh sheet of paper. “I give it a shot, and if it goes terribly, I can hire someone to fix the place up for me. Isn’t it more…unique for us to make the bar our own?”
Yoongi didn’t reply to this right away, for he seemed to be thinking it over whilst he signed all of the documents. As soon as he had scrawled his name on all of the required dotted lines, he recapped the pen and placed it down onto the table. Then he slipped the sheets of paper back inside of the envelope.

“I’ll hand these to Dohee tomorrow, she’ll get ‘em my solicitor. Then, as soon as the documents have been accepted, it’s a done deal, Jimin,” Yoongi explained, as he sealed up the envelope and turned it over to scrawl something on the front. “I’ll get Dohee to help you set up your new bank account too, ‘cos you’re gonna need it for when business starts flowing.”

“Hmm, I hope that it flows like fine wine,” Jimin remarked, lifting his glass to jokingly toast his boyfriend before taking a deep sip.

“Also, I think it’s a great idea, Jimin - you wanting to fix up the bar yourself and make it unique,” Yoongi added, as he shifted to lounge back against the throw cushions. “I’ll help whatever way I can, be it funding…or holding the stepladder.”

“Oh, so I’m doing all of the painting?” Jimin asked, placing his hand against his chest for effect. “Why am I doing all of the hard work?”

“Well, it was your idea,” he pointed out with a mischievous smile, reaching over to give his knee a quick knead.

As soon as he had finished his wine, Jimin went into the kitchen to quickly swill the glass clean under the tap, leaving it on the sideboard with the rest of the drying dishes. Then he followed Yoongi upstairs, hitting the light switch to plunge the ground-floor into darkness.

But before going up the second set of stairs to enter their bedroom, Yoongi hesitated on the bottom step. His gaze was focused on something across the study, and when Jimin turned his head to check, he saw that he was looking at the book that he had left out on the table.

“You started reading this, huh?”

Yoongi moved to collect the book from the table, holding it up so that he could flash the cover at him.
“Uhuh, I like it a lot,” Jimin replied with a nod, moving to stand behind him and slipping his arms around his waist. “I remember a few of the stories from when I was a baby. Isn’t that kinda funny?”

“Your mum used to read you old fairy tales?” Yoongi asked, as he slowly ran his thumb across the cover to trace the lines of the illustration. He shifted to lean back in his hold, the gentle slope of his shoulder practically begging that he rest his chin on it.

“Read? No, she’d recite stories from memory. Sometimes, the stories would change because she forgot something, or just because she thought that I’d like the new version more,” Jimin explained, placing his chin down on his shoulder and breathing in his scent. “My memories of some of the originals were a little hazy, but the book reminded me of how they used to go.”

“What ‘bout your dad? Did he read you stories like that?”

“For a little while, when I was a baby. He used to treat me good then, Yoongi. It took a few years before the beatings started getting more and more frequent. I can remember bits and pieces of a story that he used to tell me, one about a white tiger, but that’s it. What about you? Did your grandmother read you stories?”

“No, my grandfather used to read stories with me. I did most of the reading, I’d sit on his knee and read all kindsa stories, in English and Korean. He’d give me this sweet candy if I showed improvement with my reading skills.”

Yoongi opened the book up so that he could read the dedication on the front page, and then he started flicking through the pages. He came to a stop on an illustration of an old farmer out in a field, and he eyed it for a few seconds before slowly closing the book again.

“I think I’m gonna read this tonight…”

Upon entering the bedroom, Jimin located his notebook on the display table across the room. He opened it up, checking the pages of notes for a few seconds, and then he moved to climb onto the bed. He reached up to grab hold of the back of his tee-shirt, dragging it off over his head to toss it down onto the flooring.

Yoongi was also in the act of getting undressed, his trousers lying in a puddle on the floor by his feet. After unbuttoning and shrugging his white shirt free, he joined him in bed; throwing the light covers over his nakedness in a bid at retaining warmth. He settled back against the pillows, getting the book
in one hand so that he could spread the other across the mattress in silent invitation.

If Jimin was to lie down, his neck resting on his arm and his face against his chest, he just knew that Yoongi would sink his fingers into his hair; to play with and stroke at it until either one of them succumbed to sleep.

Jimin curled up against Yoongi’s side across the mattress instead, resting his notebook against his drawn-up thighs to get the perfect angle for writing. The bed was so large that his feet didn’t even come close to the edge of the mattress.

Above him, he could see rain still bouncing off the sunroof; fat lines of it running down the angled panes. The dull weather had caused a slight chill to settle in the air, but their bodies would warm the bed up soon enough.

“What, you gonna start designing things for the bar right now?” Yoongi asked with a smile, glancing away from his book to look down at him.

“Hmm,” Jimin hummed with a soft nod, as he uncapped his pen. “I’m gonna give it a shot. I wanna figure out the colour scheme, you know, for the walls and furniture? Blue’s definitely gotta feature inside, I know that much. What’s the interior like again, baby boy? I can’t remember the printouts that you showed me.”

“Uh, the bar has two levels: ground-floor and basement. The basement’s only small and serves as a storage-room, so, if I were you, I’d keep it that way,” Yoongi explained, his free hand settling down on his head just like he had been expecting. “The ground-floor’s got the main area, which is rectangular, pretty decent size to work with, and there’s a smaller back-room. Also, there’s the restrooms on that floor, don’t forget ‘bout that.”

“Nobody forgets about the toilets in a gay bar, Yoongi,” Jimin joked, hearing his boyfriend snorting laughter. “Oh, this is gonna be fun! Two rooms to design and work with!”

With Yoongi’s added assistance, Jimin quickly sketched out floor plans of the bar interior in his notebook: marking down the placement of all of the doors and windows, the existing bar counter, and the location of the basement and restrooms. He didn’t really know what he wanted the bar to look like just yet, but if he got his hands on some catalogues and home design magazines, he might just be able to start envisioning what he wanted.
The only thing that Jimin strongly felt was that the bar should feature blue in some way, be it the colour of the walls, upholstery, the lighting, the napkins - whatever, so long as there was deep blue involved. He didn’t want the bar looking old and boring, and so, he would probably try and find a way to make it look modern and fun.

Jimin doodled all kinds of different shaped tables and chairs; scribbled down materials for seat cushions; he even had a brief thought about a light installation of some kind. He knew that he was going to have to see the building for himself before he would be able to fully envision the perfect design, but it was still fun thinking about giant disco balls and karaoke machines.

Whilst Jimin worked away on design ideas for the bar, Yoongi slowly made his way through the old book; completely silent, save for the soft rustling sound of him turning the pages or sniffing. His fingers never left his hair once, though his hand did move around to let his fingertips explore every inch of his scalp.

Jimin slowly closed the notebook over, placing it aside on the mattress so that he could close his eyes for a moment. He just wanted to savour the sensation of Yoongi’s fingers gently massaging at his scalp, the kind of sensation that would send him off to sleep from its gentleness. His touch, combined with the constant roar of rain dancing down onto the roof, was likely what made him drift off for a few minutes, his eyelids growing far too heavy to open again.

Jimin realised that he had temporarily fallen asleep from the warmth of Yoongi’s body, so he shifted with a deep grunt to stretch his muscles and get closer to him. He felt Yoongi’s fingers stopping, pausing in the act of massaging at his scalp because he had caught his attention.

“Mmm, you awake again?” Yoongi asked, a soft smile audible in his voice.

“Uhuh,” Jimin hummed, moving to place his chin down on his chest so that he could look up at him. “Hmm, I’m awake.”

Yoongi was still reading, but he had made his way through most of the book whilst he had been designing and napping. He slowly shifted his free hand down from his hair to settle it on the back of his neck and give it a firm knead.

Jimin felt the soft press of Yoongi’s lips against the crown of his head as he planted a kiss in his hair. The warm puff of his breath against his scalp made him smile, the sensation highly pleasing. He slipped the covers over himself at long last, feeling the wonderful trapped heat that had gathered as a result from Yoongi’s body.
“Yoongi? Read me some poetry,” Jimin mumbled in a sleepy voice, bumping his nose against his chest; breathing in the faded scent of jasmine soak from his skin.

“Poetry, huh?” Yoongi asked, as he slowly placed the book down on the covers to give him his full attention.

“Hmm, read me some poetry,” Jimin requested, wriggling under the covers and feeling their feet bumping together. “You can make it up, it doesn’t have to be from a book, or anything like that. I just wanna listen to your voice right now, baby boy.”

“How ‘bout…poetry that don’t rhyme? How ‘bout something like that?” he suggested, shifting to roll onto his side and face him. “Would you like that, mmm?”

“OK, I still don’t get that kinda poetry, baby boy. But you-”

“You don’t ‘get it’?” Yoongi interrupted, his lips curling up into a lazy smile as he tucked locks of stray hair behind his ear. “You don’t get free verse poetry?”

“Yeah, I don’t get it,” Jimin continued with a nod, struggling to keep his expression serious. “Poetry’s supposed to rhyme, like a song. Otherwise, how can you tell it’s poetry, huh?”

“Free verse poetry is like…shit, Jimin.”

Yoongi paused at this, trying to find the right words to say to him. He reached up to brush his fingers across his lips, so deep in his thoughts that Jimin got savour how handsome that he looked when he was fully focused on something. It took him a moment to carry on talking, doing so in a slow, rhythmic lilt.

“I crave the way you look in the morning, when the sunlight washes over you; gold and cream, the colour of luxury, filling you up drop by drop, like my heart is filled with love for you’. There, that was poetry, darling,” Yoongi bragged, giving him a look that showed that he was incredibly proud of himself.

Jimin thought this over, trying his very hardest to not smile at how much that he had enjoyed
listening to Yoongi’s beautiful poem. The way that the words had flowed from his lips, so smooth and perfect - it showed just how much that Yoongi really adored poetry. He felt a rather mischievous idea coming to mind, one he knew that he couldn’t suppress.

“That wasn’t poetry! You were just talking, baby boy!” Jimin declared with a wide grin, reaching over to give Yoongi’s shoulder a soft shove.

Oh, the way that Yoongi’s expression shifted was so funny to watch. His eyes grew wider until they were rounded with surprise, his smile shifting into a soft pout as he stared down at him.

“It was poetry, it was!” Yoongi argued, struggling to not laugh at his antics. “That was fucking great poetry, and - ah, Jimin!”

Yoongi moved to grab hold of him, sweeping him into his arms so that he could start wrestling with him again.

Jimin burst out laughing as he slipped his arms around his neck, burying his face against his chest as he was rolled right onto his back. He felt his legs slipping between his, their bare feet bumping together as he snagged the bed sheets between his toes.

“You were just talking, baby boy!” Jimin repeated between giggles, tussling with him even when it was obvious that he couldn’t free himself.

Yoongi planted kisses against his cheek, moving along the curve of his cheekbone to his ear. His teeth nibbled at his ear, the ticklish contact making him wriggle with a cry of surprise.

“Ah, no!” Jimin giggled, curling his fingers into fists so that he could lightly punch at his chest. “No, I’m ticklish there! Stop! It was poetry, baby boy! It was the best poem that I’ve ever heard.”

Yoongi relented after a few seconds, only doing so because he had finally complimented his poem. He pressed a final, ticklish kiss against his ear before shifting to get up onto his elbows, looking down at him with a fond smile.

“OK, OK, I’ll show you how stupid that free verse poetry is - listen,” Jimin said, shifting underneath him as he searched his mind for something good. He shifted one of his hands down the dip of Yoongi’s back, settling it in place on his soft buttock to give it a firm squeeze. The contact gave him
a great idea, and he felt his lips curling up at the corners as he spoke. ‘‘My cock’s so hard, oh, it’s so hard. It’s like a rock, and…I wish to bury it in your tight ass’.’’

“Mmm, that was smut, Jimin,” Yoongi replied, giving him an open-mouthed kiss that made Jimin’s lips curl up into a smile. “Smut, but still poetry. Ginsberg would be proud of that filth, darling.”

“Well, it does sound way better than, ‘my boyfriend’s so rich, he’s got an AmEx, also, he’s really great at sex’.”

“Jimin, please,” Yoongi almost groaned, giving him a weary expression that made him giggle. “You’re too much; y’know that?”

“You love it, baby boy,” Jimin bragged, giving him a proud expression as he lifted his head up to press a quick peck on his nose. “But I really did love the poem, Yoongi. I thought it was beautiful, I really did.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Uhuh,” he confirmed with a smile, pressing more kisses against his nose and lips in turn. ‘‘My heart is filled with love for you, and you alone. It beats to the sound of your…laughter, and it stops with every smile’. How was that, baby boy? Was that a good poem?”

Yoongi didn’t reply right away, for he seemed to be finding the right words to say to him. He moved one of his hands from his shoulder to cup his cheek, his thumb softly stroking across the curve of his cheekbone.

“God, I love you, Jimin,” Yoongi whispered, rapidly blinking for a few seconds because his eyes looked a little too wet.

“I love you more,” Jimin whispered in reply, pulling him that little bit closer so that he could bring their lips together again.

Yoongi’s weight bearing down on him was the first thing that made a burst of heat start pooling out in the pit of Jimin’s stomach. From the wet heat of his tongue between their kisses, to the way that he softly rocked his hips every few seconds, had Jimin stiffening in his briefs until the hard throbbing sensation grew too powerful to ignore.
Jimin fumbled his briefs down to his knees, snagging his lower lip with his teeth as he did so. When he opened his thighs wide to let Yoongi get into a better position, he felt his briefs slipping down his calves to snag around his ankles instead; the black cotton stretched taut. He ran his hands down his back to take hold of Yoongi’s buttocks, applying pressure to make every grind of their hips feel that little more intense.

Jimin had just enough time to gasp before Yoongi’s mouth found his again, stealing the breathless sound right from his lips. He sank his fingers deeply into Yoongi’s skin, feeling the soft mound of his buttocks yielding to his touch.

The phone started ringing, the sudden sound cutting through the bedroom air to catch them both by surprise.

Yoongi sadly broke their heated kiss, shifting to look over at the telephone. He eyed it for a few seconds before he moved to grab the receiver. He had to disentangle himself from his arms to do so, even when Jimin tried his very hardest to drag him back down with a teasing whine. His boyfriend stretched the wire so that he could settle down on top of him again, but it just wasn’t the same.

Jimin hoped that whoever was calling was quick about it. They had just rudely interrupted a passionate moment for the two of them, one that he was very eager to resume. He knew that Yoongi’s bedroom phone was a private number that few people possessed, and so, the phone call was probably something related to business.

“Mmm, y’hello?” Yoongi mumbled down the line, casually nursing the receiver against his shoulder so that he could carry on playing with his hair for him.

Jimin heard a voice through the receiver, deep and distorted by static so that he couldn’t understand whatever they were saying. But he did see the way that his boyfriend’s expression shifted as he listened to whoever was on the other end of the line.

“Well, it’s for you - Namjoon.”

“How?” Jimin hummed, looking up at him in complete surprise. Then he moved to accept the receiver, stretching the kinked cord across the surface of the bed. “What’s Namjoon phoning us for at this hour?”
Jimin held the receiver against his ear, settling in place against the pillows because the cord could stretch with ease. As he did so, Yoongi shifted to lie down on the mattress beside him.

“Hey, Namo; what’s going on?” Jimin asked, slipping his arm around his boyfriend to let him cosy up against his side. “Did something happen, hmm?”

Namjoon’s voice was breathless down the static-filled line as he spoke, the sound enough to make Jimin’s skin almost ripple with goosebumps.

“Jimmy, I, uh, I dunno how to tell you this. But...well...”

“Is everything OK?”

“Jimmy...Taehyung’s in America right now.”

“...What?” Jimin asked, feeling a sudden laugh escaping him from the absurdity of his friend’s words. “What’d you mean, ‘Taehyung’s in America’? Daddy-o, are you high? Are you smoking the real good stuff right now?”

“No, Jimmy, I’m not high - not even a little,” Namjoon argued down the line, and judging from the complete sincerity in his voice, he was telling the truth. “I’m telling you everything that I know. Taehyung is in my house right now. I picked him up from the airport after a deal got majorly fucked up on his end. He’s got two goddamn passports on him right now - one for Steven Yang, a mule, and another for Jeongmin Jang. But I know for a fact that it’s him, Jimmy - it’s Taehyung. I recognised him from your Polaroids, and when I asked him, he admitted that it was a fake identity.”

“Holy...shit,” Jimin breathed out, feeling his fingers loosening around the receiver.

“Jimin?” Yoongi asked in a quiet voice, shifting to roll his head back to look up at him.

For a moment, Jimin was far too shocked to say a single word; both to Namjoon or Yoongi. He felt like he had been slapped right across the face, and unsurprisingly, his erection decided to wilt on him.
If Namjoon knew all about Taehyung’s fake identity, then that must really mean…

“What happened, Namo? Speak to me,” Jimin finally said, tightening his hold around the receiver as he sat up in bed.

“Look, brother, there’s so much to explain to you and I think that it’s better that he tells you all about that. But the reason that I called you is because he’s hurt, he’s tore up real bad inside. He had to bring the supplies over instead of the mule that I sent, and he really damaged himself down there.”

“Oh…oh, shit,” Jimin moaned, reaching up to press his fingers against his lips. “Oh, no, Namo…”

“What’s going on, Jimin?” Yoongi interrupted, shifting to sit up in bed so that he could hold his gaze. “Speak to me, you look like you’ve seen a fucking ghost.”

“Oh, this is crazy, Yoongi, it’s so crazy I don’t even know if I can explain it,” Jimin replied, hearing how uneven and breathless that he sounded as his boyfriend moved to brush his hair out of his eyes for him. “OK, so, Namo went to collect a mule that was returning from Hong Kong. It was his usual heroin collection deal for Kim, Seokjin Kim - the smuggling deal that I used to do.”

Yoongi hummed to let him know that he was following him, his eyes not leaving his face once.

“Namo was supposed to pick up some kid called Steven. But someone else showed up at the airport to finish the transaction, a guy called Taehyung. He’s my old smuggling partner, we’re good friends.” Jimin realised that he was blabbering at this point, and he forced himself to try and focus on the important facts. “Anyway, he’s hurt pretty bad from the smuggling deal, and Namo’s trying to figure out what to do with Taehyung. This has never happened to him before.”

“A deal went wrong?” Yoongi asked, and he nodded in agreement. “What’re you thinking, Jimin?”

“I’m thinking that I’ve gotta go and see Tae, Yoongi. He needs someone right now, shit, Namo needs someone too, after what’s happened.”

“Alright, let’s go.”
Yoongi shifted to climb out of bed at this, the sudden movement catching Jimin by surprise. He grabbed his trousers from the floor, stepping into them and pulling them up to his svelte hips.

“Are you sure, it’s OK?” Jimin asked in a soft voice, covering the mouthpiece with his hand to try and muffle their conversation. “If you wanna go in the morning, just say so. It’s late, I know that it’s late and-”

“Shit, Jimin, if a deal got fucked up, I wanna sort it out right now,” Yoongi interjected, as he tucked his half-hard cock into his trousers and zipped them up. “Not in the morning - right now.”

Jimin thought this over for a moment, slowly removing his hand from the mouthpiece as he did so.

“Give us fifteen minutes, Namo, we’re coming,” he said, glancing over at his boyfriend to see that he was retrieving his shirt from the floor. “Just try and keep him calm until I get there, OK? He’s gonna be so fucked up from the jet lag, and the pain… Have you given him anything for the pain?”

“I’ve given him Codeine for the pain. It’s working pretty good right now,” Namjoon replied, quickly adding. “Just take your time, Jimmy, and don’t rush on over here. This kind of weather is just asking for a crash.”

Jimin ended the call at this, crawling across the mattress to drop the receiver into the cradle. Then he climbed off the bed too, crossing the bedroom to go over to the wardrobe.

Jimin knew that he had work tomorrow, just like Yoongi. Rather than slip into a pair of jeans and a loose tee-shirt, he grabbed some of his work clothing instead - a black shirt, along with a contrasting, light grey day suit. He was going to have to wear the outfit tomorrow, and there was a high chance that he wasn’t going to sleep at all tonight. It was best to be prepared, just in case he didn’t have enough time to get ready tomorrow morning before starting work.

Jimin followed Yoongi downstairs as soon as he was dressed, slipping into a pair of leather pumps and exiting the house. His mind was racing with thoughts, and he couldn’t possibly think straight during the car ride down to Haight-Ashbury. He could barely sit still in his seat, even when he knew that his constant fidgeting might make Yoongi get anxious. His boyfriend seemed too busy focusing on the road in front of him to notice. The windshield wipers were trying their very hardest to clear the rain away, but the current shower was heavy and unrelenting.

After a roughly ten minute drive, Yoongi was pulling his car up to the curb and slowly curving onto
the slight drive. Namjoon had left the garage open for them, so that he could park without worrying about his car getting stolen during the night.

Jimin got out the car whilst Yoongi was still in the act of killing the engine, popping the door open and racing out of the garage to bound up the front steps and knock on the door.

Namjoon quickly opened the door, allowing Jimin to enter the house. He heard Yoongi making his way up the front steps behind him, his shoe soles slapping on the wet stone.

“Where is he, Namo?” Jimin asked, hopping from foot to foot as he struggled to get out of his shoes. “Is he upstairs? In the living-room?”

“The living-room,” Namjoon replied, as he closed the door behind Yoongi and worked the lock.

Jimin almost landed straight on his face as he stumbled out of his second shoe, dropping it onto the floor without a single care. The wooden flooring was cold on his soles as he darted down the hallway and through the open doorway. He had to grab hold of the door frame, accidentally slamming his upper arm against it in his haste to see the other man.

Taehyung was lying on the floor between the sofa and the television set, with a cushion shoved under his head and a blanket tossed over his lower body. He looked to have fallen asleep at some point, his dark hair a mess across his brow and his lips slack.

Jimin crossed the room and he dropped to his knees to get closer to his friend. He brushed his hair back off his face for him, feeling the way that it had clumped into thick strings from the clammy sweat that was all over his face. Just a glance down at his face showed him that Taehyung was sick, for he could see how washed-out that his rich tan currently was, and the dark bags that had appeared beneath his eyes.

“Oh, Tae,” Jimin breathed out, feeling a horrible tightness around his chest that made it hard to breathe.

It was his touch, or maybe his voice, that disturbed Taehyung, suddenly bringing him out of his slumber with a hard snorting sound. For a few seconds, he struggled to keep his fluttering eyelids open, his gaze empty and unfocused. When he finally managed to do so, Taehyung could do no more than stare up at him as he slowly came around to reality.
“Jiminie?” Taehyung mumbled in a groggy voice, as he reached up to rub at his swollen eyelids. “Huh? What’re you doin’ here?”

“Namjoon told me what happened, I’m here to see you, Tae,” Jimin replied in Korean, still knocking his damp hair off his face for him. “How’re you feeling right now, huh?”

“Feel like fuckin’ death,” his friend groaned, wincing as he moved his legs under the blanket. “It hurts so bad, Jiminie.”

Jimin heard soft footsteps drawing closer, and he glanced up to see that Namjoon and Yoongi had just entered the living-room.

Yoongi’s hair was slightly wet from the rain, and he reached up to slick it back as he came to a stop in the doorway. His white shirt was stuck to his chest, the material having turned translucent in parts.

Jimin felt a freezing cold bead of rain running down the back of his neck to soak into the collar of his own shirt.

“What happened with the Hong Kong deal, Namjoon? Tell me everything,” Yoongi requested in English, shifting to lean against the door frame as he looked down at them.

“Come into the kitchen, I can explain there,” Namjoon suggested, as he moved past him to step out into the hallway. “Would you like some coffee, Yoongi?”

“Yeah, thanks…”

Jimin was left alone with Taehyung for a moment whilst the two other men discussed the important business aspects. He pressed his fingers against Taehyung’s brow to feel that his skin was shockingly hot, even when there was a clammy sweat clinging to him. He needed to help him cool down somehow, so he got to his feet to quickly go into the kitchen. He inadvertently eavesdropped on their conversation as he did so.

“…his partner had overdosed on drugs whilst he was collecting the heroin,” Namjoon explained, as he spooned instant coffee into the cafetière. “So, Kim had already accepted the goods at that point.”
Jimin saw Yoongi watching him as he hunkered down to rummage through the cupboard, his boyfriend leaning back against the counter with his arms folded across his chest. He was unable to find what he was looking for, and when he straightened up again, he noticed that something was floating in the sink.

There was a washcloth floating in the sink, which was slightly bloodstained.

Jimin studied it for a moment, and then he went off in search of another washcloth, hearing Namjoon talking about how Taehyung had needed to find a way to smuggle half a key of heroin into the country without a mule. He located a fresh washcloth in the upstairs bathroom, which he soaked through with water to bring back to his friend.

When Jimin placed the cold washcloth down on his brow for him, Taehyung let out a sigh of pleasure as he closed his eyes again. He pressed his cool palms against his cheeks to try and bring him that little more relief, listening to Namjoon’s voice echoing through the quiet home.

“…even know how he managed to get past two waves of airport security, Yoongi. But here he is, somehow in one piece.”

“What ’bout the brown?”

“Kim has it, Seokjin Kim. I contacted him the very second I got back with him because he had to come and collect it. I weighed it, it was exact, and he seemed satisfied with the deal, even after everything that had happened.”

“How much was the deal for?”

“Uh…118,000 dollars, Hong Kong dollars. So, that’s what…”

“14,000 dollars,” Yoongi calculated, his voice so soft that Jimin could barely hear his words. “14,000 dollars don’t seem that much at all to almost die for, right?”

“Right,” Namjoon agreed in a quiet voice, the strong aroma of brewing coffee coming from the kitchen.
When Jimin looked back down at Taehyung’s face, he saw that his friend was looking up at him. His eyelids were barely even open, but they were able to hold each other’s gaze.

“What?” Jimin asked with a soft smile. “What’re you staring at me for, huh? Am I even more gorgeous than you remembered?”

“Nah, I’m starin’ at your big fuckin’ head,” Taehyung retorted, his wisecrack making him laugh.

“Namo said that he gave you some Codeine, for the pain,” Jimin said, as he wiped a bead of water free for him before it could roll down the side of his face into his ear. “Is it still hurting bad, huh?”

“It’s alright, I’m just exhausted. It hurts, but I’m good, Jiminie.”

“You feel like you’re coming down with a fever, brother.”

“I’d the flu a couple of days ago, but I’m better now. It’s probably just that, Jiminie - I told you, I’m good,” Taehyung stressed, clearly not wanting him to worry too much. “Seriously, you ain’t gotta worry ‘bout me. Daegu men are tough.”

“No, Busan men are tough, Tae. Daegu men are just idiots,” Jimin corrected, hearing his friend letting out an indignant noise.

“Busan men are assholes!”

Jimin glanced up to see Namjoon and Yoongi entering the living-room again, the both of them nursing large cups of coffee. His friend moved to hold the mug out to him, so he accepted it with soft thanks, wrapping his hands around the hot porcelain.

“Namjoon told me that you ain’t a mule,” Yoongi said from the doorway, slowly rubbing his thumb over the rim of the mug. “That you’re just a smuggling assistant. Is that right, Kim?”

Taehyung moved his head to try and look at Yoongi at this, his expression that of complete surprise because he must not have even registered the fact that the other man was present. After a few seconds of dumb staring, he managed to make a noise at the back of his throat that sounded like an
agreement.

“You got here with a falsified passport. D’you pay for it, huh?”

“Yeah, I’d to buy a…a fake passport,” Taehyung explained, before rolling his head back to try and look at him. “Is that Prince Min, Jiminie?”

“Yeah, Tae,” Jimin agreed with a soft nod, trying his very hardest to not laugh at his shocked expression.

“Oh, shit.”

“Well, I’m gonna see that you’re reimbursed, and not just for the costs of the passport,” Yoongi continued, almost as if Taehyung hadn’t just disrespectfully cursed in front of him. “Most men in your shoes, they’d have done a runner the very second the deal got fucked up. I respect the fact you didn’t, despite the dangers involved. You’re loyal, Kim, perhaps, even to a fault.”

“Uh, thanks, Prince Min,” Taehyung mumbled, trying his very hardest to hold his gaze from his awkward position. “But you ain’t gotta reimburse me for nothin’. All that I need’s a plane ticket back to Seoul, that’s all.”

“You’ll get it, as soon as you’re capable of travelling,” Yoongi promised, as he brought his coffee up to his lips to take a deep sip. “Right now though, I don’t think you’ll be boarding another plane - not for a couple of days, at least.”

“Tae, I need to check your injuries,” Jimin said in a soft voice, placing his mug aside to free up his hands. “I know that sounds bad, and trust me, I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t have to. But Namo told me that you were hurt pretty bad, and I need to check. Prince Min’s right, you mightn’t be fit for travel.”

Just the simple act of rolling him onto his front was enough to make Taehyung cry out in pain. The sound made Jimin gnaw on his lower lip, his fingers trembling as he let go of him. He had to move to kneel by his feet, so that he could examine his injuries.

“No offence, but I don’t want all you guys starin’ at my fuckin’ ass,” Taehyung remarked, sprawled out on the floor like a starfish as he looked back over his shoulder at them all.
“As much as I kinda like you, Namjoon, I think that I’d prefer Jiminie do this,” he continued, rolling his eyes over to look at him.

“OK, Tae,” Jimin said, as he took hold of the blanket to pull it down. “I’ll be as gentle as I can, I promis-”

“No, Jimin!”

Jimin felt something wrapping around his elbow at Yoongi’s call, and then he was suddenly pulled to his feet. When he twisted to look down, he saw that Yoongi was holding onto him; his grip so firm around his elbow that his tendons were rippling the surface of his skin. He lifted his gaze from his hand to hold his gaze, seeing the way that his boyfriend was staring at him.

There was something on Yoongi’s face that made a shiver run down his spine, even when he didn’t quite understand why.

“Don’t touch him, don’t get his blood on you,” Yoongi whispered in English, leaning closer to him so that he could breathe the words against his shoulder.

“Yoongi, baby, he doesn’t have AIDS,” Jimin explained slowly, reaching over with his free hand to place it over Yoongi’s hand. It wasn’t to pry it free from his elbow, rather to just hold onto him for a moment. “I haven’t even seen any warnings for AIDS over in Korea yet. It’s OK, he’s totally clean.”

“I don’t care if he’s clean or not, I ain’t letting you get his fucking blood on you,” Yoongi argued, tightening his hold around his elbow so that his grip was almost painfully tight. “No, Jimin, I ain’t gonna let you risk something like that. I-I ain’t letting you risk contracting AIDS doing something like this - like helping someone outta the goodness in your own heart.”

Jimin didn’t know what to say in reply to this, for his boyfriend had caught him completely off-guard. All that he could do was stare at him in shock, his lips parted and twitching, but no words coming free.
“Jimin, please,” Yoongi almost begged, twisting on the spot as his lips turned down at the corners. “Think ‘bout us, think ‘bout the risks. It ain’t worth it.”

“If you need me to do it, Jimmy, I’ll do it,” Namjoon offered in a quiet voice, joining their conversation purely because he seemed unable to stop himself at this point. “Just leave the room with Yoongi, I’ll tell him something as an excuse. I’ll say something about how you’re shook up and upset, I’m sure that he’ll understand.”

“…Namo, do you have any gloves? Latex gloves?” Jimin finally asked, breaking the momentary silence that had settled in the room - as heavy as a blanket. “Is that OK, Yoongi? Is it OK if I wear gloves?”

Yoongi thought this over for a moment, before giving him a soft nod to let him know that he would accept this. Then he let go of his elbow, moving to lean against the wall a few feet away; seemingly for support.

“Wear two pairs, just to be safe,” Yoongi suggested, as Namjoon crossed the living-room to go out into the hallway.

Even though Jimin knew that he didn’t need a single pair of gloves, he slipped on the two pairs that Namjoon had retrieved for him, just to put Yoongi’s worries at ease. The gloves were horrible to wear, strongly scented and filled with gritty talc, but wearing them was the only way that he was going to be able to examine Taehyung.

Jimin knelt down on floor again, tugging the blanket down to expose Taehyung’s naked lower body. The sight of blood-soaked paper towels made him turn his face away with a hard gulp, the sickening stench of blood wafting up to turn his stomach. When he glanced back down at Taehyung’s buttocks, he saw mottled bruising all over his skin - a sure-kill sign that he hadn’t been prepared for the internal parcel in the slightest.

The sound of something shattering suddenly cut through the air, and Jimin twisted around just in time to see Yoongi swooning back against the wall, his face having turned a shocking pale shade.

“Yoongi!” Jimin cried out, struggling to get to his feet in time to catch him.

Namjoon beat him to it, racing across the room to grab hold of him before he came over too faint and he collapsed.
“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” Yoongi stammered, holding onto Namjoon’s biceps for support. “Shit, I can’t feel legs, I can’t-”

Namjoon had to gently lower him down to the flooring before he ended up collapsing.

Yoongi’s eyes rolled up behind his eyelids as he slumped back against the wall, his breath leaving him in a wheezy grunt. He appeared to have passed-out, most likely because the sight of so much blood had hit him hard; had triggered a strong fear response deep inside of him.

Jimin moved over to check on him, placing his gloved hand against his throat to feel his slow and erratic pulse. Then he took hold of his hand, lightly squeezing it as he entwined their fingers together.

“It’s the blood,” Jimin explained in a soft voice. “Yoongi…he’s not good with blood, Namo.”

“I can imagine why,” Namjoon remarked, as he reached over to lift Yoongi’s eyelid up with his thumb; exposing the white of his eye, along with a tiny sliver of his dark iris. “That was a close one, Jimmy. Man, if he’d have dropped and smacked his head on the floor…”

“Then we’d have had two people to take to hospital,” Jimin said, his voice too flat to make his words sound like a joke.

“Is he gonna be alright?” Taehyung asked, almost as if he wasn’t the one profusely bleeding out of his ass right now.

“Yeah, it’s just a fainting spell. He’ll be fine, brother,” Namjoon replied in Korean. “Just give him a minute or two.”

Yoongi came back around after a mere minute of unconsciousness, lifting his head up with a gasp. He quickly looked between the two of them, no doubt disoriented after his sudden collapse. Then he let out a weak groan, dropping his head forward and closing his eyes.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to do that, or to break your mug,” Yoongi muttered, reaching up to wipe at his brow with the heel of his hand. “Shit, I feel fucking stupid now.”
“It’s just a mug, Yoongi,” Namjoon said in a quiet voice, as he gave him a firm shoulder squeeze. “Don’t worry about it. You’re not stupid either, don’t say that. Just keep your head down, OK, and breathe nice and slow.”

“Breathe,” Yoongi repeated, as he dropped his head down onto his drawn-up knees. “Just breathe…”

“Breathe and think about waves, baby boy,” Jimin whispered, giving the back of his neck a soothing rub. “I’m right here, I’m not gonna let go of your hand until you feel better.”

It took Yoongi a couple of minutes to recover from his fainting spell and regulate his breathing, his hand tightly squeezing hold of his as he did so. Eventually, he lifted his head up to roll it back against the wall, opening his eyes a crack to hold his gaze.

“OK?” Jimin asked in a quiet voice, seeing his boyfriend nodding in agreement.

Whilst Namjoon cleaned up the spilled coffee and broken shards of porcelain, Jimin turned his attention back to Taehyung. He gently pried his legs apart so that he could shuffle between his knees and open his thighs a little wider, hearing him hissing in pain at the stretch.

“It’s OK, Tae,” Jimin said, placing a hand down on the curve of his bruised buttock so that he could apply a slight hint of pressure to stop him from squirming. “It’s OK, I’m not gonna hurt you. I trusted you to prepare me for our smuggling trips. So, trust me to deal with this, hmm?”

“I trust you, Jiminie, I do. It just…shit, it hurts,” Taehyung hissed, turning his face aside to press it against his inner elbow. His voice was heavily muffled as a result, but Jimin still understood him perfectly fine. “It hurts so bad.”

“I know, but it’ll just take me a second to check, I promise.”

Upon sensing that Taehyung was going to stay still, Jimin slowly slipped his index finger inside of him, feeling the instantaneous heat of his inner walls clenching tight around him. The latex did little to negate the heat, and the lack of friction as he pushed his finger forward was a sign that he was still internally bleeding.
A quick glance back over his shoulder showed Jimin that Yoongi was watching everything from his position on the floor. He was leaning back against the wall, his thumb firmly trapped between his lips as he nibbled at his nail; his rounded eyes huge and glassy in the dim lighting from the ceiling.

Namjoon was standing a few feet away from him, respectfully looking away whilst he examined Taehyung. He had his arms folded across his chest, and he was scratching at his elbow in an anxious fashion.

“What does it feel like, Tae? The pain? Can you describe it to me?” Jimin asked, as he tenderly moved his finger around to prod and feel; shifting his other hand across his buttock to gently pull it to the side.

“It burns, or stings. It don’t hurt too bad if I stay still, but if I move or- ah!” Taehyung hissed as a result of his gentle probing, and so Jimin momentarily stopped his investigation. “When you touch certain areas, it really stings.”

Jimin hummed at this, slowly resuming his prodding. He felt nothing that worried him, no obvious lumps present on his inner walls that signalled potential abscesses. He was pretty certain that most of the pain Taehyung was feeling was a result of tearing to his inner walls, which would explain the copious bleeding and stinging sensation. After what had happened to him, it made total sense that the sudden intrusion, and prolonged stretching would have damaged his sensitive walls.

“Any clue what’s wrong with him, Jimmy?” Namjoon suddenly asked in English, his voice shockingly loud in the silence of the house.

“Yeah, I think that he’s torn the skin - anal fissures, nothing serious,” Jimin said, gently slipping his finger free to see fresh and thin blood smeared all over the clear latex. “It’s from the friction, most likely. Or the stretching. These’ll fully heal up in a couple of weeks, he’s gonna be fine.”

“OK, so, what about the bleeding? How can we stop the bleeding?”

“Tampons, he needs a tampon up there,” Jimin said, glancing up to look between Yoongi and Namjoon rapidly. “Just for a few hours to stem the bleeding and cause clotting. After the clotting, we just make sure that he stays immobile to not further agitate the wounds.”

“A tampon?” Namjoon repeated, his expression and tone showing that he was uncertain. “Are you sure? I mean, there was so much blood. Maybe, he needs something else, like, stitches or
“Look, I’ve been through this before, more times than I’d like to admit right now,” Jimin interrupted, tossing his head to the side to try and knock a stray lock of hair out of his eyes. “I know how to deal with this, Namo. Trust me on this, like I trust you with everything else.”

Namjoon thought this over for a moment, turning his head to finally look over at him.

“I trust you, Jimmy. I’ll head over to the store across the block, they definitely stock tampons and pads. Any particular kind I should look for, huh?”

“Um, look for the most absorbent kind. Try to avoid anything that isn’t simple cotton. I don’t wanna risk irritating the fissures. Also, don’t buy fragranced ones either. I dunno why they make them, but don’t buy them.”

Jimin saw that Yoongi was still gnawing at his thumb nail from across the room, his gaze latched onto the bloody wad of paper towels that was clutched in his fist. So he placed them aside, just to stop him from staring at them.

When Namjoon returned from the store several minutes later, Jimin tore open the box of tampons to pull one free. He unwrapped it, getting the plastic applicator in hand. After pulling one of Taehyung’s buttocks aside, he carefully slipped the applicator inside of him before pushing. The tampon slowly went up inside of him until there was little more than the dangling string left, and then he carefully removed the applicator.

“There, Tae, that should stop the bleeding,” Jimin said, giving his buttock a soft pat. “I’ll remove it in a few hours, OK?”

“Can you roll me over ‘gain?” Taehyung asked, and so he slowly rolled him onto his back. “Shit, thanks, Jiminie.”

“Don’t mention it, Tae. You’re gonna be fine, but you need to rest for a couple of days to let your injuries heal first; OK? Then you can head on back home to Korea.”

Jimin got upright to go into the kitchen, dumping the bloody paper towels and plastic applicator into the bin, and then he stripped the double layer of gloves free. He didn’t get a single drop of blood on
his hands as he did so, even though he knew that he had no need to worry about contracting AIDS from his friend.

Yoongi slowly entered the kitchen after him, still very much in the act of nibbling at his thumb nail. He moved to stand beside him at the counter, and that was when Jimin saw that he was actually sucking on his thumb, which was a sign that he was incredibly upset and anxious. He managed to stop doing so after a few seconds, but only because he had noticed him looking.

“Jimin, is that what…what happens when you…”

Yoongi stopped talking for a moment, his words trailing off in a way that was hard to discern. It might just have been that he was struggling to find the right words to say, or it could be that he was hesitating in saying them. Speaking his thoughts aloud might make him uncomfortable, might risk upsetting the two of them in some way after what had just happened.

“Is that what happened when I used to mule?” Jimin asked on his behalf, sensing that this might just have been what his boyfriend had been trying to ask.

“Yeah.”

“No, not that bad,” he explained with a soft head shake, giving him a reassuring smile as he twisted the sink tap. “Not even my worst smuggling trip ended with that much damage, Yoongi; just a little bleeding and prolonged discomfort. It’s natural when smuggling the parcel. Sometimes, there’s friction if there’s not enough lube, and that rubs at the skin and causes slight tears, like what happened to Taehyung. They heal up after a week or two, with plenty of painkillers, water, and hot flannels. Sometimes, there’s killer cramps and muscle pain afterwards, or even really bad bruising to the skin around the buttocks - but again, it’s completely natural.”

“Is that what happens during…during sex, Jimin?” Yoongi asked, his whisper-soft voice almost lost under the hiss of the tap water. “If we…if we made love; would that happen to you, to me?”

“No, baby boy, no. That’s what happens when you shove a several inch-long parcel inside of your body without proper preparation, and you keep it up there for over half a day,” Jimin disagreed, scrubbing his hands under the hot stream to try and rid himself of the unpleasant scent of latex, along with the talc that was caught in the grooves of his palms. “It’s different, it’s completely different to sex.”
“I…shit, Jimin. All of that blood, there was so much fucking blood,” Yoongi groaned, reaching up to place his hand against his throat. He gently rubbed at it, as if he was trying to dislodge a lump that might have formed there. “I saw all of that blood, and I thought ‘bout the pain, ‘bout the…the stretching and the roughness, and then I just…collapsed. I don’t wanna do that to you, darling. I don’t wanna hurt you like that, shit.”

“Yoongi, I’m not gonna lie to you,” Jimin said, twisting the tap off and snatching up some paper towels so that he could hastily dry his hands. “Sex can hurt, OK? Sex can be the greatest pleasure in the world, but it can also hurt - especially for guys like us. But sex can hurt for women too, if they’re not comfortable enough, stretched enough, wet enough. A lot of guys don’t even realise this fact, they just think their dicks can slide right on in and it’s all good. But I know, from talking to plenty of chicks over in The Castro, that women need preparation a lot of the time too.”

“Oh…oh, yeah?”

“Yeah, baby. Sex is…it requires patience, it requires guidance, preparation, plenty of foreplay. My past experiences…I didn’t often get to feel that, that gentle easing into sex. I’ve been hurt, sometimes pretty bad. I’ve cried during sex before.”

Jimin saw the way that Yoongi gulped at this, his Adam’s Apple bobbing down to the open collar of his shirt and then shooting back up again.

“But I’ve learnt from my past mistakes, and I’m never gonna let that happen ever again. When the time comes, when you’re ready for penetrative sex, we’re gonna take our time. We’re gonna do it right, OK?”

“OK.”

“You know, Yoongi…we don’t even have to do anything like that,” Jimin pointed out, as he bunched up the damp paper towels to toss them at the bin. “Anal sex - we don’t have to have it. We can be sexually intimate just fine without it like we are right now; you know that right?”

“I know, but I just feel like…”

Yoongi paused at this, once more struggling to find the right words to say to him. But just like before, Jimin found that he knew exactly what was on his mind.
“You feel like you need to experience it, even if only once,” he finished for him, to which Yoongi hummed in agreement. “You feel like it’s something that holds great importance. Maybe, in your journey to self-acceptance as a gay man? Or maybe, it’s a way to prove to yourself that you’re getting better?”

“Yeah, Jimin, it’s like that.”

“Well, like I said, if a day comes when you’re ready for it, then we’ll take our time and we’ll make it perfect. If that day doesn’t come, we’ll still be intimate and perfectly happy without it. OK, baby boy?”

Yoongi didn’t reply to this, rather he moved to slip his arms around his neck to pull him into an impromptu embrace.

Jimin let him do so, feeling his boyfriend pressing his face against his chest as he took a deep breath. He brought his own arms around him to hold him close, drawing some much needed comfort from him. He kept one arm slung around his waist, moving his other hand up to his head to tangle his fingers in his hair.

“Hey, Jimmy?”

At Namjoon’s sudden call, Jimin twisted to look back over his shoulder at the kitchen doorway. He saw that his friend was standing in the hallway, in the act of pulling his denim jacket on over his red tee-shirt.

“I need to head out for work, I’m already running late and my buyers are gonna be pissed as hell,” Namjoon explained, as he quickly pulled his second arm through the sleeve; his backpack swinging from his other fist. “I’ll be back in a couple of hours, OK? If you need to sleep, just use my bed.”

“Thanks, Daddy-o,” Jimin said with a smile, placing his cheek down on the top of Yoongi’s head. He felt his hair against his skin, the scent of faded shampoo mingling in with fresh sweat. “Stay safe on the streets.”

“I always am, brother.”

Jimin listened to the sound of the front door slamming shut a moment later, and then he moved to
press a quick kiss against the crown of Yoongi’s head.

Yoongi lifted his head to hold his gaze, silently imploring that he press another kiss against his brow, or maybe his lips. So Jimin did so, hoping that he would draw comfort from the soft kisses.

“I’ve been thinking about something, Yoongi,” he said, as he cupped his chin with his fingers. “Something to do with Taehyung. Before moving here, Jungkook was friends with him; they were student protesters in Seoul. Do you think that we should let him know what happened tonight?”

“No, don’t bring the kid here,” Yoongi suggested with a firm head shake. “Not when his friend’s in that state. He don’t need to see him like that, it’s upsetting, it’s shameful for Kim to be seen like this. I don’t think that Jungkook needs to see him in such a state, not after everything. ‘Specially not when he’s gonna be heading right on back home in a day or two.”

“Yeah, baby, but don’t you think that we should respect what Tae might want?” Jimin suggested, cocking his head so that a lock of hair fell across his brow; in want of being brushed back behind his ear. “This entire ordeal has been fucking traumatic for him. I wouldn’t wish what happened to him on anyone. I’ve been through the smuggling process before, but it’s not the same. He wasn’t prepared, he was flying with falsified documents. Christ, how he even ended up here, I still dunno. If Tae wants to see Jungkook, just to feel more at home, I think that we should let him.”

Jimin could see that Yoongi was thinking this over intently, no doubt trying to weigh up the pros and cons of the situation.

It was hard figuring it all out, for each pro seemed to have a con - Jungkook getting to see Taehyung again, but his friend being in a terrible state; they would get to spend time together, until he left the country in a few days time. The potential for upset was very high, Jimin would admit, but if there was a chance that the two of them could find even a tiny bit of happiness from each other’s company…wouldn’t that matter the most?

“I’ll get the kid in the morning, I’ll head over early before we start work,” Yoongi said to finally break the silence. “That’s if Kim wants to see him. Shit, I’m exhausted, Jimin.”

“Then sleep, baby boy,” Jimin suggested, placing his hands down on his boyfriend’s shoulders so that he could give them a soft squeeze. “I’m sorry for all of this, I’m really sorry.”

“Mmm, you ain’t gotta say sorry to me, darling,” Yoongi replied, his voice a heavy mumble. “But
you gotta promise me that you’ll sleep too, Jimin. Don’t stay up all night, alright? He ain’t going nowhere.”

“I will, I’ll just spend a little more time with him, and then I’ll come upstairs,” he promised, moving to give his boyfriend a final, chaste kiss on the lips.

Jimin watched Yoongi making his way upstairs until he was out of sight, until he had to track his movement by way of his softly thumping footsteps. As soon as he was certain that he was in the bedroom, he went back into the living-room to check up on Taehyung, seeing that his friend was still awake.

“Are you hungry, Tae? Do you want me to make you something to eat? You must be starving after the long flight.”

“Namjoon gave me somethin’ to eat with the pills. My stomach hurts too much to try eatin’ anythin’ else, but thanks for offerin’, Jiminie.”

“Oh, yeah? What was it?” he asked, shifting to sit down beside him on the floor again.

“Uh, chicken with salad, and some pasta.”

“You got to try Namo’s chicken pasta salad? Lucky guy!” Jimin remarked with a laugh, giving his friend a soft shove to the biceps. “That’s one of his best recipes, you’re so lucky that you ended up with that and not one of his usual…concoctions.”

“Yeah, it was cold, but it still tasted good. But…what’m I gonna do when I need to shit, Jiminie?” Taehyung asked, his expression and tone completely serious and not at all joking.

“You’re gonna swallow a bunch of laxatives, to ease the passing,” Jimin replied, as he reached over to knock his sweaty hair off his face for him. “It’s gonna hurt, I’m not gonna lie to you. It’ll hurt like hell, but the laxatives will help.”

Taehyung grimaced at this, showing that he found the idea disgusting.
Jimin had enough experience with laxatives to know that he was correct.

“I should’ve swallowed the fuckin’ drugs like Steven did,” Taehyung muttered, his words catching Jimin by surprise.

“Steven swallowed the drugs? What’d you mean by that, Tae?” he asked, lightly furrowing his brow.

“When he smuggled cocaine into Seoul, he’d swallowed one of the baggies, instead of shovin’ it up his ass. I should’ve done that too, to save myself all of this fuckin’ trouble…”

Lying on the floor just a few feet away, Jimin noticed that there were two passports. He shifted to retrieve them, checking the first to see that it was Taehyung’s real (but still technically fake) passport. He was confused by what his friend had just said, and he knew that he was going to ask Yoongi about such things at some point.

“Wow, another fake passport!” Jimin declared with a grin, as he flipped the second passport open to eye the documents. “This is getting outta hand, Tae. You’re getting a new one every week, huh?”

“Shit, I guess I got three identities now,” Taehyung remarked, the quip making Jimin snort laughter. “Don’t lemme get a fourth identity, Jiminie, or they might lock me up for bein’ nuts.”

“This is less an identity, more a…costume,” he replied, as he turned the passport around to flash it at him. “A costume that you’ll never have to wear again - thank god.”

Taehyung stared at the document for a few seconds before looking away again, and so he turned it back around to study it.

“Steven Yang, 1966…shit.”

Jimin lowered the passport at this, wanting to close it shut but finding that he couldn’t quite do so. He couldn’t even see the photograph of the boy underneath the one of Taehyung, but he still found himself staring at the square where Steven’s face should have been.

Steven was the exact same age as Jungkook, just a few months older than him - in fact. Eighteen
years old, and probably dead in the gutters somewhere from a drug overdose - a preventable, treatable death.

Goddamn, that stung.

“Tae, I’m sorry,” Jimin said in a whisper-soft voice, as he placed the passport aside.

“Huh? What’re you sayin’ sorry for, Jiminie?” Taehyung asked in genuine confusion, his eyes growing wide. “You ain’t got nothin’ to say sorry for.”

“I left you, Tae,” he stressed, even when he knew that his friend would argue against this. “I just went off-grid one day without so much as a word, and I left you behind. I feel terrible for doing that to you, and I hope that you’ll forgive me.”

“I don’t need to forgive you ‘cos you ain’t done nothin’ wrong, and I’m just gonna keep on sayin’ that, Jiminie.”

Jimin fell silent for a moment, thinking this over as he studied his friend. Although he was telling the truth and he had done no wrong, he couldn’t help but feel guilty in some way for what had happened to Taehyung. It was all because if he had still been his partner, none of this would have happened, but it was pointless regretting such things now.

“I keep thinkin’ ‘bout Steven,” Taehyung said, breaking the silence at long last. “Maybe, if I’d have known he was usin’ that shit, if I’d have said somethin’ to him, he mightn’t have taken those drugs…”

“No, it’s not that easy, Tae,” Jimin said with a soft head shake. “Believe me when I say that heroin is a bad drug, a really bad drug. There’s nothing that you could’ve done for him; OK? Talking about it wouldn’t have stopped the kid from using, it’s not that simple. Heroin takes over your brain, and even when it’s dangerous using the shit, it’s just as dangerous to stop taking it - not without constant supervision, like, in rehab.”

“What’s ‘rehab’, Jiminie?”

Jimin was once more struck by how little that Taehyung knew about the world, but he knew that it wasn’t his fault that he was so ignorant to these things.
Taehyung had a bright mind, even when he was pretty rough around the edges. He had the potential for knowing a great many things, for being as intelligent as Namjoon, but his scope was sadly limited - blinkered by an oppressive government regime that sought to drag him down.

“It’s a place where people with problems go when they need help, Tae,” Jimin explained, as he reached over to fix the washcloth back in place for him. It felt warm against his fingertips, and so it was going to need soaking in more cold water soon. “People take care of them, they help them fight certain things, like drug addiction, eating disorders, mental breakdowns - those kinda things.”

Taehyung made a soft sound at this, showing that he understood him.

“It’s not your fault that Steven was left behind like that, Tae. You didn’t know, you couldn’t have known that something like that was going to happen, so, don’t feel guilty.”

Jimin collected the washcloth, getting to his feet to go into the kitchen. He soaked it under the running tap once more to get it nice and cool, and then he brought it back to Taehyung to place it down on his brow.

“So, that’s Prince Min, huh?” Taehyung said after a moment of thought, rolling his eyes up to look at the freshly soaked washcloth. “He’s handsome, Jiminie. I dunno what I was expectin’ exactly, but I wasn’t thinkin’ he’d be handsome.”

“Yeah, I think he’s very handsome,” Jimin agreed with a soft smile, as he fixed the washcloth in place for him.

“Handsome, but short,” Taehyung remarked, which made Jimin snort laughter. “Well, you said you had a thing for short guys.”

“Tae, if you think you’re in pain now, just wait until he puts his foot up your ass after he hears you calling him short.”

This joke made Taehyung laugh, a soft chuckle that was sadly cut short as a result of his aching stomach muscles. But the sound brought a smile to Jimin’s face because it sounded just like the laugh that he was used to hearing coming from him.
“Is he treatin’ you good though, Jiminie? ‘Cos you need a man to treat you good after, y’know, all of the bad shit with your dad,” Taehyung said in a quiet voice, looking away from him in a way that showed that he was a little nervous about talking about such things with him. “I hope that Prince Min takes care of you good and proper, like a gentleman, or somethin’.”

“Prince Min’s the perfect gentleman,” he confirmed. “He makes me feel so good inside, in ways that I never even thought I could feel not too long ago. Hmm, you sound just like Namo right now, like a protective little brother.”

“Well, I ain’t sayin’ I’d kick his ass if he hurt you but-”

This time, it was Jimin that burst out laughing, finding Taehyung’s disrespectful attitude and joke highly amusing. He knew that he was just messing around, but there still seemed to be some truth in his words.

“Tae, do you wanna see Jungkook again? Whilst you’re here, in San Francisco?” Jimin finally asked, before it slipped out of his mind and he forgot to ask. “I think that he might like to see you again, so you can talk to each other in person after all of this time. But if you don’t want to, I understand.”

“You think he wants to see me ‘gain?” Taehyung asked in turn, his voice almost a whisper.

“Of course I do, you’re his friend, and he talks about you a lot,” Jimin explained, softly playing with his couple ring. “Don’t you wanna see him again?”

“Oh, he’s gonna be pissed,” Taehyung said, shaking his head from side to side with a tsking sound. “I don’t blame him, I’d be pissed off too, if it was him pullin’ shit like this. Smugglin’ drugs into the country…he might just beat me up for this.”

“Jungkook? Beat a guy up? You’re kidding me, right?” Jimin asked with a snort. “That boy’s a pacifist through and through.”

“You won’t say that when he punches you, Jiminie…”

“Anyway, I need to get some sleep, Tae, I’m working early tomorrow,” Jimin said in a quiet voice, feeling terrible because he had to leave him alone. “Are you gonna be alright? Do you want me to
“I didn’t sleep a wink on the plane, it hurt too much to fall asleep,” Taehyung replied, rolling his head back to stare up at the ceiling. “I need to get some rest too, now that I’m finally back on solid ground. I’m good, Jiminie, you go upstairs and sleep.”

“OK, I’ll be upstairs. If you need me, just shout,” Jimin said, giving his friend’s hand a final, firm squeeze. “Try and get some sleep, Tae, you deserve it.”

“You too, Jiminie. Sweet dreams, bro.”

“Sweet dreams to you too. I love you, brother.”

Before going upstairs to join Yoongi, Jimin grabbed the tray and he carried it into the kitchen. He quickly cleaned the glass and bowl in the sink, leaving the packet of Codeine on the counter, just to stop Taehyung from swallowing any more over the course of the night if the pain got too bad. He left the dishes to dry on the sideboard, having to dry his hands with paper towels because the dish towel on the floor was stained with blood.

When he spared a final glance through the living-room doorway, Jimin saw that Taehyung had succumbed to sleep at last - or more apt, exhaustion. He had his head turned to the side on the cushion, his slumbering face devoid of any expression.

Jimin hit the light to plunge the living-room into darkness, and then he slowly made his way upstairs. He cringed every time that the wooden steps creaked under his weight, the noise as loud as a scream in the silence of the home. When he reached the top, he let his breath out in a sigh of relief as he went along the landing to enter the bedroom.

The sight of Yoongi lying on the mattress, his clothing folded up on the dresser and the light covers pulled up over him, made Jimin pause in the doorway for a moment. The blue glow from the lava lamp cast over his boyfriend, a wash of deep blue on his skin that reminded him so much of the beach at night; in the summer months, when the moon would hang full in the cloudless skies.

Jimin also got undressed, slipping out of his suit and shirt to fold the items on the dresser too. He kept his briefs on for modesty, just in case Taehyung needed him in the middle of the night, and then he moved to go over to the bed.
Jimin couldn’t believe the fact that he had once found Namjoon’s bed comfortable. After spending several nights in Yoongi’s bed, he had started getting used to the wonderful softness of his California King-Sized mattress. Now, climbing onto the tiny, lumpy mattress, he realised just how uncomfortable it had been all along - they had just grown accustomed to it.

In the act of climbing onto the bed, the mattress springs groaned and shifted under his added weight. The sudden sound and movement disturbed Yoongi, who was lying away from him with his legs tucked up close to his stomach. Jimin heard a soft grunt escaping him, which signalled that he must have drifted off whilst he had been waiting for him, and he felt bad for waking him up.

“Mmm, Jimin?” Yoongi breathed out in a husky voice, as he moved to stretch his legs out across the mattress. “That you?”

“It’s me, baby boy,” Jimin confirmed, slipping under the covers and lying down on his side behind him. “It’s OK, go back to sleep.”

Yoongi sniffed hard a few times before rolling onto his back, taking up even more room on the cramped mattress as he did so. He reached up to roughly rub at his eyes for a few seconds, and then he turned his head to the side to look at him.

Their noses were just mere inches apart, and he reached up to give Yoongi a playful bat on the nose with his forefinger, bopping at the rounded tip to make him almost go cross-eyed tracking the sudden movement. Jimin found himself letting out a little giggle at the sight, seeing his boyfriend’s lips curving up at the corners in a tired smile.

“Mmm, you’re like a big kid, sometimes,” Yoongi mumbled, slowly blinking a few times to try and force his eyes to stay open. “You and the kid, you’re one and the same, thick as thieves.”

“I couldn’t help it, your nose is just asking for it,” Jimin said, as he reached over to brush Yoongi’s hair back off his brow for him. “It’s just asking to be played with, or kissed, it’s too cute.”

“It’s cute, huh?”

“Uuhh, so cute I just wanna-”

Jimin moved to press a quick kiss against the tip of Yoongi’s nose to prove a point. He had to press
another quick kiss against his lips too, of course, just for the sake of it.

Yoongi hummed at this, pouting his lips out just in time to return the kiss. He closed his eyes as he did so, his entire expression that of complete comfort and contentedness.

“There,” Jimin said with a smile, as he pulled his face away. “A kiss for my baby boy and his cute, little nose.”

“You ‘k, darling? Anything you wanna talk ‘bout? You look like you got something on your mind,” Yoongi remarked, his gaze slowly flickering between his eyes and lips in turn. “I could be wrong, but…I ain’t been wrong ‘bout that yet.”

Yes, Yoongi seemed to have an uncanny ability at detecting when he was worrying about something, or when he wanted to say something to him but he was scared to do so. He must be able to sense something coming from him, just like Jimin was able to sense when he was starting to get anxious.

“Just thinking, Yoongi. Tae said something funny, I’ve been thinking about it for awhile now,” Jimin said, as he wriggled on the mattress to try and get comfortable. “He said that the kid he was muling with swallowed the drugs, like, he swallowed a baggie of coke to smuggle it internally. Have you ever heard about something like that, baby boy?”

“We’re experimenting with it, seeing how it goes,” Yoongi replied, as he rolled onto his side to face him. He instinctively slipped his arm over his waist to pull him close, so that Jimin could press his face against his throat and breathe in the faded scent of his cologne. “Smuggling’s a tough game, Jimin - there’s no rules, it constantly changes to stay one step ahead of competition. Under my grandfather, even under my father, you could smuggle heroin into this country in fucking oil drums with shipments of, oh, I dunno - shipments of rice. It was so much easier back then, when everyone was ignorant. Now, it ain’t that simple. We ain’t shipping tons no more, we’re shipping kilos.”

Jimin made a soft sound at this to let him know that he was listening. Just like always, he found Yoongi’s ‘history lessons’ (as he liked to call them) fascinating to listen to. He liked hearing his boyfriend talking about such things, such intelligent things that he didn’t know about.

“Mmm, the Feds are so obsessed with what’s coming outta Colombia these days - blow, blow, more fucking blow. The country’s being flooded with that shit, the cartels are getting stronger and stronger. It’s been a great fucking distraction for us for a couple of years, but they ain’t dumb, Jimin. The Feds are getting smarter, they’re bringing in new ways to track drugs. Shit, they got aerostats up in the sky tracking smuggling planes from Mexico and Colombia every day; they’re starting to
monitor phone lines over in Colombia to track gang activity.”

“If they’re evolving, then that means that…”

“We gotta evolve too, just like the cartels - to keep up with ‘em,” Yoongi finished, his fingers gently tracing circles against the dip of his lower back. “Muling needs to evolve, and swallowing the drugs is just as efficient now. Harder to get caught, dozens of people on the same flight can smuggle the shit in with ease - but it’s dangerous.”

“It sounds fucking terrifying, Yoongi - I wouldn’t swallow the drugs, no way in hell,” Jimin remarked with a vigorous head shake, as he cosied up against his boyfriend. “I’m glad I got out of muling before I’d to start doing that.”

“The War on Drugs’ a gift that just keeps giving, darling. Fucking Bush keeps pushing for CIA and military involvement overseas, pft-”

Yoongi snorted at this, his breath disturbing a lock of hair on his brow.

Jimin felt it brushing against his skin, so soft and ticklish, but he made no move to brush it back off his face because he was far too comfortable lying in his arms.

“Reagan and Bush, both of ‘em are thorns in my goddamn side - a match made in fucking hell.”

Yoongi let his breath out in a weary sigh, his breath warm against his scalp in a way that Jimin craved; like how he loved feeling his cool fingers threading through his hair to play with it when he was drifting off to sleep.

“How’s Kim?” Yoongi asked in a quiet voice, finally deciding to broach the serious subject at hand. “How’s he doing, huh?”

“How’s Kim?” Yoongi asked in a quiet voice, finally deciding to broach the serious subject at hand. “How’s he doing, huh?”

“Honestly? I dunno, Yoongi. I dunno how he’s doing right now. The shock of it all, I don’t think Tae’s even registered what’s happened to him just yet,” Jimin replied, finding a tiny freckle just south of the prominent bump of Yoongi’s clavicle with his fingertips. He gently stroked at it, tracing little concentric circles around the tiny, black spot. “I’m looking at him, I’m talking to him, but it’s like… he’s not really there. Behind the eyes, you know?”
“I don’t think you gotta worry, darling,” Yoongi said, his fingers slowly shifting down from the dip of his lower back to skirt along to his hip bone. “Kim’s travelled halfway across the world, he’s suffered great shock. With all of that taken into account, ‘specially the time-zone differences, I think it’s gonna take him a lil while to come ‘round.”

“I just hope that he doesn’t take a bad turn, or something,” Jimin sighed, closing his eyes so that he could follow his boyfriend’s gentle touch. His palm settled on his hip, his thumb stroking across the wing of his hip bone and his fingers splayed across the cotton of his briefs to lightly sink into his buttock. “I don’t think that he needs to go to the hospital. But what if I’m wrong? What if he-”

“Kim’s gonna be fine, Jimin,” Yoongi interjected, cutting him off before he could finish his worried train of thought. “You need to sleep. You can check on him in the morning, and he’s gonna be perfectly fine. So, just get some rest; yeah?”

“I think that I’ll sleep better with some kisses,” Jimin whispered, shifting to bring his face closer to his and hold his gaze.

Yoongi thought this over for a moment, and then he angled his face to give him a soft, chaste kiss.

One kiss turned to two, to three, and Jimin felt his arm slipping around Yoongi’s neck to pull him closer; his legs tangling up within his under the thin covers. The act of pulling him closer resulted in Yoongi shifting to lean over him and take hold of his shoulder, the weight of his chest bearing down on his making Jimin softly moan against his mouth.

Jimin didn’t know if Taehyung was going to be alright, but he did know that being cradled in Yoongi’s arms made him feel safe.

27th October, 1984, 5:33am: The Bayview, San Francisco, United States of America

Jungkook jerked awake to the sudden sensation of something warm and wet against his face. It took
him all of three seconds to figure out what it was, mostly because he could hear the unmistakable sound of a certain puppy panting hot breath right down his ear.

“Ah, Tigger,” he mumbled, shifting to bury his face in the crook of his elbow so that his puppy would stop licking him.

Well, Tigger should have stopped licking him, but that didn’t happen at all. No, she just shoved her nose into his hair to carry on licking him instead, her wet tongue likely leaving it all tangled together in a mess of drool.

Jungkook was left with no choice but to sit upright to get her to stop, even when he was so tired that he didn’t want to move. He felt the covers slipping down to land in a puddle in his lap, exposing his upper body to the cool air at last. He reached up to scratch at his neck with a loud yawn, seeing that Tigger copied his yawn with one of her own yawns - rolling her pink tongue out much like how he flashed his tongue at her.

“Hungry?” Jungkook asked, sniffing a couple of times as he tried to find the pesky itch right between his shoulder blades so that he could scratch it and find some relief.

Tigger cocked her head at this, her floppy ears flapping around as she let out a funny sound. It sounded curious, like a little hum that meant that she wanted to know what this funny human word ‘hungry’ meant.

Jungkook slowly crawled out of bed to get to his feet, his tee-shirt heavily wrinkled in parts from slumber. When his bare feet touched the cold flooring, he let out a discontent whine because he hated the sensation. He actually stepped from foot to foot for a few seconds like a child, trying to lessen the shock of the cold wood on his skin.

Jungkook shuffled across the apartment room like a zombie, his left eye still very much glued shut and his hair sticking up in a corkscrewed mess from Tigger’s naughty grooming session. He had to root around one of the cupboards in the kitchen-area to find the tin of dog food, which was almost empty already because his puppy had such a large appetite for such a small dog.

That was likely a sign that she was going to need even more food in the future when she was an adult, which wasn’t something that Jungkook was going to think about right now.

After shovelling the remains of the dog food into the bowl, Jungkook crossed the apartment room to
place it down for Tigger. She dived right onto it eagerly, chowing down chunks of processed beef that was stuck in a thick, congealed mess of jelly that didn’t look at all appealing to him.

Jungkook collected the empty water bowl so that he could top it up with some water from the kitchen tap. He went back over to Tigger, planning on crawling right back under the covers again to get a little more sleep now that she had been fed and watered. But when he spared a quick glance out of the small apartment room window at the street down below, he found himself coming to a complete stop.

Yoongi’s car was parked outside on the curb, the sight enough to make him almost drop Tigger’s bowl of water down onto his toes.

“Huh?” Jungkook hummed, blinking rapidly as he stared at the immobile vehicle. “What the…?”

For a couple of seconds, Jungkook was almost convinced that he wasn’t even awake; that he was in fact still fast asleep on the mattress just a few feet away. It made more sense that he was asleep than he was awake because he couldn’t figure out why Yoongi’s car was parked on the street outside.

Was there a chance that he was sleepy and he was mistaken, that it was a completely different vehicle that just happened to look like Yoongi’s car? There were a lot of bright red cars in the city, after all, and so it would be easy enough to get confused.

Jungkook shifted the water bowl into one hand, so that he could reach up with his free hand to rub at his heavy eyelids with his rolled-up fingers.

No, Jungkook quickly figured out that he wasn’t mistaken. The car that was parked on the curb was most certainly Yoongi’s car: his cherry red BMW M1, the one that was apparently incredibly expensive (and very much looked to be so). There was no mistaking it, for Jungkook would recognise the car at a single glance - particularly its sharp, squared hood and boot, and the vents that covered the both of them.

“Yoongi?” Jungkook said to himself, finally placing the water bowl down beside Tigger’s food bowl. He heard her greedily lapping the water up as he moved to get to the window, just so that he could get a better look at the car.

After a moment spent staring down at the street, Jungkook moved back over to his mattress so that he could rifle through a box of clothing placed close to the bottom. He grabbed a fresh tee-shirt out of it,
dragging off the tee-shirt he had slept in to drop it down on the floor without a single care. Then he
collected his worn dungarees, deciding that they were still clean enough to wear for another day or
two. He stuck his legs through them so that he could stand up and pull them up. He slipped his arms
through the sides, and then he fixed the left strap in place up on his shoulder.

Jungkook left the right strap dangling loose because he had seen a boy wearing his dungarees like
that on the streets a couple of days ago; a cool-looking boy that had had been playing basketball with
his friends in the back of an abandoned lot, who had been sporting a pair of colourful sneakers. It
seemed like the right way to wear his dungarees too, so that he looked a little more mature and cool.

After crawling across the apartment-room to get to the box of shoes, Jungkook retrieved his white
sneakers. He tugged them on, hastily knotting the laces whilst Tigger finished devouring the remains
of her breakfast. He scanned the room as he knotted the laces, hoping to locate a pen of some kind -
spotting one lying on the floor close to his photo album.

As soon as he was done brushing his teeth in the tiny bathroom, Jungkook snatched the pen up off
the floor so that he could leave a note of some kind behind; knowing that it was irresponsible of him
to leave the block without telling his parents anything. He had to search for a piece of paper,
eventually tearing a sheet free from his notebook to place it down on the kitchen counter and start
writing.

“Goddammit,” he muttered, finding that the pen was almost completely dry.

Jungkook had to scribble in the corner for a few seconds, the nib leaving behind scratches on the
surface before the ink started running. He doodled a little ball of black, satisfied that the pen was now
working again, and then he started writing a quick note.

When he had finished the note, he snatched a still ripening persimmon out of a small, glass bowl so
that he could use it as a paperweight. He put it at the top of the sheet, quickly reading the scrawl of
black ink to make sure that his note made sense.

‘Went to go see friends, mama! Brought Tigger with me! Be back later!’

There, that would suffice.

Jungkook located Tigger’s leash on the floor by his mattress, hidden underneath his cast-off denim
jacket. He crawled over to her so that he could clip it onto her collar, and then he swept her up into
his arms to carry her out of the apartment-room - her food bowl having been completely licked clean.

It was always so much more easier carrying Tigger down the winding apartment stairs than walking her, for she always dragged on the leash and threatened to pull him down a whole flight. Jungkook darted down the narrow staircase as fast as he could, feeling his puppy bouncing around in his arms in a way that made her let out a series of curious yips.

“Big brother’s outside, Tigger,” Jungkook explained, even when he knew that the dog couldn’t understand a single word that he had said.

Upon reaching the ground-floor, Jungkook placed Tigger down at long last. He shoved the block door open, hearing the hinges creaking from years without oil and a thick layer of rust that had encrusted over them. As soon as Tigger had bounded out of the block, he followed her outside to quickly walk over to the parked car.

“Big brother, what are you doing here?” Jungkook asked, dropping to glance through the open driver-seat window at the man.

Yoongi started with an obvious jump, twisting to stare up at him. His rounded but small eyes grew considerably larger from shock, and his thick eyebrows disappeared underneath the mess of kinked, black hair that was always hanging over his brow.

“Shit, kid, you scared me half to death,” Yoongi sighed, reaching up press his hand against his chest. After checking that his heart was still ticking like regular and not about to stop beating in shock, he dropped his hand back down into his lap again. “C’mon, jump in the front. I was just ‘bout to come and get you, but then I realised I dunno your goddamn apartment room number. How’d y’know I was outside, huh?”

“I saw your car through the window,” Jungkook explained, moving around the front of the car so that he could jump into the passenger-seat. “I left a note for my parents and I raced out of the block to talk to you. But you didn’t answer my question. What are you doing here, big brother?”

“Seatbelt on,” Yoongi ordered, grabbing hold of the handbrake to disengage it before slowly pulling the vehicle away from the curb.

Jungkook did as he was told; suddenly finding himself wondering if Yoongi was avoiding answering his question, or if he was just assuming that to be the case.
Tigger settled in place in his lap, rather than crawl free to lie in the backseat like usual. The sight and scent of the open window had caught her attention, for she moved to stand on her back legs to place her forepaws on the window rest and shove her nose up against the glass.

Yoongi shifted in his seat to get comfortable, his hand on the gear stick for a few seconds as he moved it around. He shifted it back up to the steering-wheel as soon as it was in the desired gear, allowing him to keep hold with his right hand and fold his left arm on the window rest.

Jungkook studied him for a moment, eyeing his loose black suit and white shirt in mild confusion. Yoongi had never worn a suit in his presence before, for he seemed to prefer wearing casual, comfortable clothing instead. That was a sign that he might just be working today, that he had important business to see to. He looked good, looked handsome because he looked much more mature.

Jungkook knew that if he were to tell him that he looked handsome, Yoongi would get embarrassed. He might just snort and reach over to shove at his arm, or he might mutter something about how he was ugly to try and brush the compliment away.

“Yoongi?” Jungkook finally said in a quiet voice, breaking the momentary silence that had fallen inside of the car.

“…Kid, I got something to tell you right now. Shit, I know that you ain’t gonna believe what I’m gonna tell you, but you still need to listen to me; yeah?” Yoongi said, glancing away from the road for a moment to look over at him. “D’you promise to listen, even if it don’t seem real?”

Jungkook thought this over for a few seconds, finding his gaze shifting between Yoongi’s eyes and the steering-wheel in a somewhat anxious manner.

“I promise, big brother. You can tell me, I’ll listen to whatever you tell me.”

“Jungkook, your friend - Taehyung? He’s here.”

“Taehyungie? Taehyungie…he’s here? In America?” Jungkook asked dumbly, staring at him because he suddenly couldn’t seem to blink. “What?”
Yoongi turned back to the road to keep an eye on the traffic in front of them, leaving him to stare at him unblinkingly as he tried to process his words.

Yet, Jungkook found that he couldn’t seem to do that. Of all the things that Jungkook had expected his friend to tell him, that had most certainly not been on the list. It was so ridiculous that it just couldn’t be real, even if Yoongi had told him that he was telling him the truth.

“Big brother, is this a joke or something?” he finally asked, the rather disrespectful question slipping free before he was able to curb himself.

“Nah, it ain’t a joke. He’s here, in San Francisco,” Yoongi continued, moving hand over hand on the steering-wheel so that the car smoothly turned a corner. “There was a problem with a deal, and he ended up doing something pretty reckless. He can explain all of that shit better than I can, ‘k. Right now, all you need to know’s that he’s here, and I’m taking you to go and see him.”

“Taehyungie’s in Korea, big brother,” Jungkook argued, trying his very hardest to give him a knowing smile, even though his face felt rather numb and cold. “Did Jimin tell you about him? Did he tell you that it’d be funny to prank me, or something? I’ve heard that Americans love pulling pranks.”

Yoongi looked away from the road at this, giving him an expression that Jungkook had no possible way of reading. He studied him for a few seconds, and then he turned back to the wheel without a single word.

For the duration of the near half hour ride across the city, Yoongi remained completely quiet, rather than speak to him. Jungkook didn’t like this fact, as it made him feel somewhat uncomfortable. The air inside of the car didn’t feel comfortable and relaxed, like it usually was whenever Yoongi took him out for a ride across the city. No, it felt tense in a way that almost demanded to be broken… except Jungkook didn’t know how he was supposed to do that.

Taehyung was here, in America, in San Francisco? That was crazy; was like something out of a dream and in no way possibly reality. It didn’t make any sense at all why Taehyung would be in the country, and so Jungkook couldn’t help but feel that this was either a strange prank, or a very vivid dream.

Jungkook pulled Tigger that little bit closer to him, cradling her in his arms whilst she kept her black nose stuck through the crack in the window. Her tail slapped against his stomach and ribs over and over, showing just how excited that she was watching the early morning sights go blurring past the window.
The view outside of the windows was that of a sky that was still lightening in parts: a deep blue that had purple bruising here and there across the surface, along with thick gatherings of clouds. The sun had started rising already, but it would take it some time to break through what looked like another potentially rainy day. The traffic was sparse in most parts, though some roads were still packed with vehicles and early morning buses.

Eventually, Yoongi was drifting down the streets of a neighbourhood that Jungkook recognised with ease. He knew that it was Haight-Ashbury because of the colourful houses that adorned a lot of the streets; houses that looked just like Namjoon’s interesting and large home. He liked the neighbourhood a lot, even though he had been told to avoid visiting it on his own because it was riddled with crime.

Jungkook noticed that Yoongi was pulling up right outside of Namjoon’s house after a few minutes, which made him shift in the passenger-seat with a stirring sense of interest and nerves.

Why had Yoongi taken him to Namjoon’s house?

Yoongi killed the engine, popping his seatbelt free and giving him a quick look that told him to get out of the car. He shoved the door open, getting out onto the curb with a soft grunt.

Jungkook copied his actions, temporarily carrying Tigger in the crook of his elbow so that he could slam the door shut behind him. Then he followed him up the slight front steps, watching Yoongi pulling a set of keys free from his trouser pocket, which he shoved into the keyhole and twisted hard to unlock the door.

Yoongi pushed the door open, gesturing for him to enter the house first. There was an interesting scent hanging thick in the air that Jungkook recognised, but couldn’t quite figure out. Whatever it was, it was coming from the kitchen in strong waves, and it made Jungkook feel a panging under his ribs to remind him that he hadn’t eaten breakfast.

Jimin was sitting on the staircase facing the front door, struggling to stay awake judging from the way that his head was hanging low. His hair was dangling forward to obscure a great deal of his face, and it looked like his eyes were closed.

Jungkook could see those expensive-looking earrings of his in his ears, visible through the black threads of his hair - which matched the sparkling and silver rings on many of his fingers. He was also wearing a well-pressed suit of light grey, that contrasted against his black work shirt. The collar was
open, the top two buttons undone to reveal a hint of his smooth, freckled chest.

Jimin was dressed for work, dressed just like Yoongi was - the both of them looking very smart and cool to Jungkook’s eyes.

The one thing about Jimin that Jungkook had come to expect was that he looked good always: bright, glowing, quick to smile in a way that instantly brightened up the room. He was envious of the fact that Jimin had so much confidence around others, that he could strike up conversations with strangers with ease and not feel shy or uncomfortable like him.

But this morning, Jimin looked exhausted and not at all bright and glowing. He should be in his bed right now, enjoying a nice rest, and yet, he seemed unable to do so because of what was going on right now.

“Hmm?” Jimin hummed, lifting his head up at the sound of the front door swinging inwards. He reached up to massage at the back of his neck with a soft wince, slowly opening his eyes so that he could squint at them both. “Oh, you’re back, Yoongi.”

“Yeah, got the kid with me,” Yoongi replied, also talking in English. “How’s he been, huh?”

“The same as before. He can’t seem to sleep for too long right now, probably because of the time-zone differences. But he’ll be unconscious in a couple of hours when it finally hits him, especially the drugs. I gave him some more Codeine, so, he’s gonna be floating in that nice, blue haze for a little while,” Jimin replied, forcing his eyes to stay open. “Hey, Jungkook. How’re you feeling right now, huh?”

“Confused,” Jungkook retorted without a hint of hesitation. He quickly stepped out of his sneakers to be polite, leaving them by the door for Tigger to sniff at and give a naughty nibble. “I’m really confused, Jimin.”

“We gotta leave for work now, kid,” Yoongi said, hovering by the open front door. “We can’t stay here with you, I’m sorry. Namjoon’s resting upstairs after last night. If you need him, I’m sure he ain’t gonna mind you waking him up. Otherwise, it’s just you and him ‘til he wakes up.”

“There’s some eomukguk in the kitchen, rice too,” Jimin explained, softly rubbing at his heavy eyelids as he got to his feet. “Hmm, give it about ten more minutes and it’s ready.”
“Eomukguk? You made eomukguk?” Jungkook asked in surprise, finally realising what the familiar scent that was coming from the kitchen was.

“Uhuh, I know how much that Tae likes it,” Jimin said, rolling his shoulders as he sniffed hard a few times. “Come here, cutie.”

Jungkook let Jimin slip his arms around his neck to give him a rather tender embrace. He had to stretch slightly to do so because of their height difference, but he didn’t need to get up onto tiptoes at least. He wasn’t sure why Jimin was hugging him right now, but he found himself appreciating the sentiment regardless of this fact.

“I know that things might look bad right now, but Tae’s gonna be fine, OK?” Jimin promised him in a soft whisper, pulling his face away so that he could look up at him. “Tae, he did something very reckless and dangerous, and he could’ve died. But he didn’t, because he’s so goddamn lucky. Tae’s had such a bad time, and he needs a strong friend to be there for him right now. Even if you feel like crying, try and smile, just for him, Jungkook.”

“OK,” Jungkook said, still very much confused by what was going on right now. “I’ll do that, Jimin.”

This didn’t feel like a silly, American prank to him any more.

This felt like it might just be…real.

“Tae’s in the living-room,” Jimin explained, giving his shoulders a quick and comforting squeeze before he let go of him again. “Like I said, there’s eomukguk in the kitchen. Help yourself to whatever you need, OK?”

Jungkook nodded at this, moving to pass him so that he could go into said living-room. He found himself walking at a slow speed, almost dragging his feet because he was suddenly filled with a sense of apprehension.

“Hang on,” Yoongi said in English, his voice nothing more than a soft whisper but still carrying in the silent home. “Wait here a sec, Jimin. I wanna see how he reacts.”

Jungkook didn’t understand most of what his friend had just said, save for one or two words here
and there. He glanced back over his shoulder to see that Yoongi was lingering in the hallway, watching him intently for some reason that he didn’t quite know. Jimin was beside the front door, in the act of slipping into a pair of fancy-looking shoes; hunkered forward so that his nice, bouncy hair was hanging around his face in loose waves.

Though Jungkook had been anticipating the fact that he was going to see Taehyung again, when he first laid eyes on him through the open doorway, he felt his breath leaving him in a weak wheeze.

There was nothing that could have prepared Jungkook for such a reaction, for it felt like he had been punched straight in the gut - all of the air escaping his body as he crumpled forward from the sensation. He even pressed a hand against his stomach, as if he was nursing his body from the hard blow.

Jungkook felt a sudden chill spreading across his body, his heartbeat dropping to a strange, slow rhythm that made it hard to breathe. A tinny ringing starting filling his ears, which quickly flooded his skull until the noise was so strong, so overwhelming, that he wanted to press his hands against his ears to try and block it out. He staggered back out into the hallway, his legs buckling as his vision suddenly cut to black.

“Oh, cutie!” Jimin cried out, darting along the hallway to try and catch him before he collapsed.

Yoongi beat Jimin to it, catching his hands under his armpits so that he could save him from dropping to hit the floor in a crumpled heap. He had to drag him back to support his weight, letting out a deep grunt of effort as he did so.

Jungkook could feel his head resting against the other man’s thin, but wide chest. The scent of detergent and faded leather emanated from his body, a strangely comforting scent that reminded him of his father. His legs were currently useless; limp and rubbery, unable to help him stand up again, and his head felt like it was submerged in water right now.

Why did everything seem so strange and distant? He had fainted, hadn’t he? How come he could still see and hear everything that was happening around him, and yet he was paralysed; unable to move a single muscle?

“I got him, I got him,” Yoongi said in English, supporting his limp body and weight with surprising ease.
Jimin came to a stop right in front of Jungkook, his face blocking his vision so that he couldn’t see much more than a blur of features. He was so close, just like Yoongi, and yet their voices sounded like they were coming from miles away; as if they were echoing through a tunnel to reach him.

“Is he OK? What happened?”

“He’s ‘k, he’s fine, Jimin. He’s just had a lil shock, that’s all. Like I did last night. Give him a minute, he’ll be right back on his feet.”

“Oh, Jungkook,” Jimin sighed, the sound of concern heavy in his voice as he slowly brushed his hair back out of his eyes for him. “It’s OK. Just try and breathe nice and slow, hmm?”

“I told him ‘bout his friend on the drive back here, but he didn’t believe me,” Yoongi explained, before quickly adding. “Can you blame him? It sounded fucking crazy, darling. It is fucking crazy.”

“You did what you could to try and prepare him, Yoongi. I’m not surprised that he didn’t believe you, all things considered.”

Jungkook managed to get his legs back under him after a moment of weak fumbling; his socked feet slipping across the wooden flooring until he stood upright again. He placed a hand against the wall, just for the added support, and he dropped his head forward whilst he fought off the residual dizziness.

“You ‘k, Jungkook? You ain’t gonna drop again; right?” Yoongi asked, hovering his hand right behind his lower back just in case he needed to grab hold of him again.

“I’m OK,” Jungkook replied, giving him a slow nod as he reached up to touch his brow. He was shocked to find that it felt clammy, his fingers coming back slick with a greasy, unpleasant smear of sweat. His whole body felt like that: cold and slimy with sweat. “Thank you, big brother.”

“Don’t mention it, kid,” Yoongi said in a soft voice, giving him a quick pat on the back before pulling his hand away.

“I just…I didn’t understand what you meant before, big brother,” Jungkook said, as he hastily wiped at his sweaty face with the back of his hand. “When you said that he was here, in America…I couldn’t understand. It was like my brain couldn’t accept such a thing could possibly be real, and so,
it was like you were speaking complete nonsense to me. I shouldn’t have doubted you, and I shouldn’t have accused you of pulling a prank on me. I’m sorry.”

“You ain’t gotta apologise, but I’ll accept it anyway.”

“Shit, Taehyungie’s really in that room; isn’t he?” Jungkook asked, quickly brushing his hand against the front of his dungarees. “I’m not having some crazy dream right now; right?”

“Tae’s in the living-room, cutie. You’re awake right now, this is real,” Jimin replied, giving his upper arm a firm squeeze, rather than a pinch. “Are you OK? Do you need me to go in the room with you, just until the shock passes?”

“OK…OK, I can do this,” Jungkook whispered under his breath, taking a deep breath to try and still his nervous shaking. “I can do it on my own, Jimin. But…thank you for offering.”

After steeling himself with several slow and deep breaths, Jungkook moved to go through the open doorway, Tigger right on his heel. She was too busy sniffing at the floor to notice that there was something, or rather someone more interesting just a few feet away.

Taehyung was lying on the floor currently, a mass of pillows and sofa cushions supporting his head and body so that he wasn’t lying on the hard wooden flooring. A colourful, knitted blanket had been strewn across him, and the ends had lifted up show a flash of his bare feet. He looked to be in the midst of taking a nap, one arm folded over his eyes to block the dull sunlight coming from the bay window across the floor.

Goddamn time-zone differences. Jungkook could remember being unable to sleep properly for the best part of a week when he had first ended up in America.

When Tigger finally finished scenting the floor and she noticed Taehyung, she let out a yipping bark and she bounded forward to stretch the leash to its fullest extent. The sound woke Taehyung up, his eyes shooting wide open as he lifted his head up off the pillow.

“Whoa!” Taehyung exclaimed, as he tried to prop his weight up onto his elbows. A washcloth fell free from his brow to land on the flooring from the movement. “Is that a dog?! Shit, that’s a fuckin’ dog!”
Not even a twelve hour plane ride across the world, or a near-death experience, could change his friend.

Jungkook reached up to fumble at the leash, unclipping it from around his dungaree buckle so that Tigger was free to race over to his friend. She darted over to dive onto him, climbing all over his body so that she could receive attention from this interesting-smelling new human.

Jungkook saw the way that Taehyung’s excited grin twitched at the corners when the puppy’s full weight settled down onto his stomach, almost as if it hurt him in some way. But as quick as the pained expression appeared on his face, his grin returned as he grabbed Tigger’s head in both hands to give her ears a vigorous rub.

“Oh, look at you!” Taehyung declared, his voice taking on a babyish note as he addressed the puppy. “You’re a big girl, huh? A real big girl!”

From down the hallway, Jungkook heard the banging sound of the front door being pulled shut - signalling that Yoongi and Jimin had finally left to go to work. On account of the fact that Namjoon was resting upstairs, this meant that he was alone with Taehyung for the time being.

In normal circumstances, being alone with his friend would be completely natural. He and Taehyung had spent enough time in the company of other student protesters at rallies, and alone together working on speeches and organising potential escape routes around protest locations to be more than comfortable with one another.

But this wasn’t normal circumstances - not at all. It had been two months since they had seen each other, and in that time, a lot had happened to the both of them. There were so many things that Jungkook wanted to tell him about, things that he had been unable to cram into his letters; things that just felt like they needed to be shared face-to-face. Yet…he had found himself coming over so shy all of a sudden.

It was probably because he was so happy to see him, that was all. Jungkook was so happy that he had gotten nervous as a result, which happened to him often. That was why he couldn’t seem to speak to his friend right now, even though his mind was racing with the words that he wanted to say.

“Hey, Taehyungie,” Jungkook greeted in a quiet voice, hovering close to the doorway. His hands were shoved behind his back so that he could nervously fidget with them, seeing as his dungarees had no pockets to shove them into.
“Hey, Jungkookie,” Taehyung replied, glancing up from the puppy to give him a quick smile. He didn’t look nervous at all, not in the slightest - but wasn’t that to be expected?

Taehyung was the epitome of a real cool guy: laid-back, quick to laugh, always had something interesting to say.

“Your dog sure is cute. What’s her name ‘gain?”

“Tigger,” Jungkook replied, so very thankful that he had brought the puppy with him to help ease his nerves.

“Tigger? Ah, you always did like Tigger more than Pooh,” Taehyung remarked, letting out a quick chuckle.

“Jimin…um, Jimin said that you did something dangerous, that you could’ve died. He didn’t tell me what he meant by that. What happened to you, Taehyungie?”

“I tried smugglin’, it ain’t my thing,” Taehyung explained with a lazy shrug, still very much giving Tigger a massage to the jowls; the puppy happily panting away.

“Smuggling? What do you mean, Taehyungie? Like…smuggling drugs?”

Taehyung didn’t answer his question, and so Jungkook moved to cross the living-room to get closer to him. He shifted to sit down beside him, comfortably crossing his legs.

Tigger noticed that his lap was available, so she climbed off Taehyung’s ribs to settle in place there instead. Before doing so, she made sure to bump her wet, black nose against his friend’s mouth, just for the sake of it. Then she curled up in Jungkook’s lap, her short tail slapping against his thigh.

“Are you gonna tell me what happened, Taehyungie? Or, are you gonna keep it a secret, just like everything else?” he asked, looking down at Tigger so that he could avoid having to hold his gaze.

“Somethin’ went wrong, Jungkook. Let’s just say that. Somethin’ went wrong and I tried to fix it, but that wasn’t the smartest idea. I did what I’d to do, that’s all that matters.”
Jungkook couldn’t help but wonder when Taehyung would tell him what it was really like working in the gang, rather than just small details that left him with more questions than answers. He had a feeling that he did so to try and spare him from the harsh, unpleasant reality that was being a gangster, but it still left him feeling like his friend didn’t trust him. He knew that it wasn’t true because Taehyung had trusted him enough to tell him about his real identity, about what had happened down in Daegu before he had joined Moon Tiger Mob for protection. But the feeling still persisted.

“There was a documentary about gangsters on TV a few days ago,” Jungkook said, breaking the silence at long last. “I watched it right here, in Namjoon’s house whilst I was staying over for dinner. I didn’t understand most of it, it was in English and, um…Colombian?”

“Spanish, Jungkook. They speak Spanish there,” Taehyung corrected, in his usual smartass way.

“Shut up, I knew that,” he muttered, hearing his friend snorting laughter. “Anyway, they had all kinds of footage about how they smuggle drugs into America - cocaine. They kept saying that, cocaine, and… la cocaina. They use planes and trucks to move huge amounts, and people too. A lot of women smuggle, so they can feed their families, or get green cards into America. Sometimes, people die smuggling the drugs because they put them inside of their bodies. Is that what you did, Taehyungie? Did you put drugs inside of your body?”

“…Yeah,” Taehyung agreed in a quiet voice, his smile slowly fading off his face. “I, uh, I did that, Jungkook. It’s why my body’s so hurtin’ so much right now - I’d to smuggle the drugs inside my fuckin’ ass.”

Jungkook thought this over for a moment, and then he let his breath out in a soft sigh. He retrieved the washcloth from the floor, finding that it was warm to the touch, rather than cool.

“You don’t look too good right now, Taehyungie,” he said, as he dabbed at his face for him with the washcloth. The faint scent of sweat was coming from him in waves, which wasn’t at all surprising because there was a light sheen of sweat clinging to his brow.

“Look who’s talkin’,” Taehyung retorted, wriggling one of his thick eyebrows at him before he closed his eyes. “Yeah, I think I’m gettin’ a fever. My body feels all hot, but Jimin’s been givin’ me these wicked strong painkillers to help with the pain. I was sick for a week with flu, I thought it’d passed, but it might’ve came back to fuckin’ piss me off.”
“You’re an asshole, you know that, Taehyungie?” Jungkook suddenly said, as he pulled the damp washcloth away from his friend’s brow to stare down at him. “You’re a stupid asshole.”

“Nah, I think you mean I got a sore asshole,” Taehyung smartly corrected, which earned him a hard punch on the chest even when he was in pain. “Aw, shit! I forgot how hard you punch, you fuckin’ loser.”

“Oh? Oh, I’m the loser? Me? Not the guy bleeding out of his goddamn ass?” Jungkook argued, trying to sound stern and yet finding it hard to keep a straight expression because of his friend’s antics. “Unbelievable, Taehyungie, this is unbelievable.”

“Punchin’ me when I’m sick, shit, Jungkook, that’s just mean,” his friend muttered with a soft head shake.

“I mean, fuck, Taehyung,” Jungkook sighed, as he shifted to lean back on one wrist. “I don’t think that you even know how serious this entire thing is. You keep cracking wise like this is something to laugh about, but it’s not. Just think about what could’ve happened to you.”

“Nah, I know how serious it is, Jungkook,” Taehyung said, his voice barely above a whisper and incredibly husky. “When I was on that twelve hour flight, up in the fuckin’ sky, not knowin’ if I was even gonna pull through ‘fore I touched ground ‘gain? When I was standin’ in line after the flight, bein’ processed to leave the airport with a fake passport; yeah, trust me, I know how serious it all was. But, I’m tryna not think about that right now.”

Jungkook found that he didn’t know what to say in reply to this, and all that he could do was stare at his friend as he thought his words over.

“Hang on, I need to go into the kitchen,” he finally said, as he gently lifted Tigger out of his lap to get to his feet. “I’ll be right back, Taehyungie.”

The pot of eomukguk was bubbling away on the stove like mad, so he raced over to check on it. On the counter beside the oven, Jimin had left a pile of fragrant, chopped-up scallion, along with a salt shaker. Jungkook tossed the scallion and a generous dash of salt into the boiling pot, turning the heat right down for a moment whilst he tended to the pot of cooked rice.

Jimin had said that he could help himself to whatever he needed, and the eomukguk did smell good. Jungkook wanted to sample his cooking to see if he was good, as he had tried some of Namjoon’s
After scooping sticky mounds of rice into two bowls, he turned off the heat so that he could also serve the soup; ladling portions of it into deep stoneware bowls. He made sure to add plenty of fish cake chunks into Taehyung’s serving, as he was going to need to eat plenty to recover his strength.

Jungkook eyed the cafetière for a few seconds, wondering how exactly he could make coffee in the thing. He settled on checking the refrigerator instead, discovering a half-empty bottle of milk that still smelled fresh to his nose. He grabbed two glasses, pouring the cold milk into them and hearing it splashing as it lapped against the sides.

There was a tray sitting on the counter, one that would make serving breakfast so much easier for him. The bowls and glasses just about fit onto the small surface, along with spoons and napkins.

There, breakfast was served.

Jungkook made sure to soak the washcloth in more cold water, adding it to the tray beside the glasses of milk. Then he carried the tray back into the living-room, taking slow steps as to not disturb the tall, shaking glasses.

“Is that…breakfast?” Taehyung asked in a surprised voice,

“Jimin made it for you, but he had to leave before it was finished cooking,” Jungkook explained, as he carefully placed the tray down on the floor. “He knew how much you love eomukguk. Did you make it for breakfast a lot when he was staying with you in Korea?”

“Yeah, Jiminie would live on kimbap and dak galbi if I didn’t cook somethin’,” Taehyung joked with a fond smile.

Jungkook had only just grabbed a spoon from the tray when Tigger shoved her naughty nose right towards one of the bowls of eomukguk. If he didn’t stop her, she was apt to start licking up the broth, even when it contained no meat other than fish.

“No, Tigger, you’ve already had breakfast,” Jungkook scolded, giving the puppy a soft tap on her nose to get her to stop sniffing at the food.
Tigger pulled her head away at this, giving him a pitiful look in the aims of making him feel guilty so that he would share some of the tasty soup with her. But it wasn’t going to work, he was more than used to ‘the look’ by now.

Jungkook lifted the bowl of eomukguk from the tray, dipping the spoon into it to gather a mixture of broth, radish and fish cake. Then he held it out to his friend in offering, steam wafting from the spoon.

“I can feed myself,” Taehyung declared, staring at the spoon with a hard to read expression.

“If you can feed yourself, come on over and take the bowl; hmm?” Jungkook suggested, moving to hold it far out of his limited reach.

“Tsk,” Taehyung tutted out of the corner of his mouth; a hundred-percent a Daegu man at heart. “Fuck you, kid!”

“Ah, fuck you too, punk!” Jungkook argued in return, lifting his head so that he could jut his jaw out defiantly and stare down at his friend.

For a few seconds, Taehyung just stared at him without saying a single thing. Then he started laughing, though the act short-lived because he had to reach down to press his hand against his stomach. It was the first hint of pain that he had shown so far, and Jungkook couldn’t help but wonder how much that he was actually hurting.

“Goddamn, I missed you, Jungkook,” Taehyung finally said to break the momentary silence.

“I know you did,” Jungkook said with a lopsided smirk. “You missed my speech-writing skills, you missed my great sense of humour, and my intelligence. Most of all, you missed my cooking, right?”

“Nah, I missed your momma’s cooking,” Taehyung argued without a hint of hesitation, as he moved to prop his weight up onto his elbows again. “That dakdoritang? Goddamn, that was great, I-”

“That was my cooking!” Jungkook pointed out. “I made that, Taehyungie! Ah! This is unbelievable!”
“If you cooked that, then why didn’t you cook it for me now, huh?”

“Taehyung, I know that you’ve been through a lot, but I’ll still kick you in the ass if you don’t shut up,” Jungkook muttered, moving to hold the spoon out again so that his friend could sip from the spoon.

Taehyung might just be able to feed himself right now, but he made no move to try and grab the bowl from his hand. Either, he had been lying, or he had decided that it just wasn’t worth wasting his energy. So Jungkook resumed feeding him, going between the eomukguk and boiled rice until there was nothing left. It must have tasted good, for he ate every single bite with no complaints.

Jungkook started eating his own serving of breakfast as soon as he was done, watching Tigger licking up the remains of soup and sticky rice from the two empty bowls.

“Sometimes, I think she’s a pig, not a puppy,” Jungkook remarked, checking a soggy chunk of fish cake.

“Cheonsa used to eat a lot when she was a puppy, they gotta eat plenty to grow big,” Taehyung pointed out, watching the naughty puppy with a fond glint in his eyes.

“Yeah, but Tigger’s almost bigger than Cheonsa, and she’s still a goddamn puppy,” Jungkook pointed out, which made his friend laugh. “She’s not gonna slow down, she’s just gonna keep on eating. Maybe, until she ends up eating me.”

“Y’know what this’ called, right? What we’re doin’ right now?” Taehyung remarked, reaching over to give Tigger a firm pat on the side.

“What?” Jungkook asked, chewing the bite of food as he stirred at the cooling soup.

“Shootin’ duh shit.”

“Shooting the shit?” he repeated in surprise, as he had heard no such thing before. “What does that mean, Taehyungie? How did you learn that?”
“Jiminie taught me. He said it means when you’re just talkin’ to somebody ‘bout nothin’ at all, just talkin’ ‘bout whatever comes to mind; y’know?”

“Oh,” Jungkook hummed, pausing in the act of taking another sip of soup. “Shooting the shit. I like it, it sounds cool!”

“You think all Yankee shit sounds cool, Jungkookie,” Taehyung said with a soft head shake. “‘Remember that one time you learnt ‘fuck’ and you kept sayin’ it all the goddamn time? ‘Fuck, what rhymes with liberation, Taehyungie?’”, “fuck, I think that’s the police knockin’ on the window,” and–”

“OK, I get it, Taehyungie,” Jungkook mumbled, knocking Tigger away from his serving of rice again. “What’s it like over there right now, back home in Korea? Are you still dodging the soldiers every day?”

“Shit, I dunno, still bad,” Taehyung sighed, rolling onto his back to get comfortable. “It feels like it’s never gonna change some days, y’know? I know it’s gonna, if we don’t give up and we keep fightin’. But goddamn, does it really start to get tirin’ after a while.”

“It’s gonna change, man. It takes time for these things to happen. War isn’t won in a single day, and liberation isn’t achieved after a single protest. It could take so many years, Taehyungie, but it’s gonna change for the good one day. That’s what I think.”

When his stomach was finally full of hot breakfast, Jungkook shifted to lie down on the floor beside his friend. He was now able to see eye-to-eye with him whilst they conversed, and it was certainly more comfortable dragging some of the blanket over his body. There was even enough space on the pillow for him to place his head, though Taehyung did have to wriggle to the side to let him fit; wincing the entire time.

Tigger finished lapping up the remains of eomukguk, moving to climb up onto Jungkook’s stomach so that she could join them both. He placed a hand down onto her back to gently stroke her, feeling her side lifting and falling with every slow breath.

“So, what’s it like livin’ over here now, huh?” Taehyung asked, turning his head to look at him. “Is it everythin’ you were hopin’ for? Or, d’you miss livin’ in Seoul already?”
“I don’t know, Taehyungie, I think that…that I’m starting to like living here. You know?” Jungkook replied, as he stared up at the ceiling above their heads. “It’s not been easy. Getting here was so horrible that I never wanna go through that kinda experience ever again. Not the way that it made mama get so sick, that scared me so much. Honestly, I miss the sights and sounds of home. I miss my friends, I miss you.”

Jungkook turned his head to hold his gaze for a few seconds, and then he looked back up at the ceiling again.

“It’s not the same here at all, it’s all so different. Of course, I miss being back home and everything, but I’m starting to like it here. Home’s not what it used to be, our apartment room’s nothing like the house that we used to have, you know, before daddy lost his job and we had to sell it. It’s this…tiny box of a house, and I mean, the hot water doesn’t even work most days but-”

Jungkook stopped talking for a moment to let out a quick laugh, finding that his eyes felt strangely wet for some reason that he couldn’t quite figure out.

“There’s just this wholesome sense coming from what we’ve got right now, I can’t possibly explain it. There’s no words that ever could come to mind that could ever explain this feeling that I’ve got right now.”

“You’re smart, Jungkook, y’know the right words,” Taehyung remarked in a quiet voice, shifting to give him a little elbowing in the side to encourage him to continue talking.

“…Hope,” Jungkook finally said, his voice a soft whisper. “It feels like hope, after such a long time of feeling like I might never get to feel such a thing. There’s hope for my family here, Taehyungie; hope that Korea just doesn’t have to offer us right now. We can actually live here without fear, if we work hard and provide services to the mob. Sure, I know that daddy worries about it a lot because he feel that this kinda life isn’t right for mama and me. But he did the best thing, the only thing that he could have done for us.”

“Your dad’s a good man, he got you here ‘fore The Butcher could round you up with all of the other political dissenters. It mightn’t feel like the right kinda life right now, but it’s better than rottin’ in jail and labour camps - believe me.”

“Yeah, that’s what I think too, Taehyungie.”
“I think you’re better off here, Jungkook, and that’s the truth,” Taehyung admitted in a quiet voice. “I think your family should stay here for as long as you can - forever, if possible. Yankees have got it so much easier, you’d be fuckin’ stupid to leave this country.”

“No, they don’t have it easier here, Taehyungie,” Jungkook disagreed with a soft head shake. “They’re free from persecution, for the most part, but people here still struggle every single day, like us, just for different reasons. I’ve been reading a lot about racism and social inequality in the newspapers - daddy’s had to translate a lot of it for me. You wouldn’t believe how hard it is for some Americans to make it day by day. But I think that you’re right about staying here. I think that too. What about you?”

“What ‘bout me, Jungkookie?”

“Have you ever thought about getting away from Korea? Even if only until Chun gets disposed and we vote in another president?”

“…I think I should get outta this life,” Taehyung said in a quiet voice, staring up at the ceiling above them with a wistful expression. “Sometimes, I think that it’d be fuckin’ swell if I could just start again, y’know? No more Jang Jeongmin, no more Moon Tiger Mob, but I can’t. I owe ‘em too much for gettin’ me away from Daegu, for gettin’ me a fake identity. I made this life for myself, Jungkook, so, I gotta be a man and accept it.”

“They don’t own you, Taehyungie. They don’t own your soul, only you do.”

“I ain’t got a soul,” he sharply retorted. “People have died ‘cos of me. I lost guys and gals down in Daegu the night of that riot, I…I left my new partner to die in a fuckin’ shithole apartment. I’m not a good man, Jungkook, OK?”

Jungkook stared at him friend in dumb shock, finding that he couldn’t even blink, let alone argue against this.

“I’m a gangster, I’m a punk, a heartless, fuckin’ bastard,” Taehyung continued, spitting the words out as if they were bitter on his tongue. “I try to pretend that I’m somethin’ more than that, better than that - but I ain’t. All I do is cause trouble and make other people suffer. Oh, if my momma knew the kinda man I turned out to be, she’d just…just-”

The first sob escaped Taehyung’s clenched teeth, even though it was obvious that he was trying his
very hardest to not let it out. Before he could press his fingers against his lips to stifle himself, another cracked sob escaped, and that was when he burst into sudden tears.

Jungkook could only stare at Taehyung in complete shock, his fingers stilling in the act of stroking at Tigger’s side.

Jungkook had never seen Taehyung cry before, not once. He had seen him laugh so hard that he had had to wipe tears of laughter away with the heel of his hand; that wonderful full-blown belly laugh of his that was downright infectious. But tears, actual tears? It was enough to leave him dumbstruck for a moment, as he tried to figure out what he was supposed to do, or say, that could comfort his friend.

Maybe, it was the painkillers - the powerful drugs that had made him get a little bit emotional after the hellish smuggling ordeal that he had been put through?

Maybe, Taehyung was just simply upset, and he should stop staring at him like he was some animal in the zoo?

“Hey, Taehyungie, hey,” Jungkook said, as he placed a hand on his shoulder. “It’s OK, Taehyungie, it’s OK.”

Taehyung was shaking from the force of his sobbing, his hands covering his face as if he didn’t want him looking at him during this moment of weakness.

“You think that my daddy’s smart, that he’s a brave and honourable man, but guess what, Taehyung? He’s got death on his hands too. We all do. Every man and woman in Korea that refuses to fight for democracy, they’re complicit in a system that’s destroying our country and our people. But every man and woman that fights has blood on their hands too; the blood of our fallen allies. People that supported my daddy, some of those people are dead now. People I knew just a few years ago, they’re dead too. It’s not wise to dwell on the past, you can’t ever change it. You should start looking ahead to the future instead.”

“I-I’m tryin’, but it’s hard!” Taehyung gasped, lowering his hands to try and wipe at his streaming eyes. “I ain’t got a-a future, Jungkook. Not one I can suh-see.”

“Then you gotta try and make one for yourself,” Jungkook whispered, as he moved to take hold of one of his hands to squeeze at it. He felt his damp palm against his, wet from his spilled tears. “I didn’t think that I would have a future here, but I’m starting school in a couple of days to learn
English, and I think that I might actually have a real chance at something. Maybe…maybe, you should stop protesting? Go back to university and lay low for a couple of years; yeah? Study something that means the world to you, like politics, like economics. You can find a way out, Taehyungie, so long as you don’t let them get to your soul.”

“You…you think I got a soul?” Taehyung asked, sniffing hard as he wiped at his eyes again. His cheeks were flushed from crying, as was the tip of his nose.

“I do, I think that you’ve got a wonderful soul, Taehyungie - a beautiful soul, even. Life’s hard, and it throws so many obstacles at us, but we can’t just give up. The Kim Taehyung I know, he doesn’t give up. Maybe, Jang Jeongmin does, but not Kim Taehyung.”

This made Taehyung laugh even when he was still crying. He hiccuped as he tried to get himself under control, roughly wiping at his nose.

“You want change, and I respect that. I love the part of you that wants to change the world and make it better, Taehyungie. But maybe, you should change your own world first?” Jungkook finished, giving his hand another firm squeeze.

“You’re right, Jungkook,” Taehyung agreed with a nod, sticking his tongue out to wet his chapped lips. “I-I gotta do somethin’, even if it feels like I can’t. If I cuh-could get outta Daegu and start a new life in Seoul, I can do it ‘gain. Korea’s gonna change for good in the future, so, I gotta be ‘round to witness it happenin’; right?”

“Right,” Jungkook agreed with a soft smile.

Tigger shifted to get closer to Taehyung, her curious nose sniffing as she leaned over him. Perhaps sensing that he was upset in some way, she started nudging at his arm with her head, and so, Taehyung slipped his arm around her to hug her against his chest.

“I really wanna start ‘gain, Jungkook,” Taehyung reiterated, rapidly blinking to try and knock beaded tears from his eyelashes. “D’you think that I…I can?”

Jungkook nodded at this, reaching over to place his hand on Tigger’s head to play with her ears. She was lying on his friend’s chest, trying her very best to comfort him the only way that puppies could.
For a couple of minutes, the air fell silent between them, but Jungkook felt no need to break it. Taehyung managed to get himself back under control with some effort, sniffing hard and wiping at his swollen eyelids. It seemed that he had been trying his very hardest to suppress his feelings for quite some time, but he had been unable to fight the emotional outburst in front of him. That was a good thing, as Taehyung had really needed to purge the negativity so that he could allow some room for positivity.

“Shit, I’m still hungry,” Taehyung muttered with a laugh. “What I wouldn’t do for a Burger King right now…”

“Oh, Taehyungie,” Jungkook said with a smile. “Wait until you taste McDonald’s…”

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