
Oh. Oh, Hoseok thinks. Oh, he feels crawling down his spine. Oh, he sits higher in his seat. Oh, he tightens his legs together and feels a rush through his stomach, through the insides of his thighs, through his groin. Oh.

Midnight is hitting Hoseok like a brick of lead. His temples throb beneath the heels of his hands. They’re the only thing holding him upright, the weight of his head leaning heavily into his grip. His elbows slide against the table. He gives in and dives straight down into his textbook. The glossy pages cushion some of the blow, but not enough to completely block the impact from agitating his headache. He groans, disturbing the empty silence of the library around him. Soon, someone will be around to tell him that the silent floor is closing, and that he’ll need to move down to the first floor or one of the computer labs.

But until that moment comes, Hoseok would rather die than move. He rolls his head to the side, cheek smooshed into the very graph that is ruining his night. None of his notecards have done it justice, so he’s spent the last twenty minutes just staring at it in his textbook, wondering if it would be
easier to throw himself through the window down to the sidewalk four stories below than it would be to pass this exam tomorrow.

Well, today, Hoseok thinks, pushing himself upright in his seat. His exam is today. In—he checks the time on his phone—seven hours and fifty-seven minutes. If Seokjin knew that Hoseok was still awake studying at midnight the night before an exam, Hoseok would never hear the end of it.

But Anatomy & Physiology II is going to murder Hoseok, and then it will mutilate his body and string him up in front of his friends and loved ones as the ultimate sign of disrespect. He scans the graph one more time; from the first line—aortic pressure—down to atrial and ventricular pressure, then ventricular volume, then a perfect electrocardiogram reading, and ending with a perfect phonocardiogram reading. All labeled and colored and overlapping. Some lines are dotted and some lines are vertical and others are horizontal, and everybody has hinted that this graph is going to be on the exam. Hoseok’s lecture professor mentioned it. His lab instructor mentioned it. Even the T.A. suggested going over it one more time before the exam.

The problem is that Hoseok didn’t understand the graph the first time he went over it, and he definitely doesn’t understand it now. He didn’t understand it after asking for both of his instructors and the T.A. to explain it to him. He didn’t understand it before doing the reading, and he still didn’t understand it after.

This graph is everything that is happening with a heart at one time, and Hoseok just can’t put it all together.

If this graph were the only thing Hoseok was struggling with, maybe he would be in bed right now. But that’s what’s worse. Hoseok has been in the library for hours—hours—and he hasn’t even gone through half of the first chapter on this exam. And the exam covers three chapters. Hoseok reaches over to flip through his notecards, looking for something he recognizes. But now, he’s tired, and his vision is getting a little bit liquid, and this awful chair and this awful table and his awful textbook are starting to feel a little more comfortable. He could almost fall asleep right here, except—

“Excuse me,” a girl says behind him. Hoseok lifts his head to glance back at her. She smiles. She’s wearing a name tag with the school’s logo on it. “This floor is closing for the night. If you’d like, you can continue to study on the first floor, or in any of the computer labs.”

Hoseok forces a weak smile for her and nods. She hesitates, unease crossing her face, and Hoseok assumes that his smile has sunk into a grimace with the hours. He collects his things and follows her out to the stairs, where they part. She stops to lock the doors behind her, and he stumbles down three flights to the ground floor where he does not find a new table and set up shop once more. He doesn’t even glance that way. He takes to the exit, out into the cold of a January night. The wind blusters around him, but snow has yet to fall. Hoseok pulls his coat closer around himself, dropping his head down against the wind and beginning the trek back to his dorm room.

He is honestly going to fail this exam tomorrow, and he doesn’t even know what he’s going to say to Seokjin about it.

“I just don’t understand,” Hoseok says. He stares miserably at his phone, only moving to keep the screen activated when it dims ominously. Otherwise he is still, rooted to his spot in the middle of the eateries. People are milling about around him. Seokjin has already made it into a line, and has to leave his precious spot to retrieve Hoseok, who still does not look up from his phone.

“It’s the first exam of the semester, you can fix it later,” Seokjin tells him sagely. Hoseok would be a
bit more comforted if Seokjin weren’t staring up at the hamburger options on today’s menu as he speaks.

“Hyung, I failed it,” he intones. Seokjin scoffs, leaning towards Hoseok.

“You didn’t fail it, you just,” he begins derisively before peering over Hoseok’s shoulder at his phone screen. There is his grade on the course’s webpage, the total number of points in very small font and the number of points he received very large. “Oh,” Seokjin says.

Had Hoseok not just spent an entire semester telling Seokjin that he failed every exam that he didn’t ace, he might be a bit more offended. Now, though, the best thing he can manage is, “Yeah,” because this time, he actually failed it. He almost wishes he’d waited to check his grade until after they’d eaten, until he was back in his dorm where he could moan in bed on a full stomach. Now, he feels vaguely sick, and even though he already redeemed his meal plan for the day, he’s not sure if he actually wants to eat anymore. He’d rather just mope, which would be much less pathetic if he were in the privacy of his own room.

Seokjin’s mouth twists to the side in sympathy. He leads Hoseok up the line as it moves, but his eyes never leave Hoseok’s face. He’s sure he looks a sight. If there weren’t so many people around, Hoseok might be close to crying. And Hoseok may cry about many things—spiders, heights, really fast roller coasters—but he’s never cried over an exam before.

Because Hoseok has never failed an exam before. He stares at those twenty-one point five out of fifty points, and he wants to shrink up and die. He’s never going to get accepted into the nursing program if he can’t even pass A&P II. Seokjin loops an arm around Hoseok’s shoulder, jostling him kindly.

“You can still fix it. You’re a good test-taker, you’ll do better on the next exam,” he says. Hoseok’s stomach twists uncomfortably thinking about the next exam.

“It’s only going to get harder,” Hoseok says as he realizes it. “That was just cardiovascular and skin. Hyung, what am I gonna do when we get to neuro? What am I gonna do when we get to immunity?” He failed an exam. Hoseok failed an exam. And if he can’t even pass this exam, how is he going to pass any of them? It doesn’t make any sense. He aced A&P I. He crushed that class, he murdered every exam. He strolled out with an A; he’s only had one exam in A&P II and he’s already been decimated. He’s—he’s going to fail. He’s going to fail this class. He’s never going to get accepted into the program, he’s never going to be a nurse—

“You need to get a tutor.”

Hoseok opens his mouth to disagree, but he stops himself. Seokjin cocks an eyebrow at him, crossing his arms over his chest. Hoseok closes his mouth and drops his gaze to the floor. Maybe he does need a tutor. No, he really needs a tutor. But the sting of failure is still so fresh, and if none of his instructors could explain it to him, what is one more explanation going to do? Hoseok wants to say this, he wants to say that if he can’t get it, he just can’t get it, but he also doesn’t want to sound self-pitying in front of Seokjin. So instead, he just shrugs.
“I have a friend who helped me when I was having trouble with that class. I could give him your number, if you want.”

Again, Hoseok just shrugs. Seokjin looks like he’s about to smack Hoseok for his attitude, but their number comes up and he has to go retrieve their food instead. Sure enough, Hoseok only picks at his lunch. Seokjin ends up stealing most of it off of his plate, all the while stealing glances at Hoseok that he thinks are sly. They’re not. The pity in his eyes is almost more embarrassing than Hoseok’s grade. If Hoseok doesn’t get a tutor, then he really needs to start figuring something out.

hey this is namjoon. seokjin told me you were having trouble w/ap2. lmk if you wanna meet up to work out a study schedule.

“Oh, Hoseok! Don’t throw things—“

“You actually gave him my number!” Hoseok snaps, grappling for his phone so he can throw it again. Seokjin swipes it up, holding it well out of Hoseok’s reach. Hoseok jumps for it, but Seokjin pushes him back.

“Yeah, I gave him your number. You got a forty-three on that exam, and I know you studied your ass off.” Hoseok steps away, his cheeks burning. Seokjin lowers his arm slowly, as though waiting to see if Hoseok will make a grab for it, but he doesn’t. Seokjin sighs. “Look, Namjoon is really nice. He’s really smart, and he helped me when I had trouble in that class. Actually, he helped me through all of my classes. I wouldn’t be a nursing student right now if it weren’t for him.”

Hoseok eyes Seokjin warily, but Seokjin just rolls his eyes at Hoseok. Hoseok scowls. “I’m fine, hyung. It was just—a really bad day or something. I passed all of my sciences last semester, I’m gonna pass this one, too.”

Seokjin scoffs. “Yeah? How’re you doing on your homework for the immunity chapter?”

Hoseok blinks. Okay, maybe he’d spent half an hour last night trying to read the first few pages of the immunity chapter before giving up and going to bed. “That’s not fair, hyung,” he whines. “That’s the hardest chapter in the book.”

“Yes, it is,” Seokjin agrees. “And do you know what Namjoon is really good at? Immunity. Just text him back, let him help you.”

Hoseok’s hesitancy manifests as the writhing feeling of butterflies in his stomach and the accompanying grimace on his face. Seokjin reaches across the kitchen to put a hand on his shoulder. Hoseok looks up, mostly just to stick his tongue out at Seokjin, but he stops when he sees the honest look in Seokjin’s eyes. “You’ve worked so hard already,” Seokjin tells him. “You passed biochem. You did better than me in stats—you fucking killed intro psych. You can’t let this get in the way of your goals.” Hoseok swallows. He wants to tear his eyes away from Seokjin’s, but he can’t. “Even if you don’t text Namjoon back, you still have to do something. You can’t get another score like that.

“So what?” Seokjin says, voice softening, “get out of here before I burn something.” With that, Seokjin ushers him off out of the kitchen. Hoseok goes to sit at the table, pushing a stack of Seokjin’s nursing textbooks out of the way as he does.

“Whatever,” he mumbles, dropping into the chair. “You’re boiling water, you could do that in your sleep.” He never got his phone back from Seokjin, but he thinks that when he does, he might look at
that text message compulsively a few more times and then maybe…maybe respond to it.

Coordinating with Namjoon is awful. Namjoon is nice enough, always cushioning his noes with apologies and a different time offering. But Namjoon seems to work nights—a lot of nights, all night—and Hoseok has a confusing and occasionally stressful amalgamation of classes and work from nine to nine most days. Namjoon politely asks where Hoseok works, and Hoseok tells him about his job at the dance studio. He’s biting back a smile as he types it out. Seokjin peers over his shoulder, and when Hoseok looks up at him, he’s grinning smugly.

For what, Hoseok isn’t even sure. He can smile at his phone if he wants. Seokjin’s friend is nice. Hoseok figured he would be. It’s not like Seokjin would send Hoseok to someone awful, even if they were the smartest person on campus. Hoseok can smile if he wants, and there is absolutely nothing for Seokjin to look smug about. Maybe. Hoseok stares back at Seokjin’s smug face and—fuck, and he begins to think. What if Seokjin’s friend is really old? He could be, if he was helping Seokjin even back when Seokjin was pre-nursing. He’s obviously really busy all the time. And honestly—Hoseok isn’t sure if he can go ahead and assume that Namjoon is attractive or not. On the one hand, he’s an awkward genius, which doesn’t bode very well for his face. On the other hand, he’s friends with Seokjin. So. Hoseok is sort of up in the air on that one.

Most importantly, Seokjin only gets that smug look on his face when he’s really, really right about something, and usually something involving Hoseok. Like the time his old girlfriend found out about the bender he went on with Yoongi after midterms last semester. Or when Hoseok’s first boyfriend decided to break up with him because he wasn’t gay enough. Seokjin sees these things miles out, while Hoseok is often left treading the wake of disaster. He looks down at his phone, and then he looks back up at Seokjin, who puts on this innocent face as though Hoseok hasn’t just caught him reading his future.

“What?” he asks.

“Nothing. You just look so happy talking about the dance studio.”

“Yeah,” Hoseok says, “because I really like the dance studio.”

Seokjin hums and sips his coffee. Hoseok watches him for a moment longer, but Seokjin doesn’t make eye contact. Hoseok huffs, muttering an agitated whatever under his breath as he shoves his phone into his back pocket. “I gotta go. I’ve got class in twenty minutes.” Seokjin just waves him off, urging him towards the door. Hoseok goes, only glancing back at Seokjin sitting at the kitchen table one last time. Seokjin has this glint in his eyes, but his face is otherwise neutral. Hoseok pulls through the door and trudges off towards the health sciences building.

Maybe he just imagined it.

There’s a coffee shop off campus, closer into town but not completely—just in the in-between of here and there—that stays open into cruel and unusual hours of the night. Hoseok knows this because he worked there for a few months in high school before finding his job at the dance studio. The coffee is okay, the location is pretty accessible, but what really keeps the shop open is the loyalty of local college students who sleep in pockets around their hectic schedules and drink caffeine late into the moon’s domain. When Namjoon offers to meet there after his classes one night, Hoseok instinctively wants to say no.
He could lie and say that the bad taste in his mouth is from the subpar memories of working at that place. He could say that he’ll be too tired from work, or that he’ll need to be up too early the next day for his morning classes. Or he could just tell the truth and admit that he’s nervous, which he won’t, because Hoseok is a gift and meeting new people is something he does regularly to make the world a better place.

Except meeting Namjoon is going to be nothing like meeting some of Yoongi’s cute friends at a party, or meeting new classmates for a group project, or meeting new children in his classes and workshops. Meeting Namjoon is going to be figuring out whether or not Hoseok can really pass this class, which he desperately needs if he wants to apply to the program in three semesters instead of four. Or ever at all, he thinks, as though only to bring down his already sunken mood. It’s a quarter past nine when he walks through the doors of the dive, and Hoseok has a general idea of what to look for via Seokjin’s comprehensive description.

Tall, Hoseok thinks. Just taller than Seokjin-hyung. There are a few people in the shop, seated sparsely amongst the booths that run along the windowed front wall. The poor kid behind the register is almost falling asleep on top of the machine. Hoseok sweeps his gaze over every party in attendance before setting on one. Tan skin, blond hair. The man is just standing up, and he’s tall. Pretty darn tall. Taller than Seokjin, probably. Good-looking too, Hoseok thinks miserably. Of course, he realizes. This is one of Seokjin’s friends.

Namjoon is standing up, and he’s looking good, and he’s—he’s reaching for the napkin dispenser at his booth because he’s got coffee spilled all down the front of his white hoodie. Hoseok stands right in front of the door, staring as Namjoon pats at the stain uselessly. Hoseok glances down at the table and sighs when he finds it glistening with spilled coffee. He doesn’t think he’s been noticed yet; he could still walk out this door and forget any of this even happened. It might be a merciful option for them both.

But Namjoon looks up at just that moment, and Hoseok jolts a little, realizing how long he’s been staring. Stiffly, he approaches. Namjoon doesn’t look at him strangely or seem to mind at all. Instead, he smiles. Hoseok tries, and fails with a grimace. Namjoon either doesn’t notice or doesn’t mind. When Hoseok goes to sit down at the opposite side of the table, Namjoon reaches over with one long arm to grab him before he can. Hoseok stiffens against Namjoon’s solid grip, but Namjoon doesn’t release him until he’s pulled Hoseok away from the table.

“You don’t want to sit there,” he says, accompanying this with a shy smile. “I mean, unless you want to sit in cold coffee.”

Hoseok flushes and looks down at the seat. Sure enough, the grey plastic is a pale, wet brown from the spill. Hoseok shifts his weight uncomfortably. Namjoon gives him a casual just a moment gesture before approaching the kid at the register. He speaks quietly, but Hoseok assumes that he’s explaining the spill. The kid looks annoyed, but unsurprised. Namjoon looks apologetic, but he’s still smiling. Hoseok stares openly, his attention only leaving Namjoon’s big lips and deep dimples to stray towards his long arms and his long, lean hands. Hoseok curls his own into fists and stuffs them into his pockets. He’s not usually into older guys, but Seokjin’s friend is really, really good looking.

Maybe not as smart as Hoseok thought he would be, walking back to the booth with a big, brown stain on his hoodie, but definitely good looking. Namjoon collects his winter coat and his backpack out of the booth he’d been sitting at and gestures towards a new one, empty and dry. Hoseok slides in first, and Namjoon sets his things down on the opposite seat. He grabs his hoodie by its hem, pulling it up over himself and down on top of his things. His shirt underneath is black, and it clings to the soiled hoodie as Namjoon strips it off.
Hoseok tries really hard not to stare at the broad strip of golden stomach that winks at him in that glorious moment, but. Well. He is eye-level with it. Maybe just a touch lower, even. Namjoon is pretty tall. Hoseok tilts his head back to peer up at him, nodding back down as Namjoon sits. Namjoon smiles at him. Hoseok still isn’t over it.

“Did you want to order something before we get started?” he asks.

“Oh,” Hoseok says, a little bit startled for no reason at all. “Um. No, I can’t do caffeine this late.”

“Hot chocolate?” Namjoon offers. Hoseok tries to smile again. Again, he grimaces.

“Or sugar,” Hoseok admits.

Namjoon laughs and waves him off. “That’s fine, then. Do you have your textbook with you?”

“Oh, yeah.” Hoseok readily takes the opportunity to dive into his backpack, nearly burrowing his face in as he digs for his textbook and notebook and pen. When he comes back up, Namjoon is pushing his sleeves up to his elbows. Hoseok does not stare. He just—notices.

“So, Seokjin told me you’re working on immunity right now?” Namjoon asks. His voice is so smooth, so deep.

“Um. Yeah.”

Namjoon looks like he may say more, but the kid from behind the counter comes around with another coffee in his hands—this one, in a to-go cup. Lidded. Namjoon leans away from Hoseok to take it gratefully (and for how long had he been leaning so close, Hoseok wonders, feeling the distance between them as acutely as if it were a limb he’d lost), popping off the top to stir in his sugar. The kid hovers around their table warily until he’s finished, pressing the lid firmly back into place. When the kid has finally left, Namjoon takes a long sip and turns his focus back to Hoseok.

“What do you need help with?” he asks, looking as warm and golden as his coffee. Right. Business. Hoseok needs help, and Namjoon is here to help him. What does Hoseok need help with. What do I need help with? Hoseok blinks back at Namjoon, brow raising so high that it feels like it could reach his hairline. Namjoon just looks pleasant, serene, as though he doesn’t understand the breadth of Hoseok’s struggle.

“Um,” Hoseok begins, looking down at the chapter contents on the first page. He glances through it, same as he did a few days ago when he’d humored the thought of doing the reading before his lecture. He looks back up to Namjoon. “All of it?”

Some things in the universe are unfair, and that’s just the way things are. Like how summer is only four months long. Or how long whales can hold their breath underwater compared to people. Or even how Hoseok was born into the world at a time when anatomy and physiology is so well-studied that his textbook has over a thousand pages in it and is still printed in ten point font, and how his professor was born a micromanaging menace who decided that it would be to her students’ best benefit to test them from the entirety of this textbook. Hoseok has pretty much learned to accept these things.

But this.

This just isn’t fair.
Hoseok stares at his textbook, trying to understand what Namjoon is reading because it isn’t this. When Hoseok listens to what Namjoon is teaching him, everything makes sense. The skies are clear, flowers are blooming, nations all around the world are finding peace—Hoseok understands the difference between cellular and humoral immunity. At least, he does when he’s listening and not staring into the high planes of Namjoon’s cheekbones.

How is somebody this beautiful allowed to be this smart? Hoseok is pretty cute, but that’s why he’s here, listening to somebody smarter telling him what he needs to know. Namjoon just glances at the sections of his textbook—these incomprehensible walls of text, as impenetrable as if they were made from brick—and does he wither? Does he bluster at the thought of spinning these sections into comprehensible concepts?

No. He smiles at Hoseok and asks him if he would like to hear a story about the brother and sister B and T cells who want to grow up and join the police force. Hoseok nods dumbly, because if Namjoon asked him if he’d like to eat a live coal, he would still say yes. Namjoon speaks as a prophet. He uses his hands (Hoseok reaches forward to save his coffee more than once), he uses his face, he uses the pictures in Hoseok’s book. When he doesn’t like those pictures, he pulls a napkin from the dispenser and draws his own.

He might not be an artist, but he’s everything else.

“I don’t get it,” Hoseok says. Apprehension crosses Namjoon’s face, almost disappointment but kinder, more concerned. He opens his mouth, but Hoseok shakes his head and cuts him off. “I read this—I mean, I tried to read this, like, five times, and I didn’t get any of that. Like, what you just said.”

“Oh,” Namjoon says, looking mildly pleased with himself. “Yeah, it’d be way better if textbooks were written so that entry-level students could understand them, but I guess that’s just not always—”

“Yeah, but how do you know all this?” Hoseok cuts in, going immediately to the heart of his curiosity.

Namjoon doesn’t look offended, which is nice. Instead, he laughs. “I’m a grad student. I’ve already been through all of this.”

So the tutor that Seokjin recommended to Hoseok is an intelligent, attractive grad student whose only apparent flaw is his incorrigible clumsiness and his lack of artistic prowess. Hoseok drops his chin down onto his hands, staring at Namjoon like he were a math problem.

_The answer is not a real number._

“How about we do some quizzing before calling it a night,” Namjoon suggests when the silence stretches too long.

“What—” Hoseok glances down at his phone, which lights up with the time when he activates the screen. It’s almost midnight, the crawl of hours having jolted to a sprint during the time Namjoon was talking. “Right, yeah,” he agrees hastily, startled by how easily he could have been sucked into staying all night. Just some quick quizzing, and then he can go home. “Wait, what?”

Namjoon smiles. “Yeah, it’ll be fun.” He pulls Hoseok’s textbook close to him, flipping through the pages until he finds what he’s looking for. “Can you tell me what this is?” He points to a drawing, some odd stick thing sprouting out of the side of a cell. Hoseok stares at it for a moment before his memory kicks into gear, and he says,
“The hands—for the handshake?” Because that’s what Namjoon called them in his story.

Namjoon settles back in his seat. “Okay, that’s right, but when your teacher tests you on them, what’s she gonna call them?”

This is harder, but Hoseok can remember the way the word rolled off of Namjoon’s tongue, smooth and deep in his midnight baritone. “Antibodies?”

Namjoon’s smile could power a small city. “Good, Hoseok, that’s exactly right. Very good.”

Oh. Oh, Hoseok thinks. Oh, he feels crawling down his spine. Oh, he sits higher in his seat. Oh, he tightens his legs together and feels a rush through his stomach, through the insides of his thighs, through his groin. Oh. He swallows thickly. Namjoon asks him to name the different parts of the antibody. Inattentively, he points to the short chain and the long chain. He points to the antigen binding site and he points to the complement binding site and he points to the macrophage binding site. Namjoon praises him again. Hoseok nearly swallows his tongue.

“And what cells secrete antibodies?”

“Plasma cells,” Hoseok says without hesitation. He’s leaning forward in his seat now, and he doesn’t care if he looks stupid. There’s a warmth within him, overflowing with affection, and more than anything, a gentle precursor to arousal. Hoseok is so into this feeling that Namjoon is giving him. He’s so into the way Namjoon smiles every time he gets something right. He needs Namjoon to do it again, needs to hear his happy praises.

But Namjoon holds off. Hoseok pouts, but Namjoon prompts him, “Which are a type of…?”

“B cells.” There is no pause, no reluctance. Hoseok knows this, he knows he knows this, even if it was something that he was unconfident about before, or struggled to recall so easily, it’s that much easier when Namjoon is awaiting his answers. He’s almost trembling in his seat waiting—waiting—


“I never would’ve gotten it without you,” he mumbles, closing up his book and reluctantly gathering his supplies. Namjoon chuckles and tips back the last of his coffee.

“If you say so,” he says. “It’s really late, so we can start next time by reviewing humoral immunity and going over cellular immunity…when’s your next exam?”


“Then we’ve got plenty of time. Just text me next time you’re free,” he says. When they walk out of the coffee shop, they walk in opposite directions. Hoseok turns his head to watch Namjoon go, but it isn’t long before he’s turned a corner out of sight. Hoseok trudges the rest of the way back to his dorm. When he gets there, he dives immediately under his covers and ruts shamefully against his mattress. He doesn’t finish, but he does fall asleep imagining Namjoon’s deep voice in his ear.

*Good job. Good boy.*

“If you steal one more carrot, I’m gonna fry your hand in this rice.”
Namjoon stills where he’s reaching across the counter, eying Seokjin warily. If the threat had come from anybody else, it could be playful. But Seokjin isn’t even looking at him, he just has this preternatural sense of when somebody is touching his food, and Namjoon has been getting away with it for almost fifteen minutes now. He sighs, relinquishes the carrot, and leans back against the counter, impatiently waiting for Seokjin to finish dinner.

“You know, if you were so hungry, you could’ve just grabbed something on the way over. Instead of breathing down my neck while I’m working.” Seokjin places a heavy emphasis on the caudal end of his accusation, casting a very pointed sideways look at Namjoon.

Time to diffuse. “But hyung,” Namjoon whines, slumping theatrically. “your food is the best food.” Not that Namjoon consistently turns to blind compliments to save his own ass, but flattery is the surest resolution to Seokjin’s ire. He tries to look unaffected, but there’s a slight upturn to his lips, almost a smirk, that Namjoon reads like a book. Like he’s always been good at reading people. Whether they actually show more of themselves in front of him, or whether he is just better at understanding what is there to see.

Like Hoseok. Seokjin’s friend is so easy to read that Namjoon could probably play him into anything he wanted. But Namjoon is a good person, and more than anything, Namjoon is a good tutor, and so what he wants to play Hoseok into is a really good anatomy grade. “So I met up with Hoseok last night,” he says casually. Seokjin glances over, a smile brightening his beautiful face.

“Oh, did you? How’d it go?”

“Great,” Namjoon says. “He’s really smart. He just has a little trouble with the materials he’s been given.”

Seokjin’s face screws up. “Yeah. I had that professor. She almost killed me, two semesters in a row.” Namjoon hums, watching Seokjin stir. “Honestly, I’ve had med-surg books written better than that anatomy book. I sold it and got a better one as soon as I got into the program.” Seokjin’s indignation peaks, carrying off in a mildly aggressive rant. Namjoon lets him go. When Seokjin turns his back again, Namjoon steals another carrot. He thinks about anatomy, more than he has in a few years, and he wonders if Hoseok is remembering all of their work on humoral immunity.

He did last night. Hoseok did so well. All he’d needed was a patient, gentle explanation of some very difficult material, and then a little bit of…incentive. A gentle nudge. A reward for good work.

Praise.

Seokjin whirls around the moment he hears Namjoon crunching into his carrot, but he gets off easy by putting his hands up in surrender and smiling a disarming smile. Just to be safe, he backs his way out of the kitchen. Seokjin watches him the entire way, only turning back to his cooking when Namjoon has crossed the threshold into the dining area.

He pulls his phone out of his pocket to check his messages, but he hasn’t gotten a response back from Hoseok just yet. It’s still early in the evening, and he knows that Hoseok is probably still at work right now. He slides into a chair and waits for Seokjin to finish cooking.

“Eighth cranial nerve.”

“Vestibulocochlear,” Hoseok says, actually bouncing in his seat as he does. “Branches into the vestibular and cochlear nerves. Hearing and balance—um, not in that order.”
“Perfect,” Namjoon tells him, smiling at the way Hoseok flushes, how his eyes darken for just a moment before he is leaning forward for the next one. “Fifth cranial nerve.”

Hoseok lights up again, and again, and again for Namjoon. They’ve only been here for an hour, but already, Hoseok has memorized all twelve cranial nerves and pieces of the anatomy of the peripheral nervous system. Namjoon has already figured out that it isn’t the memorization where Hoseok stumbles—it’s the application. Putting together the pieces to understand the system. He knows that when they get to neuron depolarization and transmission of nerve impulses, he’s going to have to be a little bit more heavy-handed in guiding Hoseok along.

Not that Hoseok will mind. Namjoon can already tell that he’s riding high on the bliss of Namjoon’s praise. His smile is just that much sweeter as Namjoon reaches across him to turn the pages in Hoseok’s book, just close enough to break the normal parameters of personal space between them. Hoseok even leans into it. Namjoon glances over, but Hoseok only smiles. Namjoon smiles, too.

He likes Hoseok. Hoseok is a good guy. He’s smart, and he’s hard-working, and he smiles in the same way that roses bloom. Hoseok is a lot like Seokjin, back when Seokjin was trying to get into the nursing program. And then, Hoseok is nothing at all like Seokjin. Seokjin was flash cards and outlines with clear expectations. He was rambling through system functions until he could put it together himself.

Hoseok only needs a good story and a pat on the head.

When he comes to something he doesn’t understand, he quiets. He focuses. If anything is wrong with his approach, it’s that he spends too much time trying to figure things out on his own when Namjoon is right there, so willing to help him. Hoseok is persistent, he is determined.

More than anything, Hoseok is adaptable. Namjoon expects that they will spend another hour on impulse transmission. He thinks that he will explain it once, and then one more time, and then Hoseok will explain it back to him, and then they’ll go over it together. By then, Hoseok will be comfortable with most of the terminology and some of the content. Namjoon is ready for this. This is how he carried Hoseok through the immune system. This is how he carried Hoseok through brain structure.

But Hoseok is not the same student he was when they walked through immunity or brain structure. Namjoon has just finished explaining the roles of sodium and potassium in generating nerve impulses when Hoseok says, “Like muscles?”, and then he lights up. “Oh, like where nerves and muscles touch—” He sits up straighter in his chair and stares down at the diagram Namjoon is using. Namjoon watches silently as Hoseok works through it on his own. He looks back up to Namjoon. “That was my hardest chapter in A&P I, but it—kind of makes sense now?”

Namjoon flushes with pride, but instead of getting excited, he smiles and invites Hoseok to explain the mechanism back to him. If Hoseok gets anything wrong, they can focus on that, because Hoseok seems to already have the general idea.

Except Hoseok runs through the sodium-potassium pump and then some without Namjoon having to step in once. Whereas before, he looked to Namjoon for constant approval, now, he stares down at the picture, or at his hands as they come alive with his explanation. Namjoon stares, transfixed.

Hoseok is perfect. “And then the impulse—wait, the potential, it goes way down—”

“Hyperpolarizes,” Namjoon supplies.

“Hyperpolarizes,” Hoseok continues without missing a beat, “and then it levels out and the nerve can get excited again.”
The library room around them is quiet, mostly unoccupied, and yet Namjoon can feel the buzz of excitement, the hum of the acclaim that Hoseok deserves ringing in his ears. Hoseok is still staring at his book, but after a moment, he looks over at Namjoon. Namjoon realizes that he’s staring, but he can’t bring himself to stop. “You didn’t even need me, did you?” he huffs, teasing because he cannot contain his delight in any other way. Hoseok falters, brows twitching into the briefest frown, and Namjoon remembers what’s missing. “Perfect,” he says. Hoseok flushes and bites back a smile and turns his eyes back down to his book. “Exactly right. I couldn’t’ve said it better myself.”

“You just did,” Hoseok mumbles, but he’s blushing, and his cheeks are round with the smile he’s trying to swallow. Namjoon almost wants to reach over and pull it free. Hoseok looks up at him, and Namjoon can see it clear as day—how easily Hoseok would let him.

Hoseok thought it would feel more like coming home, like hitting the rebound and sinking back into his old ways. Not to say that he ever got tired of acing exams, but he did get a little bit spoiled in his first semester. He stares down at the blackboard notification on his phone, chewing his lip to keep from smiling too wide on his walk from class. People will think he’s manic.

Fuck, he could be. He aced it. He aced it. He did the math in his head, and he’s actually passing his class now. Another test grade like that, and he’ll have a B. All he needs out of this class is a B. He opens his messages and he should probably text Seokjin, but he doesn’t even think about that yet. Instead, he finds his thread with Namjoon and uses a lot of emojis to convey the grade he just got. When he’s finished, he almost puts his phone away before remembering to copy the message and send it to Seokjin as well.

He doesn’t have a copious amount of time to celebrate. When he gets back to his dorm, he only has a couple hours to finish his homework for one of his other classes before he has to leave again. But just before he can settle in too deeply, Namjoon replies.

It’s nothing extravagant. Just a quick (: so proud of you. you totally deserve it. But still, Hoseok squirms in his desk chair. He can imagine Namjoon actually saying it, I’m so proud of you, Hoseok. What a good boy, I’m so proud. He whimpers. He bites his lip and he squirms again. He stares at the message thread and he breathes out and he slides his hand across his lap, towards the fastenings of his jeans.

He doesn’t do much more. There are only a couple of hours before he has to leave again, and he has too much homework to waste this time fantasizing. But that doesn’t change the fact that as he works, all he can think about it what Namjoon would have said, how it would have sounded if Hoseok had told him in person.

What Namjoon would have done. What Hoseok would have let him do.

Namjoon hardly ever walks Seokjin to the health sciences complex, their schedules too frequently at odds to see each other over more than a passing dinner. But when he does, it’s colder than a witch’s tit and his coat won’t zip properly. He shoves the pin with his thumb, but he misses the box completely this time. His hands are shaking. He should have stayed inside until he was finished bundling. His struggle with the zipper takes so much of his attention that he doesn’t realize Seokjin is talking to him until he gets an elbow in the side. It knocks him stumbling off of the sidewalk and into the snow. It crunches up over the top of his boots and down into his socks.

“Hyung,” he whines, frowning at Seokjin as he continues to walk away. “Nonmaleficence.”
Seokjin snorts and at least glances back at him. Namjoon waddles over towards the sidewalk, kicking what he can out of his boots and shivering from that which has already melted. His bones are rattling. He tries the zipper again, but the pin snags before he can pull it up at all. “I was trying to tell you about Hoseok,” Seokjin says instead of apologizing. Namjoon glances up, but immediately glances back down at his coat.

“Oh? Cool,” he says, jerking irritably on the pull tab until it jumps up a couple teeth and then snags again. Seokjin huffs a frosty puff of an exhale at him.

“You're still not listening,” he says.

“No, no,” Namjoon insists, trying to pull the tab back down so he can start over. It won’t go. It seems to be stuck. “I'm listening,” he says. “Keep going.”

“I said Hoseok likes you. He told me not to tell you, but I told him I would anyways. I don't think he believed me, but whatever. He likes you.”

There is a pause in which Namjoon realizes that he's probably expected to reply. He glances up from his zipper and smiles his most charming smile. “Cool,” he says. Seokjin scowls so hard that steam seems to rise from his brow. He knocks Namjoon’s hands out of the way and slides the pin into the box, yanking the zipper closed all the way up to Namjoon’s face. He stares on in awe at Seokjin’s ire.

“Would you listen to me!” he snaps, holding Namjoon close with the grip on his zipper.

“I did! I heard you!” he cries.

“And?” Seokjin says. Namjoon blinks. If reading people is his thing, communicating with them is an entirely different ballgame. He's never been good at these things, even when prompted. Hell, especially when prompted. He stares. Seokjin rolls his eyes and releases him. “I just breached Hoseok’s trust. Can I at least have something to show for it?”

“Oh,” Namjoon says. And then a few seconds later, when he understands what Seokjin is asking him, “Oh.” He pauses. Thinks. “I don't know. He's really cool. Maybe if I weren't tutoring him or something,” he says, shrugging as he trails off. He doesn’t know what Seokjin was expecting, but whatever it was, it wasn’t this.

He looks like he’s been slapped. Maybe not slapped, but flicked on the nose. Or, no, now he just looks like he's smelled something awful. Namjoon tracks his expressions faithfully with no idea of where they're heading until Seokjin says, “What?” Only then does Namjoon know he's in trouble.

He freezes. “Wait, what are you talking about?” Seokjin crosses his arms over his chest. Namjoon shrinks a little bit. Seokjin looks oddly taller than him, and broader than usual. He stares down at Namjoon with a stony regard—down at him, impossibly. Namjoon has no idea what he’s said wrong until Seokjin says,

“Are you just playing with him, or what?”

And—well, Namjoon still has no idea what he’s said wrong, but at least that’s not the only thing he’s confused about anymore. He blinks at Seokjin, who only breaks his glare to glance down at his watch. He grits out a terse, “Walk,” before turning stiffly down the sidewalk once more. Namjoon hesitates, but follows. If he doesn’t die now, then Seokjin will see that it happens at some point. Might as well be prompt about it.

“I don’t know what kind of game you’re playing, but it isn’t funny,” Seokjin seethes. Namjoon has
seen him like this a couple times. A few years ago, when he was swamped with exams and research and he forgot his mother’s birthday. Seokjin had had a lot to say about that. Or when Namjoon told Jeongguk not to go into pure sciences. Of course, what he’d meant to do was encourage Jeongguk to pursue his passion for the arts, but nothing Namjoon says ever comes out the way he intends it, and so frankly, there are a lot of reasons why Seokjin could be mad right now.

But they’re talking about Hoseok. “What did I do to him?” Namjoon asks meekly, flinching when Seokjin cuts his gaze to the side.

“Um, lead him on? Hooked him and played him like you always do with people?” Namjoon opens his mouth to defend himself, but Seokjin doesn’t give him the chance. “And what, because you’re tutoring him? You’re not some sort of accredited professional. You’re not even getting paid, what—are you just making up some ethical dilemma just to get out of following through on toying with him?”

“Hyung,” Namjoon huffs, affronted. “Monetary exchange is not the base on which ethics are built—”

“Yes, it is,” Seokjin snaps. “You’re thinking of morals. And yours are seriously fucked up right now.”

Namjoon thinks that Seokjin will go on, or if he doesn’t, Namjoon still won’t get a chance because Seokjin will just talk over him again. The health sciences building is looming, and Namjoon stares up at it beseechingly. Take this madman away from him; it’s too early in the morning and he’s slept too little in the past three days to do battle with Seokjin fairly. He still doesn’t even fully understand what he’s in trouble for. Namjoon slows to a stop a ways off from the front doors, hoping that Seokjin will go on, but he doesn’t. He stops, too. Namjoon holds his breath and waits for the worst.

“I know you’re not trying to be an ass,” Seokjin begins. Namjoon perks a little. “But that doesn’t mean you aren’t one.” Namjoon shrinks. “I don’t get your whole—” Seokjin waves his hand around vaguely, almost derisively, “—ethics thing, but fine. If you don’t want to date him or whatever, fine. That’s your choice. But he really likes you, and he thinks that you like him, too, so.” Seokjin’s lips thin, and he looks at the ground and then back up at Namjoon. “I mean, the least you could do is stop flirting with him.”

“Flirting?”

But Seokjin is already turning away to pull the door open and disappear through it. Namjoon watches him through the glass, past the next set of doors and off towards the stairs to where the lecture halls are nestled along the back of the building. When Seokjin is finally out of sight, Namjoon still stands there, just staring. More students are beginning to file past him. Namjoon shuffles to move out of their way, but slowly. He’s been up since early yesterday evening working in the lab. By his circadian rhythm, it’s his bedtime now. His stomach is growling. His mind is weak and rubbery. But Seokjin’s words still float around his skull, painting themselves there so that he sees them whenever he closes his eyes. Stop flirting with him. Flirting? Has Namjoon been flirting? He frowns and thinks hard, really hard, too hard for this hour of day. Yes, he decides. He has. Namjoon has been flirting with Hoseok. Maybe not on purpose, or more, maybe exactly on purpose, but only because it’s the easiest, most fun way to get Hoseok to progress in his studies. Hoseok responds best to flirtation, so Namjoon has flirted.

He never really considered how it would affect Hoseok, other than improving his test grades. He finds the bench outside of the health sciences building and sits down, even as day truly breaks and the sidewalks fill with students. Snow begins to fall before long. It’s almost nine when Namjoon
forces himself to rise again, well and truly tired of thinking.

He has done so much wrong without even meaning to. It would absolutely be wrong of him to use his position of power as a tutor to coerce Hoseok into any sort of relationship outside of that which is strictly professional. Namjoon knows that much, and he believes it. But—he shamefully admits—his actions have not reflected this. He hangs his head on his walk home, knowing that he has lead Hoseok to believe something very different from what is right.

Namjoon does not want to stop helping Hoseok because of this. He just wants to do better. Hoseok probably won’t like it. Namjoon won’t like it either. He sighs and rifles through his pocket for his keys. It’s going to be awful, but Seokjin is right.

Namjoon can’t keep leading Hoseok on like this.

Hoseok reaches into the fridge to grab a cup of grapes while Seokjin scans the rows just a few feet down, perusing the campus shop’s meager ramen selection. The shop is mostly empty, save for a few stragglers from the lunchtime rush, so Hoseok doesn’t even bother concealing himself as he pops the top off of the cup and starts picking through the grapes inside. He meanders to Seokjin’s side, scanning briefly through the handful of flavors and wondering how it can take his hyung so long to pick between them. Seokjin once explained to him something about a proper allocation of time for mourning the awful selection, but Hoseok still thinks picking one flavor of ramen out of four or five choices shouldn’t take any longer than five minutes.

“Yoongi is gonna kill you if he sees you eating those,” Seokjin huffs, turning his hungry frustration on Hoseok. Hoseok just shrugs and pops another grape into his mouth.

“Yoongi loves me. He would never kill me.” Seokjin sniffs derisively and continues to stare at the shelves. Hoseok smirks and crunches into another grape. “I bet if I asked Yoongi to buy these grapes for me, he would say yes.”

Seokjin actually cracks at that, barely biting down around his laughter until it is little more than a hiss. He glances sidelong at Hoseok, looks him up and down, and then shakes his head and turns back to the shelves. “You’re crazy,” he says. Hoseok has a witty retort loaded on his tongue, but just before he can fire, his phone chimes in his pocket. Without hesitation, he pulls it out and opens it up. Namjoon’s message is small, but Hoseok feels the weight of it as though it weighed a ton. He sighs, tapping out a quick response, and then slides his phone back into his jeans. He looks back to Seokjin, who is already watching him.

“Namjoon,” he says. Something crosses Seokjin’s face, but it’s gone before Hoseok can identify it. “He’s had to reschedule our study sessions twice now. I guess his lab hours are starting to get really heavy.” Seokjin snorts, but this time, it sounds different. Almost mean. Hoseok tenses a little bit, frowning at Seokjin. “What?” he asks.

“Nothing,” Seokjin says. He sounds tired, which is fair because he’s had two exams this week, and he still has clinical paperwork to submit before the weekend. But Seokjin doesn’t sound school-tired. He sounds different-tired. Hoseok is about to press when Seokjin asks him, “Have you talked to him yet?”

Hoseok clams up so fast that he actually shrinks into a smaller space. His arms close in close to himself, his shoulders bunching up tightly around his neck. He grimaces. “No,” he snaps, holding his plastic cup of grapes very tight in his hand. “You didn’t say anything to him, did you?” he asks very quickly. Seokjin glances at him, and then rolls his eyes and sighs.
“No,” he says. Hoseok squints at him. Seokjin continues to peruse his ramen selection. He reaches for one, but he doesn’t actually grab it before dropping his hand back down to his side. Hoseok knows that Seokjin can feel his inspection, but he’s trying very hard not to respond to it. Hoseok squints his eyes tighter and stares harder. Finally, Seokjin asks, “Have you ever considered the idea that he might be an asshole?”

Hoseok blinks his eyes open. “What?”

Seokjin waves his hand in front of him vaguely. “Namjoon,” he says. “Have you ever thought that he might not be as great as you think he is?”

“No?” Hoseok asks, drawing the word out to convey his absolute confusion. “Isn’t he your friend? Why would you be friends with him if he’s an asshole?”

“No, I mean—he isn’t—” Seokjin chews on his lip for a moment, as though trying to reorganize his thoughts, but he never picks them back up. He shoves his hands into his pockets and stares very hard at the shelves. Hoseok can feel the tension radiating off of him. A thought comes to him, one that twists his stomach and makes his voice a little bit strangled when he says,

“Wait, are you two—” Because Hoseok never really asked when he told Seokjin about his feelings. Surely Seokjin would have said something then, unless it was a secret for some reason.

But no—Seokjin relaxes immediately, laughing softly as all of the fight leaves his body. Hoseok still eyes him warily. “No, Hoseok. No way. I would’ve told you if we were.”


Seokjin sighs. His shoulders sag. He glances at the shelves one last time before grabbing a cup of ramen and sliding past Hoseok towards the front register. Hoseok pops the top back onto his grapes and follows him. As they walk, Seokjin just says, “Sorry. It was just a stupid question.”

Hoseok wants to ask about it, wants to Seokjin to be honest with him because it feels like so much more than a stupid question, but before he can even open his mouth all the way, Yoongi leans over the counter and grabs the cup of grapes from his hands. “You’ve already eaten half of these,” he scolds, narrowing his eyes in a way that is probably supposed to be intimidating. Hoseok leans forward and smiles at him brightly. Yoongi leans back to keep some distance between them.

“Hyung, I didn’t eat that many,” Hoseok says. “Besides, I was wondering if you—”

“No,” Yoongi says, pointing a finger at Hoseok in a very definite way. “Not this time.”

Hoseok pouts. Yoongi wavers. Hoseok is just about to start whining when Seokjin reaches across both of them and takes the grapes from Yoongi’s hand. “It’s fine,” he says, “I’m paying for them.” Hoseok smiles at him in thanks, and then at Yoongi in victory. Yoongi flushes and scowls at him. Possibly mad that Hoseok is getting away with not paying for his own grapes again, but almost maybe upset that Yoongi was almost the person buying them for him. As they leave the shop, Hoseok calls out his farewell to Yoongi, who grunts as though he doesn’t care even though Hoseok knows that it means he absolutely does.

“So when are you seeing Namjoon next?” Seokjin asks him as they begin the walk back to the dorm.

“Tomorrow night, if he doesn’t have any more scheduling changes.” Hoseok hopes, he prays and wishes and dreams that he’ll see Namjoon tomorrow. Seokjin just hums. Hoseok thinks he’ll say something more—about how Namjoon is an asshole, or about Hoseok’s silly crush on him, but he doesn’t. He stares at the sidewalk and doesn’t say much else until they get back to Hoseok’s door,
Namjoon still hasn’t asked Hoseok to call him *hyung*, so he sticks to an enthusiastic, polite *sunbaenim* every time they meet. Which, to be fair, they haven’t met very often. Not recently, anyways. It seems like every time Hoseok texts Namjoon, he’s busy with homework, or he’s working in the lab, or he’s trying to sleep at strange hours because of his hectic schedule. Each time, Hoseok apologizes, and Namjoon apologizes, and one of them will suggest another time, and Hoseok will hope that this time Namjoon won’t be busy.

It’s dumb, but Hoseok is more worried about actually seeing Namjoon than he is about the point of seeing Namjoon in the first place. He thinks about it a lot. A lot more than he thinks about Anatomy & Physiology. He starts to think that maybe he’s done something wrong.

Especially those few times that Namjoon finally gives in, finally agrees to meet him on the first floor of the library or one of the tables in the coffee shop or at the cafeteria over lunch. Always somewhere bright, always somewhere public, always somewhere where the noise of the world around them spills over their walls and into their world. Together, like this, Hoseok feels even further away from Namjoon. Namjoon hardly ever meets his eyes anymore. He points to the book a lot, even though he knows Hoseok doesn’t understand it. And when Hoseok asks about quizzing, Namjoon just gives him an apologetic look and says, “I’m sorry. I don’t have time today.” He’s gone before Hoseok can say *goodbye*.

“He hates me,” Hoseok tells Seokjin on the phone. He hikes his backpack further up onto his shoulders, even as it continues to sag down with the weight of his textbook. They’d barely managed to discuss the overarching points in the process of urine production before Namjoon had to leave, staring at the floor the whole time. Hoseok had peered blankly at the pages in front of him for a long while without reading anything before shoving the book into his bag and leaving. On the other end of the phone, Seokjin makes a noncommittal noise of reassurance, but Hoseok talks over him. “What if he found out, hyung? What if he knows and he hates me for it but he’s too nice to say so?”

Seokjin snorts. “I don’t think Namjoon is too nice for that,” he says. Hoseok frowns. Seokjin can’t see it, but he can probably sense it in the silence that follows. He clears his voice and says, “Look, I don’t think it has anything to do with you. Namjoon’s just really busy. He’s got his own classes to take care of.” Hoseok still doesn’t say anything, but more out of guilt than anything. Has he been so selfish with Namjoon’s time? Seokjin pops the cherry onto that sundae of self-pity when he asks, “Have you thought about getting another tutor? You’ve got another exam coming up soon.”

Hoseok doesn’t want to think about the exam he’s got coming up soon. He whines, “*Hyung,*” as pitifully as he can because he doesn’t want another tutor and he doesn’t want to fail his exam and he doesn’t to make Namjoon hate him just because Hoseok has a stupid crush on him. Seokjin apologizes for even bringing it up, but he begs Hoseok to study when he gets home so that he can do as well on this exam as he did on the last one.

Hoseok does. He goes home and he studies, and he tries to study the way he studied with Namjoon, and he quizzes himself a lot, and he still fails the exam. He *fails* it. He fails it so bad that in the corner of his scantron, his professor has written in a note asking him to schedule an appointment during her office hours. He turns the scantron back in face down so that nobody else can see his grade, and he goes back to his dorm, and he hides under his covers, and he thinks about maybe changing his major. He did the math in his head on the walk home.
He’s going to have to score one-hundred percent on the next exam and the final just to get a B in the class. And he needs at least a B for this course to even be worth any credit on his nursing application. And Namjoon still hasn’t texted him back from a couple days ago when Hoseok asked him for a crash-course study session before this exam and Hoseok is certain he’s done something wrong.

Seokjin finds him like this. He doesn’t come to the dorms often, but when Hoseok ignores twenty-six texts and eleven phone calls in a row on the afternoon after an exam, he pulls out his old key and sneaks in to bang relentlessly at Hoseok’s door until he drags himself out of bed and answers.

Hoseok is only grateful that Seokjin doesn’t say anything. He looks like he’s about to when Hoseok pulls the door open, but his gaze finds Hoseok’s face and he lingers there, understanding watering down the ire in his glare. He silently leads the way back to Hoseok’s bed where they lay down together. At first, Hoseok leaves a wide berth of space between them, but as the night grows darker and the silence grows longer, he slides closer and closer to Seokjin. Seokjin patiently waits for him, opening his arms when Hoseok slides into them. He runs his fingers through Hoseok’s hair the way Hoseok’s mother used to.

When Hoseok has almost fallen asleep, still disappointed but at least calmed, then Seokjin strikes. His voice is raspy from the long silence. He sounds more disappointed than Hoseok feels. “You can’t rely on someone else to pass this class,” he says. “You have to find it in yourself to do well. I don’t know what happened today, but whatever it is, it’s not Namjoon’s fault, and it has nothing to do with the way he’s treating you.”

Hoseok swallows down his shame, and he says, “I know, hyung.” He thinks Seokjin might leave, go back to his own apartment down that he’s said his piece, but he doesn’t. He stays, and if Hoseok curls his fists that much tighter in Seokjin’s hoodie, neither of them say anything about it.

The first thing Seokjin says when he finds Namjoon in his apartment is, “Kim Namjoon.” He says it the way most men would utter curses, the way guns fire bullets, the way predators fall upon prey. Namjoon hasn’t even had a chance to steal any food yet. He drops his backpack and scurries away from Seokjin, who chases him into the apartment. He’s grateful that the only things Seokjin flings at him are small (though very stiff) throw pillows from his couch.

“Hyung, hyung!” Namjoon cries out. He’s tired. Yesterday, he worked more lab hours than he’s ever worked in one shift, and then he had class immediately after he got out this morning. All he wants is to raid Seokjin’s fridge for leftovers and then maybe crash on his couch for a couple hours before his next class in the afternoon. If he can find Seokjin’s charger, maybe even charge his phone, which has been dead for about two days now.

So Namjoon is tired. And Seokjin has run out of pillows, so he’s hopping around trying to pry one sneaker off of his foot. When he throws it, Namjoon barely manages to dodge, and when he does he hits the coffee table with his shin and he goes down anyways. Seokjin sits on him before he can crawl away. He thinks he’ll be attacked, but Seokjin doesn’t do anything more than scowl down at him with a very scathing expression. Namjoon cowers from it. “What’d I do?” he asks, or more, pleads.

“Hoseok failed his exam, just in case you were wondering,” Seokjin tells him. Namjoon’s gut twists very uncomfortably.

“What?” he asks, because surely he heard wrong. Hoseok had done so well on his second exam. He’d learned how to study, he’d started to get the mechanisms of body systems and functions, he was doing well, he was doing well.
“He failed,” Seokjin says, cutting through Namjoon’s confused flurry of thoughts. “He got a sixty-three. His teacher almost tried to report him for cheating on his second exam. He has to ace his next two exams just to get a B in the class.” Seokjin takes Namjoon up by the collar of his shirt. Namjoon cries out in fear. “Don’t you care?” he demands.

“Yes!” Namjoon shouts. He scrambles to get away from Seokjin, but he only gets out of his claws. Seokjin still sits on him heavily, pinning him in place. “That isn’t what I wanted, I thought he was doing better, I swear! I just wanted to stop messing with him, I didn’t think he’d fail.”

Seokjin’s eyes narrow. His lips thin. “He thinks you hate him.”

Namjoon blinks. “What?”

“He thinks you hate him,” Seokjin says again, as though Namjoon hasn’t heard. He has. He just—doesn’t get it. “You never text him back anymore,” Seokjin says, pointing one finger at Namjoon so close to his chest than Namjoon can almost feel it jabbing him. “When you do, you just jerk him around with all these schedule changes. And when you finally sit down to work with him, you won’t even look at him! You leave before he can even learn anything!” This time, Seokjin actually does jab him.

“Ow, hyung!” Namjoon shoves his finger away, but it’s a losing battle. “I'm just trying to not lead him on! You told me to stop flirting with him!”

Seokjin sits back then. Namjoon still holds his guard up close to his chest, but Seokjin doesn't surprise him. He just digs the heels of his hands into his eyes and breathes out. Namjoon watches him for a long while, but he sits like that for a moment. Finally, when he speaks, he sounds frustrated, but not furious. "I know," Seokjin says. "I know what I said, but." He pauses, taking in a deep breath. He drops his hands into his lap—Namjoon flinches, but they just lay there, not hurting him—and he looks down at Namjoon. "I didn't think you would just. You know. Cut him off entirely."

This time, when Namjoon tries to wiggle out from under Seokjin, Seokjin lets him. They sit together on the floor, both staring at their laps. A considerable silence has passed when Namjoon breaks it, quietly asking, "Did he really fail it?"

Seokjin sighs. "Yeah. I talked to him about it." He looks up at Namjoon, his eyes softer. "I know it's not your fault that he failed, but. You're just being such a dick to him. The least you could do is talk to him. Be honest and stuff. Isn't that part of your whole ethics thing?"

Namjoon plants his hands behind him and leans back on them. He frowns at Seokjin. "Honest about what?"

"About not liking him."

Namjoon’s stomach clenges. His throat tightens, but when he swallows, the lump doesn't go down. He looks down at the carpet. "I do like him, though," he says. Seokjin doesn't say anything. He just stares at Namjoon. Namjoon looks up at him, waiting for a reaction, but none comes. "I don't want to lie to him about not liking him because I do. That's why it's so hard to try to not flirt with him. Because I like it, and it really helps him a lot, and—"

"Kim Namjoon," Seokjin cuts in. Namjoon's eyes widen and he scrambles away as Seokjin grabs for the nearest throw pillow once more.

"Hyung, wait! What did I do this time?" he begs, but he still gets pelted by the tiny pillow. Seokjin
grabs him by his ankle and yanks at him, but Namjoon doesn't go easily. And Seokjin isn't pulling very hard. Namjoon quiets, and Seokjin bangs his ankle lightly against the carpet.

"You have got to be kidding me," Seokjin shouts at him, but not really shouts. More like just raises his voice incredulously. The way he would if Namjoon was stealing his food or messing with his hair. "I thought you didn't like him! I thought the whole point of this was that you didn't like him! Oh my god, you're such an idiot!"

"Hyung," Namjoon gasps, clenching his breast through his shirt.

"Fuck your ethics," Seokjin says. Namjoon gasps again. "You like him! He likes you! Why do you have to be so difficult!" He throws Namjoon's ankle down against the floor. It falls in line with its twin, and Namjoon slowly rolls over to face Seokjin again. Seokjin is standing up, stomping out of the living room and back to the kitchen. Namjoon can hear the angry clanging of pots on the stove. He lays back on the carpet and stares at the ceiling. He thinks about a lot of things—the things he's done, the things he hasn't done—but more than anything, he thinks about Hoseok failing, and how Namjoon only ever wanted him to succeed. He pulls himself up off of the floor and ambles into the kitchen. Warily, in case Seokjin is holding anything heavy that he might throw at Namjoon upon sight.

He doesn't. He spots Namjoon out of the corner of his eye, menacingly pointing on finger at him in warning, but he doesn't say anything. Namjoon edges into the kitchen, hopping up onto one of the counters to watch Seokjin work. When the tension fades into complacency, Namjoon asks, "You're supposed to be my friend, too; how come you never take my side on this?"

Seokjin just snorts and chops his onion a bit harder than necessary. "Because you're the only one who's acting like the prime rib of assholes."

Namjoon closes his mouth and thinks on that. He needs to charge his phone tonight. He wonders if he should text Hoseok when he does.

Namjoon isn't particularly good with feelings. He's good with biology. And he's good with microbiology and biochemistry and pharmacology and math of all kinds, but he's really not extremely comfortable with discussing what to do when he likes someone and he knows they like him back. He knows even less of what to do when that somebody edges into the coffee shop just a few minutes past ten, wearing exhaustion beneath their eyes and on their shoulders, watching Namjoon like they're waiting for him to disappear.

Hoseok looks so wary when Namjoon sees him. Namjoon smiles and waves, but Hoseok just slides into the booth across from him. He unzips his backpack and pulls out his textbook, even though Namjoon told him he wanted to talk instead of study tonight. Namjoon reaches across the table for Hoseok's book, and Hoseok passes it over to him without hesitation. Namjoon doesn't open it. He sets it on the seat beside him. Hoseok quirks an eyebrow at him. Namjoon leans forward and tries to look confident.

"I talked to Seokjin," he says. Hoseok blinks at him, and then a beat later, he clams up. He watches Namjoon with wide eyes, more quiet than Namjoon has ever seen him. This entirely new side of Hoseok that Namjoon has never seen before. He wants to see more of it, he wants to see sides of Hoseok that he never knew were there. He realizes he's staring, and he clears his throat and continues. "Um, he told me. About. You know."

Hoseok does know. He drops his gaze down to the table, his cheeks reddening before Namjoon has
even finished speaking. He opens his mouth to say something, but Namjoon speaks over him. "And I told him about how I feel. Y'know. About you. I don't think he told you—I mean, the way he told me about—well..." Namjoon scratches his head and trails off. Hoseok is staring at him, but there almost seems to be a smile to the way he's staring now. Namjoon smiles back. Hoseok smiles wider.

"So...you like me?" he asks tentatively. Namjoon swells with confidence.

"Of course I do," he says. "You're the cutest tutee I've ever had. And I tutored Seokjin."

If Namjoon ever forgot what it was that he found in Hoseok that first time they met, he remembers it now. Hoseok flushes, but for an entirely different reason. He smiles to himself, a small smile, but pinched at the edges, like he's biting it back from consuming the entire breadth of his face. Namjoon smiles, too. He can see Hoseok's pleasure, his exhilaration with Namjoon's compliment. Hoseok may be pulling his smiles, but Namjoon can see him opening up. He takes a deep breath and prepares himself to say everything he needs to say.

"Maybe I didn't realize it at first, because I was more concerned with helping you pass your class, and I accidentally figured out that you respond best to being praised? And I might have started out by sort of—well—manipulating that." Hoseok's smile drops away just the slightest bit, so Namjoon begins to talk faster. "But after a little while, I realized that I really liked, um. Flirting? With you? And I wanted to do it not just because it helped you learn but because it made you feel good, and I guess—"

"Wait," Hoseok cuts in. Namjoon freezes, watching his thoughts work across his expression, each one as indecipherable as the last. "So...you were flirting with me...for school?"

Namjoon's mouth works soundlessly, a lot of yes, buts coming to mind, but in the end, all that comes out is the, "Yes?"

Hoseok watches him contemplatively for a moment. Namjoon feels like he's on trial. Hoseok asks him, "So, wait. Do you...actually like me?"

"Yes," Namjoon says, much more emphatically this time.

Hoseok smiles, a real smile, spanning from ear to ear. The apples of his cheeks glow brightly in the pale fluorescents of the coffee shop. "Cool. I'm gonna stop you right there, then, before you mess anything up."

Namjoon laughs, actually laughs at that. Hoseok already knows him that well. He picks Hoseok's book up off of the seat and places it back on the table. Hoseok's smile falls a little when he sees it, but Namjoon reaches forward to grab his attention. "Now that I've confessed," he says, "I'd like to get your permission to use your praise kink to help you ace your next two exams so that you can get a B in your class."

Hoseok flushes and sputters and grabs for his book, but Namjoon holds it just out of his reach. "Praise kink?" Hoseok hisses, much quieter than Namjoon even though they're nearly the only two on this side of the shop. Namjoon quirks a smile at him. Hoseok scowls. "I do not have—"

"Hoseok, you're incredibly smart," Namjoon cuts in. Hoseok stumbles in his tirade, choking off into silence. "You're smart, you're determined, you're one of the hardest workers I've ever met." Hoseok flushes a deeper and deeper shade of pink at each turn, "and I just want to use whatever incentives you already have in order to best help you succeed in this class."

Namjoon could almost worry that he's already overstepped his boundaries, but he can see the way
Hoseok is beginning to understand what Namjoon is telling him. Maybe even beginning to understand a little bit about himself. He waits patiently, and in the end, Hoseok comes to him. He reaches for his textbook, and Namjoon gives it to him.

"We're covering acid-base balance in class right now," he mumbles, beginning to flip through the book to the right chapter. Namjoon leans forward with his most charming smile.

"You're smart. You'll get it easily." Hoseok smiles at the pages of his textbook. Namjoon feels pride settle in his chest, but also something fonder. Warmer. Hoseok blossoms in the light of Namjoon's care. That's all Namjoon wants to ever be for him.

Hoseok only knows that something good has happened when his professor gives him a very suspicious look before handing out test grades. When she hands him his scantron, there are no notes on it about scheduling an appointment or being reported for cheating, but neither are there any words of encouragement like there had been the first time he aced an exam in this class. He can't contain his smile as he stares down at his grade.

He should probably be more excited about how this is one step closer to him getting accepted into the program, but Namjoon has offered him a slightly more immediate reward. He isn't supposed to have his phone out in class, but he slips it from his pocket when his professor's back is turned to shoot Namjoon a quick text.

100%, he says. get ready to come thru

It was Namjoon's idea. Namjoon had asked if Hoseok was comfortable integrating their newfound relationship into Hoseok's studies. Hoseok, who had nearly been on the verge of illness with the fear that he wouldn't pass, had eagerly agreed. He still remembers clearly how Namjoon had felt pressed very close to him, how warm and tall and broad he had felt, as warm and all encompassing as his smooth voice whenever he praised Hoseok, good job, good boy.

More than anything, he remembers how Namjoon's hand had felt on his stomach, the warmth and texture of it through his shirt. How it had felt sliding down until Namjoon's fingers grazed the very hem of his jeans. How Namjoon had implied a very special reward if Hoseok scored higher than a ninety-five on this test.

More than earned it, Hoseok thinks, smiling down at his scantron. Namjoon texts him back to stop texting in class, and then a few minutes later to tell Hoseok that he'll be waiting outside the sciences building for him when class gets out. Hoseok stows his phone away before he can be caught. Each individual minute between now and the end of class offends him. He watches them pass on the face of the clock, and he's probably going to need Namjoon to walk him through all of this content later because he's not paying attention right now. After, though…

Definitely after.

Hoseok's hand is trembling by the time he's unlocking the door to his dorm. Or trying, at least. He keeps missing, tapping uselessly around the keyhole while Namjoon just keeps whispering into his ear, the way he's been doing since Hoseok bounded out to where he was waiting and leapt onto his back. Softly, deeply. "Such a good boy, Hoseok," he says. "So smart, so pretty," he says. "Are you this pretty when you're moaning for me? You've worked so hard for this, do you want it?"
Hoseok isn’t quite hard yet, but he’s so close, he’s so close. He feels so good with Namjoon at his back, leaning over him, warm through Hoseok’s spring jacket. Namjoon keeps murmuring. Hoseok’s mouth is so wet. He swallows and aims for the lock again.

He almost drops the key entirely when Namjoon wraps his hand around Hoseok’s, pushing the key forward into the lock. They turn it together, and then the door handle. The door eases open beneath both of their weights. Hoseok turns around to say something funny or obnoxious or maybe just loud because he’s at a loss for what else to do, but he could almost cry from relief when Namjoon interrupts him with a kiss.

Though it hasn’t been very long that they’ve been doing this, Hoseok can assert without a doubt that Namjoon’s kisses are one of Hoseok’s favorite things about him. He fists his hands in the back of Namjoon’s shirt, yanking him down to Hoseok’s level. Their tongues meet in a victorious sweep between them. Namjoon’s teeth are sharp and smooth against his lips. They’re open-mouthed, they’re sloppy, they’re stumbling—

—Namjoon hits the desk with his hip and sends a stack of Hoseok’s textbooks toppling. He breaks away from Hoseok to look back at them, but Hoseok grabs him by his collar and falls onto the bed. “Leave it,” he says. Namjoon, who lands above Hoseok with a huff, has no choice.

For all the flurry that brought them here, this is where they still. Namjoon stares down at Hoseok, who meets his gaze and challenges it. He licks his lips, loving the way Namjoon’s eyes track the movement. They orbit each other in that moment, circling closer, and closer, and closer. Namjoon’s breath is hot on Hoseok’s mouth when he mumbles a short, desperate, “Hyung.”

Namjoon sits up a little. “What?”

Hoseok blinks. “What?”

“What did you call me?”

“Hyung?” Hoseok asks, his voice twisted up at the end in question. Namjoon’s face is cloudy with confusion.

“Seokjin said you were twenty, though?”

“Yeah—” Hoseok begins, and then immediately puts it together. “Wait, how old are you?”

Namjoon colors prettily across the high of his cheeks. “I’m turning twenty in the fall.”

Namjoon counts it out in his head, and it’s not possible. He counts it out again, and it’s still not possible. He stares dumbly at Namjoon for a very long time, and when he finally finds his voice again, all he can say is, “But you’re a grad student.” It’s better than what Namjoon comes up with, which is just a shrug. “No, no, wait,” Hoseok says, pushing himself up onto his elbows. Namjoon does not move with him, so they come face to face. “You’re a grad student? When did you graduate high school?”

“Early,” Namjoon says. “Can I go back to blowing you?”

Hoseok searches his face, lost for words. Namjoon is tall, and he’s funny, and he’s good-looking. And he’s really, really, really smart. “Fuck,” he says. “A literal genius is asking to blow me.” He drops back down onto his mattress, staring up at his ceiling in wonder. “Fuck, man, you can do whatever you want.”

Namjoon’s laughter flows over Hoseok like warm water. His hands are big and warm where they
push at Hoseok’s shirt, his pants, exposing him from his chest down to his knees. All the while, he
laughs. He says, “Well, probably not,” leaning down to punctuate each word with a kiss. Hoseok’s
stomach flutters beneath his lips. “But I was hoping I’d at least be able to do you.”

Hoseok groans, and not because Namjoon is touching him. Namjoon is laughing when he kisses the
head of Hoseok’s cock. Hoseok trembles, threading his fingers into Namjoon’s hair, but he pinches
the bridge of his nose with his other hand. Namjoon mouths at his hip, at his thigh, pushes his legs up
so he can reach the flesh of Hoseok’s ass. Every part of Hoseok is thrumming with sensitivity when
Namjoon swallows him down.

And Hoseok—Hoseok lasts about as long as he feels he deserves. Namjoon’s lips are as soft as they
look, as soft as they feel when Hoseok kisses them. His hands are big—he holds Hoseok open and
touches everything. His thumbs dip into Hoseok’s crease, so close to where he is dry but hot and
twitching and desperate for Namjoon. But Hoseok doesn’t even last that long.

He finishes in Namjoon’s mouth, biting his fist around a groan. When he reaches for Namjoon’s
crotch, Namjoon pushes him back down and takes care of himself, right there above Hoseok, staring
into his eyes with an exciting ferocity. He finishes into Hoseok’s stomach, pooling in his bellybutton
and the shallow furrows of his relaxed abdomen. He sits back on his haunches and stares down at the
mess. It’s almost pearlescent in the glow of noon through the pulled shades. Hoseok is about to snap
at him to get off when Namjoon finally dismounts, stumbling towards Hoseok’s bathroom to retrieve
some tissues. Hoseok worries that he’ll trip on something as he goes, but he’s too tired and too messy
to care enough to get up.

“Was all that studying worth it?” Namjoon asks as he emerges from the bathroom. Better than a wad
of toilet paper, he’s actually dampened one of Hoseok’s wash cloths. It’s warm against his skin when
Namjoon begins to wipe him off.

“You kidding?” Hoseok slurs, rolling onto his side to watch Namjoon dispose of the wash cloth in
his laundry bag. “The studying was the best part.”

“Better than this?” The bed dips when Namjoon climbs back onto it. Hoseok is still half undressed,
his legs constricted by his jeans, his shirt rolled up to his armpits. But Namjoon’s jeans are still open
in the front, his underwear edged down somewhere inside of them and it must be uncomfortable, but
he doesn’t fix it. He just slides closer to Hoseok and pulls him in.

“Nah,” Hoseok says. “This is the best part. Studying was second best.”

Namjoon hums. The light of day beyond Hoseok’s dorm room does not tamp down the drowsiness
that comes after orgasm. They aren’t even lying the right way in bed, both of them sprawled
diagonally across so that their legs hang over the side. Hoseok promises himself that as soon as he
gets his pants back up, he’ll move them. But he doesn’t know when he’s actually going to fix them.
Maybe never, if Namjoon never lets him go.

He doesn’t realize he’s dozing until Namjoon begins to speak. Hoseok rouses with a start. “All you
got’s the final left, right?” Namjoon asks. His warm voice is even better when it’s sleepy. Hoseok
feels it where he rests on Namjoon’s chest, a deep hum, and in his own chest, a thrum of affection.

“Yeah,” he says.

Namjoon rolls over a little bit. And then a little bit more. Hoseok squirms back, craning his head up
to frown at him in question, but with this new space, Namjoon makes his move. He’s on top of
Hoseok in a second, kissing at his jaw and his neck and his ear even though Hoseok just came
maybe fifteen minutes ago. His hips twitch up. Fuck, he’s going to get hard if Namjoon doesn’t stop.
“You want some incentive to ace that, too?”

Hoseok gasps and grinds his teeth and moans. “Yes,” he grits out.

“Yes, hyung?” Namjoon asks. It takes Hoseok a moment, but when he realizes Namjoon is making fun of him, he thumps at his chest.

“Shut up,” he snaps, bristling, but Namjoon just laughs. Namjoon just laughs and drowns him out easily. Hoseok has always been so easy for him. Good boy, such a good boy.

End Notes

I never realized how many people are taking a&p until I looked through the feedback this got. If you're struggling, find me on tumblr or twitter and let's talk about it. I loved that class, I can't let anybody fail it on my watch.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!